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ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

## Trazando el paisaje de la confianza: un enfoque integral basado en actividades para comprender la dinámica de la confianza social

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### Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es justificar la necesidad de aplicar un enfoque basado en la actividad al estudio de la confianza. La base metodológica de la investigación fue un complejo de métodos, heurística y epistemológicamente justificados por las metas y objetivos del trabajo. Los autores tuvieron en cuenta tanto trabajos científicos coherentes como enfoques teóricos alternativos. La investigación empleó un análisis sistémico-comprensivo, así como métodos científicos generales: análisis, síntesis y comparación. La conclusión extraída en el estudio es que los conceptos existentes en la investigación sobre la confianza presentan varios inconvenientes que impiden realizar un análisis exhaustivo del proceso de formación de la confianza. La conceptualización y sistematización de los resultados obtenidos permitió elaborar un "Mapa conceptual de la investigación sobre la confianza". El resultado científico es la introducción de la categoría de "espacio de confianza social", que permite definir sus elementos estructurales estáticos y dinámicos y describir el proceso de su formación. El modelo desarrollado de formación de la confianza en un espacio social concreto bajo la influencia de factores externos e internos, basado en un enfoque de la investigación de la confianza basado en actividades, permitió construir un modelo paramétrico de este proceso, que implica la aplicación interconectada y paso a paso de diversas formas, métodos y medios de un enfoque integral de la investigación de la confianza basado en actividades.

**Palabras clave:** confianza, enfoque basado en actividades, modelo de proceso de confianza, actores de la confianza.

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## Abstract

### **Charting the landscape of trust: a comprehensive activity-based approach to understanding social trust dynamics**

The aim of the article is to justify the necessity of applying an activity-based approach to the study of trust. The methodological basis of the research was a complex of methods, heuristically and epistemologically justified by the goals and objectives of the work. The authors took into account both coherent scientific works and alternative theoretical approaches. The research employed a systemic-comprehensive analysis as well as general scientific methods: analysis, synthesis, and comparison. The conclusion drawn in the study is that existing concepts of trust research have several drawbacks that prevent a comprehensive analysis of the trust formation process. The conceptualization and systematization of the obtained results allowed the development of a "Conceptual Map of Trust Research." The scientific outcome is the introduction of the category of "social trust space," which allows defining its static and dynamic structural elements and describing the process of its formation. The developed model of trust formation in a particular social space under the influence of external and internal factors, based on an activity-based approach to trust research, enabled the construction of a parametric model of this process, involving interconnected and step-by-step application of various forms, methods, and means of a comprehensive activity-based approach to trust research.

**Key words:** trust, activity-based approach, trust process model, trust actors.

## 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the issue of trust has gained prominence and become the subject of study in both individual sciences and interdisciplinary approaches, characterized by the presence of a variety of different methodological concepts, theories, and definitions. At the same time, the universal viewpoint of these approaches acknowledges that subjective decisions on trust are made in fundamentally uncertain and highly complex conditions, which commonly accepted theories do not consider or cannot explain. In such circumstances, trust actors are unable to reliably predict the future behavior of those they trust. This becomes particularly problematic when one's own well-being depends on the usually unpredictable reactions of partners in the future. In these conditions, the obvious significance of comprehensive trust research and its role in maintaining the stability of the social order only implies its depth and complexity as an object of scientific inquiry.

During the analysis of the research base of scientific sources, their classification was conducted, allowing for the identification of three clusters: a) sources indicating the relevance of the chosen topic (Blau, 1964; Lewicki et al., 1998; Sztompka, 1999; Luhmann, 2000a, 2000b; Coleman, 2001; Bedny et al., 2010); b) sources elucidating conceptual approaches to the study of trust (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Fukuyama, 1995; Lewicki et al., 1998; Rousseau et al., 1998; Sztompka, 1999; Möllering, 2001; Williams, 2001; Axelrod, 2006; Möllering, 2014); c) sources analyzing the possibilities of applying an activity-based approach to trust research (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Simmel, 1990; Tennis, 1998).

