

# TRUSTWORTHINESS: THE PLACE WHERE THE TRUST OF *EGO* AND THE PROMISE OF *ALTER* MAY ENCOUNTER

LA CONFIABILIDAD: EL LUGAR DONDE LA CONFIANZA DE *EGO* Y LA PROMESA DE  
*ALTER* PUEDEN ENCONTRARSE

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The article researches the relationship between the practice of making promises and the way to foster interpersonal trust. It explores various philosophical and moral theories to understand how promises influence obligations and trust. **Methodology:** A theoretical and philosophical analysis is carried out, reviewing classical and contemporary concepts on promises and trust, including authors like John Locke and David Hume. **Results:** The study highlights the complexity and moral implications of promises, showing how they create obligations and trust. It addresses the paradox of promising and the impact of unforeseen circumstances on fulfilling promises. **Conclusions:** The article concludes that trustworthiness in fulfilling promises is crucial for interpersonal trust. It emphasizes the importance of understanding promises as moral commitments and their impact on building trust-based relationships.

## Keywords:

trust, promises, obligations, philosophical theories, trustworthiness, interpersonal relationships, moral commitments.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** El artículo examina la relación entre la práctica de hacer promesas y la generación de confianza interpersonal. Explora diversas teorías filosóficas y morales para entender cómo las promesas influyen en las obligaciones y la confianza. **Metodología:** Se realiza un análisis teórico y filosófico, revisando conceptos clásicos y contemporáneos sobre promesas y confianza, incluyendo autores como John Locke,

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David Hume y otros. **Resultados:** El estudio destaca la complejidad y las implicaciones morales de las promesas, mostrando cómo generan obligaciones y confianza. Se aborda la paradoja de prometer y la influencia de circunstancias imprevistas en el cumplimiento de promesas. **Conclusiones:** El artículo concluye que la confiabilidad en el cumplimiento de promesas es crucial para la confianza interpersonal. Se subraya la importancia de entender las promesas como compromisos morales y su impacto en la construcción de relaciones basadas en la confianza.

**Palabras clave:**

confianza, promesas, obligaciones, teorías filosóficas, confiabilidad, relaciones interpersonales, compromisos morales.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the complex world of public relations, trust is a key element, an element that, beyond being simply wishful thinking, is essential for the sustainable success of any organizational engagement. This article sets out to explore the intricate dynamics of trust in public relations, placing special emphasis on the role played by trustworthiness, understood as the ability to fulfill promises and keep commitments. Trust, in this context, is not only understood as a belief or hope, but also as a tangible, measurable expectation of behavior and results.

Trustworthiness, in the practice of public relations, represents as a bridge between pledged promises and created trust. This link is reviewed under the light of various theories and approaches, recognizing that every interaction between an organization and its audiences is an opportunity to strengthen or weaken this link. Promises, by their nature, entail a future commitment; they are forecasts of a party's intention and ability to perform in a coherent and responsible manner. In this scenario, trustworthiness refers not only to the ability to keep promises, but also to the ability to manage expectations and communicate effectively in changing and sometimes unpredictable situations.

This study also highlights the importance of ethics in public relations. Closely linked to trustworthiness, ethics is the compass that guides not only the fulfillment of promises, but also the way in which promises are made and communicated. In an increasingly connected and transparent world, ethics becomes an essential component in building long-lasting trust. Thus, trustworthiness and ethics are linked, forming the foundation on which solid and respected public relations are built.

In a broader approach, it is intended to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of how trustworthiness, by delivering on promises and managing expectations ethically and effectively, becomes a trigger for building trust in public relations. It will explore how trust not only affects the relationships between an organization and its publics, but also has an impact on the brand awareness, customer loyalty and, ultimately, organizational success. In this context, trustworthiness becomes not only an ethical responsibility, but also a crucial strategy for strengthening and developing effective and long-lasting public relations.

This article thoroughly explains the intrinsic relationship between trustworthiness and trust in the context of public relations, a field where trust management is essential for success.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this article is to provide an understanding of the relationship between trustworthiness and trust building in the field of public relations. Specific objectives include:

1. Reviewing how promises and their fulfillment affect the trustworthiness awareness in the organizations.
2. Exploring the impact of trustworthiness on building and maintaining effective public relations.
3. Suggesting a theoretical framework linking ethics, promises and trust in public relations.

