The Role of Team Identification in Creating Universities' Social Capital

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ABSTRACT: Present research aims to study the role played by team identification in development of social capital of college students. In present applied descriptive-survey research, physical education students from higher education institutions of Qazvin Province including public universities, Islamic Azad University, Medical University and non-for-profit universities were considered as statistical population among them 150 students were chosen for study using random sampling. They voluntarily completed questionnaires of team identity (Shojaei, 2010) and social capital (Moqimi, 2010). It should be noted that reliability of these questionnaires was validated using internal consistency (0.90) and Cronbach's Alpha (0.95). In order to analyze research data, inferential statistical techniques including confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were used. Results of research showed that team identity of students had a positive significant effect on development of trust, common normative network, mutual cooperation, mutual cohesion, mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy and collective identity as components of social capital. Also findings showed that students' team identification contributed to generation of social capital in universities and this overall effect was stronger than that of all sub-scales of social capital. Overall, research findings showed that individuals may help in improvement of social capital in their workplace\college by direct participation in sport teams i.e. membership in them or indirect participation i.e. becoming team fans.

Keywords: team identification, social capital, university.

INTRODUCTION

In traditional views of management, development of economic, physical and human capital played the most important role. But in present time, social capital is of more importance for development than economic, physical and human ones. Also generation of social capital now is considered as one of the most significant factors in enhancement of cultural power of universities for cultivation of intellectual abilities of students. In this competitive environment, higher education institutions seek ways to create even more social capital in their own entities. Social capital being defined as a set of mutual relationships and trust among community members is considered as a central basis of development. With respect to definition of social capital it can be concluded that social activities increasing social relationships e.g. direct and indirect participation in sport teams are able to generate social capital. One of the functions of indirect participation in sport and one of the factors influencing becoming sport fan is team identification which according to previous studies, have also many social benefits including perceived life quality, sense of community and trust in others (Clopton and Finch, 2010).

Previous research has shown that the more the identification of people with a group, the more their willingness to introduce themselves as a member of that group would be (Colman, 1961); also in this situation they have a higher level of personal identification with and emotional participation in that group (Underwood et al., 2001) and also display more support behaviors with respect to it (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998). Several researchers have considered team identity as personal commitment to and individual emotional participation in a sport organization including psychological and behavioral aspects (Branscombe and Wann, 1991; Sutton et al., 1997 and Fisher,

1998). As said earlier, indirect participation in sport can also be influenced by team identification and when sport spectators tie their identity with sport team, sport fanship emerges. Similar to other major social identities, fanship refers to dependence upon a sport concept in which a major emotional value and importance is attributed to group membership (Hirt et al., 1992). Thus sport fans do not see themselves only as spectators of sport games but see themselves as participants which cannot separate it (Noll, 1976). Previous studies considered a distinction between fans and spectators. Sport fans are interested people who follow sport events, team issues and their favorite athletes (Wann et al., 2001). Fans tend to show a steady level of identification in every season; thus in this case individual's identification with its sport team should be stable and continuous. Though role played by team fans is a crucial component of individual identity for fans with high team identity, this issue is not of much importance for fans with low team identity (Noll, 1976). Since fans with high team identification often see their favorite team as a reflection of themselves, their behavioral, cognitive and emotional reactions are completely different from those of fans with low identity.

