

Cultivating Social Capital: Dimensions of Friendship Quality among the Afars of Ethiopia

Suadiq Sufian Ali, Rajashikor Mahana

Abstract: *This paper intends to provide an insight into the cultivation of social capital. To this end, the paper employs a cross sectional survey design for the purpose of collecting relevant data through quantitative methods. The collected data for the sample of 390 respondents were examined using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to check the reliability and validity of items included in Friendship Quality and Generalized Trust Scales. Ordinary Logistic Regression (OLS) also conducted on the dimensions of friendship quality as a predictor variable and general trust as an outcome variable. The regression analysis shows that dimensions of friendship quality such as the provision of help, mutual acceptance and perceived feeling of safety tend to affect social capital positively and significantly. The finding implies that high friendship quality has influence on the cultivation of social capital in Afar pastoral community of Ethiopia.*

Keywords: *Social capital, Friendship Quality, Trust, Closeness, Help*

I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings naturally tend to live together; work in groups for each other and attempt to satisfy their basic social needs together (Coleman, 1990; Hanifan, 1916). In this context, social groups, not individuals, are commonly considered as useful asset in the formation of human society (Narayan, 1999). Conventional wisdom suggests that human society gives greater values to the quality of its social fabric (Woolcock and Narayan, 2002). In parallel, a good starting point is one of the African proverbs that say “A human becomes a human because of other humans” which vividly pinpointed the place of friendly relationships.

Historically, the concern on friendly relationships has attracted the attention of social philosophers for a long time (Field, 2008). The same concern may be seen in Aristotle’s (384-322 BC) characterization of human beings, avowing “Man is a social animal. He who lives without society is either a beast or God”. Along similar lines, Tomas Hobbes argued that “having friend is a source of power” (Silver, 2009). Here, one may ponder: what defines a friend? For the sake of simple understanding, it can be conceived as: “A friend in need is a friend indeed”. That is to say, someone who extends his/her concern at a difficult time is really a true friend. In cognizant of the prominent role of friendship, the Afar people of Ethiopia have accorded greater values to their friendship quality.

Revised Manuscript Received on December 22, 2018.

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In their long period of history, they have established and maintained different types of friendly relationships (Afar Cultural and Tourism Bureau, 2017). Yet, our knowledge on the quality of friendship and its effect is very limited due to scanty information. Especially, little is known about the influence of friendly relationship on the social capital stock. With this background, this paper attempts to examine the effect of dimensions of friendship quality on the cultivation of social capital among the Afar people of Ethiopia.

II. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The term social capital is a universal concept without having a universal definition (Krishna, 2002; Tzanakis, 2013). In the view of Dagenne and Forse (1999), the idea contained in social capital can be traced back to Thomas Hobbes who basically contended that friends are source of power. Other scholars (e.g., Portes, 1998; Suderland, 2007; Tringia, 2001) linked the intellectual history of the concept with the works of the 19th century ‘classical sociologists’ such as Emile Durkheim, George Simmel, Karl Marx and Max Weber. At the midst, there is no satisfactory evidence when the first use of the term social capital was begun (Krishna, 2002). Nonetheless, according to Dill (2015), one thing must be clear to the esteemed reader: the concept of social capital is popular in the era of globalization particularly around the year around the year 2000.

Regarding the first use of the term, there are two contradictory points that dominate social capital literature. Most scholars linked the first use of the term social capital with Hanifan’s endeavor of the 1920s. Others gave the credit to the 1960s contribution of Jaccobs (Claridge, 2004). In harmony with the first group of scholars, Putnam (2002), who is popularly known as the “king of social capital writers” (Gauntlet, 2015) claimed that the term was coined, a century ago, by Lyda J. Hanifan in 1916. Accordingly, Hanifan in his article, “The Rural School Community Center” employed the term for the first time so as to emphasize “...tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people” (1916:130).

From the initial description of the term by Hanifan (1920s) up to now, the concept of social capital has been in a series of evolution except some interruptions in-between for a couple of decades. In the last century alone, the concept has been redefined at least six times or more (Woolcock, 2000). Finally, it gained a status of being academic agenda in the 1980s by American sociologist James S. Coleman (Putnam, 2002). Importantly then, Coleman developed the theoretical framework of social capital for the first time (Harriss and Renzio, 1997).



