

Fostering the Social Capital: Interplay of Public Relations and Democracy

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Abstract *This article discusses fostering social capital as the result of interaction between Public Relations and democracy. Social capital is a collective benefit which results from the close cooperation of individuals or group of individuals through mutual interaction. Burt (2002) defined social capital as “the actual and potential resource that is embedded in available through, derived from social networks of relationships”. This present study mainly focuses on “What does interaction between public relations and democracy contributes to enhancing the Social Capital, i.e., benefits for individuals in society after mutual cooperation. Public relations and democracy are part and parcel in any society now a day. This paper also argues about the interplay between Public Relations and democracy for the betterment of society. This article ends with the implications of Public Relations on creating social capital and development of democracy.*

Key Words: Social Capital, Public Relations, Democracy, Society

JEL Classification:

Introduction

The development of a society depends chiefly upon the development of organization and institutions of that society. The practitioners and scholars of public relations endorsed the idea that public relations develop an organizational structure as well as democracy. It also helps to maintain a mutual and cordial relationship of organizations with its public, i.e., internal and external publics. Studies suggested, there is a close association among societal social capital, public relations & democracy. Social capital can be defined as the communication and mutual relationship of the different organizations through which society can be benefited (Yang & Maureen 2013). This paper argues about social capital as a societal phenomenon and answers why maximum social capital is a need for a peaceful civil society. Furthermore, it discusses how the interaction between public relations and democracy can be beneficial for the society (Kent (2013) said that this is a fact that public relations can play a vital starring role in the development of democracy and social institutions. This role of public relations is quite obvious and can be seen in

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every sphere of a democratic society. The main role of public relations is building the image of the institutions by satisfying their publics. Public relations establish a two-way flow of information and ideas that ultimately lead to the pleasant adjustment of the institutions in society ([Cutlip, 1950](#)). As society is composed of the social and economic institution, the social capital of society will increase and further flourishes if there is more satisfaction of individuals towards its institutions. In this way, the social capital of society can be maximized. This process can be achieved by using public relations and democratic institutions effectively. Keeping in view the role of public relations, this study also interrogates about the association among social capital, public relations and democracy.

Social Capital

The perception of social capital initiated in political science and sociology ([Coleman, 1988](#); [Putnam, 1993](#)). Social capital is the predictable economic or collective advantages resulting from the special treatment and collaboration among groups and individuals. Although social sciences have defined social capital in their own sphere, yet they believe in the main theme of the social capital “the social networks have value” ([Putnam, 2000](#)). Social capital is a subjective phenomenon which has an impact on the attitudes and beliefs which left deep impressions on the interaction among individuals. It is not a new concept, but the emergence of modern social capital has started the debate of academic interests in social sciences. Social capital is anything with which individuals cooperate with each other to get benefits. These benefits will not only raise the living standards of individuals but also uplift society.

Social capital is used as the collective value of all the networks of society, as it is beneficial for the whole society. Although it is based on the collective and mutual efforts of the individuals also have a great role in the development of intuitions and thus make the society in smooth functioning. Democratic institutions are also part of society, and democracy will be strengthened if institutions will have more stability. In this approach, social capital also has an important role in building and establishing democracy. James Coleman, in his famous book “*Foundation of Social Theory* (1990)” presented the foremost idea of social capital.

This study concluded social capital as the relationship and mutual cooperation among the individuals, communities and groups of different spheres which will ultimately facilitate them all collectively. After examining the different examples and results which showed a certain practice in which social capital can demonstrate itself, Coleman said that “social institutions establish social capital, enabling the accomplishment of goals that could not be attained in its absence or could be achieved only at a greater cost” ([Coleman, 1990, p. 304](#)). In this mode, social capital is also advantageous in solving the difficulties related by means of the mutual act and ought to assist the manufacturing of community goods. The idea of social capital has emerged in the economics and sociology since, 1980, but now it has also included as the part of political science. There are also no abstract parameters for the measurement of social capital. No consensus by scholars on how to measure social capital. That is why many ask why this phenomenon is called “capital” if it cannot be measured in absolute values.

Sociologist Carl and Zhou (2002) have discussed the main cause that social capital is failed to the extent absolutely that it neither group-level nor specific phenomenon, but it the one which evolved from the analysis of the individuals which participates in the

group level. They also hold that the social capital cannot be compared with the “financial capital”, which is the main resource of an individual, because one cannot collect the benefits of the social capital as it can hold the financial capital. One can feel the benefits of social capital but can’t tangibly touch them. The benefits of social institutions and organizations are not detained by individuals but are the outcome of the contribution of individuals in favorably organized and systematic group. Individuals can use social capital in order to get some benefits, while the organizations and institutions use social capital to set some norms and values. Social capital can be used individually, though it is a collective term, as linking the dichotomized paradigm 'communitarianism' vs 'individualism.'

