

The strangers you trust

 [Minh-Hoang Nguyen](#)  07/19/2022 07:18:21  2

Contributed by:

 **Minh-Hoang Nguyen**, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

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When we were teenagers, most of us might have been told by our parents, “don’t trust strangers”. On other occasions, our parents encouraged our confidence by saying: “trust yourself”. These statements seem reasonable, but what would we do if we faced someone resembling us so much at first sight? Would we be able to trust them?



Trusting stranger, illustrated by Videoplasty.com (CC BY-SA 4.0);

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hand_Gesture_-_Hand_Shake_Vector.svg

This question has been answered by two Japanese researchers from Osaka University, Tamami Nakano and Takuto Yamamoto, and published in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (Nature Portfolio). The researchers found that self-resemblance significantly influenced the perception of trustworthiness [1].

[The experiment included two groups of people](#). The first group comprised 200 Japanese college students (half male and half female, aged 19-24 years) whose facial photos were taken. The second group consisted of 30 students (half male and half

female, aged 19-24 years) acting as the evaluators of trustworthiness based on the facial photos of the first group. The researchers employed deep convolutional neural networks (DCNNs) to measure the facial similarity between the evaluators and evaluatees.

The subsequent statistical analysis showed that a person tends to perceive people with higher similarity with the self-face to be more trustworthy. However, the phenomenon only happens when the person and stranger are of the same sex, but not otherwise.

This finding can be well explained based on the self-protection mechanism implied by the mindsponge mechanism [2]. Observing is an information absorption process, while trustworthiness can be deemed a property reflecting our belief in the reliability of the information source. During the information absorption process, the new information is evaluated by the “trust guard”, a special reference from the mindset based on formerly accepted values [3]. Suppose the new information is similar to the information existing in the mindset. In that case, a “priority pass” will be given to enter the mindset without being evaluated deliberately because it is considered to be evaluated formerly. If not, the new information needs to pass through the rigorous filtering process of the mind, making the person perceives less trustworthiness from strangers owning dissimilar faces to them.

The above explanation is grounded on the assumption that we trust our ‘self’ and other properties associated with it, including appearance. But what if we lack trust in ourselves? Would we not trust someone resembling us at first sight? Or, what if we trust someone else more than ourselves? Would we have other references as our trustworthiness measurement rather than ourselves?

Yes, these questions are odd, but they are intriguing and worth further exploration in the future!

References

[1] Nakano T, Yamamoto T. (2022). You trust a face like yours. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9, 226. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-022-01248-8>

[2] Vuong QH, Nguyen MH, La VP. (2022). *The mindsponge and BMF analytics for innovative thinking in social sciences and humanities*. De Gruyter. (Forthcoming)

[3] Vuong QH, Le TT, La VP, Nguyen MH. (2022). The psychological mechanism of internet information processing for post-treatment evaluation. *Heliyon*, 8(5), E09351. [https://www.cell.com/heliyon/fulltext/S2405-8440\(22\)00639-9](https://www.cell.com/heliyon/fulltext/S2405-8440(22)00639-9)

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