



EMERALD POINTS

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Evolution, Contestation,
Application and Digitization

MUDIT KUMAR SINGH



SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital has become a core theoretical concept in the Social Sciences – linking deep insights from sociology and political theory to eminently practical applied interventions within communities and organizations. With this book, Dr Singh provides a clear, cogent review of the current state of the field and how researchers and policymakers can leverage social capital for deep, positive social change. The scholarship is thorough and insightful, tracing the roots of the idea and linking it with modern digital developments and applications across multiple policy domains. This book deserves a place on the shelf of anyone engaged in development research, practice, and policy making.

– Prof James Moody, USA

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Evolution, Contestation, Application and Digitization

BY

MUDIT KUMAR SINGH

Duke University, USA

*Jaypee University Anoopshahr, Bulandshahr,
Uttar Pradesh, India*



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my toddler daughter

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ABSTRACT

Do we really know social capital? Moreover, is our understanding of the 100-year-old term consistent with the digital world? This book delves into the intricacies of social capital, examining its historical evolution, contemporary contestation, and practical applications. The author introduces a novel refurbished notion of social capital that will improve our conceptual and practical understanding about the term while outlaying future course of actions.

This book begins with an in-depth analysis of the evolution of social capital, tracing its roots from early little known nonscientific casual use (1905) to its modern-day conceptualization. It explores the different concepts, dimensions, and application of social capital, including bonding, bridging, and linking social capital; and how these knowledge contours have changed over time in the digital era. The author examines how social capital has evolved from the traditional society to the age of social media, and online communities. The work describes how social capital is shaped up by social relationships, norms, and institutions and how it also has influenced them in due course of time. It critically examines the confused and ambiguous use of social capital in measurement and conceptualization by scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

One of the key focuses of the book is the evolution and contestation of social capital term over the years and across the disciplines while recognizing digital form of social capital in present time. It critically examines the debates and controversies surrounding social capital, including issues of inequality, power dynamics, and social exclusion. After a thorough examination, the author devises a sound understanding of the term that has originated in writings of the early scholars while criticizing the ambiguous and overlapping usage that emerged over time in scholarly debates and practice. The author traces the early debates and tensions within and that between sociologists and economists that distorted the meaning of social capital, and made the term highly ambiguous and complex. Not only the concept but also its forms, and states of being of

the term has been varying even in the most popular works that the author will bring fore to the discussion.

On a positive note, this book will examine how social capital has been used for positive social change, including its role in civic engagement in citizen support groups in the United Kingdom, community development programs in Latin America, Africa, and South Asia, and economic welfare in the United States and European countries. The author highlights successful examples of social capital application in the digital realm, ranging from crowdsourcing initiatives to social entrepreneurship, and provides practical recommendations for leveraging social capital for social good in the digital era. While briefly introducing the darker side of social capital in the digital era, such as the spread of misinformation, echo chambers, and online polarization, the author discusses the ethical and moral implications of social capital in a rapidly changing digital landscape. This book is a thought-provoking and timely exploration of the multifaceted concept of social capital in the context of the digital revolution. The write-up has offered a comprehensive overview of the evolution of social capital, critically examines its contestation in the digital age, and provides practical insights for harnessing social capital for positive social change.

FOREWORD

Dr Mudit Singh is a social scientist with PhD from Motilal Nehru Institute of Technology, Allahabad. As a postdoctoral scholar, he worked in sociology discipline of Humanities and Social Sciences Department of Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. He worked on the problem of democratic participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). He has published a framework on Participatory Local Governance of Energy Transition. The framework was successfully presented before the Elke Weber team at Princeton and other international and national forums. He combines the spirit of a fieldworker and a theorist of social capital. He has published a book, several papers and research reports on social issues and development interventions.