Pre-Condition of the Civil Society

For any civil society, social capital is pre-condition. Raison d'être of the PR is the fostering of societal social capital, as the main role is to create and maintain a collaborative and cordial relationship among organizations. [Sommerfeldt & Taylor \(2011\)](#) said that social capital needs effort, and it must not be seen as a missed inference in a community. Contribution of public relations in creating an atmosphere of reciprocity, mutual confidence and commitment are very helpful for peaceful civic society.

[Willis \(2012\)](#) said that it would simply not serve the cause and also not sufficient that organizations just hold a meeting in a hall, “collective social capital must strengthen it”. The social capital creation will come from top to bottom, as in domestic or global support of civil society. Generally, social capital works in descending order in society, from the institutions to individuals. Putnam said that it is more important than how individuals behave than from how to manage governments and organizations ([Luoma-aho, 2009](#)). It is so because society is composed of individuals, not the individuals are composed of society. So, it is more important that we focus on individuals rather than organizations. Most of the efforts in the creation of social capital, therefore, must be having the involvement of people and be started with people. It also has to create a general trust and confidence of people in society.

The survival of a healthy civil society is said by different scholars a vital prerequisite of an effective democracy (e.g., Taylor & Doerfel, 2004). However, it is totally dependent on the relationship of civil society actors and its different organization that tells us whether the civilization is accomplished of supporting successful democracy, what [Heath \(2006\)](#) terms this situation as “fully functioning society”. Social capital is a core need of civil society. Without creating and enhancing social capital, the concept of civil society is unimaginable. The role of PR in creating and building social capital in any civil society is very important. Public relations chief role is to build a relationship between the individuals and organizations which ultimately advantageous to the society.

The significant role of having a friendly relationship among the organizations in any civil society, [Taylor and Doerfel \(2005\)](#) reasoned that public relations have a considerable contribution to the research related to civil society. They further argued, “public relations, as a function which builds relationship... necessarily be in the middle of the process of civil society”. A civil society entails better relationships to be more useful and to assist an actor in the community from the social capital created with the help of such interactions ([Sommerfeldt & Taylor, p. 201](#)).

A Multi-Faceted Interactive Phenomenon

Social capital is considered as the versatility of interactive marvel, and some of the kinds of social capital are supposed to be more effectively contributing to a dynamic civil society. Social capital might be very high inside a close group, known as tie social capital, which covers many benefits to members inside the group ([Adler & Kwon, 2002](#)). “Bonding social capital” groups incline to show specified trust ([Uslaner, 1999](#)). In these circumstances, trust is offered readily to the members of the groups but will be cautiously offered to those who are outside the group, living in immediate communities. As [Allik & Realo \(2004\)](#) also said that collectivistic ethos thus curtails threat by trusting and collaborating just within their group. Thus, they gain less social capital with their relationship with the other groups.

In these circumstances, members of in-group only trust within their own group and hesitant to have confidence outside their group. This will ultimately lead in-group member away from a central society and the benefits which can be received from different social organizations of the society. This type of specific trust will lead to taking away from civic life ([Uslaner, p. 128](#)). As an outcome, bonding social capital emanates at the cost of forming cross-cutting links through different social groups, termed as bridging social capital and various benefits that are likely to get from a different interaction ([Adler & Kwon, p. 32](#)). In the same way, traditional groups of society demonstrate strong collectivistic behavior. That is why they are not able to get information and any kind of assistance from outside the group.

[Fukuyama \(2001\)](#) also clarified that customary and communalism social groups are suffering from a deficiency of “weak ties”, so they will not be able to have information or aid from out-group interactions. While in-group contacts provide various instant benefits to the members of the group. Although in-group bonds or social capital bonding may provide instant aids for those within the group, such interactions strengthen pre-existing social stratification. Even though high in-group cohesion, traditional communalist societies are likely to be underprivileged in the relations necessary to get power.

