Perceived Trustworthiness Of Occupations: 
The Case Of Korean And American Students

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I. Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine the perceived trustworthiness of nineteen selected occupations crossculturally based on U.S. and Korean students samples. Specifically, it compares the rating and ranking methods of assessing trustworthiness, examines the possibility of sex and culture differences, and evaluates the effects of subjects' levels of trustfulness. The relative trustworthiness of the nineteen occupations was highly similar across rating and ranking methods, sex, culture, and level of trustfulness. However, there was a significant relationship between level of trustfulness and level of perceived trustworthiness. Implications of these findings for future work on trustworthiness, and for survey research in general, are discussed.

II. Purpose

In recent years there has been a surge of interest in the phenomenon of trust (see Rotter, 1971; Singer and Singer, 1972: 397–398; Wrightsman, 1974). This development, which may have been precipitated by earlier calls for systematic attention (Deutsch, 1958) or by sociopolitical events of recent years, is notable for its concern with immediate social problems. For instance, the declining level of interpersonal trust among college students has been reported (Hochreicn and Rotter, 1970), and the steadily decreasing level of trust in government has been monitored using national samples (Miller, 1974). Furthermore, various occupations have been compared in terms of their perceived trustworthiness (Rotter and Stein, 1971). In these days of concern over credibility, the implications of such studies are self-evident. Indeed, the national news media have quickly picked up Rotter and Stein's finding that politicians, along with used car salesmen, ranked the lowest in trustworthiness.

The social relevance of a study increases rather than obviates the need for a sound methodology, and indeed one might say that this increase is proportionate to the seriousness of the study's implications. This perspective has prompted us to examine several aspects of the Rotter and Stein study.
Rotter and Stein compared twenty occupations in terms of judged trustworthiness. They first had subjects rate on a four-point scale the trustworthiness of each of the twenty occupations; the occupations were then ranked according to mean ratings. However, several issues need to be noted regarding the general procedure used in this study. First, the method of ranking the occupations on the basis of subjects' ratings has not been compared to the method of having subjects directly rank the occupations.

Second, the possibility of sex differences in the perceived trustworthiness of occupations has not been investigated, and in the absence of information on sex differences, the use of a combined sample of males and females is at best an equivocal procedure. Third, it is conceivable that a person's level of trustfulness may influence the way he/she perceives the trustworthiness of occupations. That is, the level of an individual's trustfulness may affect the mean level and range of his/her ratings, the relative standing of the occupations may change as a function of the rater's trustfulness, or both. Unless raters are matched for the level of trustfulness, group comparisons may be confounded by this possible relationship between ratings of trustworthiness and the rater's trustfulness.

The purpose of the present study examines these three issues, using cross-cultural data, i.e., U.S. and Korean college student samples. Cross-cultural comparisons are of intrinsic interest, and the social and political relevance of perceived trustworthiness provides an added justification for such an analysis. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons may be viewed as an extreme form of cross-validation and, as such, a finding of cross-cultural generalizability would bear on the credibility of obtained relationships.

III. Method

A multisection questionnaire was administered to a U.S. sample of 187 undergraduates at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) and to a Korean sample of 204 undergraduates at the Yonsei University (Seoul). The U.S. students were paid for their participation, while the Korean students participated as part of a course requirement. Only two sections from this questionnaire are pertinent to the present paper.

The first of these 2 sections contained 132 trust-related items with which subjects expressed their agreement or disagreement using a 5-point Likert format with response categories of (1) "Strongly agree," (2) "Mildly agree," (3) "Agree and disagree equally," (4) "Mildly disagree," and (5) "Strongly disagree." Interspersed among the 132 items were the 25 items of the Rotter Interpersonal Trust Scale (Rotter, 1967) and the 14 items of the Trustworthiness Subscale from Wrightsman's Philosophies of Human Nature Scale (Wrightsman, 1964).

The second section concerned each subject's perception of the trustworthiness of 19 occupations. These occupations were selected to be familiar to stu-