

## Multidimensional Description of Social Capital in Different Contexts: With Regard to Indian and Iranian Female Students

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### Abstract

The core concept of this article i.e. social capital consists of three main components: *scope of social relations, level of social trust, and rate of reciprocity*. The research is accomplished through 600 cases of Indian and Iranian female secondary school students and their parents, in two cities of Chandigarh in India and Tehran in Iran. Findings of the research show that the scope of social relations in India is higher than Iran, while the true level which was measured in the social network in Iran was far higher than India. Even the third aspect i.e. the reciprocity is also higher in Iran than India. Therefore, the social capital measured among the Iranian cases is higher than the Indian students and their families. Likewise, the level of trust estimated among Indian people is higher than the true level of trust present in the social network whereas; an exact opposite situation could be seen in Iran. In other words, the different aspects of social capital do not necessarily have a high co-variation among themselves.

Keywords: Social Capital; Social Relationship; Social Trust; Reciprocity; Female Students; India; Iran.

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## Introduction

Social improvement is the result of increasing social capital in societies. Societies with higher levels of social capital probably have better performance of governmental institutions, faster economic growth, less crime and violence, and higher educational performance. If ways of increasing social capital and educational performance are identified, they will help us perform accurate planning. If a society seeks to achieve the goals of its national development, it should possess a higher rate of human capital which can be achieved through educational performance. The problem lies with the fact that female students encounter with more difficulties than their male folks in case of unsuccessful education hence; female students need more empowering due to their historical suffering. Consequently, the first step to study with respect to the formation of social capital and its causes is the empirical description of such complicated concept and its multidimensional explanation. The results become more useful if the given description is based on data collected from different contexts via comparative study. As a whole, in most part of the world particularly in India and Iran, comparative researches have not focused on female students.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The main purpose of this article that is the

understanding of social capital provided by students' family network relations has an appropriate theoretical background. The primary theoretical approach of this subject is built on reciprocative and trusty social relationships with emphasis on the importance of students' outcomes (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Putnam, 2000), while the social capital as a multidimensional concept has varied definitions. Some of the older definitions of the social capital are reduced to individual manners. For instance, in 1904, Henry James defined social capital as a set of social characteristics possessed by an individual -including charisma, contacts and linguistic skill- that increase the returns to that individual in his/her communication with others. But as we know, the social capital is a network and relational variable and these types of individual characteristics are only independent variables which can affect social capital and we cannot define them. Therefore, there is no conflict between an individual-based view of social capital and a community-based view of social capital. Instead, thinking about the individual social capital is a requirement for thinking about the formation of community social capital. For example, if a person invests in communicating well, clearly he/she is increasing the social capital of both himself/herself and society. If a person invests in learning how to swindle, he/she is probably

increasing his/her own benefit in short-term but decreasing the social capital of society as a whole in the long-term.

The current scholarly interest in social capital can be attributed to the works of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. Each was based on different research areas, but ended with a similar conclusion - social relations are an important resource (Sundar, 2004: 205).

After primary conceptualization of social capital by Bourdieu, the ongoing debates and discussions around social capital were provoked by Putnam's study of regional governments in Italy. In this study, he suggests and gives evidence that the citizen's engagement in community affairs, which he terms social capital, is the explanation behind the 'high quality' democracy in northern Italy. Putnam defines social capital as those attributes of social organizations such as trust, norms and networks that can facilitate collective action for mutual benefit. He argues, on the basis of comparison between north and south Italy, that devolution works best in those regions/countries whose inhabitants have social capital (Swain, 2004: 297; Sundar, 2004: 206).

Based on Coleman and Putnam conceptualizations, social capital is a compound of 'trust', 'networks' and 'shared norms'. (Dekker, 2004: 88, 89). This concept was expanded as an attribute of social structures or a public good by Coleman and he has used the

social capital to explain a variety of outcomes including educational achievement (Coleman, 1988).

