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Is Bad Always Stronger Than Good? Culture and Negativity Biases in Generalized Trust

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Abstract

Generalized trust refers to individuals' trust in members of society at large. Previous research highlights negativity bias as a central obstacle to trust development: trust is easily destroyed but difficult to build. Yet, most evidence for this bias comes from Western, individualistic contexts. This study examines whether such findings generalize to collectivist settings. Using a preregistered online experiment in China, I show that negative information about others' untrustworthiness lowers generalized trust more than positive information raises it, which indicates a clear negativity bias in the Chinese setting. The experiment also includes a cultural priming manipulation designed to test whether making collectivistic versus individualistic considerations salient moderates this asymmetry. The preregistered analyses, however, do not reveal a statistically significant moderation effect of the priming on negativity bias. I discuss the implications of this null result and outline directions for future research on how cultural value orientations may shape negativity biases in generalized trust.

Keywords

collectivism; generalized trust; individualism; negativity bias

1. Introduction

Generalized trust, also called social or interpersonal trust, refers to the confidence individuals place in others within their society (Carl & Billari, 2014). It represents a cornerstone of social capital that enhances collective efficiency by facilitating cooperation and coordinated action (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 2000). A vast

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body of research documents the benefits of generalized trust for both individuals and societies. High levels of trust are consistently associated with economic growth (Knack & Zak, 2003), democratic development (Paxton, 2002), effective institutions (Uslaner, 2002), and greater subjective well-being (Helliwell, 2003).

Despite these benefits, generalized trust is inherently fragile (Cvetkovich et al., 2002; Slovic, 1993). Negative information or events tend to erode trust more quickly than positive experiences can build it. This asymmetry reflects a negativity bias, a psychological tendency to weigh negative information more heavily than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

This article examines negativity bias in generalized trust using data from a preregistered online experiment in China. The first contribution is to establish whether the asymmetry in trust formation documented in Western samples also emerges in a non-WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic), collectivist setting. The results confirm that negative information about others' untrustworthiness has a substantially stronger effect on generalized trust than positive information about their trustworthiness. This finding extends evidence of negativity bias in trust formation to a sample of Chinese respondents and responds to calls to move beyond WEIRD populations in research (Henrich et al., 2010).

The second contribution is to probe whether cultural orientations moderate this asymmetry. The experiment includes a preregistered cultural priming manipulation designed to make collectivistic vs. individualistic considerations salient. In the preregistered analyses, the moderating effects of the primes are in the theoretically expected direction, but do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. I interpret this as suggesting limits to what a brief, single-shot online prime can accomplish rather than as evidence against a role for culture. In exploratory analyses using a self-reported individualism–collectivism (IND–COL) scale, I find that more collectivist respondents appear more responsive to positive information, which helps attenuate negativity bias in the formation of generalized trust. Because this measure is post-treatment, these patterns are discussed as suggestive and as guiding hypotheses for future research.

By providing robust evidence of negativity bias in a non-WEIRD context and by probing—albeit inconclusively—the conditions under which cultural orientations might moderate this asymmetry, this research expands the scope of political psychology beyond its traditional reliance on Western samples (Hibbing et al., 2014). It also points to the need for stronger and more sustained cultural interventions (e.g., bundled priming tasks or offline settings with closer attention) to more convincingly identify causal effects of culture on negativity bias in generalized trust.

2. Negativity Bias in Trust Development

Research has identified several psychological barriers to trust development, among which negativity bias stands out as one of the most prominent (Kramer, 2018). The level of generalized trust an individual holds is not simply the average of past experiences; rather, positive and negative events are weighted unequally. Empirical studies consistently show that trust is more easily destroyed than created (Cvetkovich et al., 2002; Poortinga & Pidgeon, 2004; Slovic, 1993; White & Eiser, 2005). Negative events or information tend to have a stronger and more lasting impact on trust than comparable positive experiences. A single negative encounter can undermine trust, whereas multiple positive experiences are often required to restore it. Slovic (1993) described this phenomenon as "trust asymmetry." It reflects a broader negativity bias in human

impression formation (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989; Taylor, 1991). This pattern aligns with broader findings in political communication and political psychology showing that negative political information attracts more attention and has stronger effects on evaluations than comparable positive information (Fournier et al., 2020; Soroka, 2014; Soroka et al., 2019).

