



Networks of social capital: Extending a public relations model of civil society in Peru

Erich J. Sommerfeldt*

Department of Communication, University of Maryland-College Park, 2130 Skinner Building, College Park, MD 20742-7635, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 May 2012

Received in revised form 27 July 2012

Accepted 7 August 2012

Keywords:

Public relations

Civil society

Social capital

Peru

Networks

ABSTRACT

Scholars have argued that public relations can and indeed must be used to improve society. This article builds on the work of [Taylor and Doerfel \(2005\)](#), who advocated for the continued study of civil society through the lens of public relations theory. This study contributes to a normative public relations model of civil society by examining how interorganizational relationships, which may initially be established for purposes of resource exchange, benefit civil society through the creation and maintenance of social capital. The study examined a segment of Peruvian civil society dedicated to media development, as media is a key partner in building civil society ([Taylor, 2009](#)). The results of the study help to explain how interorganizational relationships contribute to the creation of social capital in a civil society network, and how certain network positions are integral to maintaining the social capital of a community of actors. Implications for the role of public relations in building and maintaining networks of interorganizational communities are discussed.

© 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The existence of a robust civil society is thought by many scholars to be an essential precondition of a successful democracy (e.g., [Doerfel & Taylor, 2004](#); [Gibson, 2001](#); [Hadenius & Ugglá, 1996](#); [Taylor, 2000](#); [Taylor & Doerfel, 2005, 2011](#)). However, it is the quality of relationships among civil society actors and organizations that may truly demonstrate whether civil society is capable of supporting democracy and what [Heath \(2006\)](#) termed a “fully functioning society.” Given the important role of interorganizational relationships in civil society, [Taylor and Doerfel \(2005\)](#) argued that public relations has much to contribute to civil society research. They suggested, “public relations, as a relationship-building function . . . must be at the center of the civil society process” (p. 122). A civil society requires quality relationships to be effective and to benefit a community of actors from the social capital generated through such relationships ([Sommerfeldt & Taylor, 2011](#); [Taylor, 2009](#); [Taylor & Doerfel, 2011](#)). Assessing the relationships that exist among civil society actors, then, is essential to understanding the efficacy of civil society movements and to how public relations may support civil society.

More work is needed to integrate public relations into civil society theory and practice. The purpose of this study is to further [Taylor and Doerfel's \(2005\)](#) public relations model of civil society in two ways. First, the study examined how relationships facilitate social capital by questioning whether organization–public relationships among civil society actors lead to increased levels of social capital. Second, the study further interrogates the concept of structural holes in social networks ([Burt, 1992a](#)) by examining the extent to which important civil society organizations are bridging structural holes and maintaining quality relationships so that social capital in a civil society network is maximized.

* Tel.: +1 301 405 6528.

E-mail address: esommerf@umd.edu

To explain the importance of relationship quality among civil society actors, the first section of the paper reviews literature on interorganizational relationships in civil society, social capital and civil society networks, and how network composition is related to social capital. The paper then presents the results of network analyses of media development civil society organizations in Peru. In so doing, the study focuses on the role of interorganizational relationships in generating the social capital necessary to maintaining a successful civil society. Last, two propositions are offered to extend a public relations model of civil society.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Understanding civil society as relationships*

Theories of civil society have argued that a robust democracy and fully functioning society require a set of autonomous organizations that work to check the power of the state and build social infrastructure (Gibson, 2001; Taylor, 2009). Succinctly put, civil society can be described as “private and public associations and organizations, all forms of cooperative social relationships that create bonds of trust, public opinion, legal rights and institutions and political parties that voice public opinion and call for action” (Alexander, 1998, p. 3). Civil society may encompass a wide variety of organizations, such as religious groups, professional organizations, universities, unions, media, international donor organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Taylor, 2009).

While the mere existence of civil society organizations is one indication of civil society's ability to effect change, scholars have argued it is the relationships among these actors that are of greater importance to goal achievement. Renshaw (1994) explained that civil society is above all else a relational construct. Renshaw argued that civil society organizations are merely the “bricks” of civil society. Only when civil society actors are joined together can they become a force for development and democratization. Hadenius and Ugglä (1996) understood civil society as groups arranged in collaborative networks aimed at accomplishing common objectives. A successful civil society is thus dependent upon quality relationships among organizations. Civil society is thus both a process and an outcome of communicative relationships.

2.2. *Building a public relations model of civil society*

Civil society research by public relations scholars has indicated that public relations, when it works to build relationships and create shared meaning, empowers the accomplishment of shared goals among civil society partners (Taylor, 2000, 2009; Taylor & Doerfel, 2003). Taylor and Doerfel (2005) elaborated on the relationship management and organization–public relationship (OPR) literature by suggesting that the strength or weakness of a civil society is found within the relationships among civil society partners. In proposing a public relations model of civil society, Taylor and Doerfel argued the success of one organization is largely dependent on the nature of relationships among all civil society partners, and highlighted the relationships among NGOs and donor organizations as particularly crucial. They explained, “relationships between [civil society] partners are needed to fully leverage the potential of each group” and “when the interests of two or more partners converge, then opportunity for those groups to achieve their goals is enhanced” (p. 122). In order to effectively accomplish shared goals, an issue-sector of civil society is dependent on the relationships among its constitutive organizations.

Taylor and Doerfel's (2005) model proposed that *networks* of relationships are the foundation of civil society and should be maintained by the public relations function of organizations. Networks among civil society actors with similar goals must be developed so they may accomplish their work with less physical capital—the money and manpower needed to enact change (Drabek, 1987). In other words, NGOs, and civil society in general, should be engaged in building networks to deal with problems too complex for a single organization to accomplish alone (Brown & Ashman, 1996). A civil society thus requires social capital.

2.3. *Social capital in civil society*

In the last two decades, few theoretical concepts have received more interdisciplinary attention than that of social capital. Social capital is a broad and, at times, vaguely defined concept that has been theorized and applied in different ways and at varying levels of analysis. One perspective considers social capital as lodged in networks of association (cf. Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). According to Putnam (1994), social capital “refers to features of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (p. 163). Social capital has thus become a common theme in civil society research, for as Fukuyama (2001) explained: “an abundant stock of social capital is presumably what produces a dense civil society” (p. 11).

When relationship networks produce benefits for civil society actors such networks are thought to be evidence of social capital (e.g., Taylor & Doerfel, 2011). Indeed, Taylor (2009) defined civil society as “the process of interactions that lead to relationships, build trust and create social capital” (p. 77). Relationships are thus the vehicle for social capital—providing a familiar scholastic milieu in which researchers can examine the role of public relations in civil society.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات