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Content Validity of Conventional Questionnaire-based Measurement of Trust

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This study provides a comprehensive critical examination of the so-called standard trust variable, which is considered to be the most commonly used tool to measure trust through questionnaires. The critical focus follows the aspects of content validity through contrasting the data of standard trust measurement – both for the whole sample and at the individual level – with results of alternative, widespread questionnaire tools including the trust radius, the ANES trust question set and the trust index. This highly comprehensive examination of content validity, which is definitely a gap in the field of trust research, is made possible by data from our own survey. The main conclusion of the paper is that the standard trust variable too loosely identifies respondents who feel – by their own self-report – trust in others, since when compared with the other measures, it is consistently found that a significant proportion of these supposedly highly trusting individuals do not feel 'generalised trust'.

Keywords: trust, standard trust question, trust radius, ANES trust questions, trust index, content validity

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEMATISATION

According to Offe (1999), trust is an affective impulse that makes agents believe that others do not intend to harm them on purpose. The recipients of this trust can be a variety of social groups, from the narrowest radius of primary relationships to the broadest possible one refers to fellow human beings as such (Fukuyama 1995). Trust that is characterising more intimate

and personal relationships, like family, kinship and other kind of close relations, is usually called particularised trust in the literature, while trust towards unknown others in general, without any distinction, is referred to as generalised trust (sometimes it is also interpreted as social or moral trust) (Bjørnskov 2007; Cook 2001; Grimalda, Mittone 2011; Hooghe 2007; Marschall, Stolle 2004; Paldam 2011; Reeskens, Hooghe 2008; Rothstein, Stolle 2008; Delhey, Newton 2005; Tamilina 2018; Uslaner 2002).

The most common way to measure generalised trust in surveys is done by the so-called standard variable formulated as the following: *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?* The use of this questionnaire item goes back a long time, its origin is usually attributed to the German statistician Elisabeth Noelle-Neuman (Algan, Cahuc 2013; Uslaner 2002) and was first introduced in a German election survey in 1948. Initially, it was used with dichotomous (yes or no) response alternatives, and the development of various scales only became widespread at a later stage. Nowadays, this variable is included into the most renowned large-sample international and European comparative surveys, such as the World Values Survey (WVS), the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the Eurobarometer, the European Values Study (EVS), the European Social Survey (ESS), the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS). Certain surveys apply a three-item formula (which is referred to in the literature as 'trust index') in which the standard is accompanied by two other variables measuring fairness and helpfulness. This tool is tracing back to Moris Rosenberg's 'misanthropy scale' (Rosenberg 1956).

Despite the pervasive implementation of both the standard trust variable and the trust index, there has been a mounting critique in the literature regarding these conventional approaches to trust measurement (Bodor et al. 2023). A substantial proportion of this criticism challenges the understanding that self-reported trust, as measured by frequently used survey methods, directly correlates with real-world behaviour of individuals (Glaeser et al. 2000; Naef, Schupp 2009; Uslaner 2012). Additionally, certain methodological aspects have been the subject of critique. For instance, studies have intensively debated the appropriate number of items to be used to capture generalised trust and whether a 'trust index' or the single-item measurement of the standard variable is more adequate (Bauer, Freitag 2018; Brehm, Rahn 1997; Zmerli, Newton 2008). A related methodological discourse focuses on a scale length. Specifically, it addresses the relative merits of shorter, binary scales versus longer scales with 4-, 5-, 10-, or 11-value increments. Furthermore, there is a debate regarding the importance of including a middle value and whether it enhances or hinder analytical precision (Lundmark et al. 2015; Uslaner 2012). Two of the more complex problems, namely the 'interpersonal incomparability' and the 'measurement inequivalence' are not independent from the aforementioned issues. In both cases, the dilemma at hand is determining whether respondents are interpreting the question(s) in a consistent manner. That is to say, any discrepancy between respondents' responses should be meticulously examined to ascertain whether it signifies a difference in their level of trust or whether it is an erroneous conclusion resulting from the respondents' divergent interpretations of the inquiry (André 2013; Davidov 2009; Delhey et al. 2011; Freitag, Bauer 2013; Reeskens, Hooghe 2008; Miller, Mitamura 2003; Poznyak et al. 2014; Torpe, Lolle 2011; Uslaner 2002; Robbins 2022; Sturgis, Smith 2010; Van der Veld, Saris 2011).

