Will Authoritarian Leadership of the Founder Attract Investor?

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Abstract

This paper asks whether projecting authoritarian leadership increases startup founders' chances of attracting investment in China's early-stage market. Drawing on signaling theory and role congruity, we propose that signals of decisiveness, control, and execution discipline will be rewarded by angel investors (H1a), and that these effects will be stronger for female than male founders (H1b) in China's high power distance, tight cultural context. We outline a rigorous, between-subjects design using AI-generated video vignettes in Mandarin. Each of 240 China-based angel investors views one two-minute pitch in which we manipulate leadership style (authoritarian vs. non authoritarian) and founder gender.

After viewing, investors complete measures of perceived authoritarian leadership, investment intention, and related signals (decisiveness, execution capability, organizational control), plus manipulation checks and controls. While we do not present data or findings, we specify a clear analysis plan and discuss theoretical and managerial implications as potential contributions. The design is pre registrable and replicable, allowing future work to test these hypotheses in a culturally sensitive way.

Keywords

Angel investment, authoritarian leadership, founder gender, signaling theory.