Various factors influence team identity and its level. Such factors as group experience, background and traditions, sport atmosphere, customs (underwood et al., 2001), team characteristics, organizational characteristics, affiliation and kinship characteristics and characteristics of related activity, sector or task (Sutton et al., 1997, Bhattacharya et al., 1995) influence the extent of team identity of players and fans. On the other hand level of team identification influence various psychological and social variables in sport environment and as previously said one of these variables is social capital. Putnam who is among the first researchers in the field of social capital acknowledges that sport serves as a group activity with potential of generating social capital as informal social ties and also it serves as a framework for creation or enhancement of social networks of relationships in the form of a group work (Clopton and Finch, 2010). Thus social activities such as direct participation in sports (as an athlete) and indirect participation in sports (as a fan and spectator) increasing social relationship capability, are able to crate social capital (Atherly 2006; Tonts, 2005); also team identification as a mediator variable can influence the level of acquiring social capital. Putnam, (2000) had already asserted that team identification played a facilitating role relating to effect of active and passive sport participation on social capital (Clopton and Finch, 2010). In the same respect Clopton and Finch, (2010) in their research on sport teams showed that team identification influenced the level of students' perception of social capital in such a way that it increased with team identification. In various studies, relationships were found between students' social capital and social aspects of self-identity (Vahida et al, 2004), identity and social capital at community level (Khodaei and Mobaraki 2009) and collective identity and social capital (Hezar Jaribi et al., 2011). Also Green and Weinberg, (2001) and Antshel, (1995) found a relationship between collective identity in sport teams and level of social support. Clopton and Finch, (2010) found a positive and significant relationship between team identity and social capital and its components including trust among people. Also in various studies, relationships were found between identity of athletes participating in sport teams and commitment and sense of community (Williams, 2007), athlete identity and motivation and empathy of people (Bysden et al., 1997) and finally levels of team identity, collective identity and social identity (Shapiro, 2001).

On one hand generation of social capital in universities is considered as one of the most important factors influencing increase in cultural power of universities and cultivating intellectual abilities of students and in this competitive environment higher education institutions seek to generate even more social capitals for themselves. On the other hand it has long been known that athlete sport competitions among universities are of benefits for participating universities and major successes in sport events have been associated with application level and number of graduates (Lovaglia and Lucas, 2005) and also with sense of community (Clopton, 2008). Thus it seems that social capital is of special importance among students because of having social and psychological components. Social capital and social networks are among environmental factors determining level of health and cohesion of the society. This is mostly because of the fact that social activities and functions demand more physical activities than isolated ones (Merlo et al., 2003). Sport competition among universities have long been associated with benefits for universities and colleges supporting them. In addition to great literature on the effect of sport events on monetary rewards, major successes in sport competition between universities have been associated with such outcomes as academic prestige and credibility of university management and students, number of applications for admission, rate of graduation and willingness and attitude of society towards study in a certain university. Indeed there is a positive relationship between attending sport events in universities and attitude of society towards universities' atmosphere. Thus with respect to definition of social capital and social benefits of team identification and importance of building social capital in universities as one of the appropriate environments for preparing efficient human capital for community and business, focus on team identification in academic sport can be effective in building social capital in universities. Present research addresses generation of social capital in universities in a conceptual framework as creation of identity through university sport teams and athletic competition between universities. It should be noted that the above issue has drawn little attention from researches

in addition to the fact that university sports can have great effects on attitude of society towards a certain university (Clopton, 2007). According to our knowledge there are no previous studies relating university sports and social capital. Thus in present study it is tried to study the relationship between team identification and social capital based on structural equation modeling framework in academic society.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