The current paper considers these critical approaches, particularly the 'item-number debate', the 'scale-length debate' and the 'equivalence debate'. However, it is not its proposed

objective to make a justified preference as regards the various tools or methodological details. Instead, the paper seeks to explore whether the standard variable is really capturing the phenomenon of generalised trust. In order to address this issue, the paper is focusing on the approach of content validity (Shadish et al. 2001). Accordingly, it problematises whether the standard trust variable, which is the most commonly used item to examine generalised trust, actually measures trust towards the broadest possible group of people, or it rather reveals the agents' trust in much narrower social groups. This explorative content validity of the standard item is carried out in comparison with several other questionnaire tools that are also used regularly. Since there is no database that contains all the well-known questionnaire tools for measuring trust, therefore we had to conduct our own survey, which makes this research exceptionally novel. To clarify again, the primary mission of the bellow-presented survey was not to explore the trust patterns of the target group, but to reveal how the standard trust variable relates to other items also designed to capture trust.

DATA AND METHODS

Our own data collection was carried out in two waves: between 8 November 2021 and 18 November 2021, and between 1 March 2023 and 31 May 2023 at the University of Pécs (in Hungary). A total of 550 people (first 250, then 300 people)[1] were surveyed by non-probability sampling who are students of six faculties of the university (Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Business and Economics, Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology and Medical School). The survey was conducted face-to-face, with the involvement of interviewers (who were students from the Department of Sociology).[2] The questionnaire was structured around two major thematic blocks, the first of which was about European values, and the second of which included the topic of trust. The trust questions are analysed in the order in which they appear in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was in Hungarian, but we used the official Hungarian translations of the original English survey items. Cross-tabulation and correlation analysis are used as part of the investigation. Used variables are presented in detail in the results section.

RESULTS

The Standard Trust Question

In our own survey, we formulated the standard question in the conventional way: '*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*' However, departing from the usual form, the standard variable of trust was asked twice in the survey, consecutively, with the same wording, but with different response options (Table 1). First, a scale of 0 to 10, used by the ESS, was given as a response option, where 0 means 'you can't be too careful' and 10 means 'most people can be trusted'. Secondly, we then used the original version of the standard trust question, the dichotomous formula, where one response option is 'most people can be trusted' and the other is 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people'.

[1] The reason for the two surveying phases was that it had to be separated into two different university courses.

[2] The questionnaire was completely anonymous and did not include a unique identifier or socio-demographic variables. The survey was subject to an ethical license issued by the University of Pécs.

Table 1. **Frequency distribution of the two variants of the standard question (%) (*N* = 550)**

Dichotomous scale		0 to 10 scale		
You can't be too careful when dealing with people	Most people can be trusted	low (0 to 4)	unsure (5)	high (6 to 10)
52.5	47.5	31.5	15.5	53.0

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the data collection.

The percentage distributions of the two variables do not necessarily imply similar conclusions. In the case of the dichotomous formula, 47.5% of respondents thought that 'most people can be trusted'. In the case of the other question, the 11-point scale makes the results less straightforward, nevertheless, the percentage of respondents who are inclined towards trust, i.e. those who gave a value of 6 or above, is 53.0%. A difficulty in making an accurate comparison stems from the fact that the 11-point scale has a mid-point, which is likely to represent uncertain opinions (moreover, quite a large number of people answered this, 15.5% of respondents). A dichotomous variable does not in any way allow for the expression of this potential uncertainty, which raises the problem that the respondent is forced to take a firm position (this methodological dilemma is, of course, also addressed in the literature, see Uslaner 2012). There is a marked difference in terms of those expressing distrust: while 52.5% of respondents in the case of the dichotomous scale stated that 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people', 'only' 31.5% of respondents in the case of the other scale chose a score representing a clear distrust (0 to 4).

