

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Social Science Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch

Radius of trust: Gradient-based conceptualization and measurement[☆]

Anning Hu

Department of Sociology, Fudan University, 1118, Liberal Arts Building, 220 Handan Road, Shanghai, 200433, China

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 September 2016

Received in revised form 20 June 2017

Accepted 7 August 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Radius of trust

Strength of ties

Specific trust

Measurement

Gradient

ABSTRACT

The radius of trust – the width of one's cooperation circle – has been widely cited by scholars from various disciplines as a key factor in the production and maintenance of public good. However, the vagueness in its conceptualization, measurement, and analysis obstructs efficient communication between empirical works, impeding the accumulation of scientific knowledge. This study develops a conceptualization of trust radius as the gradient in the level of trust in specific individuals across social ties of differing strengths. Along with this conceptualization, a new measurement scheme is constructed, which, relative to previous measures, is empirically easy-to-implement and theoretically valid in displaying individual-level variations in trust radius, highlighting trust radius' distinction from generalized trust and affinity with specific trust, and accommodating the differing tie strengths within one's trust network. Finally, this measurement scheme is well integrated in a multilevel modeling framework to study the determinants of trust radius, which is illustrated by two examples.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

A sense of being connected to people serves as the foundation for the solidarity of society, as “the consciousness of constituting with the others a unity is the whole unity in question in the societary case” (Simmel, 1910: 374). It is thus not surprising that societal cohesion is strongly related to the level of confidence people have in the trustworthiness of others (Simmel [1906] 1950: 318). Whether it is defined as “a bet about the future contingent actions of others” (Sztompka, 1999: 25) or an “encapsulated interest” (Hardin, 2001), trust has been viewed by scholars from various disciplines to be a type of desirable social capital that fosters general social wellbeing, including but not limited to economic growth (Bjornskov, 2012; Harrison and Huntington, 2001; Fukuyama, 1995) and civic participation promotion (Park and Subramanian, 2012; Paxton, 2002, 2007; Putnam, 2000). In light of the theoretical and practical significances, research themes pertaining to trust have always been on the agenda of social scientists over the recent decades (e.g., Barber, 1983; Cook, 2003; Cook Levi, and Hardin 2009; Glanville and Paxton, 2007; Seligman, 2000; Uslaner, 2002; Welch et al., 2005; Yamagishi et al., 1998).

[☆] An earlier version of this study was presented at the Symposium of Social Research Methodology in Sociology and Demography held at Nanjing University, Nanjing, China. The author thanks the comments and suggestions given by Professor Yu Xie and other meeting participants. This study was financially supported by the Outstanding Scholar (zhuoxue) Grant from Fudan University, the National Social Science Foundation [11&ZD149] and [15CSH030], and the School of Social Development and Public Policy at Fudan University.

E-mail address: huanning@fudan.edu.cn.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.08.004>

0049-089X/© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article in press as: Hu, A., Radius of trust: Gradient-based conceptualization and measurement, Social Science Research (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.08.004>

As a multidimensional construct, trust has two basic attributes: the level of trust (LT) and the radius of trust (RT) (for a review, see [Bauer, 2013](#); [Delhey et al., 2011](#)). LT refers to the intensity of trust in individuals, that is, the degree of a partner's trustworthiness, while RT concerns the scope of trust, that is, how wide a person's circle of trusted people is ([Fukuyama, 1995, 2001, 2002](#); [Delhey et al., 2011, 2014](#)). Relative to the large number of studies on LT, RT is under examined in the current literature. This research gap is due to several research challenges of RT. One challenge is the conceptual ambiguity. Although the idea of RT has been well received in the academia, its conception, to date, is still unsophisticated for empirical social research, which requires greater effort in elaboration and clarification. Another challenge is the operational ambiguity. Unlike LT that is gauged by a straightforward survey item (e.g., the Noelle-Neumann's standard question for generalized trust), RT is usually presented as a secondary construction. Although various ways of measuring RT have been proposed, their relative strengths and limitations in delivering the substantive meaning of RT have not yet been fully analyzed, and so remain unclear. This poses a practical concern for empirical researchers in the studies of RT. A third challenge, which is related to the second, is the analytical ambiguity. A particular measurement is often followed by a corresponding analytical approach. The lack of an agreed measurement scheme results in notably different and even incomparable analytical strategies when scholars investigate the state or the determinants of RT. As a result, the accumulation of scientific knowledge of RT studies has been relatively slow.

