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## Press Release

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### Beauty Is an Advantage, but Not Everywhere

**A new study by researchers at the University of Mannheim demonstrates how cultures evaluate attractiveness differently and the influence this evaluation can have on social success.**

How much does beauty influence our social success? And is attractiveness perceived in the same way worldwide? For the first time, a new study published in the journal *Scientific Reports* provides comparative insights into different countries. Mannheim economist Wladislaw Mill and his colleague Benjamin Kohler from ETH Zurich analyzed large language models in 68 languages and developed a cross-national index. In this way, they were able to find out how closely terms such as “beautiful” or “pretty” are linked to positive attributes such as “successful” - and how these associations vary depending on the culture.

The key finding: The so-called “beauty premium”, i.e. the advantage that attractive people enjoy in their career, when choosing a partner or in their social environment, is widespread worldwide - but by no means equally pronounced or defined in the same way everywhere. “For the first time, our method makes it possible to automatically and comparatively record cultural patterns in the perception of beauty,” explains the study’s author, Professor Dr. Wladislaw Mill, Assistant Professor of Behavioral Economics. “And we found that almost everywhere in the world, beauty is associated with something positive rather than something negative - but not everywhere,” adds Mannheim graduate Benjamin Kohler.

#### **Western countries: Beauty as a reflection of strength and competence**

In Western European countries such as France, Italy, and Finland, beauty is particularly often associated with positive characteristics such as competence, intelligence, and trustworthiness in language models. “In many Western cultures, external attractiveness is apparently associated with performance and success,” says Mill. The researchers have also observed this effect in countries such as Somalia.

#### **Eastern Europe and parts of Asia: Other associations dominate**

The situation is different in Romania, for example, or in some Asian countries such as Vietnam: Here, beauty is much less frequently associated with such “status-oriented” characteristics. People there even seem to have negative views of beauty which are associated with incompetence, mistrust, and failure.

However, it remains unclear why beauty is apparently more of an advantage in some cultures than others. The authors of the study suspect that beauty in these cultures may be associated with evolutionary advantages. Previous research suggests that beauty is often a sign of health - and therefore more attractive people tend to have better chances of survival and reproduction.

### **Implications for the economy, society, and equality**

The study shows that culturally influenced beauty standards may be an underestimated factor in social power structures. Because if attractiveness is associated with very different social signals in different cultures, this has a direct impact on the distribution of opportunities in society - whether in job interviews or salary negotiations. The results therefore provide new impetus for international inequality research.

### **The study**

Kohler, B., Mill, W. *Cultural differences in the beauty premium*. Scientific Reports (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-02857-4>

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