A common interpretation in political science is that this asymmetry has evolutionary roots (Baumeister et al., 2001). Experiences involving illness, conflict, or danger are relatively infrequent but carry high stakes, whereas many positive events do not pose immediate survival concerns (Hibbing et al., 2014). A heightened response to negative stimuli is thus seen as an evolved mechanism that helped humans cope with uncertain and potentially hazardous environments (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Parallel findings in animal behavior lend further support to this account (Brosnan et al., 2007; Hunt & Campbell, 1997). These tendencies are thought to have stayed with us and continue to shape how people respond to threats, risks, and bad news, even in modern politics.

Building on this literature, which emphasizes the adaptive value of negative information in social judgment, I hypothesize that:

> H1: Information about others' untrustworthiness will have a stronger effect in reducing generalized trust than positive information will have in increasing it.

In other words, individuals tend to update their generalized trust more significantly in response to information about untrustworthy others than to information about trustworthy others.

3. Culture and Trust Asymmetry

It is important to note that negativity biases are not deterministic. Scholars in political psychology emphasize that they represent tendencies in how individuals process and respond to information, rather than fixed traits (Soroka et al., 2019). A range of factors can shape or moderate these biases. At the individual level, studies have identified variations linked to political ideology (Dodd et al., 2012; Hibbing et al., 2014; but see Fournier et al., 2020; Osmundsen et al., 2022), gender (Soroka et al., 2016), and personality traits (Bachleda et al., 2020; Kiken & Shook, 2011). Contextual factors also matter; for instance, Soroka and Krupnikov (2021) show that during predominantly negative events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, media outlets increase their coverage of positive news. Similarly, Fay et al. (2021) find that higher social connectivity reduces the tendency to transmit negative information.

Despite this growing body of research and broader work in cultural psychology showing that cultural contexts shape individuals' emotional responses (Miyamoto et al., 2017; Tsai & Clobert, 2019), the role of culture in shaping negativity biases has received relatively little attention in political science. The present study addresses this gap by drawing on the IND–COL framework to examine whether cultural orientations are associated with differences in how people weigh positive and negative information when forming generalized trust.

The IND–COL framework is a central tool for characterizing cultural variation and has motivated extensive research in cross-cultural psychology (Oyserman et al., 2002). It captures a fundamental distinction in how

people define themselves in relation to others (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Schwartz, 1990; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1995). In more collectivist orientations, individuals are more likely to see themselves as embedded in close relationships and groups, and to give priority to relationship maintenance, shared goals, and collective well-being. In more individualist orientations, people tend to experience the self as more autonomous and to emphasize personal initiatives, preferences, and achievements. Although this framework has been widely applied in cultural psychology (see Oyserman et al., 2002; Oyserman & Lee, 2007), it remains underused in political science (but see Liang, in press). Few studies have explored how cultural orientations shape political attitudes, leaving open the question of how culture conditions negativity biases in trust formation.

This article argues that the negativity bias in generalized trust—where negative information weighs more heavily than positive information—may be amplified in individualist contexts and comparatively attenuated in collectivist ones. From an evolutionary perspective, negativity biases serve as adaptive mechanisms shaped by natural selection that trigger rapid and strong responses to potential external threats (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). This logic is particularly consistent with individualist settings, where protecting personal interests and avoiding individual losses are central concerns. In such contexts, distrusting others after receiving untrustworthy signals, rather than mistakenly trusting them, minimizes personal risk. However, this hyper-sensitivity to negative cues can also undermine the prospect for cooperation.

In more collectivist settings, by contrast, everyday life is organized more around interdependence and the maintenance of long-term relationships. When group cohesion and ongoing cooperation are highly valued, reacting too sharply to negative information about others can be costly, as it threatens social harmony and the stability of group ties, which form the foundation of collectivist societies (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The selective pressures that favor strong negativity biases in generalized trust may therefore be weaker in collectivist environments, where the perceived costs of rupturing relationships are higher and there are stronger normative expectations to attend to cues that sustain cooperation. Based on these considerations, I hypothesize that:

> H2: Cultural orientations moderate the asymmetrical influence of information on generalized, with negativity biases being less pronounced in more collectivist orientations.

