Power and Need-for-Justification:

Asymmetrical Effects on Senders and Receivers in Marketing Communications

LINYING (SOPHIE) FAN

DEREK D. RUCKER

YUWEI JIANG*

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Linying (Sophie) Fan (sophiefan@ust.hk) is an assistant professor of marketing at the School of Business and Management, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Derek D. Rucker (d-rucker@kellogg.northwestern.edu) is the Sandy and Morton Goldman professor of entrepreneurial studies in marketing, at the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208-2001. Yuwei Jiang (yuwei.jiang@polyu.edu.hk) is a professor of marketing at the Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Business, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

ABSTRACT

This research reveals how a fundamental and pervasive psychological state, feeling powerful, asymmetrically impacts consumers' construction of and response to communications. For senders, power reduces consumers' need-for-justification and lowers the degree of support they seek and use to construct their communications. This lowered degree of support is evidenced by reduced information search, the use of fewer rational-based arguments, and a greater reliance on more concise language. In contrast, for receivers, power increases consumers' expectations for others to justify their positions. As a result, high-power receivers require a greater degree of support in communications from others. Based on a need-for-justification mechanism, the current work derives and demonstrates theoretically driven boundary conditions (e.g., attenuation when a heightened need-for-justification or support already exists) of this relationship. Together, these results provide new insights into how power influences consumers' need-for-justification and how this need affects the ways that consumers construct and respond to communications.

Keywords: power, asymmetrical relationships, need-for-justification, marketing communications

Communications are central to marketing and consumer behavior. Consumers converse with each other about purchases, read others' online reviews of product experiences, watch YouTubers discuss products, and even tweet to companies about their satisfaction. Given this high level of communication activity, consumer researchers have invested effort into understanding how contextual factors (e.g., social density; Consiglio, De Angelis, and Costabile 2018) and consumer motivations (e.g., persuasive intent; Rocklage, Rucker, and Nordgren 2018) affect senders' construction of communications as well as recipients' receptivity to them (for a review see Berger 2014).

This work explores how a pervasive element of social structure—a state of high power or feeling powerful—affects consumer construction of and receptivity to communications. Structural differences in power can manifest as a sense of power (see Galinsky, Rucker, and Magee 2015). We reveal a novel psychological effect of a sense of power: power influences consumers' need-for-justification. This need-for-justification produces an asymmetry in the construction versus reception of messages. For senders, a high-power state *reduces* their own need-for-justification, which lowers the degree of support they put into constructing their communications. However, for receivers, a high-power state *increases* their need-for-justification from others, which increases the degree of support they expect others to provide.

By revealing this relationship between power and the need-for-justification, the current work offers two primary contributions. First, we uncover a novel means by which a sense of power can shape communications and consumer behavior. Second, whereas prior work often looks at how a given variable affects either consumers' construction of communications or receptivity to communications, we explore both and reveal asymmetric outcomes of the same variable.

POWER AND MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS: PRIOR RESEARCH

Social power, or "power" for parsimony, has been defined as "asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations" (Magee and Galinsky 2008, p. 361). Scholars note that power is a fundamental factor governing social interactions (e.g., Anderson and Galinsky 2006; Galinsky et al. 2015; Smith and Trope 2006). Moreover, structural differences in power may ultimately influence behavior by fostering a psychological state or "sense of power." As a result, a sense of power can affect consumer behavior independent of any structural differences (Rucker and Galinsky 2017; Smith and Hofmann 2016). For example, in one study, consumers in a state of high power spent more on the self; in contrast, consumers in a state of low power spent more on others (Rucker, Galinsky, and Dubois 2012).

Research has explored a variety of ways by which power shapes consumer behavior (for reviews see Rucker and Galinsky 2016; Rucker et al. 2012); yet our understanding of how power shapes consumers' construction of or response to marketing communications is limited to a handful of prior findings. Briñol and colleagues (2007) examined how power shapes people's responses to persuasive messages. They proposed that high-power, relative to low-power, states increased people's certainty in their own attitudes. As a result, people in a high-power state exhibited reduced information search and greater confidence in their own thoughts. However, Briñol and colleagues (2007) only explored how people respond to marketing communications; the relationship between power and how people construct communications is still unexamined.

Dubois and colleagues (2016b) provide the first study of how power can affect both the manner in which people communicate information and what information they are receptive to.

Specifically, these authors report that high-power states lead people to emphasize competence over warmth in their communications. Similarly, high-power states lead people to be more persuaded by competence over warmth. This prior work presents evidence that power can affect how people communicate, but it focuses specifically on information in the form of competence versus warmth.

Of potential interest to marketers, Dubois et al. (2016b) suggest that marketing communications be tailored such that the approach people take to construct their own messages should be reflected in the type of messages with which they are targeted. Put simply, this prior work implies a symmetry in how power affects what is valued at both construction and reception. However, as we will elaborate, we suspect that asymmetrical relationships are possible such that consumers might exhibit different preferences and behaviors in regard to constructing versus receiving communications.

POWER AND NEED-FOR-JUSTIFICATION:
HOW POWER AFFECTS SENDERS' CONSTRUCTION OF MESSAGES

Need-for-justification can be understood as one's expectation that a choice or decision must be explained (Kray 2000; Kray and Gonzalez 1999). We suggest that need-for-justification plays a role in consumer communications. For example, consider the question "What is a good restaurant in Chicago?" A consumer with a low need-for-justification might respond, "You can try Girl & The Goat, I think you would like it." In contrast, a consumer with a high need-for-justification might respond, "You can try Girl & The Goat, I think you would like it because it has unique food plates and an atmosphere that is warm and engaging." In both cases, the

responder references the same restaurant and offers a favorable opinion. However, in the latter case, they offer a response that provides more support for their position.

Notably, many communications occur in social settings where others are able to observe a consumer's behavior (e.g., Chan and Sengupta 2010; Dubois, Bonezzi, and De Angelis 2016a; Moore 2012). As such, the very act of communicating to others in social settings may heighten people's need-for-justification (see Kray 2000; Kray and Gonzalez 1999). For example, Jonas and colleagues found that when people make a suggestion, they automatically seek justification for their reasons by searching for information to support their position (Jonas, Schulz-Hardt, and Frey 2005). Consistent with this idea, we similarly found that consumers consider it important to justify their opinions when talking with others in the workplace and writing reviews.[1]

Although social contexts can foster a need to justify one's position in a communication, we suggest that high-power states, relative to low-power states, may reduce consumers' need-for-justification and thus how they construct communications. Several independent streams of research support this proposition, albeit indirectly. For example, research has found that a psychological state of high power enhances people's self-efficacy perceptions (Fast et al. 2009; Galinsky et al. 2006; See et al. 2011), which may reduce the perceived need to justify their own position. In addition, power can lead consumers to perceive themselves as superior to others in a manner that may reduce their need to explain themselves with respect to their decisions (e.g., Gruenfeld et al. 2008; Lammers and Stapel 2010). Furthermore, the experience of power can enhance consumers' entitlement and decrease their perceived need for social approval (e.g., Jin,

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[1] We conducted a study where we asked participants (N = 40) to indicate the extent to which they think it is important to justify their decisions in both the workplace and in writing reviews on a 9-point scale (1 = "It is not necessary to justify my decisions/opinions" to 9 = "It is necessary to justify my decisions/opinions"). Participants reported a need to justify their decisions in both contexts (M = 6.23, SD = 1.82) at a level above the scale midpoint (p = .013).

