

# The Effects of Power on Consumer Decision Strategies: The Mediating Role of Behavioral Approach-Inhibition Tendency and the Moderating Role of Gender

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**Purpose:** Previous studies on consumer decision strategies have focused on the process or outcomes of decision-making using different decision strategies. Relatively little is known about the factors (especially decision makers' characteristics) influencing the use of different decision strategies. This study examined the effects of power on consumer decision strategies and the underlying mechanisms.

**Methods:** Studies 1 (N = 128) and 2 (N = 130) examined multiple- and binary-option situations, respectively. Participants' power was manipulated with a writing task and their consumer decision strategies were assessed through the selection tasks of restaurants and beach resorts. Study 3 (N = 326) further explored the mediator of approach-inhibition tendency and the moderator of gender in the relationship between power and consumer decision strategies. Participants' chronic sense of power, approach-inhibition tendency, and purchasing strategies were measured using questionnaires.

**Results:** Powerful (vs powerless) individuals prefer to use a direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy, regardless of whether they face multiple or binary choices. An increased approach (vs inhibition) tendency explains why elevated power promotes the use of the direct selection strategy. Moreover, gender plays a moderating role. Specifically, the mediation effect of approach (vs inhibition) tendency on the relationship between power and the preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy is stronger for males than for females.

**Conclusion:** This study extends previous research on power and consumer decision strategies by clarifying that the effects of power on consumer decision strategies are primarily driven by high power (but not by low power). Furthermore, by examining the mediator of approach-inhibition tendency and the moderator of gender, this study promotes a deeper understanding of how power affects consumer decision strategies and for whom the effect is more salient. Besides, the present research has contributions to the approach-inhibition theory of power and the literature on gender differences in consumer behavior, and has practical implications for business marketing.

**Keywords:** power, consumer decision strategy, decision-making strategy, behavioral approach, behavioral inhibition, gender difference

## Introduction

When going to a supermarket, we can either directly buy our favorite products, or put multiple product options in the shopping cart and then exclude those that are less attractive before checkout. Similarly, as e-commerce has become ubiquitous in our daily life, there are two approaches that e-commerce platforms (eg, Alibaba, Amazon) use to promote their products and services. One allows us to add any products or services that we want into our cart. The other approach provides us some products or services in our cart by default, and we can remove those we do not want before the checkout. These examples demonstrate two decision strategies that consumers use when shopping: a direct selection

strategy, which refers to directly choosing attractive options from an alternative set, and an exclusion strategy, which refers to eliminating the unattractive options from an alternative set.<sup>1,2</sup>

Extant research has primarily investigated how these two decision strategies influence consumers' decision-making processes and outcomes (eg, decision-making standards, decision confidence, and product amounts that are ultimately purchased).<sup>3-5</sup> What factors influence consumers' use of different decision strategies? Only a few studies have explored this issue and have focused on the contextual factors related to decision-making (eg, choice set size).<sup>1,3,5</sup> Relatively little is known about what and how consumers' characteristics influence their use of different decision strategies. Investigating these topics is important, as retailers wish to understand the characteristics of potential consumers that influence decision strategies, so they can promote their products successfully. Meanwhile, consumers hope to determine which strategy is more suitable for a satisfactory purchase decision, based on their individual differences.

Power, typically defined as the relative ability of an individual to influence or control others, is a fundamental characteristic of a person in social settings and relations.<sup>6,7</sup> Power has been found to affect various domains of consumer behaviors (eg, acceptance of persuasion, consumer switching behavior, and indulgent consumption).<sup>8-10</sup> Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, only one study has examined the effects of consumers' power on their use of decision strategies. The study initially showed that powerful consumers prefer to use the direct selection strategy, whereas powerless consumers prefer to use the exclusion strategy when making their purchase decisions.<sup>11</sup> However, when measuring consumers' decision strategy preferences, the study used a purchase task in which participants were forced to use only one of the strategies. Actually, consumers may use these strategies jointly for real purchases.

Moreover, it is unknown about how power affects consumer decision strategies and whether this effect is more salient among certain types of consumers. Keltner et al's<sup>12,13</sup> approach-inhibition theory of power proposes that, compared to powerless individuals, powerful individuals have more opportunities to obtain resources and are more likely to administer resources and influence others. These benefits trigger a behavioral approach (vs inhibition) tendency among powerful individuals, which manifests as paying attention to positive information and approaching the desired goals. These characteristics of the behavioral approach tendency may lead powerful individuals to more easily become aware of the products that they want and translate their preferences into purchase actions (more compatible with the direct selection strategy than with the exclusion strategy). Therefore, the asymmetric approach-inhibition tendency of powerful and powerless individuals may account for how power influences consumer decision strategies. Furthermore, Meyers-Levy's<sup>14,15</sup> selective model proposes that, compared to females, males are selective processors who tend to primarily focus on the objects or attributes they want. This inclination may lead males to easily find the ideal product consistent with their preferences and select it directly (more compatible with the direct selection strategy than with the exclusion strategy). Considering this gender difference, the effects of power on consumer decision strategies through the mediator of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency may be more salient in males than in females. Accordingly, this study directly tests these two inferences.

The current study was designed with the following three objectives: (1) re-testing whether power influences consumer decision strategies by using a measure that can identify consumers' combined use of the two decision strategies and their relative preferences; (2) on the basis of the approach-inhibition theory of power, examining whether power influences consumer decision strategies through the mediator of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency; and (3) on the basis of gender differences in information processing strategies, investigating whether the effect of power on consumer decision strategies through the mediator of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency is moderated by gender.

This study makes the following contributions. First, regarding the literature on consumer decision strategies, it provides evidence for the effects of power on consumer decision strategies using a measure consistent with real purchases in daily life. Furthermore, by examining the mediating role of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency and the moderating role of gender, this study promotes an understanding of how power influences consumer decision strategies and for whom this effect is more salient. Second, with respect to the approach-inhibition theory of power, this study expands the scope that the theory can explain in the consumer behavior domain by directly revealing that the approach-inhibition tendency accounts for the effects of power on consumer decision strategies. Third, this study improves the understanding of gender differences in consumer decision strategies by initially demonstrating that gender moderates the mediation effect of approach-inhibition tendency between power and consumer decision strategies. In

addition, the findings of this study can offer suggestions on how to design marketing plans to increase product sales in accordance with the decision strategies of consumers of different genders with different levels of power.

We begin with a literature review and develop three hypotheses. We then present three studies that tested the hypotheses and conclude with a general discussion of our findings.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

### Consumer Decision Strategies: Direct Selection and Exclusion

In daily consumption, people usually adopt two strategies to make decisions when they face multiple consumption options.<sup>1</sup> One is direct selection, which refers to an individual directly choosing the product that they most want from multiple consumption options or attributes based on their preferences or needs. The other is exclusion, which refers to when an individual cannot make a decision directly; by excluding undesired options or attributes, the individual considers the remaining product to be the final choice.

Past studies on consumer decision strategies have predominantly focused on exploring the differences in the process or outcomes of decision-making using direct selection and exclusion strategies.<sup>4,16–18</sup> For example, research has shown that consumers who employ the two consumer strategies differ in the amount and type of products they ultimately choose. Compared to consumers who use the exclusion strategy, those who use the direct selection strategy generally have stricter decision-making standards and therefore choose fewer products.<sup>3</sup> In terms of product types, when consumers adopt the direct selection strategy, they pay more attention to the functional characteristics of products; thus, they will prefer more functional products (eg, healthy food, cost-effective computers). In contrast, people who employ the exclusion strategy are easily influenced by emotions and the hedonic characteristics of products, which will result in the consumption of more hedonic goods (eg, junk food, brand-name clothes).<sup>19</sup> Meloy and Russo<sup>20</sup> demonstrated a compatibility effect of product valence and the decision strategy. Specifically, selecting (vs excluding) positive products or attributes, or excluding (vs selecting) negative products or attributes can result in a greater accentuation of attribution differences, higher confidence in the decision choice, and more information distortion.<sup>4,21</sup> The reason is that consumers attend to different aspects of a product when using different decision strategies. They primarily focus on the reason for choosing an option when using the selection strategy, and therefore, the positive features of products will receive more weight. However, when using the exclusion strategy, consumers look for a reason to reject products, and the negative features of options will thus receive more weight.<sup>22–24</sup> Furthermore, Chan and Wang<sup>18</sup> showed that the impacts of decision strategies on decision confidence and decision satisfaction is moderated by the size of choice set. Using the exclusion (vs direct selection) strategy elevates decision confidence and decision satisfaction when consumers face a large (vs small) choice set. The reason is that consumers usually have a goal of avoiding rejecting good option when they adopt the exclusion strategy. They are thus more confident and satisfied with their decision-making in the situation of a large (vs small) choice set as a large choice set can reduce the possibility of rejecting superior options.