Nowadays, the different seminal studies and perspectives of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Robert Putnam and Fransis Fukuyama on social capital have mainly dominated the attention of social capital researchers (Sunderland, 2007). As a result, the last two decades have witnessed a boom in social capital studies (Hererros, 2004).

III. METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Method of Analysis

A cross sectional survey design was employed to collect relevant data through quantitative methods. To this end, questionnaires consisting of Friendship Quality and General Trust Scales were distributed to a representative random sample of 422 households. Up to the closing date of the household survey, 390 questionnaires were gathered. Accordingly, the data from the sample of 390 respondents was examined. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out to check the reliability and validity of items included in Friendship Quality and Generalized Trust Scales. Then, Ordinary Logistic Regression (OLS) was conducted on the dimensions of friendship quality as a predictor variable and general trust as an outcome variable.

Measure of Social Capital

The term social capital is a universal concept without having a universal definition (Krishna, 2002; Tzanakis, 2013). In the view of Dagenne and Forse (1999), the idea contained in social capital can be traced back to Thomas Hobbes who basically contended that friends are source of power. Other scholars (e.g., Portes, 1998; Suderland, 2007; Tringia, 2001) linked the intellectual history of the concept with the works of the 19th century 'classical sociologists' such as Emile Durkheim, George Simmel, Karl Marx and Max Weber. At the midst, there is no satisfactory evidence when the first use of the term social capital was begun (Krishna, 2002). Nonetheless, according to Dill (2015), one thing must be clear to the esteemed reader: the concept of social capital is popular in the era of globalization particularly around the year around the year 2000.

This paper therefore in line with the recommendation of Krishna (2002) and the best experience gained from prominent scholars of social capital (Coleman, 1990; Fukuyama, 2001; Narayan and Cassidy, 2001 and Putnam, 1993), generalized trust has been used as a proxy measurement for social capital. In specific terms, generalized trust as a proxy indicator of social capital was employed. In turn, generalized has been measured using General Trust Scale (GTS) developed by Fetzer Institute (2012).

The GTS comprised of six general statements (items) about the perception of participants on honesty and trustworthiness of others (Thein et al., 2012). The scale indicated how much the respondents agree or disagree with the items scored ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly disagree (5). Then, the opinions of the participants were calculated so as to compute a mean score of generalized trust. In conclusion, partly because trust defines the qualities of any close relationship (Rampel, 1985), the selection of generalized trust as a proxy indicator of social capital is apparently suitable to the current study. Indeed,

most previous social capital studies devoted to friendship, safety and other similar themes gave more emphasis to trust (Narayan and Cassidy, 2001).

Measure of Friendship Quality

Like the concept of social capital, friendship quality is a multidimensional concept which is difficult to measure. In this study, for the sake of simplifying its measurement procedure, the Friendship Quality (FQUA) Scale developed by Thein et.al (2012) was employed. The scale fulfils all the criteria of scale development and validation assessment procedures recommended by Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011). FQUA scale comprised of four dimensions of friendship quality including closeness, help, acceptance and safety.

FQUA scale has been used in several previous studies (e.g. Asher and Parker, 1993; Bendt and Perry, 1986; Bukowski and Hoza, 1989 and Ladd et al., 1996). It focused on both negative and positive features of friendship (see Asher and Parker, 1993; Bendt and Perry, 1986). Some scholars criticized the treatment of negative and positive features of friendship at the same time arguing that it is a serious violation of statistical assumptions (Macenzie et al., 2005; Thein, 2012). Given such drawback, Thein et al. (2012) suggested a new conceptualization of FQUA model which favored only positive features of friendship quality.

The current study, therefore, used FQUA scale that favors positive features with the belief that separate analysis of negative and positive features of friendship quality eases statistical analysis. Of course, paying attention to the positive features of interaction (i.e., high friendship quality) has not been strange. It was implicated in classical sociological studies. For example, Weberian sociology acknowledged two kinds of interaction between human beings or social groups: conflict and cooperation. Yet, first and foremost emphasis was given to the cooperative character of social relations (Znaniecki, 1965).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assessment of Reliability and Validity of Items

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is primarily conducted to (1) test the reliability and validity of items, and (3) extract underlying common factors. The EFA procedure begins with KMO & Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to examine the suitability of factor analysis for the collected data. Accordingly, the result shows a KMO of 0.692 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p > 0.001$) suggesting the suitability of items included in Friendship Quality and General Trust Scales for extraction of factors using EFA.