[Arefi \(2003\)](#) classifies agreement structure as an optimistic indicator of social capital. Agreement denotes communal interest and settlement amongst stakeholders and several actors to encourage collective action. So, if there is collective action in any society, this can be the indicator of fostering social capital. Nevertheless, the concept of social capital is slightly unclear; various features of this multi-faceted notion incline to be emphasized depending on the problem under consideration. Normally, two elementary concepts of social capital can remain eminent. The first aspect mentions social capital as a contribution in community associations, societal social networks and volunteer groups. The second aspect depends on the concept of sweeping trust and civic customs, checking a society from social problems and encouraging collective actions. Initially, both aspects were thought to be strong complements since organizational events were designed to create general trust and vice-versa ([Putnam, 1993](#)).

Interplay of PR and Democracy

The PR practitioners face an unavoidable issue that what will be the role of PR in democracy because the notion of democracy is slightly vague. Whether democracy is considered as just to conduct elections regularly or it is the process of democratizing the

institutions of the society. To strengthen the democracy, the institutional relations must be collaborative. Due to these uncertainties, intellectuals have considered that public relations play an important part in the communicative network that will ultimately facilitate and support a healthy democracy. Earlier attempts to ascertain the role of public relation in supporting the communicative network and to build a cordial relationship between the organizations have approached slightly indirectly.

[Taylor \(2000\)](#) has questioned the PR role in democracy through substitute communication thoughts such as public compass and civil society, respectively. Many scholars criticized the role of PR within these theories. The ideas of the sphere of the public and civil society are deemed to ignore the already suffering layman. When these aspects are distinguished and characterized by the civility of society, then they will not benefit society as a whole. Normative concepts of the public sphere and civil society have been critiqued as non-democratic, for suppressing the ideas of sidelined or subaltern publics. As a hidden type of expansionism, this will force the nations to develop into a neo-liberal economy ([Dutta-Bergman, 2005](#)). These criticisms have circuitously explained a substitute PR framework in democracy; this is how PR is considered to have a key role in building social capital which is an essential element for a successful democracy. This gives us an idea about the Public relations contribution in not only fostering social capital rather democratization of institutions.

The role of PR in a democracy is apparent as producing the social capital that assists entrance to domains of public debate and policymaking and also for keeping linkages among those groups that hinder the supremacy of the government and conserve social infrastructure. The notion of social capital does considerably for the development of PR theory and in recommending the role of PR in democracy. Furthermore, social capital viewpoint aids to reply to the criticisms of individuals who have debriefed the normative portrayal of these ideas in progressing democracy & public relations part inside them.

The scholars and public relations practitioners are convinced that PR plays a significant part in the survival of the organization. Society is composed of different social and economic organizations. Consequently, if public relations are playing an effective role in the relationship-building among different organizations of the society, including democratic institutions, it is helping the society to function smoothly. If the society functions smoothly then ultimately, democracy will also flourish. Hence democracy is indirectly dependent on public relations. Yet in society, the role of public relation remains opaque. Studies propose that PR expertise profits from social circumstances like economic development and democracy ([Ver'ci'c, & Sriramesh, 2009](#)). So, it obvious that public relations get advantages from a stable economy as well as a democratic society. In this way, public relation and democracy are interdependent because of performing professionalism in public relations; society needs to be more democratic. The next rational inquiry is that in what way the survival of professionalized public relations associated with democracy? Are public relations having a parasitic recipient of society's economic and democratic growth without sharing anything beneficial to society? [Sommerfeldt \(2013\)](#) explained that building of relationship and sharing of information comes within the purview of public relations. Social capital in this work has been well-defined as the collective and mutual network and relationship of social organization that benefits the whole society. We know public relations as primarily a profession of building relations, and due to its role of building and sustaining relationships, and smoothing

communication among various social actors that PR increase social capital and helps the survival of democratic developments in society.

Individuals, associations and political organizations are taking a keen interest in public relations which shows that in the formation of social capital and stability of democracy, the professional role of public relations cannot be ignored. Further, this study proposes that social capital has an essential common favorable association with democracy. This association permits PR to pay to democracy by inculcating social capital ([Yang & Taylor, 2103](#)).

The current decade has observed extraordinary progress globally in the sum of experts and groups keen to public relations throughout the world. A report from the Institute for PR claimed about 2.3–4.5 million PR specialists on the globe, who are active practitioners of this field (Falconi, 2006).

Effects of PR and Democracy on Social Capital

[Willis \(p. 118\)](#) questioned the public relations engagement with the communal stakeholders to have a favorable environment for the cooperation and solving the problems. The reply may be with the reinforcement of social capital and energetic civil society. Civil society is not essentially forced on states via peripheral actors. PR in global civil society interferences, though a significant part of the study, is a having a little part of the practice's role in assisting democracy. Civil society is best treated as an internal phenomenon to cultures and societies of the world—one that is reliant on the accessibility of social capital to everyone.