According to conceptual discussions, that stated so far, as a concluding argument, the social capital in Coleman and Putnam's words, which contains three main components: 'trust', 'network relations' and 'reciprocity'. Therefore, social capital refers to reciprocal and trusty relationship that can facilitate collective action for mutual benefits. Indeed, it is "give and take policy" based on trust which is behind the concept of social capital.

### **Social Capital in India and Iran**

Frequently social capital is considered as a resource inside social networks based on kinship relationships or on caste and religion by Indian sociologists. They believe that social capital plays an important role to support individuals to solve various problems in day-to-day life. In this definition, the decline of social capital is inability to encounter life problems, poverty, exclusion and powerlessness (Serra, 2004: 279-280). On the other hand, numerous Indian researchers in their studies have focused on relations between social capital as an independent variable and political behaviors and development as dependent variables. For instance, Krishna (2004) has investigated the impact of social capital on developmental performance across 60 villages in the state of Rajasthan.

A locally relevant scale for measuring

social capital in Rajasthan was developed by Krishna and Uphoff (1999). It is based on assessing participation in informal networks. In their studies, they considered the types of activities with which people of this area are commonly engaged. It should be mentioned that not all activities observed in this area are valid for investigating dimensions of cooperation and coordination. They believe that social capital exists 'in the relations among persons' and only those actions are valid for comparing social capital that inhabitants of this area regard appropriate to carry out collectively rather than individually (Krishna, 2004: 216-218).

In another study, Renata Serra examines the possibility of Putnam's argument in the context of Indian states, by discussing data available there, constructing new indicators, and attempting some preliminary statistical analysis of relationship between social capital and state performance (Serra, 2004: 259).

Renata Serra has asserted that her essay aimed to contribute to current debates on social capital by examining the applicability to the Indian context of a definition, used in Putnam (1993). Lots of qualitative evidence exists in India where dimensions such as the level of trust and norms of cooperation crucially depend on social well-being and on the effectiveness of government actions. Serra believes that no study has been done to assess

the role of measurable aspects of social capital in terms of the observed differential performances across India (Serra, 2004: 290).

Dhesi (2000a) has examined the processes of social capital formation, impact of changes in macro-structure on social capital and its role in development in a northern Indian village community. Also, a few of Indian researchers have studied the relations between social capital and educational achievement such as Dhesi (2000b). As stated, his study among secondary/pre-university students in northern India, confirms consistent findings of earlier studies in developed countries that social capital in the family, community and school is associated with achievement.

Review of related literature in Iran illustrates that Iranian researchers generally regard social capital in the frame of social networks as theories such as Colman's and Putnam's. As Firozabadi (2006) on the basis of meta-analysis states, the theoretical explanation of social capital in Iran can be under the shadow of religious commitment, direct and positive correlation with social capital in mental dimensions, and formal and informal kinds of participation. Education is also one of the effective factors of social capital; it is the second most important positive effective factor of social capital. The relation of education with conceptual components of social capital has direct

meaningful correlation apart from informal participation that has inverse correlation with others conceptual components of social capital such as general trust, awareness and formal cooperation. Formal cooperating of a member of a family has positive and meaningful relation with social capital; apart from trust organization, it has meaningful and direct relation with other conceptual components of social capital. The middle-aged with an average 51 years of age have more social capital in contrast to youth with an average 25 years of age. This subject, apart from having any relation with awareness, formal cooperating has positive meaningful relation with other components of social capital. Non-immigrants have more social capital in comparison with immigrants and among conceptual social components apart from general trust; there are meaningful relations with institutional trust, awareness, formal participation, and informal religious cooperation of non-immigrants is more than immigrants and the amount of informal charity cooperation among immigrants is more than non-immigrants.