In this book, the author delves into the transformation of social capital from its traditional roots to its modern manifestations in the age of social media and online communities. The text explores how social capital is intricately shaped by social relationships, norms, and institutional structures, while also shedding light on its reciprocal influence on these very elements over time. This book takes a critical stance on the often perplexing and ambiguous utilization of the concept of social capital, a phenomenon observed across the scholarly, practical, and policymaking realms. Central to the book's focus is the historical evolution and ongoing debates regarding the term "social capital," acknowledging its digital adaptation in today's world. The author conducts a thorough examination of these debates and controversies, which encompass issues of inequality, power dynamics, and social exclusion. Ultimately, the author strives to offer a more coherent and well-founded understanding of a concept that was originally rooted in early scholarship but became entangled in an intricate web of overlapping and uncertain usage throughout the course of scholarly discourse and practice.

Furthermore, this book sheds light on how social capital has been harnessed for positive societal transformation, highlighting its role in various contexts such as citizen support groups in the United Kingdom, community development programs across Latin America, Africa, and South Asia, and its contribution to economic welfare in the United States and European nations. While briefly acknowledging the potential negative aspects of social capital in

the digital era, such as the dissemination of misinformation, the creation of echo chambers, and the exacerbation of online polarization, the author also delves into the ethical and moral considerations tied to social capital within the swiftly evolving digital landscape.

In sum, this book serves as a thought-provoking and timely exploration of the multifaceted concept of social capital in the context of the digital revolution, offering a comprehensive review of its evolution, a critical examination of its contested nature in the digital age, and practical insights for harnessing social capital for positive societal progress.

I think the students and young scholars of sociology, development studies, civil society action, and program implementation would benefit significantly from this book.

Arun Kumar Sharma

Senior Professor of Sociology (Retd)

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur

16 October 2023

Kanpur

FOREWORD

Social capital has impacted billions of lives since its inception and is equally popular among academicians and policymakers. The term has been applied by the international agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nations since last three decades.

Social capital has been used for positive social change, including its role in civic engagement in citizen support groups in the United Kingdom, community development programs in Latin America, Africa, and South Asia, and economic welfare in the United States and European countries. This book by Dr Mudit Kumar Singh introduces a novel refurbished notion of social capital that will improve our conceptual and practical understanding about the term in the digital era. The book is a thought-provoking and timely exploration of the multifaceted concept of social capital in the context of the digital revolution. The write-up has offered a comprehensive overview of the evolution of social capital, critically examines its contestation in the digital age, and provides practical insights for harnessing social capital for positive social change. The author highlights successful examples of social capital application in the digital realm, ranging from crowdsourcing initiatives to social entrepreneurship, and provides practical recommendations for leveraging social capital for social good in the digital era. While briefly introducing the darker side of social capital in the digital era, such as the spread of misinformation, echo chambers, and online polarization, the author discusses the ethical and moral implications of social capital in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

Chapters in the book will cater to the needs policymakers and that of UG and PG students from wide discipline including Computer Science, Management, Sociology, and Political Science.

I wish Dr Singh's contribution to the knowledge of social capital will benefit the society around the globe.

(Prof Dr V P Kallimani)

VC, Jaypee University Anoopshahr

PhD, Nottingham University

7 December 2023

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ORIGIN AND CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The term “social capital” was first introduced by L. J. Hanifan in his 1916 publication titled “The Rural School Community Center.” In this publication, Hanifan defined social capital as follows:

...those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit... [Social capital] accrues to the individual and to society by virtue of the social contacts which are established in the community... (Hanifan, 1916, p. 130)

Social capital is a multidimensional concept that encompasses various forms of social connections, networks, and norms that shape social interactions within a community or society. The concept was popularized by sociologists in the 1980s and 1990s, and it has since gained significant attention from scholars across various disciplines, including political science, economics, and public health. Social capital has been recognized as a valuable resource that can have a significant impact on various aspects of individuals' lives, including their economic, social, and mental well-being. However, social capital is not a homogeneous concept; it can take on different forms that can have varying implications for individuals and communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND APPROACHES TO UNDERSTAND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social Network Approach

This framework emphasizes the structure and characteristics of social networks and how they facilitate the creation, maintenance, and utilization of social capital. It focuses on the patterns of social ties, such as the strength, density, and diversity of social networks and how they shape the flow of resources and information among individuals and groups.

Social capital is embedded in the structure and composition of social networks, including the size, density, diversity, and strength of ties among individuals and groups (Granovetter, 1973).

