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Perceived Utility (not Sympathy) Mediates the Proportion Dominance Effect

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Title: Perceived utility (not sympathy) mediates the Proportion Dominance Effect

Review Abstract (146 words)

The Proportion Dominance Effect (PDE) (i.e. the tendency to be more willing to help a fixed number of victims when the reference group is small than when it is large) has been suggested to be a part of the identifiable victim effect, which is known to be driven by sympathy. This study aims to test perceived utility as an alternative underlying mechanism of the PDE. The experiment was run in three phases to confirm each of the links separately. Phase 1: The effect of reference group size on helping behavior was replicated. Phase 2: The effect of reference group size on perceived utility but not on sympathy was confirmed. Phase 3: A mediation analysis showed that the PDE is mainly driven by an increased sense of utility. The PDE should hence be seen as a distinct psychological effect rather than a part of the identifiable victim effect.

Publication Abstract (47 words)

The underlying mechanisms of the Proportion Dominance Effect (i.e. the tendency to be more willing to help a fixed number of victims when the reference group is small than when it is large) were investigated. The results suggest that perceived utility, but not sympathy, mediates the effect.