THEORETICAL AND SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION OF THE CONCEPT OF TRUST IN FOREIGN PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

This article explores the scientific and theoretical study of the concept of trust in foreign and Russian social psychology. Trust is recognized as a fundamental factor influencing interpersonal communication, social cooperation, and organizational relations. Early research by scholars such as S. Jurgard and P. Laskou approached trust through self-disclosure, while later contributions by T. Yamagishi, M. Deutsch, and others emphasized trust's critical role in long-term cooperation and social exchange. Theoretical perspectives from Luhmann, Giddens, Fukuyama, and Sztompka offer diverse insights into trust as a mechanism for reducing social complexity and fostering societal cohesion. Empirical studies highlight the importance of factors such as reputation, risk, and strategic interaction in the formation and maintenance of trust. The article also discusses the psychological dimensions of trust in therapeutic and counseling contexts, underscoring its significance in personality development and social functioning. Overall, the research reviewed affirms trust as a dynamic, context-dependent construct vital for social cohesion and effective interpersonal relations.

Keywords: Trust, interpersonal communication, social psychology, cooperation, self-disclosure, social exchange, risk, reputation, psychological development, therapeutic context, social cohesion, trust theories, strategic interaction, personality development.

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of trust has received growing attention in both Russian and Western social psychology. Trust, in my view, plays a central role not only in interpersonal communication but also at all levels of social interaction—whether

in intergroup dynamics or organizational relations. While Western scholars began investigating trust as early as the 1950s, scientific research on the subject in Russia gained momentum starting in the 1980s. Prominent scholars such as Niklas Luhmann conceptualized trust as a mechanism for reducing social complexity and as a voluntary limitation of freedom imposed by others. Anthony Giddens examined the degree of trust individuals place in themselves and in social systems. Francis Fukuyama viewed trust as a form of moral capital within society, whereas Adam Seligman regarded it as an integral component of social life. Piotr Sztompka contributed to the classification of various forms of trust and emphasized cultural differences in its expression. Collectively, these approaches facilitate a deeper understanding of the nature of trust and underscore its significance in social processes.

In Western psychological literature, trust is often examined in the context of psychotherapy and psychological counseling, with a focus on building trust between therapist and client as well as enhancing the client's trust in themselves and the surrounding world. Influential works in this area include Erik Erikson's studies on the ontogenesis of trust (basic trust versus mistrust), Carl Rogers' ideas on personal trust and self-actualization, and Abraham Maslow's exploration of trust in the context of self-realization. Although these perspectives hold substantial theoretical and practical value, they do not constitute fully developed theories of trust. Rather, trust is treated as an essential and functional element in personal development and psychological healing.

Numerous social-psychological studies have also explored the phenomenon of trust, although distinguishing between psychological and socio-psychological approaches is often methodologically challenging. Notable contributors in this field include P. Andersen, E. Aronson, I. Atwater, D. Byrne, R. Baron, C. Verderber, L. Guerrero, C. Duffy, B. Johnson, K. Dindia, M. Singer, N. Kerr, H. Koutsures, S. Lindskold, D. Myers, N. Miller, N. Oshetow, M. Paludi, E. Pratkanis, D. Pruitt, J. Rubin, J. Rampel, Sung Hye Kim, P. Walters, U. Weiss, R. Harris, S. Hassen, R.B. Hayes, K. Hovland, J. Holmes, R. Cialdini, T. Yamagishi, and others. A common limitation across many of these studies is the lack of comprehensive theoretical generalizations.

In contrast to domestic research, in Western social psychology, the concept of trust has been extensively examined by numerous scholars as a critical component of

interpersonal relationships. Researchers in this domain regard trust as a fundamental determinant of both individual and societal psychological well-being. It is commonly defined as the expectation held by an individual, group, or society that others will not cause harm or act with malicious intent. Empirical findings from international studies indicate that individuals who possess a general sense of trust toward the world tend to exhibit higher levels of optimism and maintain stronger beliefs in social justice. In contrast, those with low levels of trust often display pessimistic attitudes and are more likely to experience doubt and anxiety in their daily lives.