[Putnam \(1995\)](#) elucidates the correlation between democracy and social capital as such that dynamic engagements of civil organizations and voluntary associations lead to the creation of trust and collaboration between people and a high level of civic commitment and involvement. Trust, civic commitment and collaboration generate conducive circumstances for the public sphere, social amalgamation, and operational democratic structures.

Moreover, there is a robust association between social capital and democracy, which is mutually-beneficial. Democracy flourishes the social capital that is the reason the social capital is suffering in non-democratic or autocratic societies. Same has argued by [Paxton \(2002\)](#) that different level of democracy have a deep impression on social capital because a well-established democratic society provides, social capital, a more conducive atmosphere than in autocratic or non-democratic countries. The studies recommend that the development of public relations will be best flourishes in democratic settings because it provides a more conducive environment for this phenomenon ([Sriramesh & Ver'ci'c, p.31](#)). The main reason behind this, in a well-institutionalized democracy, there is right of advocacy and freedom of expression which are being protected by a fair law-enforcement system. Public relations is dependent on exercising these rights. It is vital for successful public relations that one can freely exercise these rights.

Nevertheless, the input of PR to democracy is hardly debated in the literature. We propose that the significant role of PR are possibly strengthening the democracy, and eventually it is possible, that democracy may foster the social capital.

Creating Social Capital

[Willis \(2012\)](#) said while discussing Ostrom's work that the vital role of communication which it demonstrates in a society is that it helps to bring the organizations and individuals together in order to create social capital (p, 122). Public relations is a part of a communication system to disseminate information between individuals and the organization. Ostrom's is mainly concerned with the values of mutuality and trustworthiness that rise as of these relations. Her results supplement research accompanied by researchers, who determine that the concept of social capital is essential equally to the public relations theory and practice. Social capital is basic to public relations and proposes more consideration on the subject ([Ihlen, 2007](#)). Luoma-aho said in her analysis of "Putnam's influential theories of community and social capital" that the purpose of public relations must be to build and maintain social capital of organizations. She admits that practitioner and scholars need to well understand the whole processes of generating social capital (p. 235).

Social capital is a product of PR efforts. The communication using PR helps to build the trustful affiliation between the individuals and organizations, which is inevitable for creating social capital. The societies that have more comprehensive trust are capable of building relations in the external close group, as this faith encourages collaboration and contribution to community life. For collective and social welfare, a change should take place from the particular belief and fidelity that is displayed in collectivistic philosophies for relationships building ([Narayan, 1999](#)). General trust demonstrates a chief role in building a society where individuals are expected to have a dynamic role within their own community, opinion concerns in the public domain, and contribute in logical debate. This will simply help in the creation of social capital.

Shaping Identities

Public relations and democracy play an important role in (re)shaping the identities of citizens. They help to have common identities among the citizens if they are functioning properly. As a key source of communication, public relations take an important role in the transition of societies. Different scholars have studied if practices of public relations challenge or supporting the status quo ([Aldoory, 2005](#)), adding something to the sphere of the public and the overall progress of civil society, contribution of public relations to build a nation and inculcation of a collective identity among public and relationship between democracy and public relations ([L'Etang & Muruli, 2004](#)).

The main theme of these convincing arguments is: how public relations and democracy helps in (re)shaping the identities of individuals within a society? Public relations can reshape the identities in a positive or negative manner. Public relations build the relationship within an organization and also with other organizations. By practising effectively, it can create a feeling of unity and having common identity among the members of the organization with the help of building relationships. It will further be enhanced by the democratic institutions because there is the generalized trust of individuals have on these institutions.

Civic Community and Social Interactions

[Kruckeberg and Stark \(1988\)](#) reasoned that "public relations is practised as the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community". Public relation plays an

important part in the development of a civic community. The professionalism of public relations has a crucial role in social interaction as it helps to build relations and a civic community. Societies and public relations demonstrate an integrated behavior which may contribute in making a contract, penetrability, and trust-building between the individuals to share a sense of responsibility, to manage the threat and to make actions more concerted ([Heath, 2006](#)). In order to make society fully functional, PR can be used as a strength “to foster community as blended relationships, resource distribution, and shared meanings that advance and yield to enlightened choice” ([Heath, p. 97](#)). By supporting the multiplicity of ideas, cross-cutting relations and building mutual trust and confidence, public relations helps the society too in the creation of special capital which is a necessary element for the smooth functioning of society.

