

Abstract

The study is aimed at providing evidence of a distinction between general trust and specific trust. General trust, the two types of specific trust (target-based trust and stage-wise trust), and trustworthiness of a target person, were measured by various questionnaires among the Chinese respondents from Beijing, Guangdong and Hong Kong respectively. The results showed that these trust constructs are indeed distinct from each other theoretically and empirically. a) Firstly, correlation coefficients among them were found to be insignificant, and secondly different correlation patterns were found to exist between these trust constructs and the personality domains jointly defined by the Five Factor Model (FFM) and the indigenous personality scales of the Chinese Personality Inventory Scale (CPAI). b) Hong Kong respondents were found to have a higher level of general trust, while the mainland Chinese respondents had a higher level of specific trust (A-Trust). Thus this finding showed that specific trust, unlike general trust, serves a social role to keep people staying in certain social groups; however, general trust serves to emancipate people from being confined in limited social relationships. c) Path models showed that target-based trust is mostly responsible for variability of individuals' trusting behavior. Although personality traits have stable relations with general trust, personality traits as well as situational factors have only indirect effects on trusting behavior through the mediating functions of target-based trust and perceived trustworthiness of the target person involved in different social situations.