The truly exciting question, rather, is whether the link between the two items also works at the individual level (Table 2). We regard the results consistent when the category 'most people can be trusted' on the dichotomous scale is associated with a high score (i.e. 6 or above) on the 11-point scale. Analogously, it is also a consistent result when the answer 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people' is combined with low (not higher than 4) values on the other variable.

Table 2. **The link between the two variants of the standard question (%)**

		Dichotomous	
		You can't be too careful when dealing with people	Most people can be trusted
0 to 10	low (0 to 4)	30.9	32.1
	unsure (5)	12.3	18.5
	high (6 to 10)	56.8	49.4

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the data collection.

The results show that this expectation is not met for the majority of respondents, i.e. inconsistencies are observed. Taking the dichotomous variable as a reference point, 49.4% of respondents inclined towards trust can be considered consistent: these respondents also chose a high value on the 11-point scale; 18.5% of them chose a value of 5 on the 11-point scale, while 32.1% of them – in an inconsistent way – gave a low value on the ESS-type scale. However, if we focus on the other category of the dichotomous variable, reflecting distrust,

we see an even more contradictory picture. Only 30.9% of those who chose this option remained consistent by giving a low score on the 11-point scale, 12.3% of them selected value 5, while 56.8% of them chose – for some reason – a high score which means that more than half of these respondents answered in an inconsistent way. Of course, we cannot judge which scale measures more accurately; nevertheless, this is basically not the purpose of our study. To examine the content validity, it is not sufficient to analyse only these questions, additional variables from the questionnaire are also needed. In what follows, we therefore examine the relationship between the two versions of the standard trust question and other widespread question formulas designed to capture trust: the trust radius questions, the American National Election Studies (ANES) experimental question block, and further items of the trust index.

The Relationship Between the Standard Trust Question and Two Additional Items of the Trust Index

As already mentioned above, the so-called trust index, which is an extension of the standard variable with two more items, is also quite often applied in surveys (e.g. European Social Survey). In addition to the standard trust question, the trust index includes one more item on fairness and another one on helpfulness in the form of the following, respectively: *Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair? and Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves*? In our own survey, we asked these two questions twice, similarly to the standard one: first, using a 0 to 10 scale, then secondly, offering dichotomous response options.

Our aim in this analysis is to examine the content validity of the standard trust question. To this end, we examine how the items of the trust index, i.e. the standard trust question and the two additional items, relate to each other. It is a self-evident part of generalised trust that individuals generally perceive people as basically fair and helpful. With this accepted, we therefore state: whatever the standard trust question indicates, it cannot be regarded as a real trust based, if, at the same time, the respondent believes that people are generally not fair or not helpful. In what follows, we test this theoretical assumption empirically, with the help of our own data. (The descriptive statistics for the items of the trust index are provided in the Appendix [Appendix 1].)

In the analysis, we will only deal with respondents who feel trust in others according to the standard, and those who responded analogously in terms of the other two items (that is, with those who feel that others are fair and helpful), examining the coherence between the responses of these groups in the sample. The results are reported in Tables 3 and 4. The 11-point scale is used in three categories as before: low trust (between 0 and 4), uncertain (5) and high trust (6 to 10).

Looking at the data in Tables 3 and 4, a contradictory picture appears. For both the questions addressing fairness and helpfulness, we see, in line with our expectations, that the majority of the respondents selecting higher scores based on the standard trust on a 0 to 10 scale responds in accordance with our expectations; however, a quarter or a third of those with a high trust level also gave unsure or inconsistent answers in these cases. For the dichotomous version, the proportion is even less convincing, since here the typical proportion of responses is about half and half, with a tendency towards inconsistency. These results also confirm our claim that a significant proportion of respondents considered to have a high trust on the basis of the standard trust question are indeed not having a high trust.