Social capital, defined as “the resources embedded within social networks that individuals and groups can access and utilize” (Lin, 2001, p. 22), has been widely studied from the perspective of social network theory. Social network theory posits that social networks play a crucial role in the development and distribution of social capital (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973). According to Burt (1992), the position of individuals within a social network, such as their centrality and connectivity, determines their access to social capital. Granovetter (1973) argued that the strength of social ties, such as trust and reciprocity, influences the formation and distribution of social capital. Furthermore, cognitive processes, such as individuals’ perceptions of their social networks, also shape their access to social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Empirical research has provided evidence supporting the social network theory of social capital. For instance, studies have shown that social networks and social capital are positively associated with individual well-being. For example, individuals with larger and more diverse social networks tend to have higher levels of subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Putnam, 2000). Social networks also play a role in economic outcomes, as they provide access to job information, resources, and opportunities (Burt, 1997). In addition, social networks and social capital have been linked to better health outcomes, including improved mental health and reduced mortality rates (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001).

However, there are also critiques of the social network theory of social capital. Some scholars argue that social network theory tends to focus on individual-level factors and may not adequately capture broader structural and contextual factors that influence social capital (Portes, 1998). Others raise concerns about the potential for social capital to exacerbate inequalities, as

social networks and social capital can be exclusive and unequally distributed, leading to the concentration of resources in certain groups (Brulle & Pellow, 2006).

The social network theory of social capital provides a valuable framework for understanding how social networks contribute to the formation and distribution of social capital. Empirical research has supported the role of social networks in shaping individual and societal outcomes. However, further research is needed to better understand the complex interplay between social networks, social capital, and broader social structures and to address potential inequalities in the distribution of social capital.

Trust, Norms and Values

This framework highlights the importance of trust in fostering social capital. Trust is seen as a crucial element that enables individuals to rely on one another, cooperate, and engage in collective actions. Trust can be built through repeated interactions, shared norms, and common values, and it serves as a foundation for social capital formation and functioning.

The theory suggests that social capital is built upon the foundation of trust, which enables individuals to engage in cooperative behaviors, exchange resources, and establish social connections (Putnam, 2000). Trust is recognized as a crucial element in the concept of social capital, which refers to the resources embedded within social networks that individuals and groups can access and utilize (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Trust is often viewed as a foundational component of social capital, as it facilitates cooperation, collaboration, and exchange among network members (Burt, 2005; Fukuyama, 1995). Trust can be defined as the expectation that others will behave in a reliable and cooperative manner, based on shared norms, values, and experiences (Mayer et al., 1995).

Theories on trust in social capital have evolved over time. One of the prominent theories is the social exchange theory, which posits that trust emerges from repeated interactions and exchanges among network members, where individuals learn to rely on others' trustworthiness through past experiences of reciprocal behavior (Blau, 1964; Cook & Emerson, 1978). According to social exchange theory, trust is built through a process of repeated interactions and the development of shared expectations of reciprocity, leading to the formation of social capital.

Norms are shared expectations and rules that guide individuals' behavior, and values are deeply held beliefs and principles that influence social

interactions. Norms and values can shape social capital by influencing social cohesion, cooperation, and collective action in a community or society.

Institutional Theory

This framework focuses on the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping social capital. Formal institutions include laws, regulations, and formal organizations, while informal institutions include norms, customs, and traditions. Institutions can influence the formation, maintenance, and utilization of social capital by providing the structure, rules, and resources for social interactions and cooperation. Brehm and Rahn (1997) argue that “the institutional context plays a critical role in shaping social capital at the individual level”. They provide evidence on how formal and informal institutions influence the formation and consequences of social capital, particularly in the context of political participation (Brehm & Rahn, 1997, p. 999). Woolcock (1998) proposes a theoretical synthesis and policy framework for understanding the relationship between social capital and economic development. He argues that “the institutional context, including formal and informal institutions, shapes the creation and utilization of social capital, and influences its impact on economic development”. Portes (1998) emphasizes the role of institutional arrangements in shaping the distribution and consequences of social capital in communities. He argues that “formal and informal institutions influence the availability, accessibility, and mobilization of social capital, which in turn affects various outcomes, such as economic development, social integration, and civic participation”. Putnam (2000) explores the role of institutions in the decline of social capital in American society. He argues that “changes in formal institutions, such as the decline of civic organizations and social norms, have contributed to the erosion of social capital in the United States” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Fukuyama (2001) discusses how institutions shape the formation and consequences of social capital at the societal level. He argues that “the quality of institutions, such as the rule of law, property rights, and governance structures, affects the development and utilization of social capital, which in turn influences economic and social outcomes” (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 47). Woolcock and Narayan (2000) emphasize the role of institutions in shaping the relationship between social capital and development outcomes in different contexts. They argue that “institutions, both formal and informal, mediate the relationship between social capital and development, and