Iranian men have more social capital than women but there is no meaningful difference between women & men with regard to levels of general trust, institutional trust, and informal participation. In spite of that, the rate of awareness, and formal participation of men

meaningfully are more than women. General belief in religion which is weaker than religious commitment has positive effect on social capital and it doesn't have meaningful relation with public trust, awareness and formal cooperating; while it has positive meaningful relation with other components of social capital in terms of institutional trust, informal charity participation, religion and cooperating.

### Methodology

More than one strategy has been used in this study to achieve the best result therefore the applied method of the study is Mixed method. The main strategy of the project is survey since it is useful and customary in sociological researches. Along with the survey, qualitative strategies such as interview and documentary study have been used to reach to deeper understanding of the problem.

In order to measure social capital, structured interview questions and questionnaire have been used. The structured interview questions and as well as questionnaire based on the operational definitions of variables, specifically measurable and objective indicators have been designed.

The present research focuses more on the social capital conceptualizing of Coleman and Putnam. Social capital has been processed by operational definition based on mixed

theoretical framework, therefore; measured independently both with the conceptualization of Coleman and Putnam. At the same time, the main elements of the synthesized definition have operationally defined and finally measured.

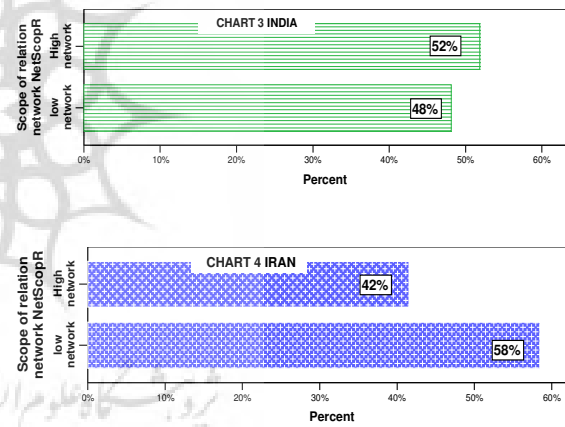
For the purpose of valid measuring of the social capital, two recently built techniques<sup>1</sup> are applied as instruments. These techniques called *position generator* and *resource generator* which were used in the 1999-2000 Dutch Social Survey on the Networks (Flap Henk, et al, 2003).

The sample of the research was chosen in accordance to the table of Krejcie and Morgn (1970) for determining the needed size of randomly chosen samples. The sample consists of female secondary school students from Chandigarh and Tehran. Through multistage systematic random sampling procedure, these samples were chosen from both private and government schools students.

**Results**

1. In the 1999-2000 Social Survey on the Networks of the Dutch (SSND), three social capital measurement instruments were included: *name generator / interpreter*, *position generator*, and *resource generator*. Although, all these instruments focus on the resource collections in social networks - they differ in the way these resources are approached, and in the way they retrieve this information from respondents (Flap, et al., 2003).

Based on conceptual discussions, social capital was studied within three main components: i) *Scope of social relation network*, ii) *trust*, and iii) *reciprocity*. Descriptive findings show that these three dimensions are not equal in Iran and India. Chart 3 and 4 point out that the Indian students have larger social relations network than the Iranian students. As Chart 3 shows 52 percent of Indian students and their families have high scope of relation network, on the contrary, Iranians have 42 percent high scope of network.



On the other hand, as it is shown in Chart 4, 58 percent of Iranian students and their families have low scope of relation network. At the same time, just 48 percents of Indian cases belong to the low network relation group.