Table 3. **The distribution of the respondents with the high trust level according to the standard across the categories of 'fairness' variables (%)**

	Fairness (0 to 10)			Total
	low (0–4)	unsure (5)	high (6–10)	
High standard (0 to 10)	11.0	15.9	73.1	100
	Fairness (dichotomous)			
	Most people would try to take advantage of you		They would try to be fair	
Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	50.6		49.4	100

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results.

Table 4. **The distribution of the respondents with the high trust level according to the standard across the categories of 'helpfulness' variables (%)**

	Helpfulness (0 to 10)			Total
	low (0–4)	unsure (5)	high (6–10)	
High standard (0 to 10)	17.9	16.9	65.2	100
	Helpfulness (dichotomous)			
	People are just looking out for themselves		Most of the time people try to be helpful	
Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	57.0		43.0	100

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results.

The Interrelation Between the Standard Trust Question and the Trust Radius

In the fifth wave of the World Values Survey (WVS), the so-called trust radius question block was introduced, the main reason for which was to identify and measure more precisely the various dimensions (types) of trust that are markedly different from each other (Welzel 2010). Although attempts have been made previously to measure the radius of trust (e.g. Trust and Engagement Survey 1996, ANES 1996, while Uslaner (2012) dates the first series of questions of this kind to 1965), but it is from this point on that we can consider the spread of this sort of measurement of trust radius. The questionnaire tool measuring the trust radius seeks to explore the respondent's trust in his/her own and external groups (in-group vs out-group) and its members. The aim of this question set is to operationalise the 'radius' of trust (see Fukuyama 1995), and thus to capture trust in narrower and broader groups of people with a new tool. To this end, the tool identifies the so-called particularised trust, which is limited to personal acquaintances, close relationships, i.e. basically family, friends and colleagues. The existence of personal experience is crucial to the development or potential absence of particularised trust; whereas this form of trust is essentially characterised by belonging to one's own group, trust representing wider and broader personal relations refers to external groups, i.e. to a group of people to which the individual does not belong (Delhey et al. 2011; Kumove 2023; Stolle 2002; Yamagishi, Yamagishi 1994; Zheng et al. 2023). The six items in

the original WVS question series address the following groups: 'family'; 'neighbourhood'; 'people you know personally'; 'people you meet for the first time'; 'people of another religion'; 'people of another nationality'. In our own questionnaire, we used this question set as a reference, but slightly adapted it as follows: *I'd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups? '0' means that you do not trust these people at all, and '10' means that you trust them completely. How much trust you have in… (1) your family; (2) your friends; (3) your fellow students; (4) people you know personally; (5) people you don't know personally but know by sight; (6) people you meet for the first time.*

Taking stock of our modifications, we can see, on the one hand, that for the questions measuring particularised trust, which indicate closer relationships, in addition to the family, we considered friends and 'fellow students' as relevant categories, because of the university background. We have kept unchanged the question on 'people you know personally', which also measures particularised trust, and the item 'people you meet for the first time', which indicates the broadest possible trust, but we have added an intermediate category: 'people you don't know personally but know by sight'. We finally discarded the last two variables of the WVS questionnaire ('people of another religion'; 'people of another nationality'), as we do not believe that they can be used universally. (Descriptive statistics for each item in the modified trust radius block are reported in Appendix 2.)