4. Priming Individualism and Collectivism

Traditionally, culture has been viewed as a stable set of traits shaped by ecological, historical, and philosophical forces (Buggle, 2020; Fincher et al., 2008; Nisbett et al., 2001; Talhelm et al., 2014). Western cultures are typically associated with individualism, independence, and analytic thinking, while East Asian cultures emphasize collectivism, interdependence, and holistic thinking (Choi et al., 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1995). This chronic perspective treats culture as a deep-seated and enduring phenomenon, often measured through country-level indices (Hofstede, 2001) or individual-level survey scales (Singelis, 1994).

More recent work in experimental cultural psychology highlights the flexible and context-dependent nature of culture. The culture as situated cognition model embodies this dynamic view (Oyserman, 2016). Building on theories of situated cognition (Bargh, 2006), it proposes that, while societies may generally lean toward

one orientation, such as individualism in the United States or collectivism in China, all human societies share a similar underlying logic. People in both cultural contexts have sufficient experience with individualistic and collectivistic situations, which allows either mindset to become salient when situationally relevant (Oyserman & Lee, 2007). When certain cues emphasize one set of norms, individuals can temporarily shift their thinking and behavior to align with that orientation (Oyserman, 2016).

A large body of evidence supports this situational model. Experiments have successfully activated both collectivistic and individualistic mindsets among Western and East Asian participants using various types of tasks (Monga & John, 2008; Peng & Knowles, 2003). A meta-analysis by Oyserman and Lee (2008), covering 64 studies, found that 57 (89%) reported significant priming effects in the expected direction.

Building on this evidence, the present research adopts a dynamic priming perspective to operationalize the IND–COL framework through experimental manipulations. Cultural priming enables the identification of the causal influence of cultural orientations on attitudinal outcomes. This approach reduces potential confounding factors and offers a clearer understanding of the mechanisms linking culture and trust.

5. Experiment Design

The experiment employs a 2×3 factorial design with two factors: the salience of participants' cultural considerations (collectivism vs. individualism) and the valence of information about others' trustworthiness (positive vs. control vs. negative).

For the cultural priming treatment, I have followed the approach of Westjohn et al. (2022) and employed an adapted version of the similarities/differences with family and friends task originally introduced by Trafimow et al. (1991). Participants are randomly assigned to either the collectivism condition or the individualism condition. In the collectivism prime, participants are asked to describe three aspects they share with their family or friends and recall a past event in which they sacrificed something for the benefit of the group. In the individualism prime, participants describe three ways they differ from their family or friends and recall a past event in which they achieved a personal goal independently. In line with the IND–COL literature, these primes are intended to make salient interdependent (group-oriented) vs. independent (self-oriented) self-construals, both in the context of positively valenced experiences.

To assess the effectiveness of the manipulation, I utilize Yoo et al. (2011) parsimonious six-item IND–COL scale. While some work contends that individualism and collectivism should be orthogonal constructs at the individual level (Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1995), I adopt the perspective of Yoo et al. (2011) and consider them as two opposing ends of the same dimension for the sake of parsimony. This approach is also widely used by applied researchers investigating the psychological implications of individualism and collectivism (Oyserman et al., 2002). This scale demonstrates good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81. The results of the principal component factor analysis reveal that the scale comprises only one significant factor. To create the scale measuring self-reported individualistic–collectivistic values, I sum up participants' responses across the six items. A higher value on the scale indicates a more collectivistic orientation. Furthermore, the summated scale is normalized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The wording of the scale items and their corresponding factor loadings can be found in Appendix A of the Supplementary File for reference. As a robustness check, I have also extracted factor

scores from the first principal component and used them as an alternative indicator of IND–COL in the exploratory analysis. Results using both operationalizations are substantially the same and are reported in Table E1 in the Supplementary File.

The information treatment exposes participants to a local news article about food safety, a salient public concern in China. The story focuses on edible oil safety. To ensure credibility, all materials are adapted from reputable Chinese news outlets such as *Yanzhao Wanbao* and *Xinjing Bao*. The articles are comparable in length and structure and revolve around the same core issue.

The key distinction between the two experimental conditions lies in the behavior of the protagonist within the news story. In the positive news condition, the protagonist is portrayed as a reliable and trustworthy seller of fried dough sticks, who takes additional measures to safeguard the health of his customers by changing frying oil on a daily basis. On the contrary, the negative news condition features an untrustworthy restaurant manager who is revealed to have violated food safety regulations by neglecting to replace the edible oil for an extended period. While the news conditions are designed to evoke contrasted emotional responses (positive vs. negative), they are supposed to be equivalent in valence, as they deal with the same topic of food safety in a similar situation. For comparison purposes, there is a control condition that does not include any news story, ensuring a baseline for evaluating the impact of the information treatment. The complete news reports can be found in Appendix B in the Supplementary File.

The dependent variable—generalized trust—is assessed using a standard question adapted from the China General Social Survey: Generally speaking, would you say that most people in society can be trusted? To enhance the measurement validity, some research suggests employing minimally balanced wording and longer scales (Lundmark et al., 2016). Therefore, in this study, the item retains only the positive endpoint ("most people can be trusted") and uses a seven-point response scale rather than a dichotomous format. To facilitate meaningful comparison and analysis, the dependent variable is rescaled to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The question wording is available in Appendix B of the Supplementary File for reference.

Analyses are conducted using ordinary least squares regression. To examine H1, a regression model is constructed with the dependent variable regressed on two dummy variables representing the information groups to which individuals are assigned (positive vs. negative vs. control). The control group is set as the reference category for comparison. I expect that exposure to negative information will have a stronger effect on trust than exposure to positive information, or $|\beta_1| > |\beta_2|$.

$$\text{Trust} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Negative} + \beta_2 \text{ Positive} + \varepsilon$$

To examine the moderation effect of culture in H2, interaction terms between the information conditions and the cultural primes are added. I expect that the asymmetry between negative and positive information will be smaller among participants exposed to the collectivism prime. However, the exact form of this moderation is exploratory. There are several possibilities for the influence of collectivism on negativity biases. Collectivism may amplify the weight of positive cues ($\beta_5 > 0$), attenuate the impact of negative cues ($\beta_4 > 0$), or both.

$$\text{Trust} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Negative} + \beta_2 \text{ Positive} + \beta_3 \text{ Collectivism} + \beta_4 \text{ Negative} \times \text{Collectivism} + \beta_5 \text{ Positive} \times \text{Collectivism} + \varepsilon$$

6. Experiment Implementation

This study was preregistered at AsPredicted.org one day before data collection (to access the anonymized preregistered document, please visit https://aspredicted.org/76xc-55nx.pdf). The survey was conducted between February 8 and 11, 2023, in Mainland China, using Credamo, a leading Chinese online survey platform that combines features of both Qualtrics and MTurk. Credamo has been widely employed in prior research (e.g., Chen et al., 2023; Gong et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022) and is known for providing reliable, high-quality data.

A total of 2,000 respondents completed the survey; 27 participants who failed the attention check were excluded, leaving a final analytic sample of 1,973 individuals. Respondents were drawn from all 31 provincial-level administrative divisions in Mainland China (excluding Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan). As is common with online samples, the demographic profile skews younger and more educated than the national average: the mean age is 29 years, 82% hold higher education degrees, and 67% are female. Appendix Table C1 in the Supplementary File reports a detailed comparison between the sample and the national population. While this composition primarily affects the generalizability of the study, the experimental design and random assignment mitigate concerns about internal validity, since our main inferences rely on differences between randomly assigned treatment conditions rather than on population representativeness.

Balance tests presented in Appendix Table C2 of the Supplementary File show no significant differences across treatment and control conditions on key demographic variables (age, gender, education). The manipulation check results, shown in Figure D1 (Appendix D in the Supplementary File), confirm the success of the cultural priming: participants in the collectivistic priming condition report significantly higher scores on the IND–COL scale than those in the individualistic condition ($p < 0.001$).

7. Main Results

Table 1 reports the main regression results. Model 1 provides clear evidence of a negativity bias in generalized trust among Chinese respondents. Compared with the control condition, exposure to positive information about others' trustworthiness increases generalized trust by 0.23 standard deviations, while negative information decreases it by 0.43 standard deviations. The negative effect is nearly twice as large as the positive one. A test of the difference between these coefficients confirms that the asymmetry is statistically significant, supporting H1. Figure 1a visually depicts this asymmetry. The coefficient for the negative information condition lies farther from zero than the positive coefficient, which indicates a stronger effect. Together, these results demonstrate that negative information exerts a disproportionately large influence on trust formation compared to positive information of equal magnitude.