These objectives are intended to provide a deeper understanding of how trustworthiness, through the management of promises and expectations, provides the basis for trust in public relations.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

In the field of public relations, trustworthiness becomes an invaluable asset. This research seeks to shed light on how promises and the fulfillment of promises in this field directly contribute to building and strengthening trust.

This research is based on the method of literature review. A wide range of theoretical and empirical sources have been reviewed, including philosophical, sociological and communication works, with a special focus on the relationship between trustworthiness, trust and promises. The authors reviewed range from classics such as John Locke and David Hume to contemporary thinkers, providing a full spectrum of perspectives on our subject matter.

The works chosen were critically analyzed in order to understand how promises and trust are expressed in the field of public relations. In addition, special importance has been given to the interpretation of how these insights are implemented in the praxis of public relations, and how they influence the public's understanding of an organization's trustworthiness.

## 4. The nature and consequences of promises in building trust

We are far from the deontically perfect world, where everything obligatory is fulfilled and all prohibitions are respected: a world in which neither the promises of some, nor the trust of others, would be intentionally spoiled, a world in which promising and trusting could be considered the two sides of the same coin. But what is the relationship between promise and trust in everyday life? As Hannah Arendt writes, are "binding promises [...] islands of security [...] in the threatening sea of uncertainty?"<sup>2</sup>

The search for a satisfactory answer to these questions can be undertaken by exploring in depth the nature and consequences of promises, beyond John Locke's proposal who, offers not only one but three possible reasons to this end:

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<sup>2</sup> [...] die bindenden Versprechen, welche wie Inseln der Sicherheit [...] in das drohende Meer des Ungewissen [...]. Arendt, H. (1967), p. 232 (Author's translation).

That men should keep their promises is certainly a great and undeniable rule in morality. But, if a Christian is asked why a man must keep his word, he will answer: because God, who has the power of eternal life and death, requires him to<sup>3</sup>. But if a follower of Hobbes is asked why, he will answer: because the public requires it, and the state will punish you if you don't. And if one of the old philosophers had been asked, he would have answered: because breaking promises is dishonest, below the dignity of a man, and opposite to virtue, which is the highest perfection of human nature.<sup>4</sup>

Claus Offe, with no less conviction than Locke regarding this obligation, states that: "Promise-keeping [...] is just the active version of truth telling. It is truth telling not about "given" facts in the world, but actively redeeming propositions concerning my own future action, thereby making them true.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Annette Baier shows her fascination with the phenomenon of promises with a subtle and thought-provoking skepticism: "Promises are a most ingenious social invention, and trust in those who have given us promises is a complex and sophisticated moral achievement."<sup>6</sup>

Although it may not seem so, this issue has been the subject of a long controversy, to the point that the concept of the so-called 'paradox of promise' has been established in the literature. One of its most recognizable versions is that of David Hume, who, from his classical usefulness, begins by considering that it is "mysterious and incomprehensible" that the mere fact of expressing an intention provides the one who promises with a reason, motive or obligation to do what is promised: "[Each new promise] is one of the most mysterious and incomprehensible operations that can possibly be imagined, and may even be compared to transubstantiation, or holy orders [...], where a certain form of words, along with a certain intention, changes entirely the nature of an external object, and even of a human nature."<sup>7</sup> Hume seems to resign himself, for lack of a better explanation, to considering the obligation created by the promise as a useful fiction collectively supported by its positive effect on social interaction; a usefulness that would be diminished with each breach, beyond the impact on the beneficiary of the promise in question: "we cannot readily conceive how the making use of a certain form of words should be able to cause any material difference. Here, therefore, we feign a new act of the mind, which we call the willing an obligation; and on this we suppose the morality to depend."<sup>8</sup>

John B. Rawls agrees with Hume in emphasizing the social advantages of the concept of the promise:

The practice of promising exists for precisely this purpose [so that both parties can gain from the benefits of their cooperation]; and so while we normally think of moral requirements as bonds laid upon us, they are sometimes deliberately self-imposed for our advantage. Thus, promising is an act done with the public intention of deliberately incurring an obligation the existence of which in the circumstances will further one's ends. We want this

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<sup>3</sup> Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica, Tercera Parte "La Vida en Cristo", Segunda Sección "Los Diez Mandamientos", p. 2147, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism\\_sp/p3s2c1a2\\_sp.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism_sp/p3s2c1a2_sp.html)

<sup>4</sup> Locke, J. [1690(2007)], Volume I, Chapter III

<sup>5</sup> Offe, C. (Edited by Warren, M. E.) (1999), p. 74. (Author's translation)

<sup>6</sup> Baier, A. (1986), p. 246. (Author's translation)

<sup>7</sup> Hume, D. [1739-1740(2009)], T,3.2.5 p. 788 (Author's translation).

