

# The dark side of social capital

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27 Oct 2023

Social capital, the networks and relationships formed within societies, is often recognised for its positive contributions to individuals and communities. However, it is vital to acknowledge that like any social phenomenon, social capital also has a dark side.



What are the negative consequences of social capital in today's constantly digitally connected environment?

## Malicious intent

One of the downsides of social capital is the tendency for individuals to overshare personal information online. People often reveal sensitive details of their personal lives, relationships, and even mental health struggles, in pursuit of validation and connection. Unfortunately, this can lead to unintended consequences, including privacy breaches, cyberbullying, and emotional exploitation and may count against you when you are being considered for a promotion or when changing employment.

## Misinformation

The rise of social media platforms has facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation. Social capital can inadvertently amplify false information as it moves through networks of like-minded individuals. When falsehoods gain traction through social capital, it undermines trust in legitimate sources of information and contributes to a society plagued by confusion and polarisation.

## Crime proliferation

Just as social capital can be used for positive purposes, it can also facilitate criminal activities. Tight-knit social networks can enable the transmission of illicit knowledge, encourage illegal behaviour, and shield individuals engaged in criminal acts. The influence and support provided by social capital can perpetuate a cycle of crime and undermine community well-being.

## Economic disruption

Social capital can have unintended consequences on economic systems. In some instances, networks built on favouritism, nepotism, or corruption can exclude deserving individuals and hinder socio-economic progress. Additionally, economic disruptions caused by socio-political movements fuelled by social capital can destabilise markets and negatively impact businesses.

## Strike action

While collective action through strike actions can serve as a means to advocate for worker rights, social capital can also be used to manipulate and exploit labour movements. In some cases, powerful individuals or interest groups can leverage social capital to incite strikes that serve their agendas, leading to detrimental consequences for workers and economic growth.

### **POPI Act**

In the context of social capital, the POPIA Act emphasises the importance of protecting personal information and maintaining privacy in online interactions. It serves as a reminder of the potential risks associated with oversharing personal details or the unauthorised use of sensitive information for targeted advertising or identity theft.

### **Cross-cultural contamination**

While social capital can foster cultural understanding and diverse connections, it can also contribute to cross-cultural contamination. As ideas and values spread through interconnected networks, they may be misconstrued, diluted or misrepresented. The cultural assimilation that follows can erode rich and distinct cultural practices and traditions.

### **Herd mentality**

The influence of social capital can create a herd mentality where individuals conform to the norms and opinions of their social networks. This conformity can suppress independent thinking, stifle creativity, and limit the exploration of alternative perspectives. The collective mindset generated by social capital can discourage critical analysis and hinder progress.

### **Occultism**

In some cases, social capital can inadvertently foster harmful occult practices. When networks become tightly knit around esoteric beliefs or pseudoscientific practices, it can result in self-deception, manipulation, and the exploitation of vulnerable individuals. The dark side of social capital is evident when these practices harm both the individuals involved and society.

To conclude, social capital is a complex and powerful force that has both positive and negative dimensions. By acknowledging the dark side of social capital, and understanding these negative aspects, individuals and communities can strive for a more responsible and beneficial use of social capital.

In the next article, we will delve into strategies and techniques to mitigate the negative impact of social capital.

*Operating since 1990, Auguste (Gusti) Coetzer is the doyenne of executive search in the sub-Saharan Africa recruitment industry and is the founder and CEO of People Power Placements SA (PTY) Ltd, trading as Auguste Coetzer Executive Recruitment. P3 is part of a global recruitment partnership Talentor that operates across five continents in 35 countries and 52 offices.*