It should be noted that among the wide range of approaches to trust research, its rationalistic understanding stands out, which considers trust as an investment in the future, and the decision to trust in this case depends on information about the preferences of the trusting actor, expected benefits from successful cooperation, and expected losses in case of refusal. That is, the key categories here are restraint and interest (Rousseau et al., 1998; Axelrod, 2006).

Equally preferable is an approach that considers the decision to trust not in conditions of uncertainty, but in conditions of ignorance (Möllering, 2014), with its source being shared values and existing relationships (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Lewicki et al., 1998; Luhmann, 2000b; Möllering, 2001; Williams, 2001). In this case, since trust is the foundation of social interaction, it is studied in the context of social relationships and social exchange (Blau, 1964). In this context, the source of trust is personal attractiveness, a certain attitude towards the trusted subject, and social approval (Blau, 1964; Coleman, 2001).

A deep conceptual basis for the study of trust was laid by the theory that considers its role as a linking element in the genesis of societal development, as well as ensuring security in conditions of distancing social interactions. Moreover, this approach emphasizes increasing complexity, uncertainty, and risk, identifying kinship ties, a sense of "ontological security," pragmatism, confidence in knowledge-based expert systems as sources of trust.

N. Luhmann conducted research on trust through the property of autonomy and stability of the system (personal, functional, institutional, etc.), considering that "to trust means to anticipate the future." He noted that its source should be sought in the sense of internal security of the system, i.e., expectations of reliability, in conditions of uncertainty and risk (Luhmann, 2000a).

Francis Fukuyama conducted research on trust in the context of social ties and societal development, seeing its task in reducing transaction costs and ensuring the overcoming of uncertainty on the path to interaction between actors. However, he believes that the effect will only occur if trust is based on "unwritten" rules, expectations, obligations, and norms requiring their unconditional fulfillment, as well as the trusting actor's own choice in conditions where it is impossible to control the actions of the trusted actor in advance (Fukuyama, 1995). Of particular interest in the context of the

contemporary international situation is the conclusion of G. Simmel (1990) and F. Tennis (1998) that trust is not static but dynamic.

Since the authors considered the process of studying trust in the context of human actions, they were attracted to P. Sztompka's conclusion that the source of trust lies in special expectations (regarding how the other will behave in a certain predictable situation) and conviction, confidence in action (bet) (Sztompka, 1999).

The result of the comparative analysis of the above and other available concepts of trust research led to the following conclusions:

1. Over the past three decades, academic interest in the concept of trust has increased both in terms of the number of publications and the variety of viewpoints. It has become an interdisciplinary field of study; however, despite this, trust still appears to be a rather abstract term, the essence of which is difficult to define, and the state of its research is in conceptual confusion.

2. The main scientific discourse revolves around a consensus that it is necessary to assess the motivation, competence, or both of the trusted actor. The author's approach to this contradiction is based on motivation. Note that this viewpoint is predominant (Ripperger, 2005).

3. Existing approaches to the sources of trusting expectations have some methodological contradiction, which lies in the fact that the source can be both calculated behavior based on profit or loss and behavior that ignores calculation, based on behaviorism.

Thus, the identified multiparadigmality and pluralism have led the authors to assert that it is not possible to develop a consolidated approach to trust research. Consequently, the problematic field of our research is not the development of a unified conceptual approach with a set of methodological principles, methods, and tools, but the development and justification of conceptual foundations that allow for the exploration of insufficiently studied aspects of trust formation.

Analysis of trust research concepts also revealed that most of them are based on three dimensions:

1. The source of trust, characterizing its nature and allowing the distinction between cognitive (assessment, comparison) or emotional aspects at the foundation of trust.

2. The basis of trust, covering the foundation for trust implementation and revealing the decision-making process regarding trust.

3. Conditions of trust, revealing the context of the trust process and enabling the investigation of the influence of external and internal factors on the decision-making process regarding trust.

Taking into account these three dimensions constructed based on the analysis of existing trust research concepts, as well as the shortcomings previously noted, the authors have hypothesized that a pragmatic approach encompassing all three

dimensions in a unified complex should serve as the conceptual foundation for exploring insufficiently studied aspects of trust.