<sup>8</sup> Hume, D. [1739-1740(2009)], T,3.2.5 p. 788 (Author's translation).

obligation to exist and to be known to exist, and we want others to know that we recognize this tie and intend to abide by it.<sup>9</sup>

Although Rawls, unlike Hume, emphasizes the obligation that voluntary participation in the practice of promising entails for all those who benefit from it, above useful considerations: "To engage in a practice, to perform those actions specified by a practice, means to follow the appropriate rules,"<sup>10</sup> while "a particular case cannot be an exception to a rule of a practice [but] a qualification or a further specification of the rule."<sup>11</sup> This obligation also extends to those who consider themselves to be in breach of a promise that may not be discovered, because although they do not undermine the promise in appearance - and thus do not run the risk of censure by the recipient of the promise - they are not undermining the promise and third parties - they would benefit unfairly from it. To which Julia Driver adds, for greater precision and paraphrasing Rawls, with respect to the aforementioned non-compliance of rules in the context of the practice of promises, that "is not fair since the promise-breakers benefit without taking on the costs. In the case of promises, this is keeping the promise that was made."<sup>12</sup> Rawls thus concludes that those who voluntarily participate in the fair practice of promising according to its rules have the right, keeping the "principle of fairness"<sup>13</sup>, to the same behavior by those who have benefited or will benefit from it.

But not all authors support the social practice theory with equal enthusiasm. From his contractualist viewpoint, Thomas M. Scanlon considers it unnecessary for promises to be perfected and binding: "I will argue, however, that the wrong of breaking a promise and the wrong of making a lying promise are instances of a more general family of moral wrongs which are concerned not with social practices but rather with what we owe to other people when we have led them to form expectations about our future conduct."<sup>14</sup> Although, according to this author, there are various ways in which such expectations can be raised, regardless of whether this happens intentionally or unintentionally: "Promising is a special case, distinguished in part by the kind of reason that the promisee has for believing that the promisor will perform".<sup>15</sup> Scanlon desarrolla esta idea partiendo de que "un acto es [moralmente] erróneo si Scanlon desarrolla esta idea on the basis that "an act is [morally] wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles for the general regulation of behavior that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement."<sup>16</sup> This definition is expressed in the specific way of the so-called F-Principle: "a principle of fidelity that requires performance rather than compensation,"<sup>17</sup> unless the one who

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<sup>9</sup> Rawls, J. B. [1971(1999)], p. 305 (Author's translation).

<sup>10</sup> Rawls, J. B. (1955), p. 26 (Author's translation).

<sup>11</sup> Rawls, J. B. (1955), p. 27 (Author's translation).

<sup>12</sup> Driver, J. (Editado por Scheinman, H.) [(2011)], p. 193 (Author's translation).

<sup>13</sup> This principle [of fairness] holds that a person is required to do his part as defined by the rules of an institution when two conditions are met: first, the institution is just (or fair), that is, it satisfies the two principles of justice; and second, one has voluntarily accepted the benefits of the arrangement or taken advantage of the opportunities it offers to further one's interests. The main idea is that when a number of persons engage in a mutually advantageous cooperative venture according to rules, and thus restrict their freedom in ways necessary to yield advantages for all, those who have submitted to these restrictions have a right to a similar acquiescence on the part of those who have benefited from their submission. We are not to gain from the cooperative work of others without doing our fair share. Rawls, J. B. [1971(1999)], p. 96 (Author's translation).

<sup>14</sup> Scanlon, T.M. [1998(2000)], p. 296 (Author's translation).

<sup>15</sup> Scanlon, T.M. [1998(2000)], p. 306 (Author's translation).

<sup>16</sup> Scanlon, T.M. [1998(2000)], p. 153 (Author's translation).

