

# A Social Capital Model of Public Relations

Melissa D. Dodd, Ph.D. (@mellydodd)  
Assistant Professor, Advertising-Public Relations  
Nicholson School of Communication, University of Central Florida  
melissa.dodd@ucf.edu

## Method

1



Synthesis of literature across disciplines in order to propose a comprehensive theory and conceptualization of social capital as a resource- and exchange-based function of public relations that may provide an ontological argument for the discipline.

2



Derived from Lin's (2001) social capital propositions and postulates applied to a public relations context, proposal of the Social Capital Model of Public Relations and 14 initial hypotheses, 1 research question

3



Empirical examination of the Social Capital Model of Public Relations via a quasi-experimental survey approach using a representative sample of Public Relations Society of America members

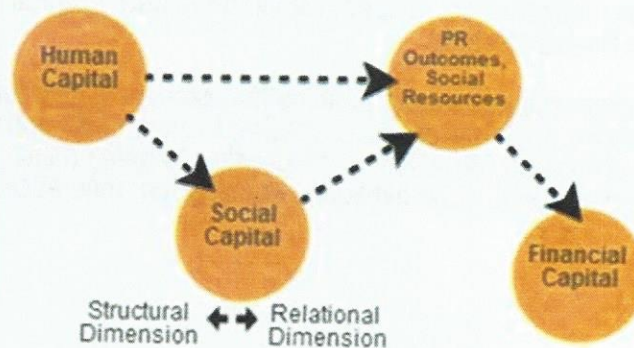
## CONCLUSION:

The Social Capital Model of Public Relations alongside several confirmed hypotheses provide evidence for social capital as a valid theory and concept for the study of public relations.

## Definition & Concept

### OPERATIONAL DEFINITION:

Social capital is facilitated by public relations professionals' knowledge, skills, and competencies (human capital) that impact the interaction of the structure of publics and components of relationships with those publics from which professionals maintain and gain social resources (social capital) to be exchanged for organizational outcomes (financial capital)."





# Major Tenets

Identified as theory that can offer an ontological argument for PR of "what is" (Ihlen, 2009) where a lack of more than one major approach exists (Botan & Hazleton, 2006) or other theories are described as "peripheral" (Ihlen & Verhoeven, 2012)

Suggested as a "meta-theory of PR" such that "the creation and maintenance of organizational social capital can be seen as a foundation for PR and as spanning the boundaries of PR through topics such as stakeholder thinking, CSR, and relationship management" (Luoma-aho, 2009, p. 231)

- Public relations professionals serve as the brokers of socially embedded resources among organizations and their publics (ontology).
- Social resources include intangible assets that result from PR pros' work on behalf of organizations.
- When social resources are exchanged for organizational outcomes (to include tangible, financial capital), they serve as "social capital" for an organization.
- Human capital: PR pros have knowledge, training, and education appropriate for maintaining and gaining social resources on behalf of organizations
- Social capital: interaction of a structural and relational dimension. The structural dimension refers to the structure of a specific public (ex. network ties), and the relational dimension refers to the relationship between the organization and this public (ex. shared sentiment, "homophily"). The result of this interaction is social resources.
- Financial capital: When social resources (ex. a good reputation) are exchanged for outcomes, they serve as social capital (ex. consumer purchases).

## Social Resources

Confidence

Collective Action

Credibility

Goodwill

Identification

Legitimacy

Power

Relationship

Reputation

Trust

## Major Conclusions

Strong theoretical support provided for a social capital theory applied to public relations

Creation of a public relations conceptualization, definition, and assessment of social capital

Support for several of Lin's postulates and propositions and good model fit with revised model retained for parsimony

The indirect effect of social capital on financial capital > the indirect effect of human capital on financial capital

Future research should examine the maintain v. gain functions of the PR pro; specific organizational case studies; further model and measure revision, specification (direction of relationship between human and social capital); social media (literal social networks) examination; theoretical comparison

