

# Hospitality, Social Ties and Emotional Vulnerability: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

This research aims to identify the relationship between social ties and hospitality, and emotional vulnerability in existing literature. The concepts and their possible relationships are initially discussed to set the basis for the subsequent analysis. The methodological procedure consisted of a systematic review of literature through the Scopus database, searching the terms “hospitality”, “weak ties theory” and “vulnerability” searched two at a time. Only articles that discussed these concepts were considered, resulting in an insignificant number of researches relating hospitality and the theory of strong and weak ties to the minimization of emotional vulnerability. This study contributes in a practical way to research areas that may be interested in reducing emotional vulnerability. As a theoretical contribution, it evidences a gap in the literature, which could become a potential field of study.

**Keywords:** hospitality, social ties, emotional vulnerability

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## 1. Introduction

The term vulnerability was initially used only as a legal concept to designate politically fragile social groups. It was used for the first time in a different branch of studies –the medical field– in 1992, referring to individuals who are more likely to contract AIDS and later on other diseases.

Since then, the concept of vulnerability expanded and become multidimensional. Currently, it is used to reference the propensity to threats, risks and dangers that can affect an individual's life in any possible aspect. There are studies on environmental vulnerability which address the risks that nature can impose upon human beings. Poverty trends, inattention to basic needs and access to education also characterize social vulnerability, and further on.

Humans can also be subject to neglect, abuse, humiliation and other situations of psychological threat, which would make them emotionally vulnerable. Such emotional vulnerability is one of the central concepts of this research, as well as its link with hospitality and the theory of strong and weak ties, which are studied as a strategy for its minimization.

Hospitality, understood as a form of reunion, a relationship between people, a welcoming, and thus as the antonym of hostility, is seen as a tool to reduce factors that cause emotional vulnerability. Together with bonding, giving, receiving, whether in private, social or commercial domains, it can also be perceived as way to minimize individual stresses.

The notion of social ties, which configure the systemic thinking of society and its relations, is developed by now classical authors in the matter Mark Granovetter, Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu, who highlight the question of relationships between people and how they can influence the life and actions of social beings. Thus, social ties, similar to hospitality, are also considered a way of coping with emotional vulnerability.

Each of these concepts and the relationships that can be established among them will be extensively reviewed in the following section in order to meet the study's objective, which is to verify whether it is possible to use hospitality and social ties as a strategy to minimize emotional vulnerability. This entails identifying existing researches that relate these concepts through a systematic literature review.

The section dedicated to the methodology addresses the step-by-step systematic literature review carried out using the Scopus platform. The results, analysis and discussion describe how these concepts have been developed in the existing literature, including their confluences, divergences, repetitions of themes, authors and trends. The final considerations answer the research question-problem: "Is it possible to relate social ties, hospitality and the minimization of emotional vulnerability based on existing literature?" .

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Emotional Vulnerability***

According to Mackenzie, Rogers & Dodds (2014), vulnerability is a condition inherent to human existence and is related to the threat of its fullness in the most diverse aspects of life. Humans are susceptible to diseases, accidents and death, which make us physically vulnerable. We are also subject to neglect, abuse, humiliation and other situations that place us in emotional vulnerability.

Oppression, exploitation, manipulation and deprivation of basic rights characterize social vulnerability, alongside other varied forms of vulnerability, such as environmental and technological vulnerability, which regard liabilities for threats derived from natural and technological settings (Mackenzie, Rogers & Dodds, 2014).

According to Ayres, Júnior, Calazans & Filho (2003), the concept of vulnerability was conceived in the area of human rights and made reference to groups that were legally weakened. It was only in 1992 that it was applied for the first time in a different context. The term was used in the health sector in the analysis Aids in The World (Mann, Tarantola & Netter, 1992), which focused on groups around the world at risk of the HIV epidemic.

Marandola & Hogan (2006) stress the need for an interdisciplinary understanding of vulnerability, conceptualized as a multidimensional concept, which permeates the entire social life of human beings. According to the authors, vulnerability is closely linked to any possibility of danger and risk of altering a normal and stable state of any aspect of life, whether biological, social, emotional or environmental.

Currently, the vast majority of research on vulnerability is focused on the biophysical area, to the detriment of studies on the many other dimensions of vulnerability that permeate human existence. This generates a great

theoretical limitation on the matter, since it does not cover the totality of its elements subject to research (Marandola & Hogan, 2006).

One of the first fields of study that started researching vulnerability once the term ceased to be exclusive to law was geography. It was studied in order to understand people in the face of dangers in the spaces in which they live. Liverman (1994) elucidated the need for the question “vulnerable to what?”, in order to acknowledge which dimension of vulnerability the individual is inserted in and, from that point on, identify which attitudes could be taken to reduce such vulnerability and which factors could contribute to its increase.