Literature has shown that various external and personal factors, such as digital influencers, personal information processing style, and prior purchase experiences, can affect consumer decision-making processes.<sup>25–27</sup> Nevertheless, relatively little is known about the particular factors that influence consumers' choice of which decision strategy to use. Several studies found that the size of a choice set influences the use of decision strategies. A large choice set leads consumers being more likely to adopt the selection strategy, as it can effectively reduce the size of the consideration set.<sup>1,3,5</sup> In addition to this external or situational factor, more research is needed to explore other factors (especially those related to individual differences) that affect the use of decision strategies.

### Power and Consumer Decision Strategies

Power is one of the basic characteristics of social life.<sup>6</sup> It often refers to an individual's potential ability to influence others or control others' outcomes via possessing valuable resources or administering rewards or punishments.<sup>28</sup> In research, power is also viewed and studied as the subjective perception of one's ability to influence others (termed as sense of power).<sup>29,30</sup> The influence of power is seen to be ubiquitous in daily consumer behavior. For example, VIP members have priority in enjoying consumer services and non-VIP members have to wait in line for service. In the field

of consumer psychology, many studies have examined the impacts of power on consumer behavior.<sup>31,32</sup> For example, Rucker and Galinsky<sup>33</sup> showed that high power promotes a focus on one's own internal desire, thus leading to increased utility consumption. In contrast, powerlessness triggers conspicuous consumption signaling status to others, and through such consumption, powerless people can compensate for being in a low social position.<sup>34</sup> Jiang et al<sup>8</sup> found that high power is accompanied by a general tendency to take action, which enhances consumer switching behavior. Rucker and Galinsky<sup>9</sup> proposed that having and lacking power activate agentic and communal orientations, respectively, thus influencing a wide range of consumer behaviors, such as purchase goal setting, gift giving, and persuasion.

To the best of our knowledge, only one study, conducted by Murali and Nagpal,<sup>11</sup> has examined the effects of power on consumer decision strategies. The study initially revealed that powerful individuals are more likely to use the direct selection strategy, whereas powerless individuals are more likely to use the exclusion strategy. Based on the study, the following three questions arise and require to be further examined.

First, when measuring participants' preference for a certain strategy, Murali and Nagpal asked participants to indicate which strategy they used in purchase tasks, which meant that the participants could only answer with either direct selection or exclusion. In reality, these two strategies are often jointly used. For example, when faced with multiple product options or attributes, a person may not initially have a clear prior preference and just narrow down from many alternatives to a few (exclusion strategy). In this process, they become aware of their preferences, and then simply choose the option that mostly matches their preferences from the remaining options (direct selection). In this case, the consumer uses both strategies. Thus, a measure that can assess the combined use of the two strategies and participants' relative use preference for the strategies is needed.

Second, Murali and Nagpal suggested that the possibility that power influences a relative behavioral tendency of approach and inhibition may explain why powerful and powerless people prefer the direct selection and exclusion strategies, respectively. However, the mediating role of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency in the relationship between power and decision strategies has not been directly tested.

Third, do gender differences affect the association between power and consumer decision strategies? Previous research has shown that gender plays a role in some stages of consumer behavior processes, such as attitude and motivation toward purchasing behavior, information processing, and the outcomes of consumption decision-making.<sup>35–37</sup> Surprisingly, it has received little attention in the research on consumer decision strategies. Past research on decision strategies either recruited unequal numbers of male and female participants or did not examine whether there were gender differences in the use of decision strategies.<sup>1,2,11,38</sup> Whether gender moderates the strength of the mediation effect in which power influences decision strategies through behavioral approach-inhibition tendency remains unclear.

Hence, this study investigates these three questions and contributes to a deeper understanding of how consumers' power affects their use of decision strategies and for whom this effect is more salient.

## The Mediating Role of Behavioral Approach-Inhibition Tendency

The dominant paradigm of socio-cognitive research on power over the last 18 years is based on the approach-inhibition theory proposed by Keltner et al.<sup>12,13</sup> This theory proposes that having power activates behavioral approach system (BAS), and lacking power activates behavioral inhibition system (BIS). Gray<sup>39</sup> first proposed these systems as the two basic motivational systems that drive individuals' reactions to the environment. BAS is activated in the presence of reward cues (eg, food and money), and is responsible for triggering approach behaviors (eg, pursuing one's aims and desires) and positive affect (eg, happiness). In contrast, BIS is activated by potential punishments and threats, and is responsible for inhibition or withdrawal behaviors and negative affect (eg, anxiety). Having power is related to possession of valuable resources and rewarding contexts. The experience of power makes people act at will with little social resistance and few constraints.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, these benefits trigger the activation of the BAS. In contrast, a lack of power is related to limited access to valuable resources, increased constraints, and exposure to potential threats and punishments, which trigger the activation of the BIS.<sup>41,42</sup> The approach-inhibition tendency of power highlights that most consequences of having power can be considered as the results of BAS activation, whereas most consequences of lacking power can be seen as the results of BIS activation. The behavioral tendencies of approach and inhibition further influence the affect, attention, cognition, and social behavior of powerful and powerless people. Specifically, the theory argues that

having and lacking power, respectively, lead to (a) positive and negative emotions, (b) attention to positive (eg, rewards) and negative (eg, threats) information, (c) automatic cognition and systematic/controlled cognition, and (d) disinhibited (eg, action-oriented) and inhibited (eg, avoidance-oriented) behavior.<sup>12,13</sup>

According to this theory, this study proposes that having (vs lacking) power enhances a relatively approach-oriented (vs inhibition-oriented) behavioral tendency, which would in turn lead to a preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy. We develop this prediction for several reasons as follows.

As powerful individuals control and have easier access to valuable resources, they are less dependent on others. Controlling resources also means that powerful individuals often find themselves in resource-rich environments.<sup>12,43</sup> Based on this premise and on Gray's<sup>39</sup> theory of approach and inhibition motivational states, having power activates a behavioral approach tendency because circumstances allow powerful individuals to approach the goals they desire.<sup>6,12</sup> Research has indicated that having power gives people clarity of focus and energizes their actions, which helps them approach goals without distractions. Power facilitates the goal-oriented behaviors, from setting goals, initiating goal pursuit, to striving until successful completion.<sup>6,44,45</sup> In consumptions, the behavioral approach tendency would lead powerful individuals to quickly become aware of their desired product(s) or attribute(s), initiate and maintain a proactive search for the product(s) or attribute(s) consistent with their preferences, and then select them. This is typical of a direct selection strategy. In contrast, powerless individuals have reduced access to resources, and their outcomes are dependent on power holders. Consequently, the powerless have a behavioral inhibition tendency, which is characterized by prevention focus orientations and avoidance of negative outcomes.<sup>12,46</sup> Based on the characteristics of powerless individuals, it seems likely that the primary goal of their purchase decision-making may be to avoid making "false" decisions (eg, remaining a negative or inferior option as the final choice). To achieve this goal, powerless individuals would be more likely to use the exclusion strategy, as this strategy emphasizes the decision of rejecting negative or inferior options.<sup>16,18</sup>

Moreover, due to being constantly surrounded by resources and rewards, powerful individuals pay increased attention to positive information and rewards, which is indicative of an elevated approach tendency.<sup>12,13,47</sup> This would lead powerful individuals to pay more attention to the positive attributes of product options and then directly select one with more positive attributes. Previous research has demonstrated that elevated attention to positive features attenuates perceptions of positive differences in product options and can provide a justification for why we choose a specific product.<sup>20</sup> This would in turn facilitate the use of the direct selection strategy. Accordingly, we predict that powerful consumers are more inclined to use the direct selection. In contrast, due to being dependent on others to obtain resources and being subjected to scrutiny by the powerful, powerless people have more vigilance and increased attention to negative information and threat cues, which is indicative of an elevated inhibition tendency.<sup>12,13</sup> This would lead the powerless to pay more attention to the negative attributes of product options during purchases. Weighing heavily on negative features attenuates perceptions of negative differences in product options and can provide a reason to explain for why eliminating a specific product,<sup>20</sup> which would in turn facilitate the use of the exclusion strategy. Therefore, we predict that powerless consumers are more inclined to use the exclusion strategy.

