

Review Article

## An Investigation of College Students' Trustworthiness

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**Abstract:** Despite numerous studies have placed an emphasis on trustworthiness among college students in the past years, an investigation of this topic in Thai context is scant. This present study aimed at examining trustworthiness among college students in Thailand. Data were gathered from 191 accounting students at a selected government university through a self-administrated online questionnaire. The scale measurement contained a 17-item of 5-point rating scale encompassing five essential dimensions of trust: integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty, and openness. Results indicated that the overall score of trustworthiness was at a good level ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $S.D. = .908$ ). "Consistency" was rated as the highest mean score ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $S.D. = 1.09$ ) whereas "openness" was reported as the lowest mean score dimension ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $S.D. = 1.01$ ). Research implications and recommendations were also discussed.

**Keywords:** Trust, Trustworthiness, College students.

### INTRODUCTION

Trust is the most essential key in developing healthy relationships with others [1]. Lack of trust can cause numerous problems in relations, particularly at the workplace. For instance, an individual who attempts to complete some tasks and assignments with the assistance of others may be irritating and cannot make the accomplishment due to low level of trust [2]. In the university, the major purpose of higher education is to develop students' learning to reach higher levels. The establishment of meaningful relationships in the university is the key to accomplish this goal. To build healthy relationship, trust is a key component for this mission [3]. Trust needs to be established not only between instructors and students, other instructors, staffs, but also between students and other students as well. Building trust in the university is crucial for students' success and achievement, which can in turn benefit the university in many ways such as a happier and more productive classroom, and university culture enhancement [4, 5].

Numerous studies attempted to investigate trust of students with the different cultures, groups of ethnicity and their discrimination of trustworthiness on skin tone [1, 6, 7, 8]. In addition, measuring trust and trustworthiness among college students through the linkage of trust game was also conducted as one of methodologies to examine college students' trust [9].

Although the examination on trustworthiness in higher education has been broadly paid more attention in the past decades [10], a little studies of trustworthiness among Thai college students have been found [11]. Therefore, this present study seeks to investigate trustworthiness among Thai college students to produce extensive knowledge in this field for the further study.

### LITERATURE REVIEWS

Trust is defined as "the positive expectation that another will not take advantage of you" [12]. Even though trust is imperceptible, it is considered as the most important part in building relationships [2]. Trust in building relationships with others can be divided into three different types: deterrence-based trust, knowledge-based trust, and identification-based trust [12]. *Deterrence-based trust* refers to the consistency of individuals' promise because they are afraid of the consequences that will happen if they will not follow or do what they promise. This type of trust mostly occurs when people fear that their inconsistency may destroy the relationships. *Knowledge-based trust* refers to an individual's knowledge of other behaviors, which can be predicted based on one's experience. The better a person know people, the better predictability of their behavior leading to trust or distrust. *Identification-based*

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*trust* happens when there is an emotional construction. This type of trust is viewed as the highest level of trust. An individual possessed this kind of trust searches for each other's best interest and act for the other. Similarly, Colquitt, Lepine, and Wesson [13] separated trust into three different types: disposition-based, cognition-based, and affect-based. These kinds of trust were described in the similar way as Lussier's explanation, but used the different designations and examples. These tree types of trust generate five different dimensions of trust: integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty, and openness.

*Integrity* is the most significant dimension used to evaluate individual's level of trust. People with truthfulness, earnestness, and honesty are perceived to have integrity. This dimension is considered as a center of five dimensions. Individuals who lack of integrity may show the weakness in other dimensions.

*Competence* refers to individuals who have practical and interpersonal knowledge, ability, and skills. To ensure the respect, trust, and confidence from the others, individuals need to demonstrate that they have sufficient knowledge, skills, and abilities to do what they promise or commit to other people.

*Consistency* alludes to the demonstration of predictable action in similar situations. To improve this dimension of trust, individuals need to keep their commitments, practice what they said, and be unprejudiced. *Loyalty* refers to people who try not to take advantage of others. This dimension needs identification-based trust.

