EDITORIAL: TRUST

Kosuke TAKEMURA1 and Yukiko UCHIDA2

1Shiga University, Japan
2Kyoto University, Japan

Since Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994) proposed the important role of trust toward
generalized others (general trust) in social dynamics, trust among people has been a key
concept not only in psychology but also in a wide range of disciplines such as sociology,
economics, political science, social epidemiology, biology, and neuroscience. Trust has
been studied as an antecedent of several important human behaviors/experiences such as
cooperation (e.g., Pruitt & Kimmel, 1977), trading at a market (e.g., Levine et al., 2014),
happiness (e.g., DeNeve & Cooper, 1998), and physical health (e.g., Subramanian, Kim,
& Kawachi, 2002). Trust has also been suggested to impact large-scale economic growth
(e.g., Zak & Knack, 2001). Antecedents of trust have been investigated as well, ranging
from neurological (e.g., Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2005) to macro-
level societal processes (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Takemura, Hamamura, Guan, & Suzuki,
2016; Yamagishi, 1998/2011). Trust is a key concept that integrates knowledge and
insights from different areas of academic research. This special issue was designed to
report the progress of research on trust by collecting papers that have utilized multiple
methodologies, including behavioral experiment, cross-cultural comparison, analysis of
archival data, multilevel analysis in local communities, and text mining of social media
data.

The first paper by Mifune and Li provides a review of the findings from economic
game experiments as well as neurological studies of trust. They report the results of an
experiment employing two different economic games related to trust (i.e., Trust Game
and Faith Game) providing insights on what these well-used behavioral measures of trust
actually measure.

The second paper by Ozono reports a cross-cultural study on general trust
comparing China and Japan. Most studies in cultural psychology have not paid much
attention to the differences between China and Japan, as they both are located in East
Asia and have been considered to share similar cultural backgrounds. However, as
reported by Ozono, there are differences between both countries (e.g., higher general trust
in China than in Japan), and it is worthwhile to explore which factors could explain these
differences.

The third paper by Hamamura reports a study examining a new method to assess
regional differences regarding residential mobility in Japan. This author utilized archival
data of family names and examined its validity by analyzing correlational patterns with

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kosuke Takemura, Department of Social
Systems, Faculty of Economics, Shiga University, Japan (e-mail: kosuke-takemura@biwako.shiga-u.ac.jp).
social capital index including general trust. This paper provides a good example of the fusion between the sociological perspective and psychological research.

The fourth paper by Fukushima, Takemura, Y. Uchida, Asano, and Okuda refers to a large-scale social survey conducted in a local area of Japan. They analyzed data from approximately 100 communities and performed multilevel analyses. These authors suggest that trust towards neighbors has double-edged implications for happiness. Trust towards neighbors was positively associated with happiness as an individual-level effect. However, as a contextual effect (i.e., effect of being surrounded by neighbors who trusted other neighbors), trust towards neighbors had a negative association with happiness. Fukushima et al. provide an explanation of this complex relationship between trust and happiness by focusing on micro and macro dynamics among community residents.

Finally, the fifth paper by A. Uchida provides data from text mining of Twitter feeds among Japanese users to investigate the characteristics of “distrust” toward policymakers in Japan. The study shows that the way of describing political topics in Twitter reflects distrust of current politics. In addition, text mining analysis suggested that the expressions of anger (by those who engage in political topics) and anxiety (by those who do not engage in political topics) were commonly used in Tweets. Through this evidence, A. Uchida reveals that distrust toward politics emerges through different emotional reactions according to an individual’s interest in political issues.

We must note that this field was pioneered by a leading researcher, Dr. Toshio Yamagishi, who passed away in May 2018. He passionately embodied the multi-disciplinary nature of studies on trust. Dr. Yamagishi bridged several disciplines including sociology, economics, psychology, biology, and neuroscience. He developed an influential theory of trust with great attention to the societal differences between Japan and the United States, and argued that trust plays an important role in micro-macro processes that involve several behaviors and psychological mechanisms such as cooperation, punishment, ingroup favoritism, and decision heuristics (e.g., Yamagishi, 1998/2011; Yamagishi, Jin, & Kiyonari, 1999). His theory has inspired many researchers to generate new ideas and continue further research. We can see many signs of Dr. Yamagishi’s work in a wide range of areas in social/behavioral sciences and this special issue is one of them.

REFERENCES


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