In the field of foreign social psychology, S. Jurgard and P. Laskou are recognized as the first researchers to conduct an in-depth study of the concept of trust. In the late 1950s, they began investigating trust through the process of self-understanding and the internal structure of the self. According to their view, trust arises during self-disclosure—a process in which individuals voluntarily and deliberately reveal themselves to others. Consequently, trust was initially examined within the boundaries of interpersonal communication. In 1974, J. Allen further contributed to this line of research by analyzing trust specifically in the context of interpersonal relationships, highlighting key criteria for assessing their positive nature.

The first foreign studies devoted to the problem of trustworthy communication in social psychology were systematically reviewed by V.S. Safonov in his dissertation in 1981. The role of trust in the context of social choice and social dilemmas has been widely explored. This line of research was initiated in the 1960s by M. Deutsch, who was among the first to associate trust with cooperation. Social dilemmas—particularly the "prisoner's dilemma"—analyze interactions in which mutual cooperation would yield the best collective outcome, yet individuals often find it more advantageous to defect in pursuit of personal gain.

During the 1970s, research on social dilemmas expanded and gained significant traction in English-speaking social psychology. Scholars define *social choice* as situations where individual interests conflict with group interests. They distinguish three main types of social choice scenarios: the prisoner's dilemma, public goods games, and resource dilemma games. Public goods games involve benefits that are collectively unlimited but depend on individual contributions; if all members fail to contribute, the collective resource is depleted. Resource dilemma games, by

contrast, involve finite resources—when individuals attempt to maximize their personal use, the shared resource is quickly exhausted.

Thus, the most rational strategy from an individual standpoint often entails maximizing personal benefits, even at the expense of the collective good.

Interpersonal trust is a crucial factor in predicting behavior in social situations. In 1986, Toshio Yamagishi developed a scale to measure mutual trust and cooperative ability, categorizing individuals into high-trust and low-trust groups. According to him, trust functions as an independent variable and is the key to success within generalized exchange systems. Additionally, goal theories developed by M. Deutsch and T. Yamagishi demonstrated that trust is a foundational element for long-term cooperation. Their studies confirmed that individuals who exhibit higher levels of trust are more inclined toward cooperative behavior. Yamagishi defined trust as the belief that "others will not exploit others' good intentions." In studies on generalized exchange and social dilemmas, trust has been shown to be a decisive factor for solidarity and collaboration. P. Ekeh (1974) emphasized that a "trust mentality" is essential for effective cooperation. In 1993, T. Yamagishi and K. Cook found that high levels of mutual trust significantly enhance cooperative performance. While strategic actions in games like the "prisoner's dilemma" may increase trust and cooperation, this effect diminishes in games involving a larger number of participants. However, in closed-chain social choice structures, such strategic actions remain effective. In subsequent years, research on the role of trust in cooperative dynamics continued to evolve. In 1995, B. Laneau found that participants' reputations play a significant role in the formation of trust. Furthermore, in 1994, P. Kollock demonstrated the link between trust and risk: without risk, trust cannot truly form. He concluded that trust depends less on interpersonal relationships and more on the structure of the situation itself. Risk, therefore, not only facilitates the development of trust but also creates opportunities for its exploitation.

Other studies have continued this line of inquiry by highlighting the complex relationship between trust, risk, and punishment. For example, T. Yamagishi (1986, 1988) found that individuals with lower levels of trust are more inclined to administer punishment.

Factors that strengthen trust include:
1. Honest and transparent communication
2. Acknowledgment and support of the partner's abilities
3. Active listening to others' opinions
4. Fulfilling promises and commitments
5. Collaborative work and mutual assistance

Factors that weaken trust include:
1. Prioritizing personal interests exclusively
2. Avoiding responsibility
3. Drawing conclusions without clear evidence
4. Blaming others and justifying oneself after mistakes

Methods for measuring and studying trust often involve game-based approaches such as the "Prisoner's Dilemma." However, since these do not always reflect real-life complexity, researchers have shifted toward examining trust in interpersonal relationships. Scholars such as Z. Rubin, J. Rotter, and V. Sveel have developed various trust measurement scales. For instance, V. Sveel classifies trust into three types:
1. *Reliability trust* — the ability to depend on others
2. *Emotional trust* — trust based on emotional connections
3. *General trust* — the overall level of trust within relationships