In the light of the theoretical framing and the operationalisation argumentation based on it, we anticipate that the item associated with the broadest radius (in people you see for the first time) and the standard trust variable are strongly related. More precisely, we anticipate a relationship that increasingly high scores on the 0 to 10 scale for the standard trust question (i.e. expressing an increasingly solid sense of trust) are also associated with increasingly high scores for the broadest trust radius (i.e. the category of people you meet for the first time). Of course, it is also expected that those who are considered to have a high (or at least higher) trust according to the standard trust variable should also have trust in the groups concerned for all trust radii. This case is not considered contradictory if the respondent indicates a low score on the standard trust variable but expresses a strong sense of trust on the items relating to narrower radii. Since the radius question set was asked using a scale format ranging from 0 to 10, we first search for correlations using the same scale for the standard trust variable.

In the following, these assumptions are checked by examining simple correlation coefficients and the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. **The relationship between the standard and the trust radius items**

How much do you trust in...	*r*
your family *x* standard 0 to10	0.97
your friends *x* standard 0 to 10	0.30**
your fellow students *x* standard 0 to 10	0.41**
people you know personally *x* standard 0 to 10	0.34**
people you don't know personally but know by sight *x* standard 0 to 10	0.50**
people you meet for the first time *x* standard 0 to 10	0.47**

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results. ** There is a significant relationship, $p < 0.05$.

The results reported in Table 5 meet with our preliminary expectations. We find a significant relationship between the radius items and the standard trust variable (except the item related to family). However, it is somewhat surprising that the results indicate only a medium-strength correlation.

Perhaps it is somewhat more tangible than the correlation coefficients if we compress the variables into fewer categories and simply look at the proportion of respondents who show confidence according to the standard variable and the last item in the radius block. Our anticipation is now obviously the same as above. The handy comparison of the two variables is somewhat complicated by the scale used, since there is no obvious dividing line between those respondents who tend to trust and those who tend to distrust. On the scale of 0 to10, an immediate categorisation can nevertheless be applied provided that values of 6 and above reflect definitely more trust, values of 4 and below reflect more distrust, while value 5 (as a midpoint) serves to express uncertainty. Thus, the above problem can be partially solved by such kind of transformation and simplification of the variables. Moreover, we have a dichotomous variable in the case of the standard trust question, so we can also use it for the comparison. The results are reported in Table 6.

Table 6. **The distribution of respondents with a high trust according to the standard across the three categories of 'trust in people you meet for the first time' (%)**

Trust according to the standard	Trust in people you meet for the first time			Total
	low (0 to 4)	uncertain (5)	high (6 to 10)	
High standard (0 to 10): 6–10	59.5	23.7	16.8	100
Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	75.3	13.9	10.8	100

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results.

The percentage distributions in Table 6, compared to the results presented so far, more specifically draw attention to the discrepancy we are investigating. It can be observed that the two standard trust questions used with different answer options show a similar pattern when examining the broadest radius of trust question, and both indicate that only a minor percentage of respondents (16.8 and 10.8%) gave answers that could be considered consistent, namely, expressed trust according to both the standard variable and the radius variable reflecting the broadest group (unknowns). It is a striking result that respondents who feel trust towards others measured on the standard trust variable in a significant proportion do not trust the people they see for the first time (more than half (59.5%) of respondents reported this according to the 0 to 10 scale and more than three quarters (75.3%) based on the dichotomous scale).

The Interrelations of the Standard Trust Question and the ANES Question Block

In this part of our analysis, we use another set of questions, also developed to measure interpersonal trust more precisely, and long used mainly in the United States, with the objective of comparing its results with the standard trust variable. The ANES survey of 1972 was the first to include a question block of 16 items (ANES 2022), in which respondents could express their agreement with various statements reflecting interpersonal trust. For us, the ANES

questionnaire proves particularly useful, because most of the variables in it are, regarding their content, consistent with generalised trust (or the lack thereof). Therefore, there are definitely some items among the variables examined, for which is it absolutely necessary to expect that respondents who feel generalised trust agree with those. These are as follows: *Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do; People in our society are genuinely concerned with others and are not just out for themselves; Most salesclerks are honest in describing the products which they sell; People are more inclined to help others than they are usually given credit for; Most people are basically honest; Even when given a chance, only a few people are likely to take advantage of you.*

