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The ‘Neighbour effect’ in giving

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When people are forced to select somebody to receive something ‘nasty’, they tend to avoid those physically closest to themselves: their direct neighbours. We extended our analysis by ‘forcing’ participants to select people to receive something ‘nice’. We wanted to test whether the avoidance of selecting neighbours extended to positive as well as negative gifts. In order to test this, 233 first year undergraduates were recruited and allocated a specific numbered seat in the lecture theatre on a pseudo-random basis. They were then given an instruction sheet that explained that they were being requested to make a forced-choice to select somebody to receive a ‘gift’. The ‘gift’ either increased or decreased the lottery tickets the person would receive in a raffle: +1 (nice), +5 (extremely nice), 0 (neutral), -1 (nasty), -5 (extremely nasty). Eligible candidates were any of the other participants on the same seating row and block in the lecture theatre. When participants issued a ‘nasty-gift’, they demonstrated a significant *neighbour effect* by avoiding their nearest neighbours. However, for ‘nice-gifts’ the opposite occurred and they favoured their neighbours. Therefore, in the condition when their selection benefitted the candidate, they became significantly more likely to pick their neighbours. We suggested that the *neighbour effect* is a robust and strong bias, which exists as an implicit bias that effects social interactions in the context of gift economy.

Reference

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