He, and Zhang 2014; Lammers, Stapel, and Galinsky 2010; Rucker et al. 2012), which could lower their concerns about what others think of their decisions. Considering this evidence, we suggest that while need-for-justification might be salient in many communication contexts, people in a high-power state may experience a lower need-for-justification in regard to explaining or supporting their position.

If high-power states are accompanied by a lower need-for-justification, this should shape consumers' communications in a predictable fashion. Generally, those in a high-power state should put less emphasis on and effort into supporting their position in communications. We use the term "degree of support" in reference to the availability in favor of one's arguments (e.g., Bermingham and Smeaton 2010; Carenini and Moore 2006; Nash and Calonico 1973). More specifically, based on prior literature, degree of support can be manifested in, and thus should be reflected by, both the degree of explanation and the reliance on rational-based arguments.

First, degree of support can manifest as the level of explanation offered in a communication, such as its length (e.g., Dean et al. 2006; Guilford 1967; Hendriks et al. 2012; Sevier et al. 2017). For example, Hendriks and colleagues (2012) argue that newsletters with more concise language are perceived as less supportive and convincing compared to those generated with greater detail. Second, degree of support can manifest in whether a communicator provides rational-based arguments or feelings-based arguments (Hong and Chang 2015; Kahneman and Frederick 2002). Rational-based arguments are perceived as more elaborated and more evidence-based than feelings-based arguments (Kahneman and Frederick 2002; Zajonc 1980).

We propose that the psychological state of power lowers people's perceived need to justify their statements or beliefs. As a consequence, we predict that this will lead to a lower

degree of support in the communications they construct or select. Namely, consumers in a psychological state of high power should show a tendency to offer less explanation (e.g., more concise messages) and rely less on rational arguments. Formally, we put forth the following hypotheses:

H1: High-power states, compared to their baseline or low-power states, will lead people to construct communications with a lower overall degree of support. This lower degree of support will be marked by less explanation in the form of more concise language as well as less rational-based arguments.

H2: The relationship between power and degree of support in sending or constructing a communication will be mediated by people's need-for-justification (i.e., beliefs about needing to justify one's opinions to others).

POWER AND NEED-FOR-JUSTIFICATION:
HOW POWER AFFECTS RECEIVERS' RECEPTION OF MESSAGES

Regarding message senders, we predict that the experience of power lowers their need-for-justification, which in turn leads to their communications having less support. However, what happens if these high-power individuals sit on the other side of the communication channel and become receivers of others' communications?

On the one hand, a matching account would predict that being in a high-power state leads people to be more receptive to messages that are similar to those that they themselves would create. Given that they construct messages with less support, they might also be more receptive to receiving messages with less support. Indeed, the notion that people might be more receptive

to information that matches how they communicate is consistent with the findings of Dubois et al. (2016b) as well as a large literature on matching more generally (e.g., Jacoby and Dallas 1981; Jiang et al. 2016; Lee and Labroo 2004).

In contrast to a matching account, we propose that high-power states might prompt people to be less receptive to others' communications that have a low degree of support. Specifically, while a state of high power might lower the extent to which one feels a need to justify a position to others, people in this state may have expectations that others need to offer greater justification. In particular, social role theories suggest that powerful people do not need to show deference nor do they need to explain themselves to others (Eagly and Wood 1999; Eagly, Wood, and Diekman 2000). Rather, those in relatively high-power positions are naturally expected to receive deference from those in relatively low-power positions, an expectation that may carry over to the experience of a high-power state (see Rucker, Galinsky, and Magee 2018). Indeed, as part of their role, those in low-power positions may be expected to offer explanations and justification to both signal deference and validate the authority of those in high-power positions (e.g., Kray 2000; Kray and Gonzalez 1999; Rucker et al. 2018). Explanations and justification involve extra effort, which can indicate respect for the message recipients (Bottom et al. 2002).

In addition, prior work suggests that high power is associated with people being more dismissive of others' ideas (e.g., Bottomore 1964; Fiske 2010). This observation that powerful people are more dismissive further implies that they might hold higher expectations for others to justify and sufficiently support their position. Consequently, while high-power consumers are predicted to offer less support for their own positions, we propose that they want and expect others to provide more. The result is that they will be less persuaded if others do not provide a

high degree of support in communications. Formally:

> **H3:** Consumers in high-power states will be less persuaded by others' communications when they are accompanied by a low, compared to high, degree of support.

> **H4:** The relationship between power and degree of support in receiving communication will be mediated by expectations that others need to offer justification.

OVERVIEW OF EXPERIMENTS

Six studies explore how power influences consumers' communications. Study 1 tests the causal relationship between consumers' psychological state of power and the degree of support observed in their communications. Study 2 explores the underlying process; we find that need-for-justification mediates the impact of power on the degree of support in communications. Study 3 provides evidence for our proposed mechanism through a process-by-moderation approach. In the final three studies, we explore how high-power states affect consumers' receptivity to a message. Specifically, high-power states lead people to be less persuaded by messages with a lower degree of support (study 4), and this is mediated by their beliefs that others need to offer greater justification (study 5). Finally, study 6 uses an incentive-compatible design and finds that those in high-power states are less persuaded by messages with a lower degree of support.

Across studies, we measure/manipulate degree of support in communication in one of two different forms: rationalization and degree of explanation. We test our effects with both within-subjects (studies 1 and 2) and between-subjects designs (studies 3, 4, 5, and 6). We also use both C2C (studies 1, 2, 3 and 5) and B2C contexts (studies 4 and 6). In all studies, in addition

to the degree of support, we measured the language characteristics of the messages, such as their warmth, competence, and abstractness. Given the limited space in the main text, we do not discuss these characteristics further (additional measurements and analyses can be found in web appendix A and B).

STUDY 1: POWER AND SENDERS' DEGREE OF SUPPORT

The first study tested our hypothesis that feeling powerful decreases the degree of support that consumers use in their communications (H1). In this study, we operationalized the degree of support via the length of the message in communications. We predicted that participants with an incidentally heightened state of high power would be more likely to choose a more concise recommendation over a verbose one.

Method

Three hundred British adults participated in this study on Prolific (194 women, M_{age} = 38.58) for a small payment. We preregistered this study (at AsPredicted, #100994, https://aspredicted.org/y5g83.pdf). The study was a 3 (power: high vs. low vs. baseline) × 2 (order of recommendations: concise recommendation first vs. verbose recommendation first) between-participants design. We counterbalanced the order of recommendations. Each participant was presented with both concise recommendation and verbose recommendation.

We first manipulated participants' feeling of power through a resource allocation task (adapted from Khademi et al. 2021). Participants were told that we were interested in

understanding how people make decisions based on their role (see web appendix C for complete details). Specifically, high power participants were assigned as allocators while low power participants were assigned as receivers. As the allocator, high power participants determined how much bonus the receiver would receive. The bonus ranged from £0 to £0.6. In contrast, lower power participants were told that, as the receiver, they would passively receive the bonus decided by the allocator. The bonuses given for the low power conditions were either £ 0.2, 0.3 or 0.4 (distribution was random). Participants in the baseline condition did not complete the allocation task. To avoid comparison effects, participants in different roles were not told about how much the participants in other conditions were being paid.