Based on the reasons above, we propose Hypotheses 1 and 2 as follows.

H<sub>1</sub>: When making consumption decisions, powerful individuals prefer the direct selection strategy, whereas powerless individuals prefer the exclusion strategy.

H<sub>2</sub>: Power influences consumer decision strategies through the mediating role of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency.

## The Moderating Role of Gender

Evidence has shown that gender differences influence the strategies for processing information and evaluating options.<sup>15,48,49</sup> Meyers-Levy's<sup>14</sup> selective model suggests that males are selective processors who tend to use a heuristic strategy to search for and evaluate objects' information. This heuristic strategy involves focusing on the objects or attributes they want and may lead to the disregarding of less salient information. In contrast, females are



comprehensive processors and tend to employ a detailed strategy which involves relatively thorough and effortful processing of all objects' available information.<sup>50,51</sup> The gender differences in processing strategies have a biological basis. Human brain includes two hemispheres. Lateralization refers to the tendency of some neural functions or cognitive processes to be specialized in one hemisphere. The left hemisphere specializes in verbal abilities and the right hemisphere specializes in spatial perception.<sup>52,53</sup> The pattern and degree of lateralization influence cognitive processing. Research has indicated that the two hemispheres are more specialized in males and more integrated in females.<sup>54,55</sup> More functionally lateralized male brains process information on a piecemeal basis, whereas more integrated female brains process information holistically. Therefore, males tend to process information by focusing on limited salient information, whereas females tend to process information with an elaborate and detailed strategy.<sup>51</sup>

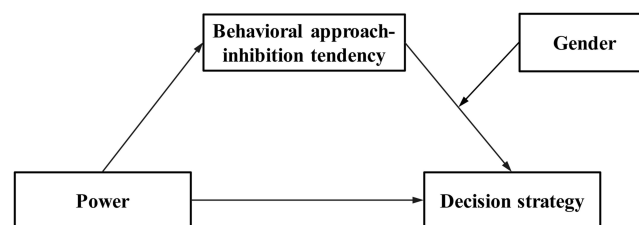
When individuals primarily focus on the information (eg, products, attributes, and brands) consistent with their preferences, they can easily find the ideal product and choose it directly.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, males should be more prone to using the direct selection strategy. In contrast, when individuals exhibit more elaboration on all available messages, including both preference-consistent and preference-inconsistent information, their tendency to use the direct selection strategy decreases.<sup>38</sup> Sometimes, when individuals consider all available information, their preferences may not manifest initially. They use an exclusion strategy to reduce the size of the consideration set. Progressively, they become aware of their preferences and weight positive, preference-consistent information as more important. Thus, they seek the most preference-consistent product and choose it directly. In this situation, individuals use both decision strategies jointly. Another possibility is, once individuals detect negative (eg, preference-inconsistent, unattractive) information, they may pay more attention to the negative information in the evaluation stage than to positive (eg, preference-consistent, attractive) information, as the evolutionary perspective suggests that negative information is critical to human survival and adaptation.<sup>56–58</sup> Thus, individuals have a strong desire to avoid negative stimuli, which is compatible with the exclusion strategy.<sup>4,20,59</sup> At this time, individuals are more likely to primarily use the exclusion strategy. In summary, the situations above indicate that elaboration may reduce the tendency to solely use the direct selection strategy. As females tend to rely more on elaborative processing in their decision-making, they should be less prone to using the direct selection strategy primarily.

Based on the claims above, gender may moderate the relationship between behavioral approach-inhibition tendency and decision strategies. For males, their processing strategy of primarily focusing on salient and preference-consistent information may strengthen the association between behavioral approach (vs inhibition) tendency and the preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy. In contrast, for females, their processing strategy of detailed elaboration on all available information may attenuate the association between behavioral approach (vs inhibition) tendency and the preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy. Thus, we propose Hypothesis 3 as follows.

H<sub>3</sub>: Gender moderates the association between behavioral approach-inhibition tendency and decision strategies.

## Overview of the Current Research

Three studies examined the effects of power on consumer decision strategies and the mechanisms underlying the power effects. Specifically, a moderated mediation model was established to test the following questions (Figure 1): (1) Does behavioral approach-inhibition tendency mediate the relationship between power and consumer decision strategies? (2)



**Figure 1** The hypothesized moderated mediation model.

Does gender moderate the relationship between behavioral approach-inhibition tendency and consumer decision strategies?

Considering that consumers vary their decision strategies in different situations involving choice sets of different sizes,<sup>5,18</sup> Studies 1 and 2 examined the effects of power on consumer decision strategies in multiple- and binary-choice situations, respectively. In these studies, participants' experience of powerfulness or powerlessness was experimentally induced by a writing task created by Galinsky et al.<sup>60</sup> Then, the participants completed a consumer decision task involving going to a restaurant for dinner with six available options (Study 1) and going to a beach resort with two available options (Study 2). Their decision strategies were measured during the tasks. Study 3 further tested the hypothesized moderated mediation model. In this study, participants' chronic power was measured using the Sense of Power Scale.<sup>30</sup> Chronic power can reflect either an individual's actual, objective power in terms of factors such as wealth, superior roles at work, and high socioeconomic status, or an individual's overall sense of power in their everyday life.<sup>61</sup> Then, behavioral approach-inhibition tendency was assessed using the BAS/BIS scale.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, participants completed a questionnaire consisting of four consumer decision tasks adapted from Wedell.<sup>24</sup> Their decision strategies were assessed for each decision task.

## Study I

### Method

#### Participants

G\*Power indicates that, for an experimental design with two independent groups capable of detecting a medium effect size ( $d = 0.05$ ) with sufficient power ( $1 - \beta = 0.80$ ), at least 128 participants were desired. Therefore, we set a priori minimum sample size of 128 participants, and recruited participants (psychology students or staff were excluded) from a university psychology participant pool via opportunity sampling during three weeks. A total of 130 participants took part in the study in exchange for payment of 5 CNY. Two participants' data were excluded because they did not complete the writing task of power manipulation successfully, leaving a final sample of 128 participants (82 females and 46 males;  $M_{age} = 26.59$ ,  $SD = 9.68$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to a powerful or powerless condition.

#### Procedure and Measures

Upon arriving at the lab, participants were seated in separate computer cubicles and completed the study on a computer E-prime program. They first completed a writing task in which they were randomly assigned to a powerful or powerless condition by the E-prime program. Following this task, participants completed a manipulation check, measure of mood, and a restaurant selection task in which their decision strategy, choice of restaurant, decision satisfaction, and decision confidence were measured. Afterwards, they completed demographic items, and were then probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked.

#### Power Manipulation

Participants were asked to recall and describe a past incident in which they had power over other(s) (powerful condition) or in which someone had power over them (powerless condition).<sup>60</sup>

#### Manipulation Check

To verify that the power manipulation was effective, participants reported how much they were in charge, how much the other person(s) was in charge, how much influence they had, and how much influence the other person(s) had in the described incident on 9-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much).<sup>42</sup>

#### Measure of Mood

Participants rated their mood on four 7-point scales ranging from 1 (very bad; very sad; very discontent; very tense) to 7 (very good; very happy; very content; very relaxed).<sup>42,63</sup>

## Measure of Consumer Decision Strategies

Participants completed a restaurant selection task that was adapted from those of past research.<sup>64</sup> They were given six restaurant options, each of which included ratings on the taste of the restaurant's food, service and the environment, and prices (Table 1). Each restaurant was rated high on one attribute, medium on the second attribute, and low on the third attribute (eg, one restaurant was rated as having food with the highest level of taste, a medium level of service, and expensive prices). Thus, no restaurant option dominated any other restaurants on all three attributes. Participants were asked to consider the restaurants carefully and then choose the one that they thought they would actually go to for dinner. Then, they were given descriptions of two strategies that they might have used when making the decision:

Direct selection refers to you selecting the option that you want the most. Exclusion refers to you excluding the options that you do not want and choosing the remaining option as the final choice.