*Openness* involves the level of reception to new thoughts, ideas, and change. In addition, people who are open have a tendency to demonstrate a high level of self-disclosure and accept diversity and conflict.

Based on the literature reviews, this present study used these five dimensions described by Lussier [12] to assess college students' trustworthiness. Thus, the research question was proposed as "what were levels of college students' trustworthiness?"

## METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study aimed at investigating levels of college students' trustworthiness. Data were collected from 191 accounting students at a selected government university in Thailand through an online questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was uploaded on Google platform. The instrument was adapted from an original scale assessment called "your trustworthiness" proposed by Lussier [12]. This scale measurement consisted of 17-item of 5-point rating scale ranging from 1(almost never) to 5 (almost always). This scale contained five dimensions of trustworthiness including integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty, and openness. Students were asked to complete this scale measurement by rating each statement based on their frequency with they had conducted that behavior in their daily life. The higher the score, the more trustworthy they were. Reliability with Cronbach's alpha test was conducted to ensure the quality of this instrument. Alpha score of 0.952 indicated the highly acceptable of this scale measurement. To examine respondents' levels of trustworthiness, descriptive statistics included mean and standard deviation were computed.

## RESULTS

Of 191 participants in this study, the majority of them were female (86.9%). Their average monthly income was approximately \$150. Almost 60 percent of contributors reported that they had about 4-6 members in their family (59.7%). Table 1 demonstrated the level of trustworthiness among accounting students. The total mean score of trustworthiness was at a good level (M = 3.72, S.D. = .908). Among five dimensions of trustworthiness, "consistency" was reported as the highest mean score (M = 3.81, S.D. = 1.09) followed by "competence" (M = 3.80, S.D. = 1.05), "loyalty" (M = 3.77, S.D. = 1.03), "integrity" (M = 3.58, S.D. = 0.868), and "openness" (M = 3.57, S.D. = 1.01). All of these dimensions were at a good level. To highlight the highest mean score dimension, results implied that this group of students tried not to overcommit to the point of destroying commitments, and attempted to do as promised as well as treated their friends and others fairly.

**Table-1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Trustworthiness**

Dimension	Mean	S.D.	Rank
Integrity	3.58	.868	4
Competence	3.80	1.05	2
Consistency	3.81	1.09	1
Loyalty	3.77	1.03	3
Openness	3.53	1.01	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.72</b>	<b>.908</b>	

## CONCLUSION, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although five dimensions of trust were at a good level, students should place their focus on weaker areas. Based on this study's findings, openness dimension was the weakest area that this group of students needs to pay more attention. In particular, this dimension of trust is very important for students as individuals with openness characteristics are more likely to admit new ideas and

change. In order to develop openness, students are recommended improving their areas of self-disclosure and others' self-disclosure as well as ability to accept diversity and conflict. Lussier [12] stated that self-disclosure helps increase relationships between people leading to a higher level of identification trust. However, students need to be aware of consequence and risk that may come up with self-disclosure as this approach for building trust can lead to exploitation, disappointment, and upset.

As trust is the most essential part of building human relations in the organization, the university needs to create curricular activities and environments to develop students' trustworthiness after their admittance to the university and prior to taking the internship course. Group-based learning activities are encouraged as one of learning methods that needed to be implemented to enhance trustworthiness among students in this university. As openness dimension received the lowest score among five dimensions, self-disclosure activities and training programs should be particularly paid more attention and provided. In addition, as integrity is viewed as the most important dimension, students ranked this dimension in the third level, according to their self-assessment. Thus, the emphasis on fostering ethical behavior should be put more concerns. Additionally, college students' trustworthiness education program should be executed to enhance students' trust [14].

Recommendations for further studies include the extension of sample sizes to other majors and faculties as well as other universities in Thailand. Other variables such as ethical behavior or locus of control should be added for the next investigation to explore the relationship between these variables and trustworthiness. The comparison of trustworthiness between people with different sociodemographic should be developed.

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