Next, as part of an ostensibly unrelated study, participants read a scenario in which they met a foreign tourist on the street who asked for their recommendations regarding two local tourist attractions. Participants were provided with two different recommendations varying in conciseness, while counterbalancing the recommended museum (see web appendix D). Participants were asked to choose one recommendation to provide to the tourist. Finally, in a funnel debriefing, participants were invited to guess the purpose of this study.

Results

This manipulation of power was validated through a pretest with an independent sample of 300 participants (204 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.87$). After the resource allocation manipulation, participants reported their agreement with three statements that asked how the task made them feel on a 9-point scale (1 = "I feel powerless/submissive/insecure," 9 = "I feel powerful/dominant/confident"; $\alpha = .86$; Jiang, Zhan, and Rucker 2014). The findings show that

this resource allocation manipulation significantly affected participants' feelings of power ($F(2, 297) = 133.18$, $p < .001$). Participants reported higher levels of power in the high-power condition ($M = 6.99$, SD = 1.62) compared to those in the baseline ($M = 5.20$, SD = 1.51; $t(297) = 8.13$, $p < .001$) and the low-power conditions ($M = 3.40$, SD = 1.54; $t(297) = 16.32$, $p < .001$). Participants reported feeling less powerful in the low-power condition compared to those in the baseline condition ($t(297) = -8.19$, $p < .001$). Feelings of mental fatigue were also measured in the pretest (1 = "not at all", 9 = "very much"). We did not find significant effects of power manipulation on mental fatigue ($M_{\text{high power}} = 3.98$, SD = 2.35 vs. $M_{\text{baseline}} = 4.51$, SD = 2.39 vs. $M_{\text{lower power}} = 4.23$, SD = 2.57, $F(2, 297) = 1.18$, $p = .310$), suggesting that the resource allocation task did not trigger differential depletion across conditions.

A 3 × 2 ANOVA did not show a significant main effect of recommendation order or interaction (ps > .896), so we collapsed the data across the conditions for further analysis. We observed a significant main effect of power on participants' recommendation choice (*Wald* = 7.58, $p = .023$). Consistent with predictions, participants were more likely to choose the more concise recommendation in the high-power condition (49.0%) compared to those in the baseline condition (30.6%; $b = -.78$, SE = .30, *Wald* = 6.88, $p = .009$, *OR* = 2.18) and those in the low-power condition (35.3%; $b = -.57$, SE = .29, *Wald* = 3.87, $p = .049$, *OR* = 1.76). There was no significant difference between the baseline and low-power conditions ($b = -.21$, SE = .30, *Wald* = .50, $p = .482$). In addition, no participant successfully guessed that this study is about power, suggesting that the effects we observed were not driven by an explicit demand effect.

Discussion

The results from study 1 provide initial support for H1—incidentally heightened states of power decreased the degree of support that consumers put into their communication, manifested in the form of shorter messages. Moreover, study 1 found that, relative to a baseline condition, the observed effect was driven by feeling powerful as opposed to feeling powerless. This result is consistent with the idea that a need-for-justification may often be a default in social communications and that a feeling of power reduces this need.

STUDY 2: THE UNDERLYING MECHANISM

Study 2 aimed to both replicate the effect of power observed in study 1 and shed light on the underlying process. Our proposition is that a psychological state of high power lowers people's perceived need to justify their statements or beliefs. As a consequence, this lowered need-for-justification reduces the degree of support they require for their communications.

Method

Two hundred adult U.S. consumers (69 women; M_{age} = 36.87) from MTurk participated in this study for a small payment. We randomly assigned participants to either a high-power or a low-power condition. We manipulated power based on a past procedure in the literature (adopted from Rucker et al. 2011). Specifically, participants were instructed to put themselves into the role of a person in a story. In the high-power condition, participants assumed the role of the boss at a company who was in charge of directing subordinates. In contrast, participants in the low-power condition assumed the role of an employee at a company who was responsible for carrying out

the orders of the boss (see web appendix E for complete details). After the task, participants responded to the same manipulation checks used ($\alpha = .92$).

Next, participants completed a museum recommendation choice task similar to that in study 1. They were told to recommend a historical society museum to a business associate who was planning a tour of their city. We provided two different ways to offer the recommendation (either a rational-based recommendation or a feeling-based recommendation; Hong and Chang 2015; Lu and Sinha 2017; see web appendix F). This approach and procedure allowed us to hold the message length constant. Rational-based arguments are typically viewed as more justified than those which are feeling-based (Hong and Chang 2015; Kahneman and Frederick 2002). Participants chose the communication they preferred to offer. Finally, to test need-for-justification as a mediator, participants were asked to report the extent to which they felt the need to 1) justify actions they took, 2) provide reasons for what they did, and 3) explain why they made a certain decision (e.g., Hsee et al. 2003; Tetlock and Boettger 1989; $\alpha = .94$), using a 9-point scale (1 = "not at all," 9 = "very much").

Results

Participants felt more powerful in the high-power condition ($M = 7.50$, SD = 1.27) compared to those in the low-power condition ($M = 5.96$, SD = 2.47; $t(198) = 5.47$, $p < .001$) and were also less likely to choose the rational-based recommendation in the high-power condition (29.9%) compared to those in the low-power condition (56.3%; $\chi^2(1) = 14.18$, $p < .001$, $OR = .33$). Finally, participants indicated a lower need-for-justification in the high-power condition ($M = 6.20$, SD = 2.28) compared to those in the low-power condition ($M = 6.92$, SD = 1.44;

t(198) = -2.69, *p* = .008). The mediating role of need-for-justification to others was supported by a bootstrapping procedure (with 5,000 resamples, PROCESS Model 4; Hayes 2013 bias-corrected bootstrap), which showed a 95% confidence interval [-.3306, -.0020] that excluded zero (indirect effect = -.11, boot SE = .08).

Discussion

Study 2 supported the proposition (H2) that a psychological state of high power reduces consumers' degree of support in their communications as a result of having a lower need-for-justification in regard to validating their opinion to others.

STUDY 3: POWER AND SENDERS' DEGREE OF SUPPORT, EVIDENCE OF THE PROCESS VIA MODERATION

Our conceptual model posits that, for senders, high-power states reduce individuals' need to justify their position to others. If this process account is correct, then heightening everyone's need-for-justification should attenuate or eliminate this effect. Study 3 tested this possibility, which allowed for a test of the process via moderation. Specifically, we predicted that participants in a heightened state of power would write communications more concisely. However, when everyone's need-for-justification was heightened, we predicted that participants would write communications of similar length regardless of power. Furthermore, different from the within-subject design (preference for one message over the other) we used in studies 1 and 2, this study explored our effect in a between-subject setting.

Method

Two hundred and seventeen Hong Kong undergraduate students (159 women, M_{age} = 21.72) were recruited to participate in this lab experiment for a small payment. The study had a 2 (power: high vs. low) × 2 (justification need: baseline vs. heightened) between-participants factorial design.