Participants indicated the extent to which they used the direct selection or exclusion method to make their decision on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (used the exclusion method completely) to 7 (used the direct selection method completely). They also rated how satisfied and confident they were with their choice on two 7-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all satisfied; not at all confident) to 7 (extremely satisfied; extremely confident).

## Results

### Manipulation Check

The two items measuring the participant's power were combined into one score,  $\alpha = 0.94$ ,  $r_{(128)} = 0.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Similarly, the two items regarding other people's power were averaged into one score,  $\alpha = 0.71$ ,  $r_{(128)} = 0.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Independent sample *t*-tests showed that powerful participants felt that they had more power ( $M = 6.43$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) in the recalled incident than powerless participants ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ),  $t_{(126)} = 10.98$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.94$ . Additionally, powerful participants felt that other people had less power ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ) in the incident than powerless participants ( $M = 7.02$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ),  $t_{(126)} = -7.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.29$ . Therefore, the manipulation of power was effective.

### Mood

The four items measuring mood were averaged into one score,  $\alpha = 0.88$ . An independent sample *t* test showed that participants' mood did not differ, regardless of their power conditions (powerful:  $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ; powerless:  $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ),  $t_{(126)} = 1.74$ ,  $p = 0.084$ ,  $d = 0.30$ .

### Choice of Restaurant

Twenty-five (19.5%) participants chose restaurant A as their final choice. Fifty-seven (44.5%) chose restaurant B, 30 (23.4%) chose restaurant C, 8 (6.3%) picked restaurant D, 3 (2.3%) picked restaurant D, and 5 (3.9%) picked restaurant E. The power condition did not influence the participants' choice of restaurant,  $\chi^2_{(5)} = 8.26$ ,  $p = 0.142$ .

### Decision Strategies

An independent sample *t*-test demonstrated that when making their decision on which restaurant to go to, powerful participants preferred to use the direct selection strategy ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ) more than powerless participants ( $M =$

**Table 1** Information of Six Options of Restaurants in Study 1

Restaurant	Food Taste	Service and Environment	Price
A	★★★	★	★★
B	★★★	★★	★
C	★★	★★★	★
D	★★	★	★★★
E	★	★★	★★★
F	★	★★★	★★

**Notes:** ★★★ Indicates the highest level of an attribute, ★★ Indicates the medium level, and ★ Indicates the lowest.



3.89,  $SD = 1.80$ ),  $t_{(126)} = 2.28$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ,  $d = 0.40$ . Since the rating scores above the midpoint of the scale (4) denoted a preference for the use of the direct selection strategy while the scores below the midpoint denoted a preference for the use of the exclusion strategy, one sample  $t$ -tests were then performed to determine whether powerful and powerless participants' ratings on the decision strategy measure were different from the midpoint. The analyses showed that powerful participants' ratings were significantly higher than the midpoint,  $t_{(63)} = 2.68$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ,  $d = 0.34$ , indicating that they preferred to use the direct selection strategy. However, powerless participants' ratings were not different from the midpoint,  $t_{(63)} = -0.49$ ,  $p = 0.629$ ,  $d = 0.06$ , indicating that they did not have a particular preference for the exclusion strategy.

### Satisfaction and Confidence

Participants' satisfaction with their choice was not influenced by their power conditions (powerful:  $M = 5.34$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ; powerless:  $M = 5.17$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ),  $t_{(126)} = 0.78$ ,  $p = 0.439$ ,  $d = 0.14$ , nor was their confidence in their decision-making (powerful:  $M = 5.58$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ; powerless:  $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ),  $t_{(126)} = 1.54$ ,  $p = 0.126$ ,  $d = 0.28$ .

## Discussion

Consistent with Murali and Nagpal's<sup>11</sup> study, Study 1 showed that powerful people preferred to use the direct selection strategy to make consumption decisions. However, inconsistent with their study, Study 1 did not find that powerless people preferred the exclusion strategy. The inconsistency will be discussed in the general discussion section. In Study 1, participants' emotions were not affected by their power conditions, which means that emotion cannot explain the effects of power on consumer decision strategies. In addition, there was no significant difference in decision satisfaction and decision confidence between powerful and powerless groups, suggesting that power does not influence decision satisfaction or decision confidence.

Early studies have indicated that if a product option or attribute clearly dominates other options or attributes, consumers can easily and directly choose the optimal option or attribute.<sup>18,64</sup> Only when the overall difference among multiple options or attributes is not obvious will individuals show differences in their decision strategies. In Study 1, six restaurant options varied across three attributes (the taste of their food, service and the environment, and prices). Each restaurant was rated high on one attribute, medium on the second attribute, and low on the third attribute. The combination of attributes was identical to that of past research.<sup>11,64</sup> This manipulation aimed to prevent one restaurant option from dominating the other options on all three attributes. However, the results showed that more participants picked restaurant B than the other options, suggesting that they placed the heaviest weight on the taste of the restaurant's food, followed by service and the environment; prices received the least weight. Study 2 addressed the issue by using a more sophisticated combination of product attributes, and it investigated the effects of power on consumer decision strategies in binary option situations.

## Study 2

### Method

#### Participants

Similar to Study 1, Study 2 used a two-group experimental design. The sample size determination is therefore the same as that of Study 1. We set a priori minimum sample size of 128 participants, with a stopping rule of recruiting participants for three weeks as it took to exceed 128 participants. A total of 134 college students from four universities in East China took part in the study in exchange for payment of 5 CNY. All the participants did not major in psychology or had participated in Study 1. Four participants' data were excluded because they did not complete the writing task of power manipulation successfully, leaving a final sample of 130 participants (91 females and 39 males;  $M_{age} = 20.70$ ,  $SD = 2.34$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to a powerful or powerless condition.

#### Procedure and Measures

The procedure for Study 2 (including power manipulation, manipulation check, and mood measure) was identical to that of Study 1 except that participants of Study 2 completed a selection task of vacation spot in which their decision strategy, decision satisfaction, and decision confidence were measured.

## Measure of Consumer Decision Strategies

Participants completed the vacation spot selection task that was used by Murali and Nagpal.<sup>11,24</sup> Participants were given two beach resort options, each of which included weather, beach, hotel quality, and nightlife information (Table 2). One resort was an impoverished option with average attributes. The other was an enriched option with extreme positive and negative attributes. Participants were asked to consider and choose the resort that they would go to for a holiday. They were then provided descriptions of the direct selection and exclusion strategies and rated the extent to which they used the strategies to make their decision on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (used the exclusion method completely) to 7 (used the direct selection method completely). They also reported how satisfied and confident they were with their choice on two 7-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all satisfied; not at all confident) to 7 (extremely satisfied; extremely confident).

## Results

### Manipulation Check

The two items measuring the participants' power were combined into one score,  $\alpha = 0.94$ ,  $r_{(130)} = 0.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Similarly, the two items regarding other people's power were averaged into one score,  $\alpha = 0.68$ ,  $r_{(130)} = 0.54$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Independent sample *t*-tests demonstrated that powerful participants felt that they had more power ( $M = 6.55$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) in the recalled incident than powerless participants ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ),  $t_{(128)} = 12.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 2.12$ . Additionally, powerful participants felt that other people had less power ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) in the incident than powerless participants ( $M = 6.93$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ),  $t_{(128)} = -8.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.49$ . The manipulation of power was therefore effective.

### Mood

The four items measuring mood were averaged into one score,  $\alpha = 0.87$ . An independent sample *t*-test showed that participants' mood did not differ, regardless of their power conditions (powerful:  $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ; powerless:  $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ),  $t_{(128)} = 1.80$ ,  $p = 0.074$ ,  $d = 0.32$ .

### Choice of Beach Resort

Sixty-three (48.5%) participants picked resort A, while 67 (51.5%) chose resort B as their final choice. The power conditions did not influence their choice of beach resort,  $\chi^2_{(1)} = 1.51$ ,  $p = 0.219$ .