Table 1. Main results.

	Model 1	Model 2
Information stimuli (Ref.: control)		
Positive condition	0.231*** (0.053)	0.198** (0.075)
Negative condition	−0.432*** (0.053)	−0.428*** (0.075)
Cultural priming (Ref.: individualism)		
Collectivism condition		0.116 (0.075)
Collectivism condition × positive condition		0.065 (0.106)
Collectivism condition × negative condition		−0.008 (0.106)
Linear combination of coefficients		
Positive condition + negative condition	−0.201* (0.092)	
Observations	1,973	1,973
R^2	0.075	0.080

Notes: Entries are OLS regression coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses,* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

In Model 2, the analysis tests whether cultural priming moderates the effects of information stimuli. The interaction coefficient between collectivistic priming and the positive stimulus is positive, which indicates that the average treatment effect (ATE) of the positive stimulus is somewhat larger under the collectivistic condition. Although the moderation effect aligns with H2, it is not statistically significant ($p = 0.106$). Likewise, the interaction coefficient between collectivistic priming and the negative stimulus is close to zero, which suggests that priming does not meaningfully alter the ATE of the negative stimulus on trust.

Figure 1b presents the ATEs of information stimuli across cultural priming conditions. Respondents primed for collectivism appear to show slightly less negativity bias than those primed for individualism, as the absolute values of the positive and negative coefficients are more similar in the collectivistic condition. Collectivistically primed participants also seem somewhat more receptive to positive stimuli. However, the interaction terms remain statistically insignificant.

Overall, the preregistered analyses do not provide evidence that the cultural priming manipulation moderates negativity bias in generalized trust. There is insufficient evidence for H2.