Regarding the following statements, in turn, we anticipate that respondents who feel trust in others will disagree with them: *Most people have very little confidence in others; Most people would tell a lie if they could gain by it; More often than not, people have hidden reasons for doing nice things for others; Trusting in other people very often leads to disappointment; In dealing with strangers, one ought to be cautious until they have shown themselves to be trustworthy; It is a good idea to look for hidden meanings behind what other people say.*

In our survey, we used the same five-point scale as in the corresponding original ANES questionnaire block, with this Hungarian adaptation, as follows: 1) strongly disagree; 2) disagree; 3) both agree and disagree; 4) agree; 5) strongly agree. For the purpose of transparency of analysis, the five-point scale has been recoded into three categories as follows: 1) disagree; 2) unsure; 3) agree. (Descriptive statistics of the items are presented in Appendix 3.)

Again, we are interested in the relationship between the ANES variables and the standard trust question. Our theoretical assumptions have been described earlier, and empirical checks of their fulfilment are presented in Tables 7 and 8. Table 7 shows the connection between the standard trust variable and those questions in the ANES question block for which we identified that we can expect agreement for respondents who feel trust. In Table 8, we examine the relationship of the items with the opposite content to the standard trust question. In this analysis, we use the standard trust question in both of its versions that we asked. The 11-point scale has been transformed into three categories, as introduced earlier: low trust level (between 0 and 4), unsure (5) and high trust level (6 to 10). Tables 7 and 8, however, for the sake of clarity, only include the responses of those who trust others for the two standard variables.

Table 7. **The distribution of respondents feeling trust by the standard across categories of ANES items reflecting trust (%)**

	Standard trust question	ANES items reflecting trust			Total
		disagree	unsure	agree	
Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	15.8	41.3	42.9	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	4.1	37.1	58.8	100
People in our society are genuinely concerned with others and are not just out for themselves.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	15.4	47.1	37.5	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	7.9	34.7	57.4	100
Most salesclerks are honest in describing the products which they sell.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	67.2	25.9	6.9	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	56.7	30.2	13.1	100

Table 7. **(Continued)**

	Standard trust question	ANES items reflecting trust			Total
		disagree	unsure	agree	
People are more inclined to help others than they are usually given credit for.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	14.8	47.5	37.7	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	13.6	33.1	53.3	100
Most people are basically honest.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	22.1	39.9	38.0	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	9.6	27.1	63.2	100
Even when given a chance, only a few people are likely to take advantage of you.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	33.3	41.1	25.6	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	16.3	38.4	45.3	100

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results.

If we examine only the respondents who trust others according to the standard variable in the relation to the ANES items, we see perhaps an even more contradictory picture than the previously presented one. We see significant differences in relation to all items; however, it is important to note that only a limited number of respondents who feel trust towards others according to the standard variable clearly agree with these statements (between 6.9 and 58.8%).

After the ANES items reflecting trust, we examine the relationship between statements related to distrust and responses to the standard. In this case, in contrast to the previous ones, we expect that respondents who tend to trust according to the standard would explicitly reject these statements. The results obtained are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. **The distribution of respondents feeling trust by the standard across categories of ANES items reflecting distrust (%)**

	Standard trust question	ANES items reflecting distrust			Total
		disagree	unsure	agree	
Most people have very little confidence in others.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	5.4	22.5	72.1	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	13.4	29.3	57.2	100
Most people would tell a lie if they could gain by it.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	14.3	32.4	53.3	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	25.0	39.1	35.9	100
More often than not, people have hidden reasons for doing nice things for others.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	13.1	31.3	55.6	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	23.3	36.8	39.9	100
Trusting in other people very often leads to disappointment.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	25.9	35.1	39.0	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	45.9	34.8	19.3	100

Table 8. **(Continued)**

	Standard trust question	ANES items reflecting distrust			Total
		disagree	unsure	agree	
In dealing with strangers, one ought to be cautious until they have shown themselves to be trustworthy.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	5.0	20.2	74.8	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	8.2	36.1	55.7	100
It is a good idea to look for hidden meanings behind what other people say.	Most people can be trusted (dichotomous)	22.9	29.8	47.3	100
	high standard (0 to 10)	30.2	31.6	38.1	100

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results.