<sup>17</sup> Scanlon, T.M. [1998(2000)], p. 304 (Author's translation).

accepted the promise exonerates the one who gave the promise from its performance. On the good understanding, as Charles Fried explains, like many other authors before him, that “we identify as a further necessary condition of promissory obligation that the promise be accepted. The need for acceptance shows the moral relation of promising to be voluntary on both sides.”<sup>18</sup> Scanlon argues accordingly that what disqualifies any violation of Principle F and thus of promises is that no one can reasonably refuse to act in accordance with that principle in the absence of “special” reasons for doing so:

Principle F: If

- (1) A voluntarily and intentionally leads B to expect that A will do X (unless B consents to A’s not doing so);
- (2) A knows that B wants to be assured of this;
- (3) A acts with the aim of providing this assurance, and has good reason to believe that he or she has done so;
- (4) B knows that A has the beliefs and intentions just described;
- (5) A intends for B to know this, and knows that B does know it; and
- (6) B knows that A has this knowledge and intent; then, in the absence of special justification, A must do X unless B consents to X not being done.<sup>19</sup>

However, critics of Principle F, such as Margaret Gilbert, argue that even supposing it were valid, it would explain the moral obligation to respect promises made on a general basis, but “Scanlon’s principle is not equipped, in and of itself, to account for promisee’s rights and the correlative directed obligations of promisors.”<sup>20</sup>

Given the lesser or greater skepticism regarding the origin and role of the praxis of promising or its power to create obligations in those who promise in favor of those who accept the promises, there is also a proposal of statements, such as that of Harold A. Prichard, who, not without a hint of doubt, considers it an a priori-truth that the sole identification of something as a promise is unconditionally binding: “Once an act is denominated as a promise, all questions about whether there is an obligation to do so seem to have disappeared.”<sup>21</sup>

We thus assume the hypothesis that the promise binds the one whose promise has been accepted in the established terms and independently of past or future actions on the part of the one who accepted it - unlike what happens in agreements, in which there is a *quid pro quo* and an interdependence in the form of reciprocal conditionality. Consequently, the promise grants its recipient the right to request and to be exempted from its performance. It is a different matter whether the performance of the promise is unconditional in the way that it cannot be subject to other circumstances beyond the will of the one who has made the promise.

In our approach to the act of promising, we do not enter into an assessment of the real capacity and true intention to perform on the part of the one who promises. The reason for this is that the fact that both parties will condition the probability of performance is

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<sup>18</sup> Fried, C. [1981(2015)], p. 43 (Author’s translation).

<sup>19</sup> Scanlon, T.M. [1998(2000)], p. 304 (Author’s translation).

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert, M. (Editado por Gilbert, M.) (2014), p. 293 (Author’s translation).

<sup>21</sup> Prichard, H. A. [(1968)], p. 198



as true as the fact that from the perspective of the one who accepts the promise, reasonably informed and in good faith, the right presumably acquired against the one who promises will not change. A controversial aspect related to the rights that promising can create, but the consideration of which would divert us from our analysis, is whether it grants on the potential indirect beneficiaries of the performance of the promise and, if so, what they are, as when I promise you that I will do something for her and I fail to perform: does she have the right to request it from me, assuming that she is aware of this circumstance, or can she only do so from you?

## **5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. Commitments and trust, an analysis of the dynamics of promise in public relations**

The results presented below have direct implications for the world of public relations. The authors analyze how trustworthiness leads to the trust awareness of stakeholders and how this has an impact on reputation management.

### **5.1. Are promises unconditionally binding?**

After the review, we start with the first question raised at the beginning and, more specifically, with the one related to the obligation that can be entailed by promising - committing to something to someone- voluntarily and unconditionally, once the promise has been somehow accepted by the recipient of the promise. Acceptance, which completes or perfects the promise, differentiating it from what would otherwise be no more than a mere declaration of intentions or generic offer, in the form of a gift that is offered and is no more than a substitute for it as long as it is not accepted.

From a viewpoint based on the confluence of willingness, authors such as Gilbert argue that promising requires a voluntary “joint commitment” to achieve a common goal, on the part of the one who promises and the one who accepts the promise, which would make each of them responsible for any breach with respect to all the parties - this last point may seem obvious, but it responds to the fact that a joint commitment, which is not a mere grouping of individual ones but a single commitment undertaken by several persons, can be made by more than two. It is also characteristic of a joint commitment both that it cannot be unilaterally withdrawn under normal conditions and the existence in the promise of two different obligations in a single act:

This perspective of plural subject based on joint commitment allows for the possibility that someone who promises has two distinct obligations as a result of the promise: he or she has a joint commitment obligation to fulfill the promise and is also morally obligated to fulfill it [on an individual basis] considering the content and circumstances of the promise. Only the first of these two obligations is shared by those who promise, regardless of the content and circumstances of the promise.

