



Network subversion: The contrasting effects of multiple networks on bribery in South Korea

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Abstract

This paper is based on the premise that corrupt uses of public, civic networks ostensibly built and legitimated for their altruistic purposes can be a source of network subversion and corruption. Open, public, civic networks of South Korea seem to be systemic and organizational facilitators of criminality instead of assumptions of criminality being related only to closed, criminal cultures or anomie. We test whether increasing participation in the major social networks of Korean civic life — networks based on geography (common ancestral hometown), family (extended kinship), and education (alumni) — are associated with increasing penchants for self-admitted criminal collusion, in this case, bribery. We argue that due to relational association or within-network favoritism the increase in multiple networks per individual generates increasing social capital of access, information, and trust which may be subverted toward some form of private criminal collusion.

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1. Introduction

How do social networks generate collusion in general and in this case, corruption and bribery? Social networks have been found to function beneficially as facilitators of not only

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social capital but also malignantly as pathways of corruption and bribery (Baker and Faulkner, 1993; Brass et al., 1998; Granovetter, 2007). The coexistence of the bright and dark sides of social networks suggests that our understanding of social capital in networks should include a wider sample of behaviors around civic networks than simply the question of whether they facilitate altruism. Can civic networks facilitate criminality as well? By looking at negative aspects of social capital, we gain insight into fuller ramifications of network effects in a more neutral manner.

In the past, deviant behavior has been explained in relation to social networks in only two ways. We are suggesting a third in what we call *network subversion*. First, a dominant explanation that we call *network altruism* assumes that social networks do more to suppress opportunistic behavior than facilitate it. Research in the social control perspective has emphasized the effectiveness of social networks in subduing deviant behavior through norms and participation of members in the community (Bellair, 1997; Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt, 1992; Putnam, 2000; Sampson and Groves, 1989).

However, social networks also have been regarded as a factor of collusion among network members toward illegal ends. Trust and solidarity from social networks can unite the tie holders to take advantage of those who are not in their networks. However, in analysis of this negative side of networks, the dominant explanation for deviant behavior in social networks has been limited to the stereotype of a closed network of a criminal culture, a perspective we call *closed collusion*. Networks can maintain a secretive shared criminal culture as a collective endeavor and even honor. This closed, criminal culture of social capital has been found in both lower class poverty-stricken communities and in upper class elite deviance (Younts, 2008). Such closed networks are argued to produce moral hazard and isolation (Portes, 1998). They also have been argued to provide networked offenders with useful social capital and cultural models for deviance (Browning et al., 2004). Thus there is a dichotomous assumption in the literature about deviance and social networks. Public or open social networks are stereotyped as only altruistic forms of social capital that constrain deviance, while private or closed singular networks are stereotyped as the only networks that are criminally inductive in their social capital that encourages deviance.

There is a third possibility of how social networks, social capital, and deviance operate. Ostensibly public altruistic social networks may be a resource for facilitating private, closed senses of deviance – in *network subversion* – via manipulation of someone else's potentially altruistic behavior and loyalty to protect their opportunistic members, securing a double use of the network for a member's illegal ends. This brings about degeneration of social networks from altruistic or innocent phenomena toward being a major source of illegal behaviors. We see network subversion as a bridging concept and mechanism between those two stereotyped views on networks regarding altruism and corruption.

This network effect is tested as a source for corruption in South Korea. From the point of this third view of network subversion, existing research assumptions about networks, altruism, and corruption have limitations in the light of the Korean experience with corruption. First, in the past literature, network members' illegal behavior was studied mostly for its connection to special groups such as organized crime but seldom were such illegal behaviors studied from the point of view that more altruistic networked areas of the general public may experience network subversion that conditions those in the civic networks to facilitate someone's criminal behavior out of altruistic loyalty to that person (Cartier-Bresson, 1997; Gambetta, 2009; Manion, 1996; Tavits, 2010). Corruption and networks of private clientelism can be widespread among the general public, particularly in a geographic area of large mistrust (Putnam et al.,

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