Risk – a situation to which one is exposed– and danger –an event that can cause harm– are external aspects, while vulnerability –the ability or inability to defend oneself against risk and danger– is an internal aspect. Its dimensions are, therefore, more complex (Watts & Bohle, 1993; Marandola & Hogan, 2006).

Watts & Bohle (1993) discuss the confrontation of social vulnerability in reference to hunger issues around the world. The authors use the concept of “empowerment and entitlement” to minimize vulnerability, which basically defends that knowledge, strengthening and guaranteeing rights is the best way to reduce a person's vulnerability.

A concept closely associated to vulnerability is coping. According to Antoniazzi, Dell'Aglio & Bandeira, (1998), it is the set of efforts that individuals use to deal with and adapt to adverse situations. The area of knowledge dedicated to these studies is psychology, as it is a collection of psychological tools.

The way the individual deals with a stressor or with a situation of vulnerability, regardless of whether it comes from an emotional dimension or not, is directly related to the person's emotional characteristics and personality, as these are cognitive strategies that respond to complex situations (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

Currently, there are several lines of research regarding vulnerability and how to address it. One of them seeks to link hospitality to the minimization of vulnerability, assuming that they are intimately linked by the fact that the absence of vulnerability allows for hospitality to exist, which at the same time needs to be increasingly adapted to assist in current issues, such as vulnerability in its various stages (Cockburn-Wotten, McIntosh & Phipps, 2014).

Cockburn-Wootten, McIntosh & Phipps (2014) consider hospitality as a way of minimizing immigrants and refugees' vulnerability in the way they are received, for example. They state that, generally, where there is no hospitality, there is vulnerability.

Vulnerability can be found in other environments and hospitality can make the difference in a patient's experience and well-being, as in the case of hospitals, clinics and maternity hospitals in which the physical comfort provided by furniture, paintings, human treatment, security and the welcoming feeling of the accommodations become positive aspects (Lugosi, 2016).

## **2.2 Hospitality**

Grassi (2011) emphasize hospitality as the bridge between “the outside” and “the inside”, as well as the whole welcoming ritual that involves the moment of admission of others, outsiders, foreigners. The author establishes that hospitality is the rite, the authorization gesture that allows outsiders to surpass internal bounds, whether it's a group, a house, a city or any context in which they do not belong. The author often refers to this moment as “crossing the threshold”.

The author emphasizes the sacred dimension of hospitality, which is understood as a virtue, a moral attribute to be taught to society, exemplified through Greek mythology: Hérmes was the god of movement, travel, of the act of not-staying –thus, the guest–, while Hestia was the goddess of the hearth, of home, of welcoming –thus, the hostess–. In this context, transforming from Hérmes into Hestia is to be admitted as part of the hospitality ritual and to cross the threshold.

Montandon (2011) considers hospitality as a set of rules that govern the proper ways welcoming and serving in order to avoid hostility. The author describes it as intrusive and states that it can generate constraints, since it entails a set of obligations for the host, who must receive their guest accordingly while the guest must waiver certain precepts in order to penetrate another's territory. The author states that hospitality is guided by unwritten laws, such as politeness and rules of etiquette, which help relationships.

Baptista (2005), who considers hospitality to be a fundamental competence of citizenship, believes that it does not lie "outside" or "inside" a house, address or place, but rather on the threshold between the two. The author affirms that each individual consists of a particular universe, composed of unique meanings, experiences and relationships and that, therefore, hospitality would be nothing more than the acceptance of people's otherness, configuring a movement from the outside in, in which an individual welcomes and respects another. Only hospitality could enable a relationship to be formed by two people. According to the author, the meeting point of the guest and the host initially consists of a moment of rupture, because it interrupts the dynamics which are common and traditional to each of the individuals, allowing them to glimpse an alternate existence, a completely different universe embodied in the other. This moment will later become a sort of convergence point, fertile enough to allow a relationship between these two individuals to spring.

Hospitality is more than an observable fact; it is a virtue that is expected when we are faced with a stranger – and any stranger is also a foreigner–, someone who is not yet but who must be recognized and acknowledged (Camargo, 2015). This meeting point, according to the author, can bring individuals closer together or create distances between them, as they can manifest or not hospitality, which is understood as an attribute and ritual that governs human relationships.

According to Camargo (2015), interpersonal relationships are inherent to human existence as we are social beings and depend on relationships. This is the core of hospitality, a concepts which derives in others such as exchange, virtue, rituals, contact, closeness, human warmth, meeting, reception, among others. The laws of hospitality exist as a form to avoid hostility; they are not written, but rather transmitted informally and vary according to different cultures.