contextual factors shape the formation, maintenance, and utilization of social capital” (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p. 235). Schneider et al. (1997) examines how institutional arrangements influence the distribution and consequences of social capital in different societies. They argues that institutional factors, such as legal frameworks, cultural norms, and social hierarchies, shape the formation, distribution, and utilization of social capital, and influence its impact on various outcomes, such as economic development, civic engagement, and social cohesion.

Human Capital Theory

This framework emphasizes the role of individual skills, knowledge, and education in fostering social capital. Human capital refers to the attributes and capacities of individuals that can be invested in social interactions and relationships. Individuals with higher levels of education, skills, and knowledge are often more likely to participate in social networks, engage in collective actions, and access social resources, thereby fostering social capital.

Human capital theory suggests that individuals with higher levels of education, skills, and knowledge are more likely to engage in social interactions, participate in social networks, and foster social capital (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman (1988) emphasized the role of individual human capital, such as education, skills, and knowledge, in the formation and utilization of social capital. Coleman argues that “individuals with higher levels of human capital are more likely to participate in social networks, establish trust, and engage in collective action, which can result in greater social capital” (Coleman, 1988, p. S95). Bourdieu argues that “cultural capital influences the types of social networks and relationships individuals can access, which in turn affects the amount and quality of social capital they can accumulate” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). Bourdieu (1986) extends the human capital theory of social capital by emphasizing the importance of cultural capital, which includes education, values, and norms, in the formation and distribution of social capital. Lin (2001) further develops the human capital theory of social capital by highlighting the role of cognitive skills, such as problem-solving and communication abilities, in the formation and utilization of social capital. Lin argues that individuals with higher cognitive skills are more likely to effectively utilize social networks, establish trust, and engage in collective action, which can enhance social capital. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) emphasize the role of human capital in shaping the development of social capital among immigrant communities. They argue that “education, skills, and language proficiency are

important forms of human capital that influence the formation and utilization of social capital among immigrants, which can have implications for their integration and well-being in the receiving society” (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993, p. 132).

Human capital theorists argue that “education, as a form of human capital, positively influences the formation of social networks, trust, and participation, which can contribute to the accumulation of social capital” (Flap & Völker, 2001). Uslaner (2002) examines the role of education in the formation of social capital, particularly in the context of political participation. Uslaner (2002) argues that “education is an important form of human capital that can enhance political knowledge, participation, and engagement, which can result in greater social capital.” Sabatini and Sarracino (2017) extends the human capital theory of social capital by exploring the role of education and skills in shaping social capital in the digital era. Sabatini argues that “digital literacy, online communication skills, and the ability to navigate social media platforms are emerging forms of human capital that can influence the formation and utilization of social capital in the digital age.” [Table 1](#) summarizes the literature review of social capital without considering digital implication on the term.

Evolution of Social Capital Over the Years

The concept of social capital has evolved over the past 100 years with a very gradual speed until scholars in the United States and Europe popularized the concept by linking it with the social phenomena of policy importance. The popularity of the term “social capital” can be gauged by the fact that there are as many as 89,500 documents on Google scholar database that contain the phrase in their title itself. Similarly, Web of science shows 12,448 documents on conducting the search for “social capital”. Just to illustrate the knowledge contours built around the term, I will discuss the social capital evolution across the disciplines, countries over the years according to Scopus database. The key word search criteria “Social Capital” yielded 35,356 documents ranging from 1936 to 2024 listed on Scopus. I filtered down the documents to 2022 for better representation and authenticity with time. The years 1936 and 1968 had one document each and are included in the analysis. The final analysis consists of 34,519 documents. Since the search criteria is almost all inclusive and includes reports, peer reviewed papers, books, and conference proceedings, there is less likely a chance that the search will exclude any important

Table 1. Some Social Capital Concepts by Known Authors.