### Decision Strategies

An independent sample *t*-test demonstrated that powerful participants preferred to use the direct selection strategy ( $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) when making their decision regarding the beach resorts more than powerless participants ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ),  $t_{(128)} = 2.45$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ,  $d = 0.43$ . Furthermore, one sample *t*-tests were performed to determine whether powerful and powerless participants' ratings on the decision strategy measure were different from the midpoint of the scale. The analyses showed that powerful participants' ratings were significantly higher than the midpoint,  $t_{(64)} = 2.92$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ,  $d = 0.36$ , indicating that they preferred to use the direct selection strategy. However, powerless participants' ratings were not different from the midpoint,  $t_{(64)} = -0.70$ ,  $p = 0.486$ ,  $d = 0.09$ , indicating that they did not have a preference for the exclusion strategy.

### Satisfaction and Confidence

Participants' satisfaction with their choice was not influenced by their power conditions (powerful:  $M = 5.34$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ; powerless:  $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ),  $t_{(128)} = 1.25$ ,  $p = 0.215$ ,  $d = 0.22$ , nor was their confidence in their decision-making (powerful:  $M = 5.62$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ; powerless:  $M = 5.42$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ),  $t_{(128)} = 1.13$ ,  $p = 0.262$ ,  $d = 0.20$ .

**Table 2** Information of Two Options of Beach Resort in Study 2

Resort A	Resort B
Average weather	Lots of sunshine
Average beaches	Gorgeous beaches
Medium-quality hotel	Super modern hotel
Medium-temperature water	Very cold water and very strong winds
Average nightlife	No nightlife

## Discussion

Study 2 examined the influences of power on consumer decision strategies when individuals faced two consumption options. Considering the possible shortcomings of the decision task of Study 1 (the restaurant options were not well balanced in attributes, resulting in most participants choosing a certain option), Study 2 made some improvements. Regarding the two consumption options in this study, one option included both extreme positive and negative attributes (the enriched option), while the other contained all medium-level attributes (the impoverished option). Generally, no option exceeded the other. Thus, participants could not directly choose the “better” option when making their decisions. Our results supported this by showing that there was no difference in the number of the participants who chose the enriched option and the impoverished option. When making decisions, participants needed to weigh positive and negative attributes (within options) and simultaneously consider attribute combinations (between options). Thus, they varied in decision strategies (directly choosing or excluding specific attributes). Therefore, this task could be used to measure the differences between powerful and powerless participants’ decision strategies.

Study 2 illustrated that powerful individuals preferred to use the direct selection strategy. Similar to Study 1, powerless individuals in this study did not display a preference for the exclusion strategy. Study 2 also showed that there was no significant difference in emotion, decision satisfaction or decision confidence between powerful and powerless individuals, which is consistent with the findings of Study 1.

Studies 1 and 2 showed an effect of power on consumer decision strategies. Study 3 further explored how power affects consumer decision strategies by examining the mediating role of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency. In addition, the study investigated whether the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency was moderated by gender. It recruited equal numbers of male and female participants to test the moderating role of gender.

## Study 3

### Method

#### Participants

A total of 351 participants took part in the study through the Wenjuanxing online data collection platform (<https://www.wjx.cn/>). Twenty-five were excluded because they failed preplanned attention checks (eg, “Please select response 4 for this item”), they gave the same answer on all items, or their response time of completing the whole task was three *SDs* above or below the average response time of all the participants. Of the remaining 326 participants, 163 were female and 163 were male. Their average age was 27.25 years (*SD* = 9.21).

#### Procedures and Measures

Participants completed the measures of the studied variables and demographic items online through Wenjuanxing platform.

#### Measure of Chronic Power

The 8-item Personal Sense of Power Scale<sup>30</sup> was used. An example item is “I think I have a great deal of power”. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In the current sample, the Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this scale was 0.79.

#### Measure of Behavioral Approach-Inhibition Tendency

The 20-item BAS/BIS scale<sup>62</sup> was used. Thirteen items of the scale measure the general tendency of behavioral approach. An example item is “When I want something, I usually go all-out to get it”. The remaining seven items measure the general tendency of behavioral inhibition. An example item is “I worry about making mistakes”. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). A single score for behavioral approach-inhibition tendency was computed by subtracting the standard score of the inhibition items from the standard score of the approach items.<sup>65</sup> Larger values denote that the participant tends to be more approach-oriented, while smaller values denote that the participant tends to be more

inhibition-oriented. In the current sample, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the BAS scale, the BIS scale, and the behavioral approach-inhibition tendency score were 0.85, 0.81, and 0.86, respectively.

### Measure of Consumer Decision Strategies

Participants completed four selection tasks regarding computers, restaurants, apartments, and shoes.<sup>24</sup> Each task contained two options: an enriched option with extreme positive and negative attributes and an impoverished option with moderate attributes (Table 3). For each selection task, after reading the information about the two options and making the selection, the participants were given descriptions of the direct selection and exclusion strategies and then self-rated the extent to which they used the strategies to make their decision on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (used the exclusion method completely) to 7 (used the direct selection method completely). Participants also rated how satisfied and confident they were with their selection in each task on two 7-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all satisfied; not at all confident) to 7 (extremely satisfied; extremely confident). In the current sample, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the participants' decision strategies, decision satisfaction, and decision confidence in the four tasks were 0.73, 0.79, and 0.81, respectively.

## Results

### Common Method Bias Test

Harman's single-factor test was performed to analyze common method bias.<sup>66</sup> Principal component analysis of all 40 items showed that the first component with an eigenvalue greater than one explained 20.93% of the total variance, which was less than the critical value of 40%, demonstrating that the common method bias was not problematic in the current study.

**Table 3** Information of Two Options of Computer, Restaurant, Apartment, and Shoes in Study 3

<b>Computer A</b> Two-year warranty Extensive memory Cheap price Slow processing speed Almost no software	<b>Computer B</b> Three-month warranty Reasonable memory Moderate price Moderate processing speed A standard package of software
<b>Restaurant A</b> Very exotic atmosphere Great tasting food Lots of different items on the menu High price Long waits	<b>Restaurant B</b> Moderate atmosphere Ordinary food A variety of items on the menu Average price Fair service
<b>Apartment A</b> Cheap rent Located in a quiet community All new, modern appliances Extended driving time to work Small bedrooms and closets	<b>Apartment B</b> Average rent Moderate noise level from neighbors Adequate appliances Average driving time to work Moderate bedrooms and closets
<b>Shoes A</b> Has a warrantee Highly stylish High price Wears out quick	<b>Shoes B</b> No warrantee As if everyone has a pair Average price Offers moderate support

## Descriptive Statistics

The results of the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are presented in Table 4.

## Testing for the Mediation Model

Model 4 from the SPSS PROCESS macro<sup>67</sup> was used to examine the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency between chronic power and consumer decision strategies. After controlling for age, chronic power positively predicted consumer decision strategies in the absence of a mediator,  $b = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t = 4.10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.17, 0.50]. As shown in Table 5, chronic power positively predicted behavioral approach-inhibition tendency (Model 1),  $b = 0.55$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 9.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.43, 0.67]. When behavioral approach-inhibition tendency was added as a predictor (Model 2), it positively predicted decision strategies,  $b = 0.39$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $t = 5.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.25, 0.54], and the effect of chronic power on decision strategies became non-significant,  $b = 0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $t = 1.35$ ,  $p = 0.177$ , 95% CI [-0.05, 0.29]. The results indicated that behavioral approach-inhibition tendency fully mediated the effect of chronic power on consumer decision strategies,  $ab = 0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95% CI [0.13, 0.32]. The mediation effect accounted for 64.35% of the total effect. Therefore, H<sub>2</sub> was supported.

In addition, we tested whether chronic power had an effect on decision satisfaction through the mediator of approach-inhibition tendency. After controlling for age, chronic power positively predicted decision satisfaction in the absence of a mediator,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 2.50$ ,  $p = 0.013$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.26]. As shown in Table 6, chronic power positively predicted behavioral approach-inhibition tendency (Model 1),  $b = 0.55$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 9.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.43,

**Table 4** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables (Study 3)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.00						
2. Age	0.03	1.00					
3. Chronic power	0.11	0.13*	1.00				
4. Approach-inhibition tendency	-0.01	0.15**	0.47**	1.00			
5. Decision strategy	0.07	0.13*	0.24**	0.36**	1.00		
6. Decision satisfaction	0.04	0.15**	0.15**	0.30**	0.46**	1.00	
7. Decision confidence	0.04	0.19**	0.21**	0.32**	0.44**	0.79**	1.00
M	1.50	27.25	4.22	0.00 <sup>a</sup>	4.69	5.06	5.17
SD	0.50	9.21	0.96	1.15	1.44	1.03	1.01

**Notes:** N = 326. Male = 1, female = 2. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ . <sup>a</sup>The score of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency was computed by subtracting the standard score of the inhibition items from the standard score of the approach items. Thus, the average score was zero.