Assuming the logic of the joint commitment, it can be established as a standard that a complete and fully binding promise is only the one in which the two aforementioned obligations coincide. This helps to explain the logical hesitation with respect to the commitment derived from the promise of an immoral act or from a promise obtained under coercion, in which the second type of obligation, which is individual and of a moral nature, is more than questionable. It is perhaps not easy to anticipate how someone of good moral integrity resolves the moral dilemma of having promised something immoral, but it is to be expected that someone will feel much more obliged by

a moral promise than by one that is not moral and which, not being so, should morally lead that person to reconsider its fulfillment - even if it is not, for example, the extreme case of a vendetta.

Having specified the obligations that converge in a voluntary, unconditional, moral and accepted promise, it is worth considering the impact on the expectation of its performance, which cannot be withdrawn unilaterally, derived from a change of such importance in the circumstances that objectively would make it partially or totally unfeasible. Authors such as Driver say, in view of this situation, that the “obligations arising from the promises are *pro tanto*”, which is the same as saying, as much as possible, in the event that their full performance is not feasible for reasons not attributable to the parties, reasonably unforeseeable and strictly exceptional. This is inevitably reminiscent of the supplementary rule of *rebus sic stantibus*, which makes the fundamental principle of *pacta sunt servanda* more flexible in cases where the performance has become - subsequent to the creation of the obligation and prior to its performance - extraordinarily burdensome in an unforeseeable manner. We, therefore, believe it is appropriate, without any attempt to make the analysis judicial, to take the repeated - and therefore no less applicable - approach of the Supreme Court’s jurisprudence since 1957, in the understanding that the aforementioned exceptionality is based at least on: “[the] extraordinary alteration of circumstances at the time of fulfillment [...]; an exorbitant imbalance, beyond all estimation [...]; and that all this occurs due to the occurrence of radically unforeseeable circumstances [...]”. However, once we are open to this scenario, there are many questions that arise, for example, without limitation, the following:

- How will the person who accepts the promise know that it is offered conditionally or *pro tanto*? Does the one who promises have to make this clear or can it be regarded as obvious? And even if he or she makes it clear, to what extent is it possible, in such a case, to establish in the promise the limit of the ordinary as opposed to the extraordinary, given that the latter is supposed to be unpredictable?
- Does this mean that if there is a greater general usefulness -or personal convenience- as a comprehensive result of not keeping the promise, as opposed to the alternative of keeping it, then partial or total non-fulfillment is justified? This is something with which the pragmatic politician and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero readily agrees, when he writes that “nor should promises be kept [...] in case they cause more harm to you than benefit to the one to whom you promised”, because “making promises, keeping agreements and returning deposits become dishonorable if their usefulness is altered” due to a change in circumstances.
- How is it guaranteed that the one who has promised does not prematurely and self-interestedly give up the fulfillment of the promise without reaching his or her personal limit of what is possible in the attempt? Is the standard valid in establishing this limit that of the one who is to fulfill the promise or that of its beneficiary?
- Considering that the right of the one who accepts the promise lasts in principle until the fulfillment of the promise or the exoneration, should the one who



accepted the promise be pleased with the satisfaction regarding the part of the unfulfilled commitment because it is considered unilaterally impossible at the discretion of the one who promised and, eventually, in disagreement with the first one?

And all this considering that, in the practice and disregarding possible extreme means of pressure, the position that the one who promised regarding the fulfillment is of greater value than the convictions that the one who accepted the promise holds on this same issue.

Driver, avoiding entering into the question of whether or not the assessment of the practical impossibility of total or partial performance is to be made by mutual agreement, raises, in view of the subsequent and subjectively inevitable breach of the promise, "the need to do something relevant that one can do and to feel bad for not being able to fulfill the obligation that is still pending". And even assuming, however improbable it may seem, that this might appear to the recipient of the promise to be the beginning of a reasonable solution, the following questions, among others, prevail:

- How can we prevent - or react upon finding - a possible breach of the promise as a result of obviously demanding, if not impossible, fulfillment requirements, known to the person who made the promise and unknown to the person who accepted it at the time?

- How to prevent the promisor from creating, at a later date and at his/her convenience, a situation in which non-fulfillment is unavoidable? Note that even the perfect Kantian has clear difficulties in assuring the fulfillment of what is promised in the case of an insurmountable conflict of absolute constraints.