The application of EFA provides five underlying common factors for a total of 20 survey items. The result reveals most of the items are loaded into a single common factor having a factor loading greater than 0.3 ($r > .3$). In total, 16 Survey items are refined and chosen for further analysis. Table 1 indicates the Coronbach α of each underlying factor is greater than 0.7 implying the presence of internal consistency between the survey items.



The Chronbach α value of 0.7 or above is acceptable while measuring reliability (Mackenzie et al., 2011).

The test of validity also needs a great concern. Sometimes, although survey items are reliable, the test of validity is mandatory as reliability alone is not sufficient. Given various types of validity, the assessment of validity begins with the examination of content validity. To this end, the study examined previous researches on friendship quality and social to examine the content validity of items included in their proxy indicators: Friendship Quality Scale and Generalized Trust Scale. By doing so, the study

conducts the assessment of content validity to confirm there is desirable rigor in the measurement of friendship quality and social capital using the proxy indicators.

On the other hand, regarding convergent validity, the result of EFA provides evidence for its presence. Table 1 indicates the method of Maximum likelihood extraction and Direct Oblimen rotation resulted in five common factors which accounted a total of 58.54% variance explained. The finding ensures convergent validity is succeeded because the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than 50% for all underlying factors (Mackenzie et al., 2011).

Table. 1 Assessment of Reliability and Validity of Items

Factors	Survey Items	λ	Cronbach alpha (α)	AVE
General Trust	Most people are trust worthy	0.898	.747	57.32%
	I am trustful	0.823		
	Most people respond in kind when trusted	0.555		
	Most people are basically good	0.453		
	Most people are basically honesty	0.334		
Provision of Help	My friend Correct my work	0.900	.840	74.17%
	My friend help me to solve problem	0.823		
Level of Closeness between friends	I understand my friend mood	0.807	.774	54.21%
	I and my friend share life experience	0.743		
	I understand my friend background	0.659		
Mutual Acceptance	My friend treat me well	0.869	.740	52.94%
	My relationships with friends are brotherly	0.673		
	My friend and I can overcome difference	0.641		
Perceived feeling of Safety	My friend gives me all information	0.740	.702	50.36%
	My Friend never lies to me	0.711		
	I feel safe with my friends	0.678		
Total Variance Explained				58.54%

Extraction of Underlying Factors: Friendship Quality and Generalized Trust

As reported earlier, the EFA conducted on the response given by Afar pastoral communities yielded five common factors. The first common factor is related to general trust. The rest are grouped under the general umbrella of dimensions of friendship quality. Regarding general trust, out of the four items, two items have very high loading factors (.89 and .82) and one item has a moderate factor loading (.55). Meanwhile, the last two items show relatively low factor loadings (.33 and .45). The finding suggests that participants who scored high on the item most people are basically honest and good tend to score higher values on trustworthiness of people, kindness of people and one’s own trustfulness.

The second common factor is the provision of help. It comprises two survey items on participants’ belief about friends’ interest in solving problems and correcting mistakes of one another. These items loaded highly into the underlying factor with a factor loading of 0.9 and 0.82. The third common factor is closeness measured in terms of three survey items consisting of understanding friend’s mood, recognizing background and sharing life experience. These items loaded into the underlying factor ranging from 0.65 to 0.8.

Therefore, it can be said those participants who have high scores in understanding friendship backgrounds are more likely to share their life experiences and know very well the mood of their friend.

The fourth underlying factor is mutual acceptance. The factor emerges from three survey items with factors loadings of 0.86, 0.67 and 0.64. The factor loadings provides an insight about individuals who have high tendency of forgiving friends are more likely tend to overcome differences, initiate sisterly or brotherly relationships and treat their friends well. The last but not the least, common factor is perceived feeling of safety comprising of factor loadings ranging from .67 to .74. Accordingly, there is plausible evidence to believe that those participants who felt safe with their friends are more likely to view their friends as honest and genuine source of information in times of need.