**Table 5** The Moderated Mediation Model of Gender Between Power and Consumer Decision Strategy Through Behavioral Approach-Inhibition Tendency (Study 3)

Predictors	Approach-Inhibition Tendency (Model 1)		Decision Strategy (Model 2)		Decision Strategy (Model 3)	
	b	t	b	t	b	t
Constant	-2.64	-9.12***	3.88	9.06***	3.81	8.23***
Age	0.01	1.87	0.01	1.40	0.01	1.35
Chronic power	0.55	9.27***	0.12	1.35	0.07	0.77
Approach-inhibition tendency			0.39	5.32***	0.87	3.95***
Gender					0.19	1.31
Approach-inhibition tendency x Gender					-0.30	-2.28*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.23		0.14		0.16	
F	47.68***		17.63***		12.09***	

**Notes:** N = 326. Male = 1, female = 2. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



**Table 6** The Mediation Model of Behavioral Approach-Inhibition Tendency Between Power and Decision Satisfaction (Study 3)

Predictors	Approach-Inhibition Tendency (Model 1)		Decision Satisfaction (Model 2)		Decision Satisfaction (Model 3)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
Constant	-2.64	-9.12***	4.69	14.94***	4.65	13.58***
Age	0.01	1.87	0.01	2.02*	0.01	1.99*
Chronic power	0.55	9.27***	0.01	0.14	-0.01	-0.08
Approach-inhibition tendency			0.25	4.69***	0.38	2.32*
Gender					0.07	0.65
Approach-inhibition tendency x Gender					-0.08	-0.81
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.23		0.10		0.11	
<i>F</i>	47.68***		12.29***		7.56***	

Notes: N = 326. Male = 1, female = 2. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

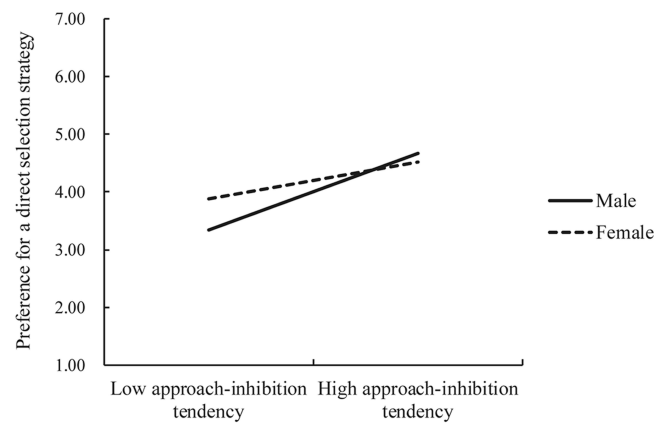
0.67]. When behavioral approach-inhibition tendency was added as a predictor (Model 2), it positively predicted decision satisfaction,  $b = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t = 4.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.15, 0.36], and the effect of chronic power on decision satisfaction became non-significant,  $b = 0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 0.14$ ,  $p = 0.888$ , 95% CI [-0.12, 0.14]. The results showed that behavioral approach-inhibition tendency fully mediated the effect of chronic power on decision satisfaction,  $ab = 0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.21]. The mediation effect accounted for 93.76% of the total effect.

We also tested whether chronic power influenced decision confidence through the mediator of approach-inhibition tendency. After controlling for age, chronic power positively predicted decision confidence in the absence of a mediator,  $b = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 3.51$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.09, 0.31]. As shown in Table 7, chronic power positively predicted behavioral approach-inhibition tendency (Model 1),  $b = 0.55$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 9.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.43, 0.67]. When behavioral approach-inhibition tendency was added as a predictor (Model 2), it positively predicted decision confidence,  $b = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t = 4.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.13, 0.34], and the effect of chronic power on decision confidence became non-significant,  $b = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $t = 1.16$ ,  $p = 0.247$ , 95% CI [-0.05, 0.20]. The results showed that behavioral approach-inhibition tendency fully mediated the effect of chronic power on decision confidence,  $ab = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ , 95% CI [0.06, 0.20]. The mediation effect accounted for 63.86% of the total effect.

**Table 7** The Mediation Model of Behavioral Approach-Inhibition Tendency Between Power and Decision Confidence (Study 3)

Predictors	Approach-Inhibition Tendency (Model 1)		Decision Confidence (Model 2)		Decision Confidence (Model 3)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
Constant	-2.64	-9.12***	4.43	14.59***	4.36	13.15***
Age	0.01	1.87	0.02	2.72**	0.02	2.70**
Chronic power	0.55	9.27***	0.07	1.16	0.07	1.03
Approach-inhibition tendency			0.23	4.47***	0.25	1.60
Gender					0.07	0.62
Approach-inhibition tendency x Gender					-0.01	-0.12
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.23		0.13		0.13	
<i>F</i>	47.68***		15.55***		9.37***	

Notes: N = 326. Male = 1, female = 2. \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



**Figure 2** Gender moderates the relationship between the approach-inhibition tendency and the preference for a direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy.

### Testing for the Moderated Mediation Model

Model 14 from the SPSS PROCESS macro<sup>67</sup> was used to test the hypothesized moderated mediation model with behavioral approach-inhibition tendency as a mediator and gender as a moderator. As displayed in Table 5 (Model 3), behavioral approach-inhibition tendency positively predicted consumer decision strategies,  $b = 0.87$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ,  $t = 3.95$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.44, 1.31]. Moreover, the interaction between approach-inhibition tendency and gender was significant,  $b = -0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $t = -2.28$ ,  $p = 0.023$ , 95% CI [-0.56, -0.04], showing that gender moderated the relationship between approach-inhibition tendency and decision strategies. Simple slope tests showed that a higher approach (vs inhibition) tendency led to a stronger preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy among male consumers,  $b = 0.58$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $t = 5.38$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.37, 0.79]. However, the effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency on decision strategies diminished among female consumers,  $b = 0.28$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $t = 3.07$ ,  $p = 0.002$ , 95% CI [0.10, 0.45] (Figure 2). Therefore,  $H_3$  was supported.

In addition, we tested whether gender moderated the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency between power and decision satisfaction. As displayed in Table 6 (Model 3), behavioral approach-inhibition tendency positively predicted decision satisfaction,  $b = 0.38$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $t = 2.32$ ,  $p = 0.021$ , 95% CI [0.06, 0.70]. However, the effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency on decision satisfaction was not moderated by gender,  $b = -0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $t = -0.81$ ,  $p = 0.421$ , 95% CI [-0.27, 0.11].

We also tested whether gender moderated the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency between power and decision confidence. As displayed in Table 7 (Model 3), the effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency on decision confidence was not significant,  $b = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $t = 1.60$ ,  $p = 0.111$ , 95% CI [-0.06, 0.57]. Additionally, the effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency on decision confidence was not moderated by gender,  $b = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $t = -0.12$ ,  $p = 0.901$ , 95% CI [-0.20, 0.17].

### Discussion

The findings of Study 3 replicated and extended those of Studies 1 and 2. The results revealed that elevated power promoted an increased preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy when consumers make consumption decisions. Behavioral approach-inhibition tendency mediated the association between power and consumer decision strategies. Elevated power triggered a relatively approach-oriented (vs inhibition-oriented) tendency, which in turn enhanced a preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy. Furthermore, the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency was moderated by gender. The mediation effect was stronger for males than for females.

Irrelevant to the main research purposes, Study 3 also found that behavioral approach-inhibition tendency played a mediating role between power and consumers' satisfaction and confidence in their choice. Specifically, the higher an individual's power was, the stronger the behavioral approach tendency, which thus led to higher levels of decision

satisfaction and decision confidence. These results were inconsistent with those of Studies 1 and 2. The first two studies did not find any effects of power on decision satisfaction or decision confidence.