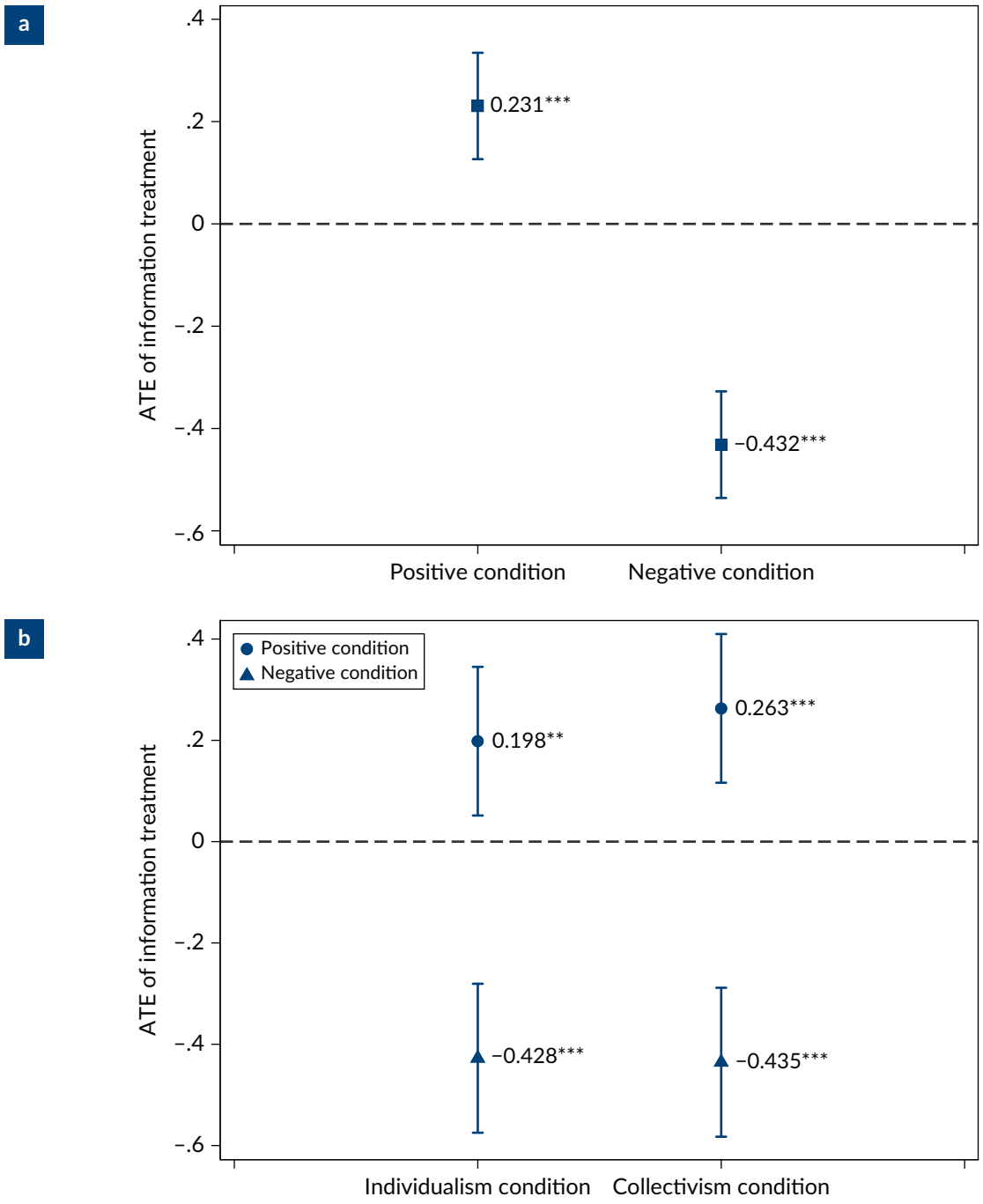

Figure 1. ATE of information: (a) ATE of information; and (b) ATE of information by culture priming. Notes: Figure 1a displays the ATE of information treatment in the whole sample, and Figure 1b specifies the ATE of information treatment conditional on cultural priming; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

8. Discussion

This study examined generalized trust through the lens of negativity bias in a non-WEIRD context. Using a preregistered online experiment in China, it shows that negative information about others' untrustworthy behavior has a substantially stronger effect on generalized trust than positive information of comparable content. Chinese respondents' generalized trust declines much more when exposed to negative news than it

increases in response to positive news. This finding extends evidence of negativity bias in trust formation—often documented in Western, individualistic samples—to a large sample of Chinese citizens. This finding suggests that the tendency for "bad to be stronger than good" is not confined to WEIRD populations, but may reflect a more general feature of how people process social information.

The experiment also tested a preregistered hypothesis about the moderating role of culture. In the preregistered analyses, the interaction terms between the primes and the information treatments are in the theoretically expected direction. Notably, collectivistic priming is associated with somewhat greater responsiveness to positive information. However, they do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. I interpret this null result not as evidence that culture is irrelevant to negativity bias, but as indicating the limits of what a brief, single-shot online prime can accomplish relative to deep-seated cultural orientations.

Several features of the design may help explain why the cultural prime did not produce a clear moderation effect. As shown in Figure D1 in the Supplementary File, the manipulation significantly increases the salience of cultural considerations, but the effect size (approximately 0.3 standard deviations) is modest. This suggests that a brief online priming task may be too weak to meaningfully shift value orientations in ways that alter how respondents weigh positive and negative information. Furthermore, the online panel setting likely introduced additional noise and heterogeneity in respondent engagement. Together, these considerations suggest that experimentally activating cultural orientations, at least in this way, is challenging.

Another reason to doubt that the null result reflects the irrelevance of culture rather than the weakness of the prime comes from additional, non-preregistered analyses using a self-reported IND–COL scale measured after the priming task. In these analyses, I explore whether deep-seated cultural values are associated with variation in how respondents react to positive and negative information, while controlling for the experimental treatment conditions and standard sociodemographic covariates, including age, gender, and education. Interested readers are referred to Appendix E in the Supplementary File for further details.

The exploratory patterns tentatively suggest that more collectivist respondents are more responsive to positive information, while their response to negative information remains relatively stable. As a result, the asymmetry between negative and positive effects appears largest among respondents with more individualistic orientations and less pronounced among those with more collectivistic orientations. In other words, among the most individualistic respondents, negative information has a strong effect on generalized trust, whereas positive information has little impact; among the most collectivistic respondents, positive information plays a larger role, bringing the magnitudes of the positive and negative effects closer together (see Figure E1 in the Supplementary File). These patterns are consistent with the idea that collectivist orientations may help attenuate negativity bias in generalized trust primarily by increasing sensitivity to positive social cues.