Present research is an applied one with respect to its purpose and is a correlational-descriptive one with respect to data collection and employs a path analysis. Also since the study of relationships between variables is done as predicting changes in a variable i.e. social capital, with respect to changes in independent variable i.e. team identification, thus present research exploited a regressive approach. Statistical population of present research consisted of physical education students of higher education institutions of Qazvin Province including public universities, Islamic Azad university, Medical University and non-for profit universities. Sample of present study consisted of 150 students of higher education institutions of Qazvin Province including public universities, Islamic Azad university, Medical University and non-for profit universities. In present research three questionnaires were used. Questionnaire of Demographic characteristics included demographic information of respondents including gender, age, university campus and number of study years in the university. Questionnaire of team identification included 34 items based on Likert 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. This questionnaire was developed by Shojaei, (2010). Also instrument for measuring social capital consisted of 31 items standard by Moqimi, (2010) and included sub-scales of trust, common normative network, mutual cooperation, mutual cohesion, mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy and collective identity. Finally internal consistency of social capital questionnaire was 0.95 and it was 0.90 for team identification questionnaire calculated using Cronbach's Alpha.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In order to verify that social capital relates to six factors (trust, common normative network, mutual cooperation, mutual cohesion, mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy and collective identity), second-order factor analysis was used and with respect to Figure1 it can be said that all obtained coefficients were significant because all of them were above significance level of 1.96. Since RMSEA was less that 0.1 and ratio of Chi Square to its degrees of freedom was less than 3, therefore high fitness of model is confirmed.
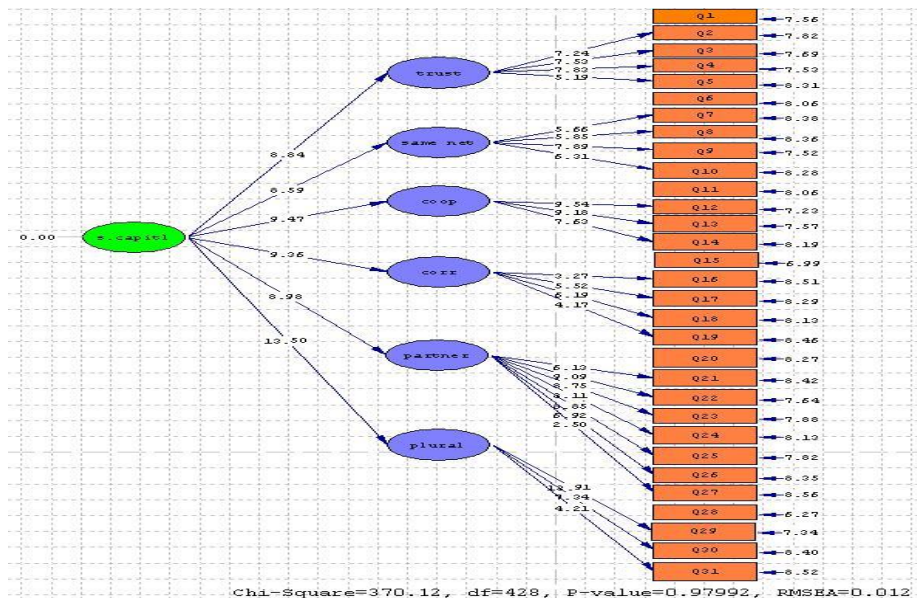

Figure 1. Second order factor analysis model for variable of social capital

Study of the Relationship between Research Variables and Test of Hypothesis

In this section hypotheses of the study are studied using path analysis technique and the reason for using this method is the number of items of team identification variable, lack of factorization and type of research hypotheses. One of the differences between this method and structural equation analysis in Lisrel software is lack of elliptical latent variables. After expression of model and collecting data, model estimation starts with a set of known relationships between measured variables. Path analytic model is a logical extension of multiple regressive models. Though path analysis also includes models with multiple observed variables but with respect to sample size, it is possible to use any number of dependent and independent variables and equations (for path analysis graphs in Lisrel software it is possible to use any number of dependent and independent variables provided that sample size is at least 10 times of the number of latent variables). In output graph, significance of all coefficients and parameters of model are tested. A coefficient is significant when significance level is higher than 1.96 or less than -1.96. Results of path analytic model and significance of path coefficients are provided in Figure2. Since RMSEA is less than 0.1 and ratio of Chi square to its degree of freedom is less than 3, high fitness of model is confirmed.
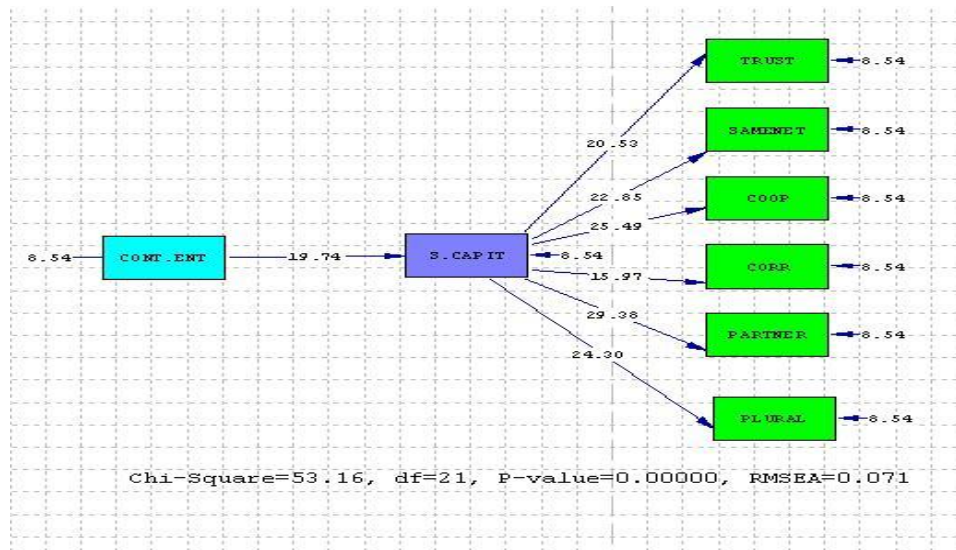