Conceptualizing Social Capital	Authors
Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.	Bourdieu (1986)
Social capital can be defined as (1) a source of social control, (2) a source of family-mediated benefits, and (3) a source of resources mediated by nonfamily network.	Portes (1998)
Social capital encompasses the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.	Putnam (2000)
Social capital is the social resources that individuals and groups possess through their networks of relationships, including social ties, shared norms, and values.	Lin (2001)
Social capital is a resource for action. It consists of the networks of relationships among people, including their levels of trust, reciprocity, and cooperation.	Coleman (1988)
Social capital is the social interconnectedness, trust, and cooperation that exist within and between individuals and groups.	Kawachi et al. (2004)
Social capital refers to the social networks, norms, and trust that facilitate collective action and cooperation among individuals and groups.	Woolcock and Narayan (2000)
Social capital is the social resources and social ties that individuals and groups can access, which can result in beneficial outcomes.	Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998)
Social capital concept is poorly specified and the use of the term is inherently problematic, and needs to be carefully critiqued and empirically grounded before it can usefully be applied in social policy formulations.	Morrow (1999)
Social capital encompasses the social relationships, networks, and norms that create social cohesion and facilitate cooperation and collaboration.	Uslaner (2002)
Social capital is the social connectivity, mutual support, and shared values that contribute to community development and well-being.	Fukuyama (1995)

document, and although a few of the uncategorized documents (0.97%) are left from the analysis, it will help readers to build an understanding about social capital term in the literature. Fig. 1 suggests there are only a handful documents traceable in Scopus database until 1988. But we see a sharp takeoff post-2000 as the term was widely applied to numerous public policy programs and used heavily by researchers from social science and management disciplines alike.

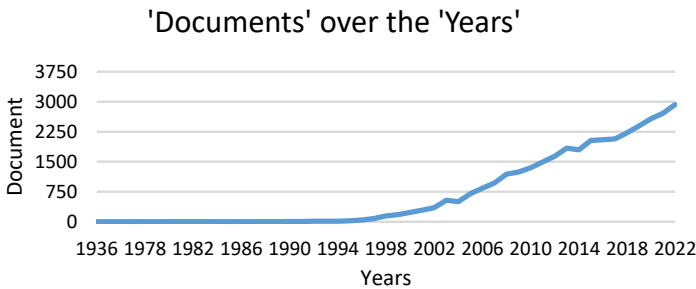


Fig. 1. Social Capital Literature Growth According to Scopus Database.

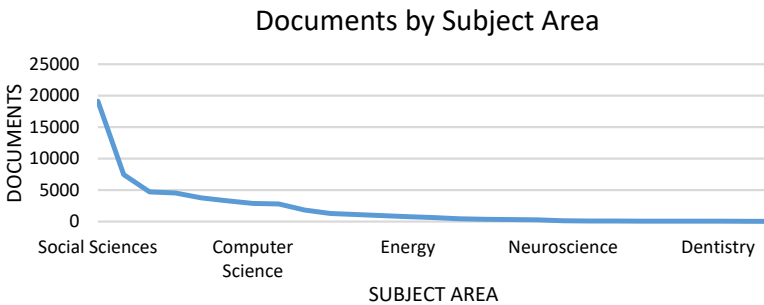


Fig. 2. Discipline Wise Documents in Social Capital.

Fig. 2 shows discipline wise distribution of social capital usage gives us an idea how social capital gained its wide presence across multiple disciplines from natural to social sciences and humanities. Conforming to its origin in 1916 and later usage of the term by social scientists, there is a huge amount of work from the disciplines of social sciences that goes to other natural science disciplines.