It is understood that, as a matter of basic consistency, one should neither offer nor accept implausible promises, or rather, knowing that they are implausible. However, this situation is not as unusual as it may seem: how many reckless, excessive or hypocritical promises are made - disregarding the third Delphic maxim - and, moreover, are accepted without the slightest critical thinking? In the end, a promise that is offered without the required capacity or without the intention of fulfilling it is just as flawed as one that is accepted justifiably suspecting the existence of any of the above circumstances, despite the formal reason that the recipient of the promise will have in any case to seek its fulfillment.

All the above considerations bring us back to the question we are trying to clarify regarding the nature of the promises and their consequences in terms of rights and obligations for both parties. And, unfortunately, instead of with an answer, we end up with more questions than the ones we started with, but at least something more than a well-founded intuition is pointed out, because, although the outcome of a voluntary, moral and accepted promise is subject to unforeseeable circumstances -what is not in this life?- and it must be understood therefore, under normal conditions its fulfillment depends mainly on the trustworthiness of the promisor.

## 5.2. The Concurrence of *Alter's* Pre-acceptance of *Ego's* Trust and *Ego's* Acceptance of *Alter's Pro tanto* Promise

Attempts to link interpersonal trust and promises are not uncommon in the literature. Typical of this school of thought is Katherine Hawley's statement that "to be trustworthy is to ensure that our commitments are matched by action [...]. [...] a trustworthy person keeps his/her promises,"<sup>22</sup> no less than the comparison between the two included in the definition of trust by Julian B. Rotter — "Interpersonal trust is defined here as an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon."<sup>23</sup>— or Hume's well-known statement in this regard: "When a man says he promises anything, he in effect expresses a resolution of performing it; and along with that, by making use of this form of words, subjects himself to the penalty of never being trusted again in case of failure."<sup>24</sup> In this context, it is also interesting to note the definition<sup>25</sup> of trust by James M. Hagen and Choe Soonkyoo, because they add to Rotter's a sort of exception to the concurrence of unforeseen -but not extraordinary- circumstances, in which case a cooperative behavior is expected from the other party. Other authors argue that the acceptance of promises takes or even builds trust in the one who accepts them, as say, for example, respectively, Michael Nagenborg—"who accepts a promise, needs to trust the person who has made the promise"<sup>26</sup>— and Baier: "[Promises] not only create obligations because the one who commits himself wants them to, but they also create trust, since the one who trusts wants them to."<sup>27</sup>

According to Hawley: "To trust someone to do something is to believe that he/she has a commitment to doing it, and to rely upon him/her to meet that commitment."<sup>28</sup> This approach is very enlightening in the context at hand, since the author identifies as the origin of trust the acceptance of a solid commitment to *alter*, in the way of promise or assurance<sup>29</sup>, although it is understood that other types of statements and actions can also lead to such a commitment:

Paradigm cases of promising and assertion are voluntary and explicit: we imagine the speaker as saying, 'I promise...', or as clearly and seriously articulating the proposition asserted. But, in practice, we often acquire commitments in much less clear-cut ways, for example by nodding, by failing

<sup>22</sup> Hawley, K. (2019), p. 73 (Author's translation)

<sup>23</sup> Rotter, J. B. (1967), p. 651 (Author's translation)

<sup>24</sup> Hume, D. [1739-1740(2002)], THN, BIII, PII, Sect.V (Author's translation)

<sup>25</sup> [...] "confianza" es la expectativa de que se puede uno fiar de la promesa del otro y que, frente a circunstancias imprevistas, el otro actuará para con quien confía guiado por un espíritu de cooperación.

[...] "trust" is the expectation that the promise of another can be relied on and that, in unforeseen circumstances, the other will act in a spirit of cooperation with the trustor. Hagen, J. M. y Soonkyoo, C. (1998), pp. 589-590 (Author's translation)

<sup>26</sup> Wer ein Versprechen annimmt, muss auf die Person, welche das Versprechen gibt, in dem soeben dargestellten Sinne vertrauen [...]. Nagenborg, M. (Edited by Maring, M.) (2010), p. 157 (Author's translation).

<sup>27</sup> [Versprechen] schaffen nicht nur Verpflichtungen, weil der, der sich verpflichtet, es so will, sie schaffen auch Vertrauen, weil der Vertrauende es so will. Baier, A. (Edited by Hartmann, M. y Offe, C.) (2001), p. 60 (Author's translation).