Two reasons may account for the inconsistent results across the three studies. First, it may be related to power type.<sup>32,68</sup> The first two studies examined the effects of power-related experiences induced by experimental tasks, while the third study used questionnaires to measure individuals' long-term, stable perception of the overall power in everyday life. The influences of manipulated temporary power and measured chronic power may be different. Second, the associations among power, decision satisfaction, and decision confidence are complicated and controversial. Regarding the association between power and decision satisfaction, past research showed that power does not solely affect but interacts with other factors (eg, cooperative versus competitive decision orientation, relationship strength, or decision strategies) to produce an interactive effect on decision satisfaction.<sup>11,69</sup> With respect to the association between power and decision confidence, some evidence showed that elevated power enhances judgement confidence.<sup>70-72</sup> However, other studies showed that individuals can feel confident or uncertain regardless of their power, showing that power manipulations influenced psychological states of power without impacting confidence.<sup>73</sup> In summary, this research demonstrated a consistent effect of power on decision strategies, but the results regarding whether power influences decision satisfaction and decision confidence were not consistent. This suggests that the effects of power on decision processes (decision strategy) are independent of those on decision outcomes (decision satisfaction and confidence). Therefore, detailed studies are needed in the future to examine the association between power and decision satisfaction and the association between power and decision confidence.

## General Discussion

A previous study showed that consumers' power affects their decision strategies when making consumption decisions. High power promotes a preference for the direct selection strategy, whereas low power promotes a preference for the exclusion strategy.<sup>11</sup> However, few studies have investigated the mechanisms underlying this relationship. This research examined whether behavioral approach-inhibition tendency mediates the association between power and consumer decision strategies and whether gender moderates the mediation effect in which power affects decision strategies through behavioral approach-inhibition tendency. Studies 1 and 2 manipulated participants' experience of powerfulness and powerlessness through a writing task and found an effect of power on decision strategies. Consistent with Murali and Nagpal's<sup>11</sup> study, these studies demonstrated that powerful individuals preferred to adopt the direct selection strategy, regardless of whether they faced multiple or binary options. However, powerless individuals did not display a preference for the exclusion strategy, which was not consistent with the results of Murali and Nagpal. Study 3 recruited equal numbers of male and female participants and measured their chronic power and general behavioral tendency of approach and inhibition via questionnaires. The study revealed that behavioral approach-inhibition tendency mediated the association between power and consumer decision strategies. The higher power an individual possessed, the stronger the activation of an approach (vs inhibition) tendency, which thus led to a stronger preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy. Furthermore, gender moderated the mediation effect. Specifically, compared to females, the association between behavioral approach-inhibition tendency and decision strategies was stronger among males.

## The Mediating Role of Behavioral Approach-Inhibition Tendency

Keltner et al's<sup>12,13</sup> approach-inhibition theory argues that power triggers a behavioral tendency of approach because powerful individuals control and have more accesses to valuable resources. The resource-rich environments of powerful individuals allow them to be less dependent on others, be free to take action, and approach important opportunities easily. The general approach tendency increases powerful individuals' motivation to take goal-oriented actions and elevates their sensitivity to positive information such as rewards.<sup>6,45,47,60</sup> In the domain of consumer behavior, goal-oriented motivation and action tendencies can lead power holders to become easily aware of their product preferences and initiate a proactive search for the ideal product. Moreover, elevated sensitivity to positive features enables them to easily find the product consistent with their preferences. In addition, the elevated approach tendency of powerful individuals is also manifested in their automatic cognition.<sup>12,13</sup> Past studies have shown that power holders are more prone to using cognitive heuristics because they are less motivated to attend their action consequences.<sup>13,74</sup> This may lead powerful

individuals to rely on simple rules (eg, their preferences) or salient product features to make a quick purchase decision. Together, these characteristics are typical of the direct selection strategy. Therefore, elevated power promotes the dominant use of the direct selection strategy through the mediator of behavioral approach tendency.

This study did not find that reduced power led to a preference for an exclusion strategy. The result is inconsistent with that of Murali and Nagpal.<sup>11</sup> In their study, participants could report only one of the two strategies (even though they might have used both strategies when completing the decision task). However, in this study, the decision strategy measure could assess participants' combined use of the strategies and their relative preference for the strategies. Our results demonstrated that powerless individuals did not have a stronger preference for the direct selection strategy compared to powerful individuals. Moreover, they also did not show a preference for the exclusion strategy. These results suggest that no strategy was preferred and that powerless individuals might jointly use the two strategies. One reason may be that a lack of power triggers controlled and deliberate cognition.<sup>12,13</sup> With limited resources and increased constraints, powerless individuals must ponder carefully before making decisions. Research has revealed that, compared to powerful people, powerless people consider more information before setting a goal. Additionally, they spend more time initiating actions to pursue a goal.<sup>6,45</sup> Regarding attention strategies, powerful individuals attend to and process goal-relevant (vs goal-irrelevant) information more extensively. They prioritize directing their efforts toward salient desires and aims.<sup>6,75</sup> In the field of consumer behavior, powerful people know which product (or attribute) they prefer and select it directly. However, powerless individuals consider sources of information equally important and have less clear priorities.<sup>41</sup> Controlled information processing and deliberation of powerless individuals may result in the combined use of the two decision strategies when they make consumption decisions. They may use the exclusion strategy to narrow down some options. During consideration, they become aware of their preferences and select the option that matches their preferences.

To test the explanation above, an additional analysis was performed to compare the powerful and powerless participants' response times (in seconds) for the selection tasks in Studies 1 and 2. In Studies 1 and 2, participants completed the tasks of power manipulation and choice selection on an E-prime program on computers, so that their response times for choice selection could be recorded. However, Study 3 was conducted through the Wenjuanxing online data collection platform, which can only record a participant's overall response time to complete the entire questionnaire (including measures of chronic power, behavioral approach-inhibition tendency, and decision-making in the four selection tasks). We could not specify and analyze the response times for each selection task. Therefore, we only compared the response times that the powerful and powerless participants took to make the selection in Studies 1 and 2. An independent sample *t*-test showed that powerful participants took less time ( $M = 90.14$ ,  $SD = 30.87$ ) to select a restaurant than powerless participants ( $M = 107.11$ ,  $SD = 43.10$ ) in Study 1,  $t_{(126)} = -2.56$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ,  $d = 0.45$ . Similarly, powerful participants took less time ( $M = 78.31$ ,  $SD = 25.39$ ) to select a beach resort than powerless participants ( $M = 87.20$ ,  $SD = 24.00$ ) in Study 2,  $t_{(128)} = -2.05$ ,  $p = 0.042$ ,  $d = 0.36$ . Therefore, the results of response times support our explanation.

The current research ruled out an alternative explanation for the obtained effects. Previous studies have indicated that elevated power activates positive mood while reduced power induces negative mood.<sup>76,77</sup> Additionally, past research suggested that mood may influence decision strategies.<sup>11,78</sup> Thus, we examined whether power influenced mood, in turn explaining the differences in decision strategies. In Studies 1 and 2, participants' mood was not affected by their power. Therefore, mood cannot explain the effects of power on consumer decision strategies.

## The Moderating Role of Gender

Gender has been identified as a factor affecting information processing and other aspects of consumer behavior.<sup>35,36,48,49</sup> Given that a consumer's decision strategy reflects how they process and evaluate product information,<sup>4,20</sup> it should be influenced by their gender. Notably, however, extant research on consumer decision strategies has not tested gender differences. This study showed that gender moderated the association between behavioral approach-inhibition tendency and decision strategies. Specifically, compared to females, the association between approach (vs inhibition) tendency and preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy was stronger among males.

Our results support the selective model and social perspective in clarifying gender differences in information processing. According to the selective model,<sup>14,15</sup> males are selective processors who primarily rely on a subset of highly salient (eg, preference-consistent) information when making decisions. Females are comprehensive processors who often assimilate all available information before making decisions. This model also argues that females have a lower threshold for elaborative processing than males.<sup>48</sup> The social perspective suggests that males, driven by self-focused agentic goals, are more prone to focusing on information that is consistent with their goals or preferences. Females, driven by relationship-oriented communal goals, are more likely to consider multiple information holistically.<sup>48–50</sup> Compared to elaborative processing, heuristic processing of salient, preference-consistent information is more compatible with the direct selection strategy.<sup>38,59</sup> Therefore, for males, their baseline tendency to heuristically process salient (eg, preference-consistent or goal-relevant) information strengthens the association between the behavioral approach (vs inhibition) tendency and the preference for the direct selection (vs inhibition) strategy. In contrast, females' baseline tendency to elaborately process all available information attenuates the association between the behavioral approach (vs inhibition) tendency and the preference for the direct selection (vs inhibition) strategy.