For empirically oriented social scientists, these ambiguities should be tackled with. This study attempts to make contributions to the literature of RT in the three areas: Theoretically, we elaborate Fukuyama's original idea of RT, explicate in great detail the intricacies surrounding it, and propose a conceptualization of RT based on the gradient in the level of trust in particular individuals across one's social network.¹ Operationally, congruent with our conceptualization, we propose a handy strategy for operating RT as the regression slope between the level of specific trust and an indicator of the strength of social ties in one's trust network. Analytically, we articulate and illustrate how to examine the determinants of RT by integrating our operationalization in a multilevel modeling framework.

2. Theoretical clarifications

2.1. What is the radius of trust and why does it matter?

It is widely acknowledged that the idea of RT was coined by the political scientist Francis Fukuyama, who describes RT as the width of the "circle of people among whom cooperative norms are operative" ([Fukuyama, 1999: 2](#)). This conceptualization captures a common phenomenon in human society: a person has a circle of partners who are deemed to be trustworthy, but the scope of such a circle varies from person to person. A wide RT enables an individual to cooperate with socially "remote" individuals, while those with a narrow RT are oriented to restrict their cooperative activities within a small circle of "us" (e.g., [Cook et al., 2009: 5](#)).

The idea of RT is theoretically inspiring as it directs our attention to an important fact that a trust relation is beneficial for a society only when both LT and RT are taken into account. For a society with a narrow RT, for example, an intense LT decreases social solidarity by widening the gulf between in-group and out-group persons. In light of this, RT, by highlighting the extent of contrast in the perceived trustworthiness between in-group and out-group referents, informs us with the condition when trust serves as a kind of desirable social capital and works to produce and maintain public good. When the in-versus-out group distinction is stark, people are inward-looking, less likely to grant a similar level of confidence in "others" as that in "us," and more likely to sacrifice public good for small-group interests (e.g., [Banfield, 1967](#)). That is why [Fukuyama \(2002\)](#) characterizes the familism of Latin America and the Chinese parts of Asia as well as the ethnonationalism of the Balkans with a narrow RT. For those societies, the problem they face is that "the average radius of trust of cooperative groups tends to be small" ([Fukuyama, 2002: 32](#)).

Since the term was coined, RT has been cited widely by scholars from various disciplines. However, regarding this theoretical construct, there is still room for further clarification, which is addressed in the following discussions.

2.2. The unit of analysis

Following Fukuyama's cross-national comparative research, most studies on RT are macro-oriented in the sense that RT is treated to be kind of a cultural or civilization trait. For instance, [Delhey et al. \(2011\)](#) examine, compare, and rank the width of RT across 51 societies. A similar study conducted by [Reeskens \(2012\)](#) looks into country-level variations in RT among 29 European nations. Similar to the cross-national works, other studies compare RT across groups of individuals (e.g., ethnic groups) within a society (e.g., [Zhou and Hu, 2013](#); [Reeskens and Hooghe, 2008](#); [Nannestad, 2008](#)). Again, these studies, in essence, also view RT as an aggregate construct.

Working with RT at the aggregate level is practically convenient, and also sheds light on the substantive differences between nations or other analytical groups. Bearing these merits in mind, this approach, however, is not elaborate enough to reveal individual-level variations of RT. In other words, from these studies, we learn about certain macro patterns, but we

¹ The term "gradient" is deployed to highlight the echelon or "ladder" in the transition of specific trust from close partners (e.g., family members) to remote partners (e.g., strangers).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7338956>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7338956>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)