We first manipulated participants' feeling of power through a recall task (see Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003; Jiang et al. 2014; Rucker and Galinsky 2008). Specifically, based on condition, participants described a) a recent circumstance in which they had control over another person (high-power condition) or b) a recent situation in which someone had control over them (the low-power condition). Participants then completed the manipulation checks as in the previous studies (α = .92). Next, participants were asked to write down why innovation was important and could change how people live. To increase the realism of the task, we informed participants that their post might be shared on their Facebook page for a local event called "Innovation Day." In the heightened-justification-need condition, participants were told that later they would be asked to explain their post to a group of other participants as well as the experimenter (see Hsee et al. 2003; Kinney 1971). Thus, regardless of their power condition, it was made clear that everyone would need to have a justification for their post. In contrast, in the baseline condition, participants were given no information about the need-for-justification to others. Finally, after participants finished their posts, their need-for-justification was measured through the same three items as in study 2 (α = .89).

Results

Participants felt more powerful in the high-power condition ($M = 6.08$, SD = 1.47) compared to those in the low-power condition ($M = 3.70$, SD = 1.58; $t(215) = 11.47$, $p < .001$). We counted the words in their posts using LIWC (Pennebaker, Francis, and Booth 2001; Pennebaker et al. 2007). A 2 × 2 ANOVA on communication conciseness yielded a significant main effect of justification need ($F(1, 213) = 24.50$, $p < .001$) and a non-significant main effect of power ($F(1, 213) = 1.33$, $p = .250$), qualified by a significant interaction of power × justification need ($F(1, 213) = 6.45$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .029$; see figure 1). In the baseline condition, participants in the high-power condition wrote shorter posts ($M = 30.57$ words, SD = 13.99) than their low-power counterparts ($M = 38.71$ words, SD = 15.46; $t(213) = -2.56$, $p = .011$, $d = .55$). However, in the heightened need-for-justification condition, no differences emerged between the high-power ($M = 47.07$ words, SD = 17.27) and low-power conditions ($M = 44.02$ words, SD = 17.66; $t(213) = 1.00$, $p = .318$). In fact, consistent with a heightened need-for-justification, participants in both conditions wrote longer posts.

FIGURE 1

MEAN NUMBER OF WORDS WRITTEN AS A FUNCTION OF POWER AND NEED-FOR-

JUSTIFICATION—STUDY 3
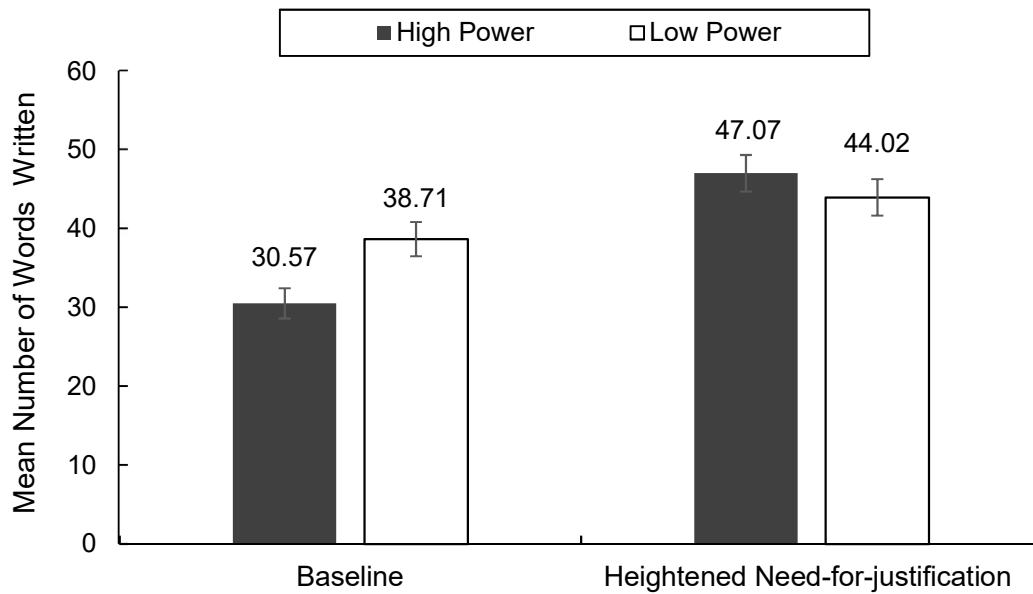
A 2 × 2 ANOVA on the need-for-justification dependent variable yielded a marginally significant main effect of justification need ($F(1, 213) = 3.33$, $p = .069$), qualified by a power × justification-need interaction ($F(1, 213) = 4.23$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = .019$). As expected, in the baseline condition, participants reported a lower need to justify their position to others in the high-power condition ($M = 5.50$, SD = 1.93) than did those in the low-power condition ($M = 6.23$, SD = 1.23; $t(213) = -2.58$, $p = .011$, $d = .45$). However, in the heightened-need-for-justification condition, participants' need-for-justification did not differ across power conditions ($M = 6.26$, SD = 1.12 vs. $M = 6.18$, SD = 1.34; $t(213) = .28$, $p = .777$). Bootstrapping procedures (with 5,000 resamples, PROCESS Model 8; Hayes 2013) with power as the independent variable, need-for-justification as the mediator, heightened justification as the moderator, and communication conciseness as the dependent variable revealed a significant moderated-mediation pattern [95% CI: .1469, 4.3420] that excluded zero (indirect effect = 1.54, boot SE = 1.01). Consistent with our prediction, in the baseline condition, need-for-justification mediated

the effect of power on consumers' communication conciseness [95% CI: -3.9034, -.1832]. In contrast, this mediation was not significant in the boosted-justification-need condition [95% CI: -.7360, 1.2358].

Discussion

Study 3 provided additional support for our underlying process regarding need-for-justification to others. We found that the previously observed effect of power on degree of support was eliminated when consumers' need-for-justification was experimentally boosted, as predicted by a need-for-justification account.

STUDY 4: POWER AND RECEIVERS' RESPONSE TO DEGREE OF SUPPORT

The next three experiments explored how power affects receivers' responses to messages that vary in degree of support. As noted earlier, while a matching effect whereby those in high-power states prefer to send and receive messages with lower degrees of support could be expected, we offer a different prediction. Specifically, whereas high-power individuals feel they do not have to justify their own decisions, they hold the expectation that others must. Consequently, we predict that these participants in high-power states will be less persuaded by marketing communications with a lower degree of support (H3) and that this effect is mediated by a heightened belief that others need to justify their positions (H4).

In study 4 specifically, we examined whether high-power participants were more or less persuaded by rational versus feeling-based arguments. Study 2 showed that high-power

participants were less inclined to select rational-based arguments, consistent with a reduced need to justify their position. However, if they believe others should justify their opinions, then they may exhibit less persuasion when others use feelings-based arguments (i.e., a lower degree of support). Thus, we predicted that consumers in a high-power state, compared to those in a low-power state, would be less persuaded by feelings-based marketing communications than by rational-based communications. Of note, for low-power consumers, we did not have an *a priori* reason to predict a difference. Specifically, to the extent that low power does not lead to the belief that others must justify their decisions more, individuals in this state may be responsive to either rational-based or feelings-based arguments.

Method

Three hundred and thirty-five Hong Kong undergraduate students (211 women, M_{age} = 20.07) were recruited to participate in a lab experiment for partial course credit. The study was a 2 (power: high vs. low) × 2 (message type: feeling-based vs. rational-based) between-participants design.