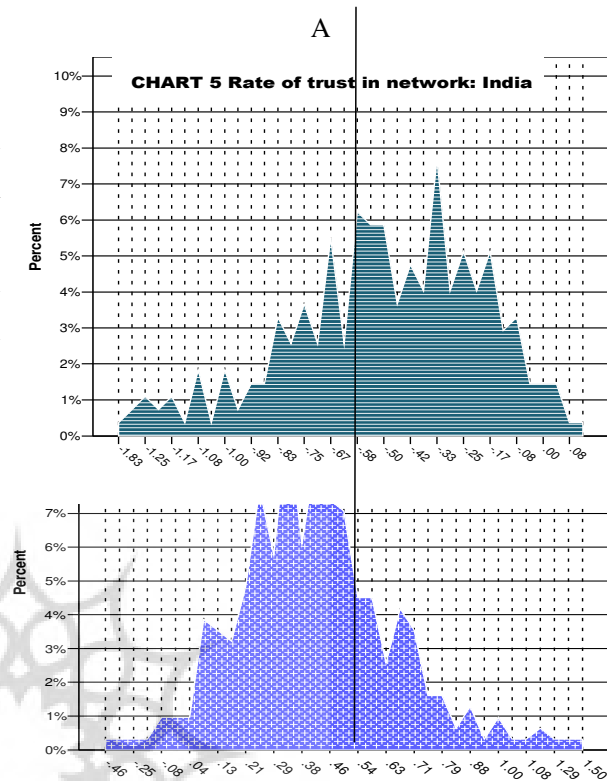
Chart 5 depicts the amount of actual trust present in the social relation network in India and Chart 6 shows the actual trust present in

the studied Iranian cases. For more explanation,

regarding the inter-network actual trust present amongst the surveyed people of both the countries, it is necessary to mention the conditions of evaluation of trust. Trust among people was evaluated through differential scale item on which the answers were registered from -2 to +2. These scales which were drawn in the form of semantic differential scale item, used to evaluate the scale of trust or mistrust amongst

the people, as compared to those people whom they knew, in the form of two opposite poles. Thus, every time the amplitude of answer amongst the surveyed people moved towards +2, it showed their mistrust towards the person whom they knew in the network. With these explanations, in a second glance on charts 5 and 6, it can be seen that the vertical line A is showing the situation where the people did not have a clear positive or negative opinion, regarding the scale of trust in respect to the mentioned people in the social network.

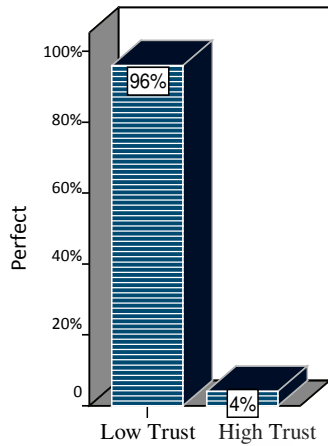
Based on the conceptualization of social capital of this article, we can see that the factors like scope of social relation network, level of trust in the network, and the reciprocity rate in the network, are like triple components me together spectrum, which in turn shows the presence of trust or a high level of trust in the social



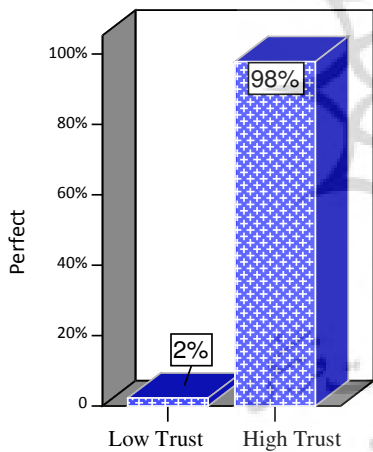
network.

To explain as why trust is so low amongst the Indian cases and so high in their Iranian counterparts, requires a detailed separate research. However, with the aim of explaining the level of social capitals in both the countries; based on these evidences, it can be said that a contradictory situation is seen in both the countries. Hence, at least, this conclusion can be reached while evaluating only one of the factors of social capital; one cannot easily claim that social capitals were evaluated completely in the studied society. Charts 7 and 8 show the variables of actual trust amongst the studied Indian and Iranian subjects, at two different levels of low and high trust scale, respectively. These charts shed more light on the situations

explained earlier.



