

# The Sociology of Trust in Modern Societies

COMPREHENSION • VOCABULARY • DISCUSSION

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## Reading Passage

Read the passage carefully. Each paragraph is labelled with a letter for easy reference.

- A** In contemporary societies, trust plays a pivotal role in shaping interpersonal relationships and societal dynamics. Trust is not merely a personal sentiment; it is a social currency that facilitates cooperation and collaboration across various sectors. For instance, in urban environments like New York City, where diverse populations converge, trust becomes essential for community engagement and social harmony. People rely on trust to navigate complex social networks, from neighborhood interactions to business transactions, which can significantly impact their quality of life. A study conducted by sociologists at Columbia University found that neighborhoods with higher levels of trust reported lower crime rates and greater civic participation. This correlation highlights how trust fosters a sense of belonging and safety, which in turn encourages individuals to contribute positively to their communities. Furthermore, trust can enhance social cohesion, leading to more resilient neighborhoods where residents feel empowered to work together towards common goals, thereby creating a supportive environment for all.
- B** Moreover, the digital age has transformed the landscape of trust in profound ways. Online interactions, while convenient, often lack the personal touch that face-to-face communication provides, which can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of genuine connection. This shift raises important questions about the nature of trust in virtual spaces. For example, platforms like Facebook and Twitter rely heavily on user-generated content, yet the prevalence of misinformation can erode trust among users and complicate the sharing of accurate information. A survey by the Pew Research Center indicated that 64% of Americans believe that social media undermines trust in information, reflecting widespread concern about the reliability of online content. In response, many individuals are becoming more discerning about their online interactions, actively seeking out sources that they deem credible and reliable. This behavior reflects a growing awareness of the need for critical thinking in evaluating information. Thus, as societies evolve, the mechanisms of trust must also adapt, highlighting the importance of fostering transparency and accountability in both personal and digital realms. By doing so, communities can work towards rebuilding trust and ensuring that it remains a vital component of social interaction, ultimately leading to a more informed and connected society.

## Vocabulary Glossary

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Key words and phrases from the passage. Study them before attempting the exercise below.

WORD / PHRASE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
<b>pivotal</b>	very important in affecting the result of something	<i>The decision was pivotal to the success of the project.</i>
<b>currency</b>	something that is used as a medium of exchange	<i>Respect is a social currency that can help build strong relationships.</i>
<b>navigate</b>	to find your way through a difficult situation or area	<i>She learned to navigate the complex rules at her new job.</i>
<b>cohesion</b>	the action of forming a united whole	<i>The team worked well together, showing great cohesion.</i>
<b>misunderstanding</b>	a situation where someone does not understand something correctly	<i>There was a misunderstanding about the meeting time.</i>
<b>discern</b>	to see or understand something clearly	<i>He could discern a slight change in her mood.</i>
<b>credible</b>	able to be believed or trusted	<i>The witness gave a credible testimony in court.</i>
<b>resilient</b>	able to recover quickly from difficult conditions	<i>Children can be very resilient after a setback.</i>

### Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blank

Use one word or phrase from the glossary above to complete each sentence. Each item is used only once. Answers are on the final page.

1. Trust is often seen as a kind of social \_\_\_\_\_ that helps people work together.
2. In times of change, communities need to be \_\_\_\_\_ to overcome challenges.
3. She could \_\_\_\_\_ which news stories were true by checking multiple sources.
4. A strong sense of \_\_\_\_\_ helps the group stay united during difficult times.
5. The new policy was \_\_\_\_\_ for improving the company's efficiency.
6. Sometimes online communication can lead to a \_\_\_\_\_ if people are not careful.

## Comprehension Questions

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*These questions are different from the online practice test. Choose the best answer (A, B, C, or D). Answers and explanations are on the final page.*

### Question 1

#### **What is the main argument of the passage?**

- A. Trust is essential for both personal and digital interactions in modern societies.
- B. Social media is the biggest threat to trust in today's world.
- C. Urban environments have no need for trust due to their diverse populations.
- D. Trust is only important in face-to-face interactions.