Participants first completed the same power-role manipulation task and manipulation checks (α = .90) as in study 2. They were then asked to carry out an ostensibly unrelated task focused on evaluating an advertisement for blood donation. Specifically, in one condition, the ad emphasized the benefits of blood donation through feeling-based arguments, such as "giving blood is giving life" and "blood is the most precious gift to give to another person." In the other condition, the ad used rational-based arguments to encourage blood donation, such as "one pint of blood can save up to 3 lives" and "someone needs blood every 2 seconds." We adapted these

arguments from Lu and Sinha 2017; see appendix A. After reading the ad, participants provided their attitude toward blood donation on four items (i.e., "dislike/like," "bad/good," "not appealing/ appealing," and "unfavorable/favorable," using 9-point scales; α = .93); then, they evaluated message persuasiveness on four items (persuasive, convincing, effective, and coherent; 1 = "not at all," 9 = "very much"; adopted from Cesario, Grant, and Higgins 2004; α =.89). Given that these eight items loaded onto one single factor in a factor analysis we conducted (see web appendix G for details), we averaged them (α = .93) to build a blood-donation evaluation index; a higher score means a more favorable evaluation of blood donation.

We also measured two additional dependent variables: participants' future blood-donation intention ("How likely will you be to donate your blood in the future?" 1 = "very unlikely," 9 = "very likely") and their intent to download a new mobile-phone application, NZBlood (choice: "Yes" vs. "No" vs. "No, because I already have a similar one in my phone," adapted from Lu and Sinha 2017).

Results

Participants reported feeling more powerful in the high-power condition ($M = 6.77$, SD = 1.61) compared to those in the low-power condition ($M = 3.67$, SD = 1.49; $t(333) = 18.29$, $p < .001$).

A 2 × 2 ANOVA on participants' blood-donation evaluation yielded a power × message-type interaction ($F(1, 331) = 8.07$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$; see figure 2), a marginally significant main effect of message type ($F(1, 331) = 3.63$, $p = .058$), and a non-significant main effect of power ($F(1, 331) = .29$, $p = .592$). Participants in the high-power condition reported a more

negative evaluation of blood donation after exposure to feeling-based messages ($M = 4.78$, SD = 1.61) compared to evaluations of blood donation after exposure to rational-based messages ($M = 5.46$, SD = 1.16; $t(331) = -3.37$, $p = .001$, $d = .49$). Participants in the low-power condition showed no difference between feeling-based ($M = 5.27$, SD = 1.01) and rational-based arguments ($M = 5.13$, SD = 1.44; $t(331) = .66$, $p = .510$).
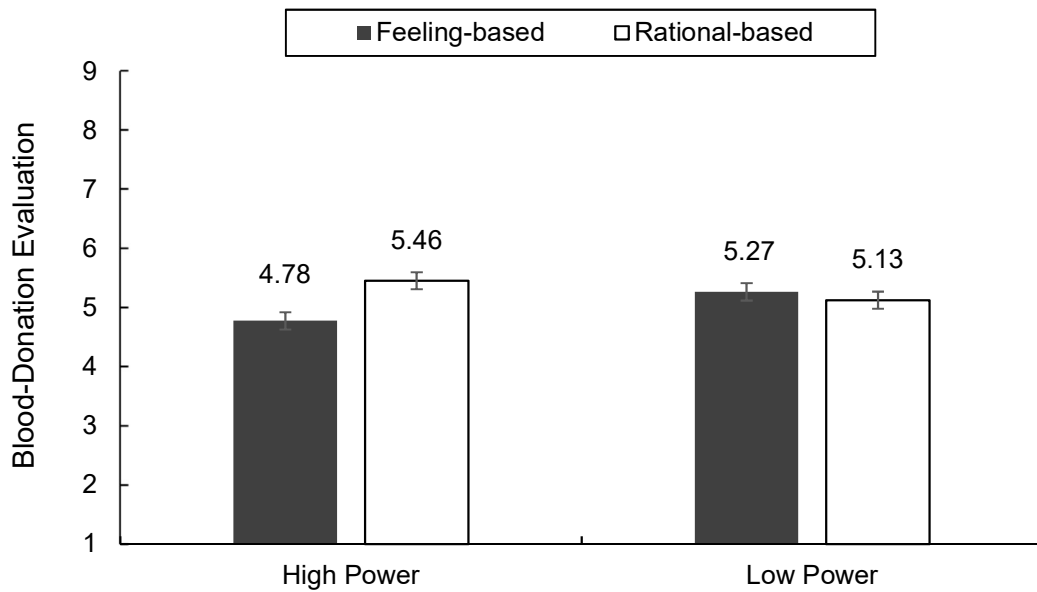
For the future blood-donation intention, the power × message-type interaction was not significant ($p = .113$), but we replicated the predicted simple contrast among high-power participants when it came to feeling-based ($M = 4.61$, SD = 1.89) versus rational-based arguments ($M = 5.20$, SD = 1.67; $t(331) = 2.14$, $p = .033$, $d = .33$). However, we did not find a significant pattern in participants' choice to download NZBlood (a blood-donation management app). We suspect that participants' app download decision might not be solely determined by message persuasiveness but could be shaped by many other factors (e.g., their interests, whether they have a smartphone, or their cellphone usage habits). Detailed analyses of these additional measurements are reported in web appendix H.

FIGURE 2

MEAN BLOOD-DONATION EVALUATION AS A FUNCTION OF POWER AND

MESSAGE TYPE —STUDY 4

Blood-Donation Evaluation chart comparing Feeling-based and Rational-based arguments across High Power and Low Power conditions. High Power: Feeling-based 4.78, Rational-based 5.46. Low Power: Feeling-based 5.27, Rational-based 5.13.

Discussion

Although high power may reduce people's need to justify their decisions in communications to others, it appears to lead them to expect others to justify their messages. Consistent with our need-for-justification perspective, high-power individuals showed less favorable product evaluation and lower persuasion regarding marketing communication with a lower degree of support (i.e., feeling-based arguments compared to rational-based arguments).

STUDY 5: THE ROLE OF NEED-FOR-JUSTIFICATION FROM OTHERS

Study 5 aimed to test the process underlying our observed effect on the side of receiving communications. Our theory predicted that high-power states lead consumers to expect others to justify their position more, resulting in a lower level of persuasion by others' marketing

communications when they are accompanied by a lower degree of support. To test this idea, we measured participants' expectations regarding others' degree of justification. Furthermore, instead of the B2C (business to consumer) context we used in study 4, this study explored our effect in a C2C context, where the product information that high- (low-) power consumers receive is from an individual seller in an online marketplace.

Method

We preregistered this study (at AsPredicted, #74385, https://aspredicted.org/xw34g.pdf) and recruited 400 British participants (280 women, M_{age} = 32.56) on Prolific. This study featured a 2 (power: high vs. low) × 2 (message length: concise vs. verbose) between-participants factorial design.

Participants first completed the same power-role manipulation task and manipulation checks (α = .91) as in study 4. They were then asked to perform an ostensibly unrelated product-evaluation task in which we manipulated the length of an advertising message. Specifically, participants were asked to imagine that they were searching for a new paper reader on a C2C (consumer to consumer) online marketplace and found a product ad (Kindle Paperwhite) created by an individual seller. Our two versions of the ad contained the same product image but with either a concise verbal product message (the concise-message condition) or a verbose verbal product information (the verbose-message condition; see appendix B). Participants were asked to provide their evaluation of Kindle Paperwhite on four items (i.e., "dislike/like," "bad/good," "not appealing/ appealing," and "unfavorable/favorable," using 9-point scales; α = .96). Next, we measured attitude certainty followed by expectation of others' justification. People may argue

that power can influence consumers' perceived certainty, which leads them to scrutinize information more or less closely (Briñol et al. 2007).