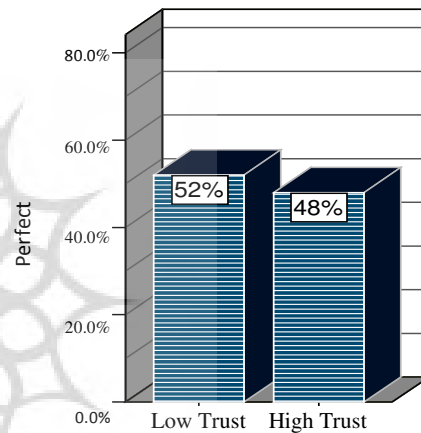
**Chart 7 Rate of trust in network (Binominal)- INDIA**



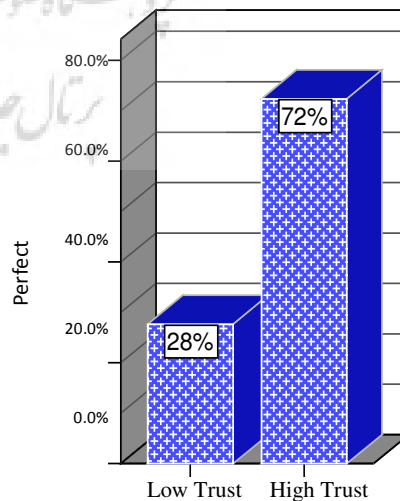
**Chart 7 Rate of trust in network (Binominal)- IRAN**

The next variable is the rate of reciprocity in social relation network, which is considered as the third factor amongst social capitals in this research. Charts 9 and 10 show the levels of scale of reciprocity amongst Indian and Iranian examples at two different levels of low and high reciprocity. Even, if this variable is not much different in both the countries as it was at

the level of trust, with a glance on Charts 9 and 10, it becomes clear that the high reciprocity in Iran and India is 72 and 48 percent whereas low reciprocity in both cases is 29 and 52 percent, respectively. In other words, the level of reciprocity in the social relation network in Iran is higher than India. As we can see, with respect to reciprocity, both Iran and India have a different situation than the scope of relations.



**Chart 7 Rate of trust in network (Binominal)- INDIA**



**Chart 7 Rate of trust in network (Binominal)- IRAN**



Based on network relations with a blend of trust and reciprocity, it can be claimed that from the three above-mentioned factors, the Indian participants had higher position in the scope of relations; on contrary, the level of trust and the reciprocity was low amongst them. Keeping in mind the description of the three factors of social capitals, it can be said that the social capital in Iran is higher than India. But, it seems that if the area of the studied cities (Chandigarh and Tehran) would have been proportionate to each other, presumably the scope of relations may have been similar to each other; as the smaller area of Chandigarh could have been one of the reasons for the higher social relations.

Besides the true level of trust that was mentioned earlier the assessment of general level level of trust in society is also one of the factors that was used by various scholars, for the evaluation of social capitals (See Putman, 2000; Healy, 2003). Charts 11 and 12 show the trust rate in society that estimated by the respondents. This type of trust results from the attitude of respondents about level of trust in the society and it can be different from true rate of trust. Estimated trust was evaluated by five partial items from the scale of very less to very high. With the comparison of the charts it can be understood that Indians have assessed the level of trust in their society, much higher than their Iranian counterparts, i.e. the chart related to India is more inclined towards higher

level of trust than the chart related to Iran.

