

SYNOPSIS

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES REGARDING EXPECTED UTILITIES AND COSTS OF PLAGIARISM—A COMPARISON OF HIGH-TRUST AND LOW-TRUST STUDENT SAMPLES

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Abstract: The outset assumption is that plagiarism can be understood as a variation of crime or opportunistic behaviour. Correspondingly it serves actors as an illegitimate or illegal, but nevertheless economical means to reach target ends. Adopting this thesis plagiarism seems not to be a crime of passion but of calculation, where actors compare utilities and costs. Against this background, the study asks for cultural variations regarding the perceived utilities and costs of plagiarism, focussing on the following questions: (1) Do students from student samples with a different level of generalized trust vary with respect to the average frequency of plagiarism? (2) Do students from student samples with a different level of generalized trust vary with respect to the on average perceived cost-utility structure of plagiarizing? (3) Is it possible to explain observed sample-specific differences in the average frequency to plagiarize by different sample-specific perceptions of the cost-utility-structure of plagiarizing? Survey data of students from universities in Poland, Germany and Denmark are used to answer these questions, whereby the Polish student sample represents a low-trust-, the German sample a medium-trust- and the Danish sample a high-trust sample. Methodically, the study is based on bivariate statistics, principle component analyses and multiple regression. Significant differences are found regarding both the frequency of plagiarism and the willingness to plagiarize between high-trust-, medium-trust- and low-trust samples. In the high-trust case perceived moral costs of plagiarizing activity provide stronger disincentives for committing plagiarism than possible external sanctions. Above this, a reverse effect of administrative sanctions within high-trust- and low-trust samples could be observed, with the remarkable recognition that in high-trust samples the threat of administrative sanctions does not prevent but provoke deviance. Evidence was found that differences in the aggregated frequency of plagiarism between different samples can be explained by the activity of utility-oriented actors under circumstances of a varying level of generalized trust influencing the perceived moral costs of plagiarism.

Key words: Plagiarism; opportunistic behavior; extended rational-choice approach; generalized trust; low-trust- and high-trust cultures

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