Based on the percentage distributions presented in Table 8, it can be declared that our preliminary expectation is not met here either. We can see that only a very small proportion of respondents who feel trust towards others according to the standard variable clearly reject those statements that reflect on distrust. In our view, these observations highlight a substantive problem regarding the content of the standard trust item.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In our study, we undertook a task that has so far been considered to be a gap in trust research, namely, to examine the content validity of the standard trust question, the best-known and most widely used questionnaire tool to measure generalised trust. In order to achieve this objective, we have considered several approaches that try to operationalise the trust in people. As there is no single database that contains all these different measurement tools together, we conducted our own survey, and our analysis was based on that data collection. Both the scaled and dichotomous versions of the standard trust question were analysed, specifically in comparison with the trust index, the trust radius, and the trust and distrust block of the ANES questionnaire. The aim of our research was to examine one fundamental aspect: specifically, that those respondents who said that they generally trusted people in response to the standard question also had the same attitude as measured by the other instruments. Briefly summarising our results, we can state: a significant proportion of people who say that they trust others are not actually considered to have a high level of trust (if tested by other tools in addition to the standard). All this leads inevitably to the conclusion that the standard trust question measures trust in an overly coarse way: it seeks to capture the content of the individual's trust in the broadest possible group of people, but in many cases, it reflects a presumably narrower circle of trust. We argue that the standard trust question fails to clearly delineate between trust deriving from identity-based belonging and togetherness-type trust that derives from a sense of belonging based on the appreciation of otherness.

Of course, we cannot overlook the aspect that the standard trust issue is a univariate tool, while other tools all follow a more complex and more compound approach of measurement. Obviously, respondents give different answers in response to multiple questions compared to when they answer a single question. Despite, our results clearly indicate the tendency that the standard variable regularly overestimates the proportion of respondents with a high trust in the sample compared to other measurement tools. It is therefore not only true that univariate

and multivariate instruments measure something different, which is perhaps acceptable up to a certain level for reasons of questionnaire technique, but, at the same time, it is also clear that the multivariate tools all measure lower trust level than the standard variable. Because of all these findings it seems justifiable to use a more complex measurement approach, instead of or in addition to the standard trust variable, in order to identify trust in people more accurately, precisely, adequately, or in a way simply subject to more stringent conditions.

The present study is not without its limitations, which must be considered in relation to the findings and possible conclusions. Firstly, it has to be acknowledged that the survey was conducted on a specific target group of university students, which may be regarded as overly homogenous, with a sample size of 550 respondents. In addressing this limitation, it is crucial to note that our objective was to analyse how the standard trust variable measures one's trust in other people in comparison to other well-known questionnaire tools that attempt to capture the same phenomenon in different ways. This limitation is salient not because our findings should not be generalised to a broader population, as we did not intend to achieve that objective. The special target group and the size of the sample are rather relevant factors because they may challenge this paper's primary goal of providing a comprehensive critical examination, i.e. the content validity of the standard trust variable. In this regard, it is noteworthy that our paper introduces significant innovations, particularly given that no prior study has sought to systematically compare the standard trust variable with other frequently used questionnaire tools that similarly measure generalised trust. Moreover, this research, based on the original items, has developed a questionnaire and conducted a survey to fill this gap in the literature. Nevertheless, we regard this study as a preliminary undertaking in examining the content validity of conventional questionnaire-based measurement of trust. The findings of our study lend support to certain criticisms regarding the operationalisation of trust measurement and underscore the necessity for more complex and sophisticated approaches to capture trust towards people in general.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. The descriptive statistics for the items of the trust index (%) (N = 550)

		Low (0–4)	Unsure (5)	High (6–10)	Total
Standard	0 to 10	31.5	15.5	53.0	100
	dichotomous	52.5	–	47.5	100
Fairness	0 to 10	30.9	19.4	49.7	100
	dichotomous	47.5	–	52.5	100
Helpfulness	0 to 10	32.0	18.8	49.2	100
	dichotomous	51.0	–	49.0	100

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results.