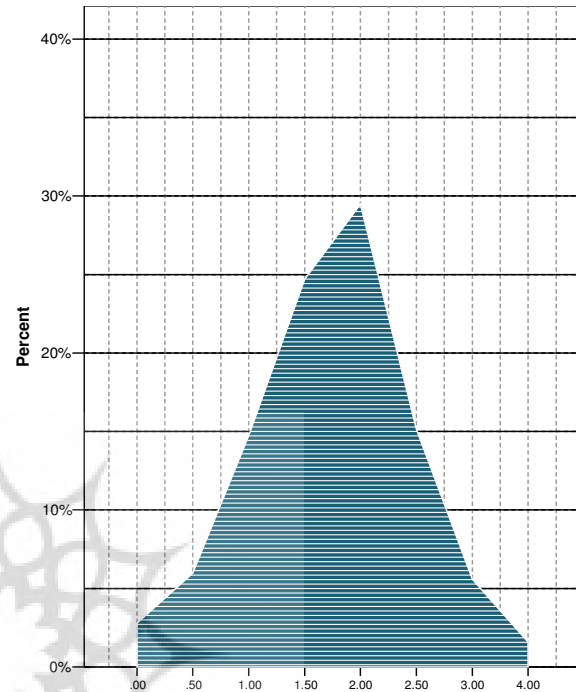


CHART 11 Estlm ate of trust rate in society

INDIA

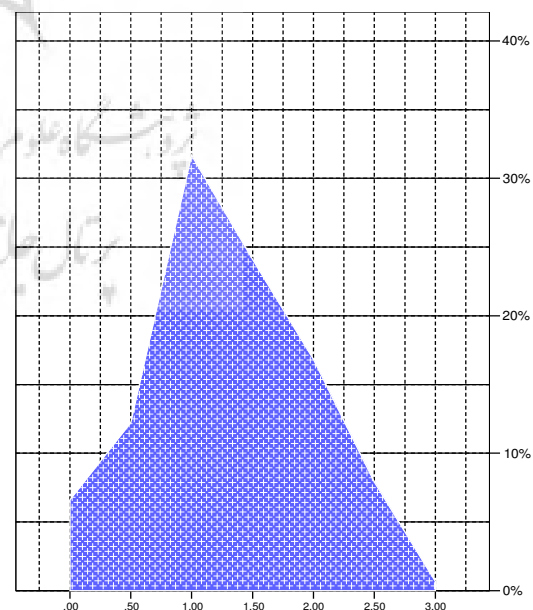


CHART 11 Estlm ate of trust rate in society

IRAN

The same fact can be seen more clearly in Charts 13 and 14. In the aforementioned charts, participants were divided into two groups, i.e. those who believe in the presence of low level of trust in the society; and those who believe that the level of trust is higher. As can be seen, only 25 percent of Iranians have estimated the level of trust in their society, to be on a higher end, while the same figure for Indians is 52 percent.

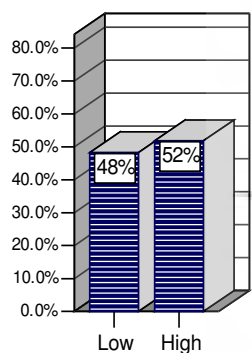


CHART 13 Estimated Trust in 2 Classes  
India

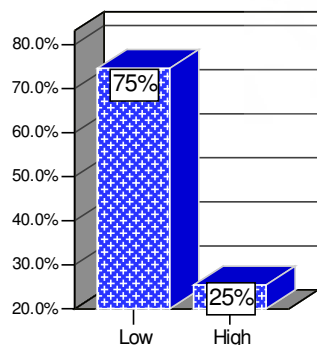


CHART 14 Estimated Trust in 2 Classes  
Iran

Based on findings, it can be claimed that the assessment of the level of trust in the society is not always congruous to the true level of trust. It was seen earlier that the true level of trust in the relation network of Iranian people was pretty higher than their Indian counterparts.

Based on the studies, it can be said that there is a difference between the estimated trust among the people and the actual evaluated trust present among them. In other words, it was hypothesized in this thesis that the overall evaluated trust -as evaluated by the people in a society- which can be evaluated and assessed by phrases like “most people can be trusted”; is pretty different than the level of trust for people in a social relation network, who are very well-known. The second type of trust which was named as actual trust present in a social network in this article was evaluated by using the revised position generator technique. The results of this research show that there is a difference between the two mentioned types of trusts. The same differences are supported in the latest researches in various other societies also (Sturgis & Smith, 2010).