[Sisk \(1999\)](#) argued that if the state is not helpful or effective in supporting the social capital, civil society organizations together with NGOs backed by global performers, have a crucial part to play in supporting social capital. Different groups and organizations of civil society use PR to simplify and support the public to build the relationship between groups ([Taylor, 2011](#)). Public organizations also indulged in PR with the help of creating and managing relationships to achieve collective aims.

[Paxton \(p. 262\)](#) claimed that social capital thoroughly connects with robust civil networks. People who have faith and trust in others are more inclined to involve others. Their involvement may take the kind of civic contribution such as relationship in nonprofits, religious and other civil groups. Organizational communication experts must study social capital to answer how organizations are contributing to and supporting society (Lewis, 2005). This can also be true for public relation practitioners and experts—formation of social capital is the phenomenon in which public relations can support society. Role of PR in circulating information and supporting relationships—Putnam said it as robust civic connections. So we can see a strong PR is an integral part of society. Stronger the social interactions in society, stronger will be the social fabrication of society.

Association between Social Capital, Public Relations and Democracy

A nexus between social capital, public relations and democracy is part and parcel for any vigorous society. Public relations is always cross-cutting relationships whenever required, and mutual trust is built among organizations in civil society. Here [Paxton \(2002\)](#) argues that in (re)turn, a healthy public debate and civil society can support a more democratic state (p. 265).

Role of public relations is certainly not quite finished because social capital maintenance amongst publics is required a guarantee they will be able to carry on, in civil society, to come together. Whereas campaigns on a larger scale, global nation-building struggles, state relationships, establishing societies, development of communities into fully functional society, public expertise in a democracy might be decisive input in democracy by public relations.

Social capital has a deep influence on democracy, build and strengthen democratic institutions. It will help to democratize the institutions with the help of civil society which can be a direct outcome of public relations practices. The development of “Healthy democratic institutions” is one of the major areas where social capital is linked with democracy ([Paxton, p. 256](#)). One of the major contributions of social capital for society

is to build a democratic society in non-democratic countries with the help of organizations and civic communities that establish critical dialogue and collective actions on a large scale. Paxton further argues this is established on the presence of relationships based on trust between associations and individuals. She further said that social capital “provides a space for the creation and dissemination of discourse critical to the present government . . . and it provides a way for active opposition of the regime to grow” (p. 257). The main reason for leading social capital in public spheres and to build a civil society is because people have trust in one another. If people show trust in each other, they will be more dynamic in their groups, tolerate views and ideas different from their personal concepts, and collaborate with one another.

By seeing the formation of social capital in society, its role in supporting and flourishes the public society, and how PR abets the democratization of institutions and democracy in the public sphere, we can say it is that social capital, public relations and democracy are interdependent upon each other for their survival and development in society. Public relations, as a relationship-building and social-interaction function, if done by social players, may attempt to re-shape democracy if it supports social capital amongst growing publics, thereby making relationships and a cooperative civil society ([Weaver & Motion, 2002](#)). Through building communities and trust, the role of public relations is very important in a democracy because organizations and individuals cooperate together for the benefits of the whole society and the public good. [Taylor \(2011\)](#) also argued individuals also use principles of public relations via their input in different social organization, with the help of learning from each other and change to varying social settings (p. 439).

Conclusion

Different concepts like social capital, public relations and democracy are discussed in this article with their role in the development of society, building-relationships and ways to facilitate each other. The literature discusses all these concepts separately as well as collectively. It is impossible to cover all aspects of these concepts and to resolve the disputed arguments in this study, but it is only a brief effort to link these concepts theoretically and to discuss interrelationships between these ideas, with special emphasis on fostering of social capital. In its core, this article discusses how the interplay of public relations and democracy create and enhance social capital in society. The simple argument to this question is that public relations are a relationship-building process and democracy is necessary to flourish public relations practices. Social capital is the outcome of the interaction between effective public relations and a robust democracy. Consequently, social capital in society increases and allows public relations and democracy to function more smoothly for the relationship building between individuals and organizations. Analysis suggests that PR play a significant role in edifice relations between institutions and society, which strengthens the democratic institutions and resultantly creates and foster social capital in society ([Yang & Taylor, p. 257](#)). So it is concluded that public relations and democracy contribute to making a civil society by fostering social capital.

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