Dimensions of Friendship Quality as Predictors of social Capital

In order to assess the relationship between friendship quality and social capital, a regression analysis conducted



using dimensions of friendship quality as a predictor variable and generalized trust as an outcome variable. More precisely, dimensions of friendship quality such as the provision of help, closeness, feeling of safety and mutual acceptance were employed in the regression after averaging the opinions of participants' on the survey items that distinctly loaded into each common factor. Along similar lines, general trust score representing the outcome variable was computed by averaging the response of each participant on the four survey items of the generalized trust scale - proxy indicator of social capital. The application of regression analysis indicates very low values of R (0.091) suggesting that only 9.1 % of variation of the social capital could be explained by a corresponding change in the dimensions of friendship quality.

Table. 2 OLS Regression Result: Mean score of Generalized Trust is a Dependent Variable

	Unstandardize d Coefficient	Sig.
Constant	1.487	.000
Provision of Help	.080	.020*
Closeness between Friends	-.003	.948
Mutual Acceptance	.253	.000** *
Perceived Safety	.112	.064
R ²	0.091	

** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$

The regression analysis ensures most of the dimensions of friendship quality tend to positively affect social capital. This is illustrated by the positive effect of positive features of friendship quality on generalized trust. The finding is in harmony with the report of previous studies conducted on the area of friendship quality. For instance, Ladd et al., (1996), Thein et al., (2012) and Berndt (2002) point out the positive effect of dimensions of friendship quality in their respective studies.

More detail to the point, the provision of help which is one dimensions of friendship quality tends to affect social capital significantly and positively ($p < 0.05$). Similar research reports by Krishna (2002) and Degefa (2009) show the contribution of help for enhancing social capital. Traditionally, Afar pastoral communities have a mutual support mechanism known as *Hatota* practiced along clan lines. Evidences also support that close friends help each other in times of need such as drought as the harsh climatic condition compel them to work together expecting some kind of reciprocity in return.

Similarly, the influence of mutual acceptance between friends on social capital is positive and significant ($p < 0.001$). Most participants believed that best friends treat well each other and can overcome differences. In fact, well treatment of people is neither limited to best friends nor close relatives. Afars commonly practiced it even to strange guests. *Ibnayayitino* could be a very good example in this regard. In Afar language, *ibnayayitino* means welcoming a guest. Honoring guest regardless of their background is mandatory in Afar culture. Their customary law is serious about those who disrespect guests.

Meanwhile, the finding reveals closeness of relationship between friends more likely tends to affect social capital negatively. It is learned that as the level of closeness among friends increases, general trust score tends to decrease. In specific terms, for one unit increase in the mean score of closeness, there will be a corresponding decline of general trust by 0.009 units. Perhaps, this is partly because understanding friends' mood and sharing life experiences with friends lead to unintended consequences. Sometimes, close friends may doubt the quality of their friendship as they know more about each other's life experiences and mood. In this respect, the finding seems slightly consistent with the works of Granovetter (1983). Granovetter contended that "strong" interpersonal ties are less important than weak ties in maintaining community cohesion (1983).

V. CONCLUSION

Friendship quality affects the cultivation of social capital. In specific terms, dimensions of friendship quality such as provision of help, mutual acceptance and perceived feeling of safety tend to influence social capital positively. This may stem from the fact that Afar pastoralists of Northeastern Ethiopia have accorded greater values to their long standing traditions of friendly relationships. In fact, the effect of some dimensions of friendship quality may not be always positive as illustrated by closeness of relationships. This shades light on the possibility that very close relationship is not important or even detrimental to the existing social capital. Therefore, close friends should be careful while sharing life experiences, introducing backgrounds and treating one another. Sometimes, misunderstanding between friends may hurt their feelings and result in undesirable consequence of friendship, which may in turn, affect social capital. Generally, dimensions of friendship quality play a prominent role among the people of Afar. To mention few, they are beneficial to access information; receive various supports in times of need and provide emotional support. In so doing, they are believed to enhance the asset of social capital.

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