The objective of the paper is to provide rationale for utilizing an activity-oriented methodology in investigating trust.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodological foundation of the research was based on a comprehensive analysis of scientific works (Blau, 1964; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Simmel, 1990; Bourdieu, 1994; Fukuyama, 1995; Lewicki et al., 1998; Tennis, 1998; Sztompka, 1999; Luhmann, 2000a, 2000b; McKnight & Chervany, 2001; Möllering, 2001; Williams, 2001; Hardin, 2002; Uslaner, 2003; Ripperger, 2005; Robbins, 2016; Tagliaferri & Aldini, 2020), which elucidated the conceptual underpinnings of trust research. Special attention was given to the works of scholars such as N. Luhmann (2000a), P. Sztompka (1999), and F. Fukuyama (1995), as their conceptual approaches to some extent correlated with the author's hypothesis.

Utilizing synthesis method to extract new insights from the obtained research results allowed the authors to outline their approach to the problem, while employing the principle of identification revealed the relationships between theory and the practice of trust phenomenon research. Consequently, referring to the aforementioned works enabled the identification of shortcomings in trust research concepts and formulated and justified the necessity of applying a comprehensive activity-based approach to its study.

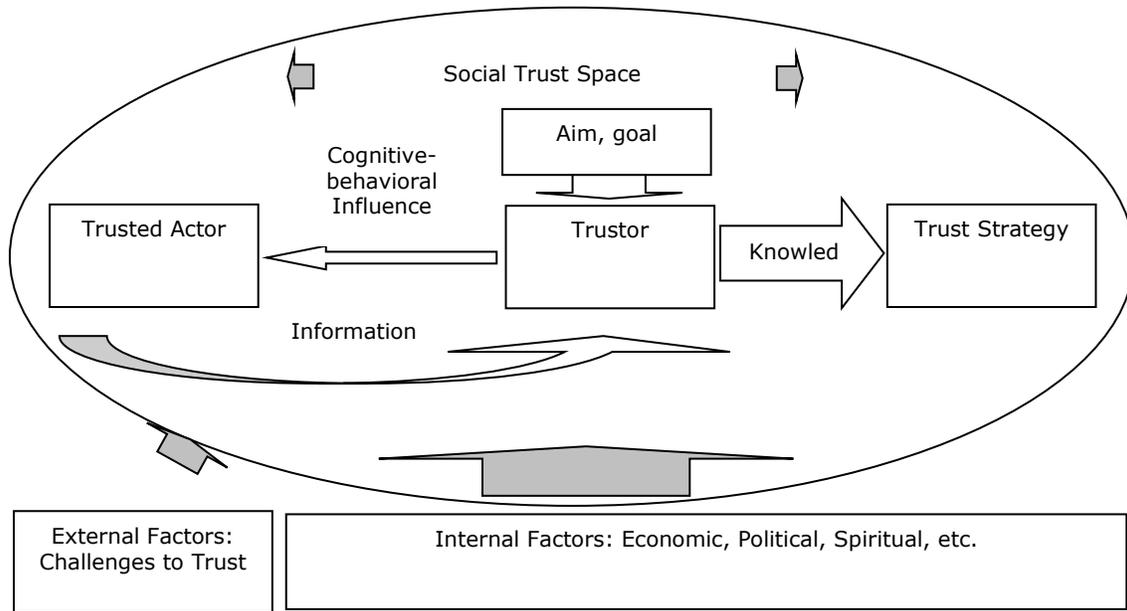
The construction of the parametric model was based on a holistic approach, emphasizing that trust, as a phenomenon, possesses specific parameters which collectively facilitate the process of its formation.

## **3. Results**

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social space (Bourdieu, 1994), the authors were able to identify the structural elements of the trust formation model: the position, goals, and tasks of trust actors, external and internal factors influencing this process. These factors, influencing the social space formed by trust agents, create its social fields (contexts), each operating within its sphere, which influence the decision-making process regarding trust and the trustor's choice of trust strategy. The model of trust formation in a specific social space under the influence of these factors is depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

**Trust formation model in a specific social space under the influence of external and internal factors**



The authors formulated two types of "understanding" of the trusted actor for the trustor:

1. Direct observational understanding, where the trustor simply observes what the trusted actor does and "reads" their body language and facial expressions to gain necessary knowledge.
2. Empathetic understanding, where the trustor attempts to acquire necessary knowledge about the trusted actor by trying to understand the motives that prompted their actions.