Appendix 2. The descriptive statistics for each item in the modified trust radius block ($N = 550$)

How much do you trust in... (0 to 10)	Mean	Standard deviation
your family	9.1	1.4
your friends	8.7	1.3
your fellow students	6.3	1.9
people you know personally	6.5	1.7
people you don't know personally but know by sight	4.2	2.0
people you meet for the first time	3.1	2.0
standard trust question (0 to 10)	5.4	2.0

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results.

Appendix 3. The descriptive statistics for the items of the ANES question block used in our analysis (%) ($N = 550$)

	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Total
Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do.	15.1	42.2	42.7	100
People in our society are genuinely concerned with others and are not just out for themselves.	16.2	42.4	41.3	100
Most salesclerks are honest in describing the products which they sell.	64.4	25.8	9.8	100
People are more inclined to help others than they are usually given credit for.	17.4	41.6	41.0	100
Most people are basically honest.	20.3	37.6	42.2	100
Even when given a chance, only a few people are likely to take advantage of you.	29.6	39.1	31.3	100
Most people have very little confidence in others.	8.8	24.1	67.2	100
Most people would tell a lie if they could gain by it.	19.2	32.0	48.8	100
More often than not, people have hidden reasons for doing nice things for others.	15.9	35.3	48.8	100
Trusting in other people very often leads to disappointment.	31.0	33.7	35.3	100
In dealing with strangers, one ought to be cautious until they have shown themselves to be trustworthy.	5.1	23.9	71.0	100
It is a good idea to look for hidden meanings behind what other people say.	25.0	31.0	44.1	100

Source: own elaboration based on the data collection results.

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Įprastiniu klausimynu matuojamo *pasitikėjimo* turinio pagrįstumas

Santrauka

Šis straipsnis yra vadinamojo standartinio *pasitikėjimo* kintamojo, kuris laikomas labiausiai paplitusia priemone įvertinti *pasitikėjimą* taikant klausimynus, išsamus kritinis tyrimas. Kritinis dėmesys sutelkiamas į turinio pagrįstumo aspektus, kontrastuojant standartinio *pasitikėjimo* matavimo duomenis – tiek visos imties, tiek atskirų individų – su alternatyviais, plačiai paplitusiais įrankiais-klausimynais, įskaitant pasitikėjimo spindulį, anglakalbėje literatūroje vadinamą ANES (*American National Election Studies*) – pasitikėjimo klausimų rinkinį ir pasitikėjimo indeksą. Šis labai išsamus *pasitikėjimo* kintamojo turinio pagrįstumo tyrimas, kuris iki šiol neabejotinai buvo spraga *pasitikėjimo* tyrimuose, įmanomas remiantis mūsų pačių apklausos duomenimis. Pagrindinė darbo išvada yra ta, kad standartinis *pasitikėjimo* kintamasis nepagrįstai dažnai identifikuoja respondentus, kurie, pačių teigimu, jaučia pasitikėjimą kitais, nes, palyginti su kitomis tyrimo priemonėmis, nuolat nustatoma, kad didelė dalis šių tariamai labai pasitikinčių asmenų nejaučia *apibendrinto pasitikėjimo*.

Raktažodžiai: pasitikėjimas, standartinis klausimas apie pasitikėjimą, pasitikėjimo spindulys, ANES pasitikėjimo klausimų serija, pasitikėjimo indeksas, turinio validumas