In 1995, K. Parks and L. Hulbert investigated how interpersonal trust influences cooperation. Their findings showed that in the presence of risk, highly trusting individuals are more likely to cooperate than those who are less trusting. However, when risk is absent, both trusting and non-trusting individuals display similar levels of cooperative behavior. R. Levitsky and B. Banker (1993) examined the developmental stages of trust and analyzed how it evolves throughout the process of cooperation. Their studies demonstrate that trust serves as a fundamental component of social relationships and cooperative behavior. Although numerous investigations have been conducted on this topic, the precise psychological nature of trust has yet to be fully understood.

Studies of various psychological and socio-psychological issues show that trust is often discussed in the context of other psychological phenomena — such as group formation, its stages and typology, authority, influence, friendship, cooperation, as well as intra-group and inter-group interactions. However, trust has rarely been identified and studied as an independent socio-psychological phenomenon in its own right.

Typically, trust has been presented as a one-dimensional construct lacking distinct psychological characteristics and has not received sufficient analytical attention. As a result, trust has often been explained through other psychological constructs, merely serving as a background condition for their existence. While it is indeed involved in all the aforementioned phenomena and is viewed as a necessary prerequisite for their development, trust itself has not been thoroughly explored as a separate psychological construct.

Nevertheless, trust plays a central role in all of these phenomena and is regarded as a foundational element of interpersonal and social-psychological relationships. Consequently, despite the absence of focused scientific analysis, a misleading perception has emerged that trust has already been sufficiently studied. In fact, trust is a key facilitating factor in the existence of numerous socio-psychological phenomena — such as friendship, love, status, cooperation, influence, and interaction.

In socio-psychological research, the issue of trust is often examined within the framework of the phenomenon of suggestion. Significant contributions to this area have been made by scholars such as V. M. Bekhterev, V. S. Kravkov, V. N. Kulikov, G. K. Lozanov, A. S. Novoselova, G. A. Veselkova, K. K. Platonov, and I. Ye. Shvarts.

Studies of suggestion processes have identified a psychological defense mechanism — referred to as "counter-suggestion" — which arises when an individual automatically rejects suggestions that contradict their personal values. Research indicates that individuals tend to adopt a resistant stance toward proposals misaligned with their belief systems. This process is directly linked to the development of trust, particularly in the context of shared value systems, which significantly enhance trust. According to V. N. Kulikov, as an individual develops psychologically, their response to suggestion becomes more complex and gradually differentiates based on both the content of the suggestion and its source. In other

words, whether a person trusts or distrusts a suggestion often depends not only on who is making the suggestion but also on how well the content aligns with their personal values.

Trust has been studied by many researchers within the framework of the friendship phenomenon. For example, I. S. Kon emphasizes that trust is an integral element of friendship relationships. He argues that the breakdown of trust often leads to the dissolution of the friendship itself. Kon also links variations in types of friendship—such as those between adults and adolescents, or between men and women—to differences in the level of trust that characterizes these relationships.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of trust holds a fundamental position in both interpersonal and societal interactions. Research across Western and Russian social psychology demonstrates that trust is not only a psychological construct relevant to personal development and psychotherapy, but also a key element in maintaining effective social exchange, cooperation, and communication. Scholars such as Luhmann, Giddens, Fukuyama, and Sztompka have provided diverse theoretical perspectives that deepen our understanding of trust's role in reducing complexity and fostering stable social systems. Empirical studies—from Jurgard and Laskou's early work on self-disclosure to Yamagishi's and Deutsch's research on generalized exchange and cooperation—underscore trust as a predictor of collaborative behavior, particularly in situations involving risk and uncertainty. Furthermore, more recent findings highlight the importance of factors such as reputation and perceived risk in shaping trust-based interactions. Altogether, these insights affirm that trust is a dynamic and context-dependent mechanism crucial for social cohesion and long-term cooperation.

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