Figure 2. Path analysis of research model

As seen in the above graph, with respect to sample size (n=150) and number of not-factorized or not-purified items of team identification variable (34 items) and given the fact that sample size is 10 times of the number of items, it is impossible for team identification items to emerge as separate latent variables and thus only team identification appeared in the model. Also it was impossible for items of social capital items to emerge as separate latent variables together with their specified factors. Also because of path analysis very nature, both variables of social capital and team identification emerge in rectangular form as is the case with all latent variables. Also high values of beta coefficients is noticeable in the results which means high influence of and major role played by team identification with respect to social capital and all its constituent factors. In the following tables are provided so that relationships and coefficients of model parameters are better shown.

Table 1. Calculation of direct and indirect and total effects of dependent and independent variables

Independent variable (from)	Dependent variable (to)	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effe3ct
	Social capital	0.85	-------------	0.85
Student	trust	-------------	0.731	0.731
Team identification	Creation of common normative networks	-------------	0.748	0.748
	Development of mutual cooperation	-------------	0.765	0.765
	Development of mutual cohesion	-------------	0.68	0.68
	mutual respect and understanding, Empathy, voluntary participation and synergy	-------------	0.782	0.782
	Collective identity	-------------	0.765	0.765

According to Table1, among studied variables social capital is of highest effect (0.85) on student team identification variable followed by mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy (0.782).

Table2. Results of standard coefficients and significance values (supporting or rejecting hypotheses)

Independent variable (from)	Dependent variable (to)	Standard coefficient	Significance level (t-values)	Hypothesis support or rejection
	Social capital	0.85	19.74	supported
Student	trust	0.731	Indirect effect	supported
Team identification	Creation of common normative networks	0.748	Indirect effect	supported
	Development of mutual cooperation	0.765	Indirect effect	supported
	Development of mutual cohesion	0.68	Indirect effect	supported
	mutual respect and understanding, Empathy, voluntary participation and synergy	0.782	Indirect effect	supported
	Collective identity	0.765	Indirect effect	supported