<sup>28</sup> Hawley, K. (2019), p. 9 (Author's translation). To be trustworthy, we need to avoid unfulfilled commitments. Hawley, K. (2019), p. 95 (Author's translation).

<sup>29</sup> [...] we can understand that an affirmation implies a promise [to tell the truth] that is immediately fulfilled or unfulfilled; this allows us to think that affirming and promising are remarkably similar, it being plausible to identify affirming that p with promising that p. Hawley, K. (2019), p. 70.

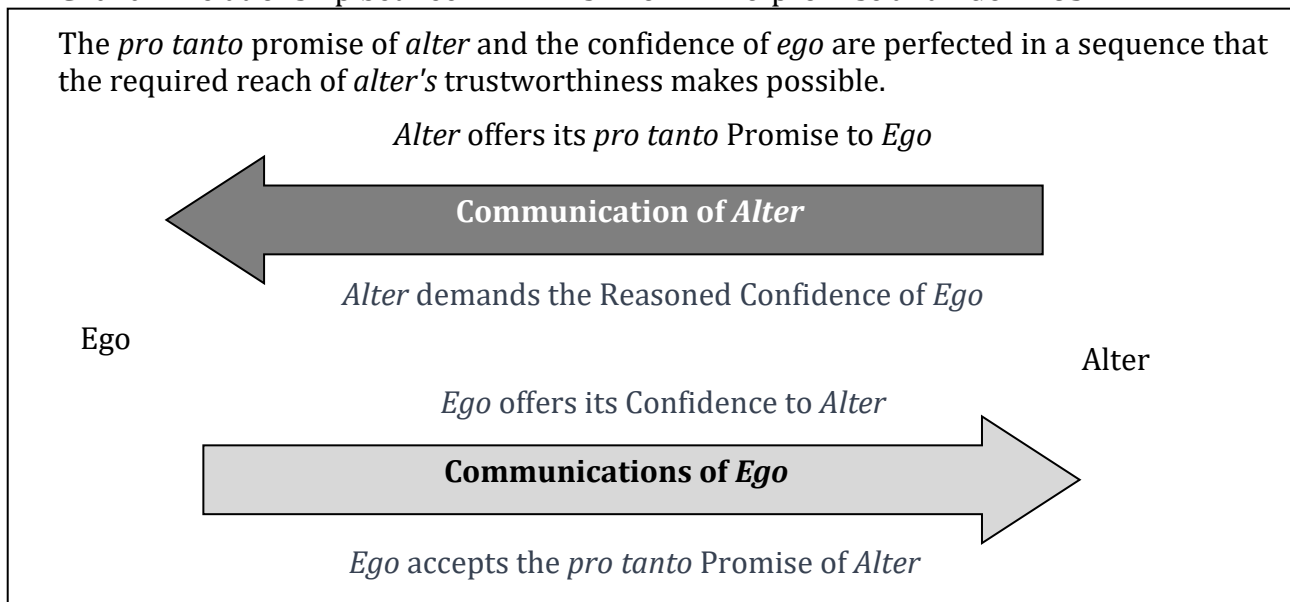
to object to suggestions or presuppositions, [external placed on us] by allowing others to continue in their expectations of us, or by receiving a favour within a social practice of reciprocity.<sup>30</sup>

Once we have come to the conclusion that the best way to assess the corresponding expectation of fulfillment is on the basis of the trustworthiness of the one who promises, it is necessary at this point to refer to some of the features of our interpretation of *ego*'s interpersonal trust that are of particular significance in the context of the relationship that we presuppose to the corresponding voluntary, *pro tanto*, moral and accepted promise of *alter*:

- *alter* must be a person aware of the trust vested in him/her and must accept such trust expressly or by consenting to it, as an alternative to expressly rejecting it; and
- *alter* must enjoy enough autonomy for the development of the objective entrusted to him/her, i.e., he/she must have enough freedom not to respond to the trust.

Based on the foregoing premises, the relationship between the voluntary, *pro tanto*, moral and accepted promise of *alter* to *ego* and the trust of *ego* in *alter*, is shaped, as shown in the following chart: in two steps that include, consecutively, both the corresponding offer of the promise and that of the trust, as well as the pre-acceptance of *ego*'s trust by *alter* and the resulting acceptance of *alter*'s *pro tanto* promise by *ego*.