The result of theoretical and empirical analysis led to the postulate that a key aspect in the comprehensive activity-based approach to trust research is the definition of trust actors and the boundaries of the social trust space formed by them, as well as a complex of parameters characterizing this process: (who, where, why, how). The social trust space is a part of the social space created by trust actors, in which they interact in the interests of establishing trusting relationships amidst the interdependent influence of social fields (contexts).

Addressing these tasks will be facilitated by the parameterized model developed by the authors (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Parametric Model of Activity-based Approach to Trust Research**

Research Parameters	Index	Parameter Characteristics
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<b>W H O</b>	Trust Actors and Their Goals	S <sub>ta</sub>	Quantitative and qualitative parameters (openness, reliability, self-confidence, conviction, values, faith, pursued goals, genesis of relationships, etc.) of the trustor and trusted actor (individual, group, society, institution, state)
	Communication Channel between Trustor and Trusted Actor	S <sub>cc</sub>	Verbal, non-verbal, comprehensive, technical
<b>W H E R E</b>	Boundaries of Social Trust Space	S <sub>sts</sub>	Spatial dimensions limiting the process of social interaction between trust actors.
<b>W H Y</b>	Trust Factors (External and Internal)	S <sub>tf</sub>	Factors (external and internal) directly influencing trust actors and the communication channel between them within the boundaries of the social trust space, their probabilistic and hierarchical assessment, negative and positive components.
	Context of Social Trust Space Formed by Trust Actors, External and Internal Factors	S <sub>csts</sub>	Contextual content of factors influencing trust actors and the channel of interaction between them (political, social, economic, sociocultural, legal, educational, etc.).
	Points of Impact of External and Internal Factors on Trust Actors and Their Interaction Channel	S <sub>pi</sub>	Points of maximum application of external and internal factors' influence on trust actors and their interaction channel.
<b>H O W</b>	Actions Undertaken by the Trustor to Obtain Information about the Trusted Actor	S <sub>a</sub>	Activities of the trustor to acquire necessary information about the trusted actor and actions of the trusted actor to provide this information (observation, conversation, document analysis, acquaintance survey, etc.).
	Forms, Methods, and Means of Processing Information Necessary for Understanding the Trusted Actor	S <sub>i</sub>	Comprehension, objectification, and perception of knowledge conveyed by the trusted actor in symbolic form (speech, artifacts, gestures, facial expressions, behavior, etc.), formation of shared social constructs representing their understanding; legitimization and

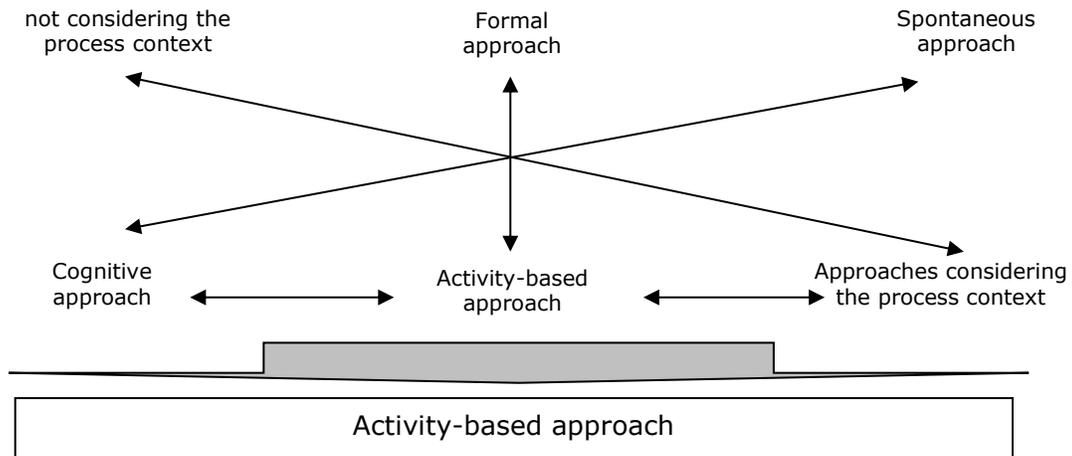
		substantiation of acquired knowledge, typologization.
Trustor's Decision-making Strategy for Trusting the Trusted Actor	S <sub>s</sub>	Forms, methods, and means of implementing trust actions (complete trust, partial trust, etc.).