For the proposed mediator—expectation of others' justification or perceived justification—we asked participants to report the extent to which they felt the product information 1) met their expected justification from the individual seller; 2) satisfied their need for justification from the individual seller; and 3) made them feel that the justification the individual seller provided was sufficient (1 = "not at all," 9 = "very much"; α = .95). In addition, to explore an alternative account—that high power triggers greater certainty (Briñol et al. 2007)—we measured participants' attitude certainty toward the advertised product via three items (e.g., how certain/confident/sure are you of your attitudes about this product? 1 = "not at all," 9 = "very much"; adopted from Briñol, Petty, and Tormala 2004; Briñol et al. 2007; α = .97). Finally, we also measured perceived difficulty of processing information and the participants' degree of involvement in this study.

Results

Participants reported feeling more powerful in the high-power condition ($M = 6.44$, SD = 1.65) compared to those in the low-power condition ($M = 3.61$, SD = 2.02; $t(398) = 15.29$, $p < .001$).

A 2 × 2 ANOVA on product evaluation yielded significant main effects of power ($F(1, 396) = 4.01$, $p = .046$) and message length ($F(1, 396) = 26.02$, $p < .001$), qualified by a power × message-length interaction ($F(1, 396) = 22.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .055$; see figure 3). Participants in the high-power condition exhibited more negative attitudes toward the product accompanied by a

concise message ($M = 5.03$, SD $= 2.03$) compared to the product accompanied by a verbose message ($M = 6.74$, SD $= 1.61$; $t(396) = -6.90$, $p < .001$, $d = .93$). Participants in the low-power condition did not show this difference ($M = 6.21$, SD $= 1.53$ vs. $M = 6.26$, SD $= 1.70$; $t(396) = -.22$, $p = .823$).

FIGURE 3

MEAN PRODUCT EVALUATION AS A FUNCTION OF POWER AND MESSAGE

LENGTH —STUDY 5
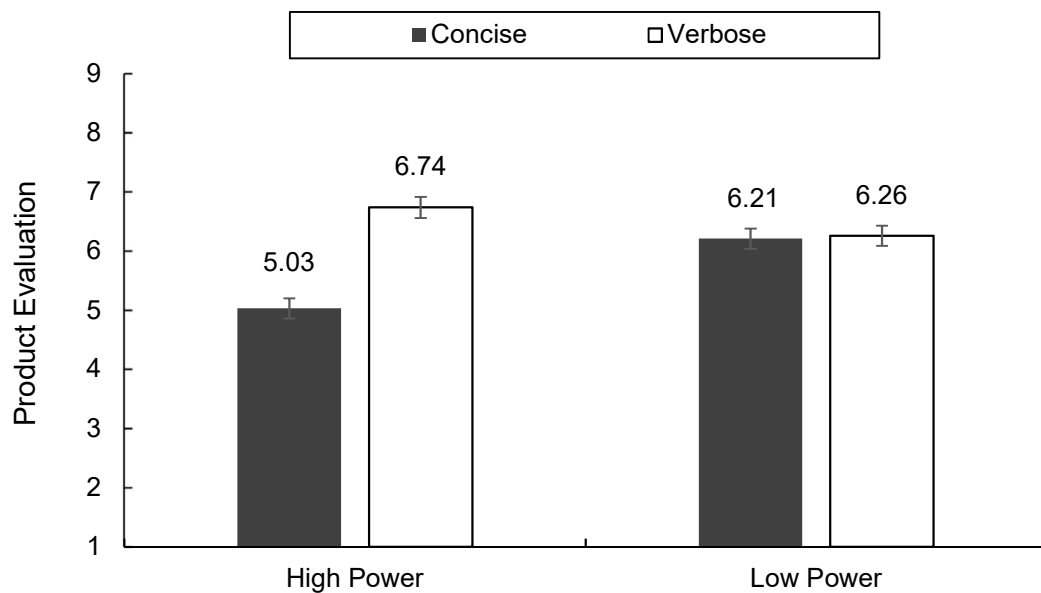
A 2×2 ANOVA on perceived justification yielded significant main effects of power ($F(1, 396) = 10.31$, $p < .001$) and message length ($F(1, 396) = 51.15$, $p < .001$), qualified by a power $\times$ message-length interaction ($F(1, 396) = 37.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .087$). As expected, high-power participants reported a lower perceived justification from the seller when they received a concise

message (M = 4.24, SD = 2.09) compared to when the product was accompanied by a verbose message (M = 6.59, SD = 1.52; $t(396)$ = -9.29, $p < .001$, d = 1.28). Participants in the low-power condition did not show this difference toward concise and verbose information (M = 5.89, SD = 1.79 vs. M = 6.07, SD = 1.59; $t(396)$ = -.71, $p = .476$).

Bootstrapping procedures (with 5,000 resamples, PROCESS Model 8; Hayes 2013) with message length as the independent variable, perceived justification from the seller as the mediator, power as the moderator, and product evaluation as the dependent variable revealed a significant moderated mediation pattern [95% CI: -1.7826, -.8895] that excluded zero (indirect effect = -1.32, boot SE = .23). Consistent with our prediction, in the high-power condition, perceived justification from the seller mediated the effect of message length and product evaluation [95% CI: -1.8257, -1.0722]. In contrast, this mediation was not significant in the low-power condition [95% CI: -.3823, .1749]. These findings suggested that high-power receivers expect others to justify their opinions, whereas the need for others' justification is not as critical for low-power receivers.

Finally, we did not find a difference in participants' perceived attitude certainty toward the product (2 × 2 interaction, $p = .130$) or their degree of involvement in this study (2 × 2 interaction, $p = .928$, NS). We did observe that the concise product information was perceived as more difficult to process (M = 2.94, SD = 2.50) than the verbose version (M = 2.24, SD = 1.59; $t(398)$ = 3.31, $p = .001$). However, perceived difficulty did not mediate our effect (Process 8, [95% CI: -.1372, .0490]). In addition, all the significant effects we observed still existed after controlling for perceived difficulty of processing information.

Discussion

With another operationalization of degree of support (i.e., concise vs. verbose messages), we demonstrated that high-power states led people to be less favorable to a message with reduced support. Furthermore, this difference was mediated by the perceived justification of the communicator. High-power states can reduce the degree of support that consumers put into communications as senders; yet, for receivers, high-power states led people to want others to demonstrate a high degree of support in their communications.

STUDY 6: AN INCENTIVE-COMPATIBLE BIDDING TASK

Study 6 was conducted to replicate the observed effects of power on degree of support with consumers in a context with a real incentive-compatible behavior. We again predicted that consumers in a high-power state, compared to those in a low-power state, would be less persuaded by marketing communication with a lower degree of support. Thus, they should be willing to pay less for the same product when it is accompanied by concise (vs. verbose) product information.

Method

Three hundred and seventeen Hong Kong undergraduates (236 women, $M_{age} = 21.22$) participated in this experiment online for a small payment. This study adopted a 2 (power: high vs. low) × 2 (message length: concise vs. verbose) between-participants factorial design.