**Chart 1.** Relationship between *ALTER*'s *PRO TANTO* promise and *EGO TRUST*.



The most remarkable feature of the approach that this pattern shows is to identify that *alter*, when offering his/her *pro tanto* promise to *ego*, is also pre-accepting the latter's trust if it is offered on the basis of the extent given, in its case, by *ego* to the trustworthiness of the former. Subsequently, when *ego* offers, in its case, to *alter* its

<sup>30</sup> Hawley, K. (2019), p. 72 (Author's translation).

reasoned trust on the basis of the positive evaluation of the scope of the latter's trustworthiness, it is also accepting from *alter* in this very action its voluntary, *pro tanto* and moral promise. In other words, the novel aspect of our proposal is to consider that, if *ego* values in a positive way the extent of *alter's* trustworthiness, the following may happen in this context and sequentially: that *alter*, by promising *pro tanto*, pre-accepts *ego's* eventual reasoned trust and that the latter accepts such a promise if she/he finally offers her/his reasoned trust to *alter*. On the other hand, the idea that the acceptance of the promise does not have to be expressed, and that consent is enough, is already included in the literature, as authors such as David Owens insist that "and because a promise is normally regarded as a benefit, the promisee's silence is usually taken as consent."<sup>31</sup>

Finally, we would like to point out that the "Trust View" of the "promissory obligation", which Daniel Friedrich and Nicholas Southwood, according to which "making a promise involves inviting another individual to trust one to do something,"<sup>32</sup> misses the essence of the matter, since the promise is not so much an invitation to trust the one who promises, but to evaluate his trustworthiness. Another way, indirect but no less effective, of questioning the proposal of these authors is that of Stephen Darwall: "One way of seeing the difference between promising and the issuing of an invitation to trust is to notice that despite the fact that promisees frequently trust their promisors to keep their promises, one can accept a promise without thus trusting [its fulfillment]. But while it is possible to accept someone's promise without trusting that the promise will be kept, it is not possible to accept an invitation to trust without trusting".<sup>33</sup>

This final idea argues that the view of trust in promissory obligations, put forward by Daniel Friedrich and Nicholas Southwood, does not adequately address the essence of the issue. In contrast, it is argued that making a promise is not simply an invitation to trust the promisor, but rather an invitation to assess the promisee's level of trustworthiness. As we have seen, Stephen Darwall emphasizes that it is possible to accept a promise without necessarily trusting its fulfillment, but, it is not possible to accept an invitation to trust without having confidence in the entity issuing the invitation.

In the context of public relations, this phenomenon highlights the importance of trustworthiness and the perception of trustworthiness by stakeholders. Public relations organizations and practitioners must understand that building trust goes beyond simply issuing promises; it involves demonstrating through consistent actions that they are reliable and trustworthy. Trustworthiness in public relations is essential to earning the trust of key audiences, which in turn is critical to success in reputation management and building strong relationships.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

By focusing on the essence of trustworthiness in the field of public relations and its impact on trust building, it is possible to conclude by highlighting several key points. First, trustworthiness, understood as the ability to fulfill promises and manage expectations, emerges as a critical component in the perception and valuation of trust by

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<sup>31</sup> Owens, D. [(2006)], p. 72 (Author's translation)

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich, D. y Southwood, N. (Edited by Scheinman, H.) [(2011)], p. 277 (Author's translation)

<sup>33</sup> Darwall, S. (Edited by Faulkner, P. and Simpson, T.) [(2017)], p. 45 (Author's translation).

publics and stakeholders. This relationship is especially pronounced in public relations, where integrity and consistency in the fulfillment of promises reinforce an organization's reputation and credibility.

It also highlights the interdependence between trustworthiness and ethics in public relations. Ethics not only guides the development and communication of promises, but also plays a fundamental role in defining trust. In this context, trustworthiness is not limited to the sole performance of promises, but also involves transparent communication and ethical adaptation to changing situations.

It is crucial to also acknowledge the contribution of various authors discussed in the article, such as John Locke, David Hume, and other contemporary thinkers. Their thoughts on the nature of promises, ethics and trust have provided valuable insights that enrich the understanding of these dynamics in public relations. The integration of their theories allows for a richer and deeper analysis of how trustworthiness and ethics, based on promises, play an essential role in building and maintaining trusting relationships in a field as dynamic and crucial as public relations.

Finally, it is argued that effective trustworthiness management in public relations not only strengthens existing trust, but also opens ways for building new relationships based on trust. In conclusion, trustworthiness is presented as an essential strategy for the sustainable development of effective public relations, where promise, ethics and trust intertwine to form the basis for successful organizational interactions.

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