Mathematically, the process of researching the phenomenon of "trust" (S<sub>tr</sub>) is described by the following dependency:

$$S_{tr} = F (S_{ta}, S_{cc}, S_{sts}, S_{tf}, S_{csts}, S_{pi}, S_a, S_i, S_s) \quad (1)$$

Navigation through theories of trust research and their shortcomings, as well as analysis of conceptual models by B. Robbins (2016), E. Uslaner (2003), M. Tagliaferri and A. Aldini (2020), regarding the presentation of research results on the phenomenon of "trust," allowed the authors to substantiate the research hypothesis and construct a "Conceptual Map of Trust Research" (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
**Conceptual map of trust research**



#### 4. Discussion

The proposed activity-based concept of trust research has its roots in Karl Marx's theory of practice (Marx & Engels, 1974). Expanding on his approach, practice is understood as "the process of organizing trust relationships, during which its actors

acquire new knowledge about each other, filled with specific meaning, and based on this, change themselves, change the circumstances of their lives, and change the circumstances of their lives by changing themselves."

According to S. Rubinstein's principle of the unity of consciousness and activity, activity mediates consciousness: "there is a real possibility to illuminate a person's consciousness through their activity, in which consciousness is formed and revealed" (Rubinstein, 1934). In the systemic-structural theory of activity, human activity is considered as a purposeful self-regulating system (Bedny & Karwowski, 2007). Therefore, the process of trust research can be viewed as a systemic process of activity research, in which the trusting actor, through trials, errors, and feedback adjustments, develops a trust strategy derived from acquired knowledge, as reflected in the model depicted in Figure 1.

Since activity consists of actions, which can be cognitive/internal and behavioral/external (Bedny et al., 2010), all actions in the trust process are organized and aimed at achieving conscious goals and tasks. In this regard, the activity of the trusting actor is nothing but conscious, intentional, purposeful, and socially formed behavior aimed at understanding the trusted actor.

The theory of psychological activity is of great importance in justifying the legitimacy of the authors' proposed activity-based approach to trust research. According to A. Leontiev, activity is directed towards the realization of motives, which represent objectified needs. In this case, its components are actions aimed at the actualization of goals, and the components of actions are operations, which are ways of solving problems.

The theory of the social constructivist paradigm by P. Berger and T. Luckmann, in which scholars offer a series of iterative processes and concepts to describe how the "intersubjective" gap between individual consciousnesses is overcome and how socially constructed realities, containing the knowledge of any social group, are shared and achieve everyday objectivity, sufficiently congruently justifies the author's conclusion that all types of actions between trust actors, in one way or another, are created and recreated by them, and subsequent result-oriented actions are products of their human mind expressed in their trusting activities.

## **5. Conclusion**

The analysis of existing conceptual foundations of trust has revealed a wide range of approaches to its investigation, each with its own inherent costs. The conceptualization and systematization of the obtained results, along with the development of the "Conceptual Map of Trust Research," have justified the necessity of introducing a comprehensive activity-based methodological approach into the theory and practice of trust research. The application of this approach enables the exploration of the activities of trust actors as a complex interplay of cognitive and behavioral actions aimed at achieving conscious goals and tasks.

In order to conduct comprehensive research on trust, the category of "social trust space" has been introduced, allowing for the identification of static and dynamic structural elements of the trust process and its description with consideration of the influence of external and internal factors. The analysis of the trust formation process within the boundaries of the social trust space has led to the development of the "Model of Trust Formation in the Social Trust Space under the Influence of External and Internal Factors."

The created parametric model entails the interconnected and step-by-step application of various forms, methods, and means of the comprehensive activity-based approach to trust research. Thus, the authors believe that the proposed research hypothesis is justified and see the prospect of further scientific work in substantiating the structure and content of each element of the formed parametric model.

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