### Question 2

#### **What effect does trust have on neighborhoods, according to the passage?**

- A. It leads to increased crime rates.
- B. It decreases civic participation.
- C. It fosters a sense of belonging and safety.
- D. It makes residents feel isolated.

### Question 3

#### **How does the digital age challenge traditional concepts of trust?**

- A. By eliminating all personal interactions.
- B. By making face-to-face communication obsolete.
- C. By introducing new ways to connect that can lead to misinformation.
- D. By reducing the number of online platforms available.

### Question 4

#### **Why are people becoming more discerning about their online interactions?**

- A. Because there are too many online platforms.
- B. To avoid misinformation and find credible sources.
- C. Due to a lack of interest in social media.
- D. To reduce their time spent on the internet.

### Question 5

#### What does the Pew Research Center's survey indicate about social media?

- A. It increases trust in society.
- B. It has no effect on trust.
- C. It undermines trust in information.
- D. It is completely reliable for information.

### Discussion & Writing Prompts

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*Each prompt references a specific detail from the passage above. Use for classroom discussion or a short written response (150–200 words).*

1. The passage notes a study from Columbia University showing that trust leads to lower crime rates. How might increasing trust in a neighborhood be achieved?

2. Paragraph two discusses the impact of misinformation on social media. How can social media platforms improve the trustworthiness of the content shared?

3. According to the passage, 64% of Americans believe social media undermines trust. What measures could be taken to restore trust in online information?

# Answer Key

## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Q1 A

Q2 C

Q3 C

Q4 B

Q5 C

## VOCABULARY EXERCISE

FIB1 currency

FIB2 resilient

FIB3 discern

FIB4 cohesion

FIB5 pivotal

FIB6 misunderstanding

## Comprehension Question Explanations

Why the correct answer is right — and why each wrong option is incorrect.

### 1. What is the main argument of the passage?

✓ A — Trust is essential for both personal and digital interactions in modern societies.

The passage discusses the importance of trust in both personal and digital interactions.

✗ B — Social media is the biggest threat to trust in today's world.

The passage mentions social media but does not claim it's the biggest threat.

✗ C — Urban environments have no need for trust due to their diverse populations.

The passage argues the opposite, that trust is crucial in urban environments.

✗ D — Trust is only important in face-to-face interactions.

The passage includes trust in digital interactions as important.

### 2. What effect does trust have on neighborhoods, according to the passage?

✓ C — It fosters a sense of belonging and safety.

The passage states that trust fosters a sense of belonging and safety.

✗ A — It leads to increased crime rates.

The passage states the opposite, that trust decreases crime rates.

✗ B — It decreases civic participation.

The passage mentions increased civic participation, not decreased.

✗ D — It makes residents feel isolated.

The passage suggests trust creates community, not isolation.

### 3. How does the digital age challenge traditional concepts of trust?

✓ C — By introducing new ways to connect that can lead to misinformation.

The passage explains that online interactions can lead to misinformation.

✗ A — By eliminating all personal interactions.

The passage does not claim all personal interactions are eliminated.

✗ B — By making face-to-face communication obsolete.

The passage does not say face-to-face communication is obsolete.

✗ D — By reducing the number of online platforms available.

The passage does not mention a reduction in online platforms.

#### 4. Why are people becoming more discerning about their online interactions?

✓ B — To avoid misinformation and find credible sources.

The passage states people are seeking credible sources to avoid misinformation.

✗ A — Because there are too many online platforms.

*The passage does not mention the number of platforms as a reason.*

✗ C — Due to a lack of interest in social media.

*Interest in social media is not cited as a reason.*

✗ D — To reduce their time spent on the internet.

*Reducing internet time is not discussed in the passage.*

#### 5. What does the Pew Research Center's survey indicate about social media?

✓ C — It undermines trust in information.

The passage states that 64% believe social media undermines trust.

✗ A — It increases trust in society.

*The passage indicates the opposite effect on trust.*

✗ B — It has no effect on trust.

*The passage clearly states an effect on trust.*

✗ D — It is completely reliable for information.

*The passage highlights concerns about reliability.*

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