### Conclusion

According to the debates, which drawn so far in the conceptual and theoretical framework of the article, social capitals was divided into 1) scope of network relations 2) level of trust inside a network 3) level of reciprocity inside a network.

The findings demonstrate that Indian students and their families have a wide-range of relations as compared to Iranian students. It seems that the small size of city and the closeness of residences of people in Chandigarh alongside all other variables are the reasons of increasing social networking in the Indian cases.

But the second aspect which is based on the quality of relations shows the true level of trust in the relation network. From this point of view, Iranians had a much higher level of trust in people they knew, while the level of trust of Indians was very low for the people whom they knew in relation network. In other words, unlike Iranian networks, a kind of absence of trust can be seen in the relation network of Indians. The findings related to the third aspect of social capital shows that the level of reciprocity among the studied Iranian subjects is much higher than their Indian counterparts.

Summarizing the findings; this discussion put forward that various aspects of social capitals do not necessarily have a high co-variation in various societies. In other words, it is possible that one of the aspects of social capital could be high in a society and the rest of the aspects may not have developed to that same level. There could be various reasons for this condition, which needs a separate detailed study. Keeping in mind the higher level of trust and reciprocity among the Iranian examples, it

can be claimed that on the whole the Iranian examples have a higher level of social capitals compared to the studied Indian examples. Likewise, if we consider the level of scope of relations as a kind of indicator for a weak social network and consider the level of trust and reciprocity as an indicator for a strong social network; the results explain that social network with weak ties is higher in India than Iran. In contrast, social network with much more strong ties is seen in Iran more than India.

Another finding that was pointed in this article is the difference between the true level of trust and the assessed level of trust. As shown, even with the presence of a higher true level of trust evaluated in the social network in Iran, the Iranian subjects estimated the level of trust in their social network to be much lower. And, the exact opposite situation can be seen on the Indian side of the study, i.e. the studied Indian subjects estimated the level of trust to be much higher than the actual amount of trust present in the society. This finding shows that there is no congruence between the true level of trust present in the social network and the level of trust estimated by the people of the society. Hence, based on the findings, the level of trust in a society cannot be exactly evaluated nor the assessment and evaluation of trust by the people of the society can be considered as a moderate scale for the evaluating the presence of a higher or a lower amount of social capital in a society.

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## توصیف چند بعدی از سرمایه اجتماعی دانش‌آموزان هندی و ایرانی

حسین دهقان<sup>۱</sup>

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۰/۷/۱۸

تاریخ پذیرش: ۸۹/۶/۱۶

سرمایه اجتماعی به تفکیک ابعاد سه‌گانه آن یعنی، گستره روابط اجتماعی، میزان اعتماد اجتماعی و میزان معامله به‌مثل، با ۶۰۰ نمونه از دانش‌آموزان و والدین آن‌ها در دو شهر چنددیگر در هند و تهران در ایران مطالعه شد. نتایج نشان می‌دهد که گستره روابط اجتماعی در هند بالاتر از ایران است، در حالی که میزان اعتماد واقعی سنجیده شده در شبکه اجتماعی ایران بسیار بالاتر از هند می‌باشد. سومین بعد یعنی میزان معامله به‌مثل نیز در ایران بالاتر از هند است و بدین ترتیب، سرمایه اجتماعی در نمونه‌های مطالعه شده ایرانی بالاتر از هند می‌باشد. همچنین میزان اعتماد اجتماعی تخمین زده شده به وسیله افراد در هند بالاتر از میزان اعتماد واقعی موجود در شبکه است و عکس این حالت نیز در ایران دیده می‌شود. به عبارت دیگر ابعاد مختلف سرمایه اجتماعی، الزاما با یکدیگر هم‌تغییری بالایی ندارند.

**واژگان کلیدی:** سرمایه اجتماعی، روابط اجتماعی، اعتماد اجتماعی، معامله، دانش‌آموزان، هند، ایران.

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۱. رئیس انجمن علوم اجتماعی ایران