Participants first completed the same power-role manipulation task and manipulation

checks as in study 5 (α = .92). Next, they were told that as a token of appreciation for their

assistance, they had a chance to bid for a box of six assorted color highlighters (see appendix C;

Roux, Goldsmith, and Bonezzi 2015; Wertenbroch and Skiera 2002). A poster with an image of

the items and product information was presented to participants with either concise product

information that had fewer words (the concise condition) or a verbose product message that had

more words (the verbose condition).

Participants were informed that an undisclosed reservation price had been set for the

highlighters and that they could place a bid from HK$0 to HK$30 (approximately US$3.85).

They would receive the highlighters if their bid equaled or surpassed the undisclosed reservation

price. Moreover, they were informed that if they "won" the bid, they would need to pay the bid

price from their own pocket (i.e., the bid would be directly subtracted from their participation

payment). After participants indicated their bids for the product, they viewed the results of their

bids and completed the transaction. Participants paid their bidding price, received their remaining

payment (HK$30 minus their bids), and were invited to the lab later to pick up the highlighters,

if their bid equaled or surpassed the reservation price, which was set as HK$5.

Results

Participants felt more powerful in the high-power condition ($M = 6.37$, SD = 1.53)

compared to those in the low-power condition ($M = 4.05$, SD = 1.78; $t(315) = 12.40$, $p < .001$).

A 2 × 2 ANOVA on bidding price yielded a significant main effect of message length

($F(1, 313) = 4.93$, $p = .027$) and a non-significant main effect of power ($F(1, 313) = 1.61$, p

$= .206$), qualified by a power × message-length interaction ($F(1, 313) = 6.90$, $p = .009$, η_p^2

= .022; see figure 4). The participants in the high-power condition bid lower prices for the

highlighters accompanied by a concise message (M = HK$7.07, SD = 6.33) compared to a

verbose message (M = HK$11.21, SD = 7.73; $t(313)$ = -3.40, p = .001, d = .58). The participants

in the low-power condition did not show this difference (M = HK$10.39, SD = 8.78 vs. M =

HK$10.05, SD = 7.35; $t(313)$ = .029, p = .772).

FIGURE 4

BIDDING PRICE (IN HK$) AS A FUNCTION OF POWER AND MESSAGE LENGTH—

STUDY 6
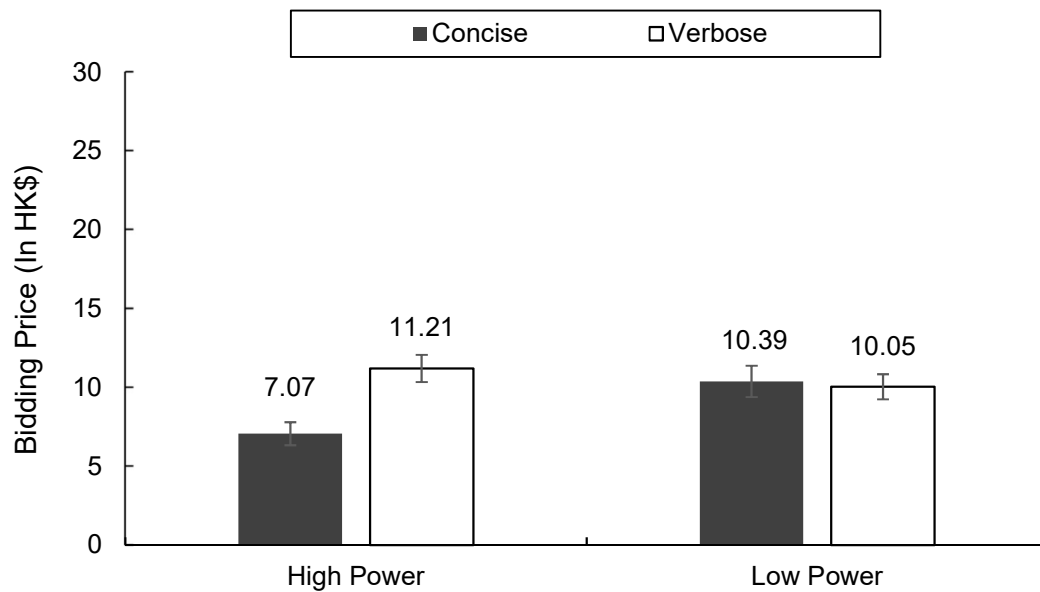
Discussion

With this incentive-compatible bidding data, study 6 replicated the finding that

individuals in a high-power state are less persuaded when information is lower in support. Given the incentive-compatible design, this study's findings suggest that experiences of power not only influence consumers' product evaluations and perceived message persuasiveness but can also affect behavior (e.g., actual payment).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Efforts to better understand consumer communications and how behaviors are shaped by various factors have increased within marketing, consumer behavior, and psychology (e.g., Chen 2017; Chen and Lurie 2013; Dubois et al. 2016a; Kronrod and Danziger 2013; Lee, Shrum, and Yi 2017; Moore and McFerran 2017; Rocklage et al. 2018; Schellekens, Verlegh, and Smidts 2010). The present research explored how a fundamental and pervasive psychological state—a sense of feeling powerful—can affect both consumers' need to justify their position to others and the justification they expect from others.

The outcome of this paper is twofold. First, a high-power state reduces consumers' own need to justify their position to others and thus lowers the degree of support they exhibit in their communications. This results in more concise language (studies 1 and 3) and a lower reliance on rational-based arguments (study 2). Second, and in contrast, in regard to receiving messages from others, a high-power state decreases consumers' receptivity to communications in which others offer low support (studies 4–6). This effect was mediated by the perceived justification required from others (study 5). Thus, despite sending messages with low support, consumers in a high-power state appear to want others to provide messages with more justification.

Contributions of the Present Work

The current work offers two primary conceptual contributions. First, we identify a novel psychological mechanism by which power can affect consumer behavior—need-for-justification. Although social contexts can foster a need to justify one's position in communication, we suggest that high-power states, relative to low-power states, may reduce consumers' need-for-justification when communicating to others. In contrast, we reveal that high-power states can lead consumers to expect others to offer greater justification in their communications. As a result, our second contribution is the documentation of an asymmetry in the construction versus reception of messages. For senders, a high-power state *reduces* consumers' own need-for-justification, which lowers the degree of support they put into constructing their communications. For receivers, a high-power state *increases* their need-for-justification from others, which increases the degree of support they expect others to provide.

Our studies expand prior research on how power shapes consumers' communication. The majority of extant work reports that power can affect how people receive or send messages in isolation. For example, Briñol and colleagues (2007) focused on how power influences the certainty of message recipients. Similarly, Magee and colleagues (2010) focused on how high power affects whether people send messages with more abstract (vs. concrete) language. In contrast, the present research offers a novel psychological mechanism and looks at how power affects both senders and receivers. Our mechanism is distinct from both Briñol and colleagues (2007; see study 5) and Magee and colleagues (2010); our results were not attributable to difference in certainty (see study 5) or difference in abstractness (see web appendix B for details). One study that has explored how power affects both senders and receivers is Dubois and

colleagues (2016b), who found that high-power states lead people to both emphasize and prefer to hear about competence—a symmetry in sending and receiving. In contrast, we demonstrate that asymmetric outcomes are also possible due to differential expectations around the need for justification from the self and others.

Beyond these conceptual contributions, the present findings introduce considerations for marketers seeking to design effective communications. As shown in studies 4, 5, and 6, the degree of support can influence persuasion and behavior (e.g., Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. 2012; Packard, Moore, and McFerran 2018). Thus, marketers could make more active efforts to consider the type of arguments used to persuade consumers (e.g., rational versus emotional). Indeed, as big data allows us to better understand our customers, we might be able to identify those who are more likely to possess power. In such cases, based on the present results, we would do well to offer messages with a higher degree of support. The findings of this research may also apply in sales contexts in regard to how salespeople should be trained to interact with customers. For instance, salespeople might need to put more versus less justification in their pitches based on whether they are addressing customers with lower versus higher wealth, a potential correlate of power (Rucker et al. 2018).

Limitations and Future Directions

The current research has its limitations, but we believe that these limitations offer a springboard for additional research. We discuss several limitations and opportunities regarding interpersonal power, need for justification, and degree of support.

Interpersonal Power. One promising direction for future research would be to look at

differences in the degree of support offered based on whether there is a difference in power between the communicator and the audience member—interpersonal power. For example, consider an individual sending an email to a manager or a subordinate. One possibility, consistent with this study, is that they would tailor their email based on whether they have low or high power relative to the person with whom they are communicating. However, in many cases, the interpersonal power between individuals may be unclear, yet differences in intrapersonal power could still affect the construction and reception of communications. Indeed, while speaking to a manager might require a subordinate to offer greater justification, a subordinate who feels psychologically powerful may actually give less justification. Thus, we propose that studying intrapersonal power may be as important as actual structural differences in power between two parties (e.g., Inesi et al. 2011; Rucker and Galinsky 2016). In addition, future research could further examine relationships between power and communication by exploring more secondary data (e.g., consumers' job position or income and their online word-of-mouth behavior).

Low-power states. In the current research, we did not find a difference in terms of the degree of support in communication between baseline and low-power states. One possible explanation for this null effect is via a simple assumption that consumers often have a "need-for-justification" in social communication (Kray 2000; Kray and Gonzalez 1999). People do not simply make a recommendation; they express arguments in support of it, consistent with the findings in our pretest. That is, people believe that it is important to justify their decisions both in the workplace and in writing reviews. As a result, a state of low power will not further increase consumers' need-for-justification and degree of support in communication. That being said, understanding consumers' behavior in a low-power state seems to be an important direction for

further exploration. Indeed, consumers may often experience feeling powerless rather than feeling powerful (e.g., Schaerer et al. 2018, 2021; Weiss et al. 2020). Specifically, a recent review shows that only one percent of power research was designed to explicitly test the effects of low power (Schaerer et al. 2018). Although low-power states did not heighten need-for-justification in the present work, it is possible that low-power might affect people's approach to other aspects of communications. For example, perhaps those who are lower in power might vary in their propensity to use pictures or words (Amit, Danziger, and Smith 2022; Li, Chan, and Kim 2019) or share positive versus negative thoughts (Chen, Sengupta, and Zheng 2022).

Need-for-Justification. By drawing attention to the role of need-for-justification, the present research raises the more general question of what factors lead consumers to feel a response is sufficiently justified. Indeed, some literature suggests that evaluative communications (e.g., opinions) require more justification than non-evaluative or descriptive communications (see Jacobsen and Höfel 2003; Mandler and Shebo 1983). In addition, communication partners may also shape consumers' need-for-justification. For example, consumers might feel a lower need to justify their decision when they talk to close others compared to distant others (Chang, Moon, and Balasubramanian 2012). Of note, future research could explore whether states of power interact with these other factors. For example, perhaps being in a state of high power does not affect people's need-for-justification when talking to others since this need is already low.

Degree of Support. Although a heightened need-for-justification is associated with a greater degree of support in the present studies, we note that these two constructs are orthogonal (e.g., Anderson and Butzin 1974; Bindra 1974). For example, people could have a heightened need-for-justification but lack the time or ability to provide strong, or the desired degree of,

support. Alternatively, people with a low need-for-justification may still explore and support their position if they perceive the topic to be interesting. Future research could examine the consequences that result from mismatches between the need-for-justification and the support that consumers are able to provide in response to this need. For example, perhaps a high need-for-justification and low support would lead a sender to have an attitude with less certainty.

The current research used rational-based (vs. feeling-based) arguments as one representation of degree of support in communication. One might wonder if the rational/feeling dichotomy is identical to the competence/warmth dichotomy in the Dubois et al. (2016b) paper. Although we acknowledge some similarities, we view them as conceptually distinct. For example, one could have rational arguments that are viewed as more or less supportive due to their message conciseness (study 2). Moreover, a competence argument could be supported with logic or with feeling. For example, the expertise of a chef and/or the quality of their food has been treated as a competence argument (see Dubois et al. 2016b). However, one might support that competence argument rationally ("The chef is an expert; he or she has 10 years of experience in three-star Michelin restaurants and has award-winning dishes") or emotionally ("The chef is an expert; I love the taste of their food and it's to die for"). In both cases, the argument is about the chef's competence, not about his or her warmth, but the claims are supported in a more rational or emotional way.

One might wonder if there are situations where those in states of high power might provide a greater degree of support in their messages. We view this as an intriguing question, and we believe one possibility concerns the gravity of the topic itself: the powerful may add greater justification when the situation demands it, as we observed in Study 3. Thus, the powerful are not "situationally stiff" but show flexibility in response to the situation. Indeed, in some

circumstances, people might hold expectations that those in power are primarily responsible for a decision, whereas those low in power are not; this could create an asymmetry where the powerful are expected to offer justification while the powerless are not.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the current research provides fresh insights into how a fundamental psychological state—power—can affect the construction and reception of communications via a novel psychological mechanism: need-for-justification. The work reveals an asymmetry: those with power construct messages with less support, but they are more responsive to messages with more support. In doing so, this work introduces new knowledge about how consumers communicate as a function of their power state, and it invites additional research inquiries into this area.

Data Collection Information

The first author supervised the data collection, conducted by research assistants for study 3 in Winter 2017; study 6 in Fall 2020, in the marketing behavioral lab at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University; and study 4 in Spring 2020 in the marketing behavioral lab at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. The first author also managed the data collection on Amazon's Mechanical Turk for study 2 in Summer 2020; and on Prolific for study 5 in Fall 2021, and study 1 in Summer 2022. All data were analyzed by the first author through discussion and consultation with the second and third authors. The data are currently stored in a project directory on the Open Science Framework and available to all authors.

APPENDIX A

EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI IN STUDY 4

Feeling-based Blood-Donation Ad	Rational-based Blood-Donation Ad
LifeBlood Blood Donation Services • Giving blood is giving life. • Blood is most precious gift to give to another person. • There is no substitute for blood. • Giving redefines your happiness with smile.	**LifeBlood** Blood Donation Services • One pint of blood can save up to 3 lives. • Someone needs blood every 2 seconds. • It renews itself with the body. • It burns calories and helps in weight control.

APPENDIX B

EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI IN STUDY 5

Concise Information	
Verbose Information	

EXPERIMENTAL STIMULI IN STUDY 6

Concise Information	6 ASSORTED COLOR HIGHLIGHTER It allows you to highlight precisely and evenly all the way across the page
Verbose Information	6 ASSORTED COLOR HIGHLIGHTER Clear, see-through tip allows you to highlight evenly across the page Smear Guard ink technology resists smudging of many pen and marker inks (let ink dry before highlighting) Easy-glide tip allows for smooth, straight lines and precision highlighting

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