Since data required for support or rejection of hypotheses are provided in Table1 and clearly shown in Table2 according to Lisrel graph, thus each hypotheses is explained referring to Table2. With respect to influence of student team identification on building social capital in universities, it is seen that standard coefficients are at required significance level (more than 1.96) suggesting significant effect of student team identification on social capital in universities. With respect to effect of student team identification on trust as one component of social capital in universities, standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.731. Since coefficient between these two variables is more than 0.3, thus the relationship is significant. It means that team identification contributes to trust as one component of social capital. With respect to effect of team identification of students on creation of common normative networks as one component of social capital, standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.748. Since coefficient between these two variables is more than 0.3, thus the relationship is significant. It means that team identification contributes to creating common normative networks as one component of social capital. With respect to effect of team identification of students on development of mutual cooperation as one component of social capital, standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.765. Since coefficient between these two variables is more than 0.3, thus the relationship is significant. It means that team identification contributes to development of mutual cooperation as one component of social capital. With respect to effect of team identification of students on development of mutual cohesion as one component of social capital, standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.68 as seen in Tables 1 and 2 and coefficient between these two variables is more than 0.3, thus the relationship is significant. It means that team identification contributes to development of mutual cohesion as one component of social capital. With respect to effect of team identification of students on mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy as one component of social capital, standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.782 and coefficient between these two variables is more than 0.3, thus the relationship is significant. It means that team identification contributes to development of mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy. Finally with respect to effect of team identification of students on development of collective identity as one component of social capital, standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.765 and coefficient between these two variables is more than 0.3, thus the relationship is significant. It means that team identification contributes to development of collective identity.

Results of Goodness of Fitness of Path Analytic Model
Goodness of fitness demonstrates if theoretical model is of statistical significant from theoretical and practical views. Indices and values obtained with respect to path analytic model are compared in Table3.

Table3. Model fitness criteria

Fitness index	Acceptance criteria	Research model statistic
(Chi square) χ^2	$\chi^2/df \leq 3$	2.53
RMSEA[1]	RMSEA<0.08	0.071
NFI[2]	NFI>0.90	0.93
CFI[3]	CFI>0.95	0.96
GFI[4]	GFI>0.90	0.92
AGFI[5]	AGFI>0.85	0.87

As seen from Table3, with respect to mentioned indices, path analytic model of present research is of a good fitness. According to results of inferential statistics, main hypothesis and all secondary hypotheses of present research were supported i.e. student team identification with respect to university sport teams contributes to social capital and all of its components (trust, common normative networks, mutual cooperation, mutual cohesion, mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy and collective identity). Also path analytic model developed for present research shown in Figures 1 and 2 is of a high fitness given the information provided below the graphs (RMSEA is less than 0.1 and ratio of Chi square to degrees of freedom is less than 3) and values for fitness indices NFI, CFI, GFI and AGFI as shown in Table3.

Discussion

Results of analysis of research findings showed that students' team identification had effect on generation of social capital in universities and this effect was stronger than that of all social capital sub-scales. Putnam, (2000) was one of the earliest works in the field of social capital and states that sport as a group activity has the potential of generating social capital in the form of informal social ties and actions in a work group framework and it seems that team identification plays a major role in facilitating this process. In the same respect, Clopton and Finch, (2010) studied university sport teams and showed that team identification influenced students' perception of social capital in such a way that social capital increased with team identification which this finding also is consistent with results of present research. Of course in research conducted in outside of sport field, Vahida et al, (2004) reported a significant, positive and relatively weak relationship between students' social capital and social aspects of their own identity (r=0.19). Also Khodaei and Mobaraki, (1999) and Hezar Jaribi et al, (2011) showed that in general there was a significant and direct relationship between collective identity and social capital. As previously seen, research conducted in outside of sport field, consistent with results of the present research, showed a significant and positive relationship between various dimensions of social capital and identity but it seems that in present research sport and participation of students in sport teams may serve as a catalyst or facilitator and moderate the extent of influence of team identification on social capital and strengthen this relationship.

Findings of present research showed that students' team identification influenced development of common normative network as a component of social capital i.e. with engaging of students in sport activities in the form of participation in sport teams of their university, their social capital increases through generation of normative networks and this fact demonstrates the importance of this aspect of social capital being directly and indirectly affected by sport activities and internal evolutions of teams finally leading to improvement of team identification. In the same respect in one of few studies in this field but in non-sport settings, Qader Zadeh, (2011) reported that collective identity of people in the society influences the extent of their common norms as one of the components of social capital. Thus according to results from present research and also with respect to theoretical bases of this field of research, and given the fact that relationship between team identification and social capital is already confirmed, it seems that active participation of students in sport teams as players or fans leads to generation of common normative network for them.