These exploratory findings resonate with prior research in cultural psychology showing that East Asians experience stronger positive emotional activation in interpersonal contexts compared to Caucasians (Deng et al., 2023; Uchida et al., 2009). Such cultural differences in emotional processing could contribute to increased responsiveness to positive information and a reduced negativity bias among individuals with stronger collectivistic orientations. However, because the IND–COL scale was measured after the priming

and information treatments, these results are vulnerable to post-treatment bias and must be interpreted with caution. Even with appropriate controls included in the model (see Table E1 in the Supplementary File), the analyses remain correlational and cannot be used to draw firm conclusions about causal mechanisms. I therefore treat them solely as hypothesis-generating for future research rather than as evidence supporting the moderation hypothesis in this study.

Taken together, the findings have several implications. First, they provide robust evidence that negativity bias in generalized trust extends to the Chinese context, which lends credence to the view that trust is more easily destroyed than built across distinct cultural settings. This contributes to ongoing efforts to move beyond WEIRD populations and to understand the psychological foundations of trust in diverse societies. Second, they highlight the difficulty of experimentally identifying causal effects of culture using brief online primes. The null result for the preregistered cultural priming hypothesis underscores the need for stronger and more sustained cultural interventions, such as bundled tasks, richer narrative primes, or offline settings with higher engagement, to better examine how culture shapes the weighting of positive and negative information.

Beyond these immediate empirical contributions, the study also has broader implications for theorizing about trust and culture. The evidence of a robust negativity bias in generalized trust in China indicates that this asymmetry is not confined to Western, individualistic settings and may reflect a more general feature of how people process social information. At the same time, although the present design does not permit definitive conclusions about cultural moderation, the exploratory patterns in this study, together with existing work in cultural psychology, suggest that culture may shape the strength of this bias. In particular, they point to the possibility that collectivist orientations may indirectly foster higher levels of generalized trust by attenuating negativity bias and increasing responsiveness to positive information. Some prior studies have argued that collectivism promotes trust directly (Westjohn et al., 2022; Zeffane, 2017). The patterns reported here instead point to a complementary, more speculative mechanism, operating through differential responses to positive and negative information.

This study also has some limitations regarding sampling. First, the effectiveness of the cultural prime is evaluated only within a single, predominantly collectivist context. Without a parallel implementation in a more individualistic setting, it is not possible to assess whether the same manipulation would have stronger or weaker effects across cultural environments, or whether the challenges observed here are specific to the Chinese context. Second, the sample is drawn from an online panel and is not nationally representative of the Chinese population. Although this design is common in online experimental research and the main patterns are robust across standard sociodemographic controls, the results should not be taken as precise population estimates, but rather as evidence about underlying psychological processes in a particular segment of Chinese respondents.

Future work can build on these insights in at least two ways. First, future studies should develop more powerful experimental manipulations and measurement strategies that can more convincingly identify causal links between cultural orientations and negativity bias. Promising avenues include combining longer and richer priming materials, repeated exposure over time, or offline and field settings with higher levels of respondent engagement. Designs of this kind would be better positioned to detect whether and how culture shapes the weighting of positive and negative information when people form generalized trust. Second, researchers can replicate the negativity bias experiment in other contexts and with different types of

trust-relevant information, in order to assess how general the asymmetry is across societies, issue domains, and institutional settings. Such comparative evidence would clarify whether the Chinese case is typical or distinctive, and help identify conditions under which negativity bias in generalized trust is stronger or weaker. Implementing comparable priming designs in both predominantly individualist and collectivist contexts would also make it possible to directly compare the strength and consequences of cultural primes across cultural environments.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Data will be made available upon request.

LLMs Disclosure

The author declares having used OpenAI's ChatGPT 5 model to enhance the English language. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication. All opinions and analyses conducted in this article are the author's own.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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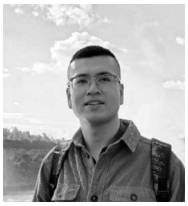

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