## Implications and Contributions

This study examined the effects of the individual factor of power on consumer decision strategies, and to the best of our knowledge, is the first to directly test and clarify the mediating role of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency in the relationship between power and consumer decision strategies and the moderating role of gender in the mediation effect. This study has both theoretical and practical implications.

## Theoretical Implications

Extant studies on consumer decision strategies have primarily focused on the process or outcomes of decision-making using different decision strategies. Relatively little is known about the factors (especially decision makers' characteristics) influencing the use of different decision strategies. Power is ubiquitous in everyday life. Ranging from people from different social classes to managers and subordinates in professional situations and to parents and children in family situations, power differences are very common. Power has been proven to have impacts on a wide variety of consumer behaviors such as buying attitude and perspective taking.<sup>32</sup> However, to date, only one study has examined its effects on consumer decision strategies.<sup>11</sup> This study initially revealed that powerful (vs powerless) individuals prefer to use the direct selection (exclusion) strategies when making consumption decisions. Two questions then remain: How does power affect consumer decision strategies, and for whom is this effect more salient? Our work examines these questions and extends Murali and Nagpal's study in three ways. First, by using a measure that could record a consumer's combined use of the direct selection and exclusion strategies, we find that powerless individuals do not have a clear preference for either strategy presumptively due to their controlled and deliberate cognition. This result can clarify that the effects of power on consumer decision strategies are mainly driven by high power, leading to a preference for the direct selection strategy (but not driven by low power, leading to a preference for the exclusion strategy). Second, we address the question of "how" by examining the mediating role of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency in the relationship between power and decision strategies. The results indicate that elevated power does not directly lead to a preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy but influences it through the mediator of behavioral approach (vs inhibition) tendency. Third, with respect to the question of "for whom", we examine the moderating role of gender in the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency. The results reveal that, for males, the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition was stronger than for females. In summary, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the influences of power on decision strategies.

Our research extends the approach-inhibition theory of power to interpret the effects of power on consumer behavior. Over the past 18 years, this theory has been the dominant paradigm used in power-related research to explain the psychological effects of power.<sup>79</sup> However, whether this theory is suitable for explaining powerful and powerless individuals' purchasing decision strategies has not been tested. This study provides the direct evidence that the approach-inhibition tendency accounts for the effects of power on consumer decision strategies. This expands the scope that the approach-inhibition theory of power can interpret in the domain of consumer behavior.



This study improves our understanding of gender differences in consumer decision strategies. Males and females are different in consumer behavior due to their different upbringing and socialization along with other biological, cultural, psychological, and social factors.<sup>35</sup> Previous research has examined gender differences in some major aspects of consumer buying behavior, such as purchase motivation, evaluations of product options, and outcomes of purchase decisions (eg, satisfaction).<sup>35–37</sup> However, it remained unclear whether gender affects consumers' decision strategies or interacts with other factors to produce influences on decision strategies. This study provides initial evidence that gender moderates the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency between power and consumer decision strategies.

## Practical Implications

In addition, the results and conclusions of this study can provide some suggestions for the marketing practices of enterprises. Enterprises and businesses can improve their marketing plans in accordance with the decision strategies of consumers of different genders and levels of power to increase their product sales. According to the results, powerful males are more action-oriented and more inclined to adopt a direct selection strategy. If they are the main target consumers, vendors and companies could focus on presenting and advertising the positive attributes or advantages of products. E-commerce platforms could allow them to add the products they are interested in into their carts (termed as a selection decision). This setting would be more suitable for powerful male consumers than the setting where e-commerce platforms present some products or services in consumers' carts by default, as consumers have to decide what they do not want when checking out (termed as an exclusion decision) in the latter setting. In contrast, for powerless or female consumers, as they engage in more elaborative processing, vendors and companies could simultaneously present them with positive and negative product information. Doing so may help both powerful and powerless consumers make decisions easily, thereby promoting their buying behavior.

## Conclusion

Consumers are faced with too many choices today while shopping: different kinds of dishes on the restaurant menu, various brands of daily necessities on the supermarket shelves, and so on. Meanwhile, online platforms provide abundant options at better prices with more convenience.<sup>80</sup> Consumers would like to know what type of decision-making strategy will enable them to make satisfactory purchases. As commerce companies, understanding how consumers' characteristics influence their purchase decisions is useful for promoting their products to the target consumers they want to appeal to.

This study examines the effects of power on consumer decision strategies. The results show that: (1) Compared to powerless individuals, powerful individuals prefer to use a direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy, regardless of multiple- or binary-option situations; (2) Behavioral approach-inhibition tendency mediates the relationship between power and consumer decision strategies. The higher power an individual possesses, the stronger an approach (vs inhibition) tendency, which thus leads to a preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy; (3) Gender plays a moderating role. Specifically, the mediation effect of approach (vs inhibition) tendency on the relationship between power and the preference for the direct selection (vs exclusion) strategy is stronger for males than for females. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by establishing a moderated mediation model, which helps our understanding of the mechanisms connecting power and consumer decision strategies. The findings of this study also have implications for how to promote products among consumers of different genders with different levels of power.

## Limitations and Future Directions

This research reveals the mediating role of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency and the moderating role of gender in the association between power and consumer decision strategies; however, many additional issues remain to be explored.

Other possible mediators need to be explored regarding the relationship between power and decision strategies. For example, given that possession of power implies asymmetric control over valuable resources, Rucker and Galinsky<sup>9</sup> proposed that having power triggers an agentic orientation. Agency refers to the existence of a person as an individual. It emphasizes achievement, competence, and self-reliance, and orients individuals to focus on their own goals.<sup>81</sup> In contrast, a lack of power triggers a communal orientation.<sup>9</sup> Communion refers to the participation of a person in

a large social entity. It emphasizes social connection and cooperation, and orients individuals to focus on their relations with others.<sup>81</sup> Agentic-communal orientation has been used as a mediator to explain the effects of power on some domains of consumer behavior, such as gift giving and persuasion.<sup>9</sup> Future research could examine whether agentic-communal orientation mediates the association between power and consumer decision strategies.

Future work could also explore other moderators in the association between power and consumer decision strategies, or in the mediation effect of behavioral approach-inhibition tendency on the relationship between power and consumer decision strategies. For example, past studies have suggested that there may be differences in the use of decision strategies as people age.<sup>82</sup> Compared to younger adults, older adults tend to rely more on heuristic cognition in decision-making. Because they have declined cognitive resources, doing so can conserve their limited mental energy for other tasks.<sup>83</sup> In consumptions, heuristic processing of product information would allow older adults to make a quick selection. Thus, older adults would be more likely to use the direct selection strategy. Future research could recruit a sample of participants with various age to test this hypothesis and further examine whether age moderates the relationship between power and consumer decision strategies. Except for individual factors, it needs to be explored whether decision contextual factors play a moderating role. For example, previous studies have shown that elaboration increases the processing of preference-inconsistent information, thus reducing the tendency to use a direct selection strategy.<sup>38,59</sup> We speculate that decisions relying on deliberative processing (relative to those relying on feelings or intuitions) would attenuate the association between elevated power and direct selection strategy. In addition, as the use of a decision strategy is influenced by the size of the consideration set.<sup>1</sup> Thus, this factor may have a moderating effect.

Power can arise from a number of cognitive (eg, episodic recall), structural (eg, hierarchical position), and physical (eg, power-related posture) factors.<sup>32,84,85</sup> This study focuses on the power arising from cognitive antecedents and examines the impacts of subjective power or perceptions of power on consumer decision strategies. Future studies could explore the impacts of the power arising from other antecedents. For example, future research could investigate whether people with different structural power (eg, socioeconomic status or company position levels) differ in their use of consumer decision strategies. Moreover, future studies could explore whether power from different resources have interactive effects on consumer decision strategies.

## Data Sharing Statement

The data of the present study supporting the conclusions will be made available on request by the first or corresponding authors.

## Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Shanghai Normal University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in this study.

## Funding

This study was supported by the National Science Foundation of China (grant number: 31900780) and the China Postdoctoral Science Foundation (grant number: 2019M661575).

## Disclosure

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in this work.

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