Also analysis of findings showed that students' team identification contributed to mutual cooperation as a component of social capital. It means that with participation of students in sport teams as players or fans their social capital increased by development of mutual cooperation between them. In similar studies Green and Weinberg, (2001) and Antshel, (1995) in their research on sport teams reported that increase in collective identity in sport teams led to increase in various types of supports particularly social one and made people more supportive, responsible and cooperative towards each other and this fact highlighted in the case of dealing with problems. It is obvious that with enhancement of cooperation, support and responsibility, sense of trust improves among people. Consistent with this finding, results from present research showed that team identification of students influenced trust building as one component of social capital. Also Clopton and Finch, (2010) reported a positive significant relationship between team identification and social capital and its components including trust and their finding is consistent with that of present research. When people identify with their teams their sense of trust improves because of similarities and intimation between them and other team members and this makes them pleasant with respect to participation in the team.

Results of present research showed that students' team identification contributes to development of mutual cohesion as one component of social capital. Thus it suggests that team identification being generated by students through direct or indirect participation in sport teams leads to their cohesion and finally increased social capital. In the same respect and consistent with results of present study, in a non-sport research Fokuhi and Parsa Pazhouh, (2002) reported that collective identity among people in the society and in their neighborhoods led to increased

cohesion between them and in turn improved social capital. In similar studies, Rouhani et al, (2012), Horton and Mac, (2000) and Williams, (2007) investigated student sport and reported that team identity of athletes participating in sport teams increased commitment and cohesion among players. Also consistent with results of present research, Clopton and Finch, (2010) reported a positive significant relationship between social capital and its components including mutual cohesion. Thus according to all above interpretations it seems that direct and indirect participation in sport activities finally may lead to increased cohesion between people and in turn improves social capital and relationship between team members.

Research findings showed that team identification of students contributed to development of mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy. Consistent with this finding, previous study already showed that team identification had a positive significant relationship with cooperation, support and collaboration between people. Green and Weinberg, (2001) and Antshel, (1995) reported that with increase in collective identity among student sport team members, the extent of assistance and support particularly social one improved and led people to be more responsible, supportive and cooperative towards each other. Also Clopton and Finch, (2010) reported a positive significant relationship between team identification and social capital and its components including development of mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy. Also Baysden et al, (1997) reported that athletes' identity led to improved motivation and empathy in them. Thus with respect to above interpretations it seems that direct and indirect participation of people in sport activities along with improved team identification lead to increased mutual respect and understanding, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy and in this way indirectly influences social capital of people and contributes to it.

Finally analysis of research findings showed that students' team identification contributed to development of collective identity as a component of social capital and collective identity of students participating in sport teams in direct and indirect ways improves with increase in team identification. These students find similar characteristics between themselves and their favorite teams, identify with it and participate in activities of their sport teams; thus they obtain higher collective identity besides increase in their trust, cooperation, empathy, and cohesion. All of the above finally lead to their increased social capital. In a study on work and management teams Shapiro, (2001) showed that there was a positive significant between team, collective and social identification levels of individuals. Also Clopton and Finch, (2010) found a significant relationship between team identification and social capital and its components including collective identity.

CONCULSION

Reviewing findings of previous literature and those of present research it can be argued that results of present paper also stated in relevant and irrelevant previous studies suggest a relatively strong relationship between team identification and social capital. Also results showed that team identification has a positive significant effect on all components of social capital and people may improve their social capital by participating in sports teams as members or fans so that they can access valuable resources through relationships and ties between members and achieve their aims through common norms and mutual trust. In this case people obtain appropriate team identification, become more compatible with norms of their groups and environment and establish more reliable relationships with others. Also in difficult times they show more cooperation and prepare the ground for more cohesion and friendship; exploit more mutual understanding and respect, empathy, voluntary participation and synergy. Of course many studies have been conducted on components of social capital but few of them addressed team identification and its role in generating social capital. With respect to this fact results of present research may provide some information to interested managers so that they can improve and enhance these influential components.

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