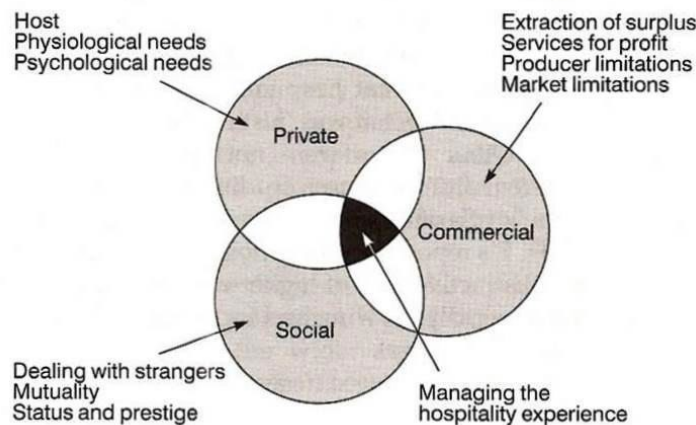
The antinomy between hospitality and commercial hospitality is discussed by Gotman (2009), who states that the asymmetry in regard to reciprocity is a preponderant factor: only genuine hospitality offers a gift free of interest, whereas in commercial hospitality money establishes a balance between the actors, thus disposing of the gift, the reciprocity and the creation of bonds, and de-characterizing the hospitable scene. What was before understood as a genuine gesture, liable for retribution, becomes an exchange motivated and finalized by payment.

Commercial hospitality mimics genuine hospitality, replacing contact and bonding with contracts and payments. This mechanism removes the protagonists and exempts them from their obligation to retribute, prioritizing the guest's freedom over the hosts and the place of reception. Commerce, therefore, acts hospitality out, but is in constant conflict against what it really stands for (Gotman, 2009).

Godbout (1998) has a similar understanding of gifting, observing a departure from the reciprocal relationship among actors who continuously place themselves in positions to give and receive driven by spontaneous and internal, non-contractual obligations. According to the author, when hospitable actors give something to another actor, they intend to create a bond and are not seeking an economic exchange, making the relationship reciprocal and extinguishing any form of debt.

Pitt-Rivers (2012) states that there are laws of hospitality that govern the most diverse scenes and vary according to culture, time and place, constituting precepts on how to admit and treat foreigners and even guests' efforts. The author explains, for example, that for smoothly running a hospitable scene, hosts are expected to honor their guests, protecting and offering them their best, while guests must dignify their role, accepting everything that is offered and never usurping the hosts' role.

Lashley (2000) observed the phenomenon of hospitality more completely, to overcome the way it was being studied, which emphasized hospitality as an economic activity. The three-domain approach consists of a Venn diagram, as shown below, which outlines the spheres of private (host, physiological and psychological needs), social (treatment to the foreigner, reciprocity, status and prestige) and commercial hospitality (getting a surplus, for-profit service, producer and market limitations). Each refers to an aspect of hospitality, which, according to the author, consists of a framework of social behaviors.



Hospitality domains (Lashley, 2000)

According to O'Mahony (2015), this hospitality observation model allowed the holistic and multidisciplinary study of its aspects and the expansion of its concepts. Lashley (2015) states that, although hospitality has traditionally been studied through the commercial lens, it derives from the social matrix, a domain that contemplates the rules, rituals and morals that permeate the existence of individuals, as well as the rules that determine their connections, relationships and the creations of ties.

### 2.3. Social Ties

Granovetter (1985) understands that social relations directly affect society's behavior and institutions, such as the market. The author considers that relationships between people can be understood as a residual phenomenon of the economy and, precisely for this reason, emphasizes the need for sociological studies to better understand the influence of the social network on the economic results of a society.

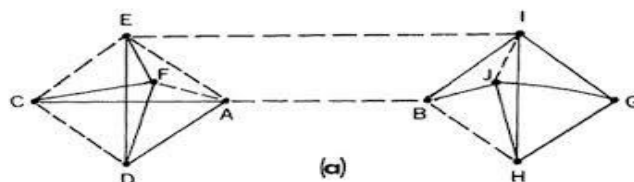
One way of understanding social ties is by structuring them in networks and observing that they inspire initial trust and encourage them, according to their concreteness. For example, more concrete relationships tend to generate a higher level of credibility among their participants, who would be much more comfortable taking advice and information from people that they know than from people with whom they have insignificant relationships (Granovetter, 1985).

Granovetter (1978) presents a model of collective behavior, stating that, when making a decision such as whether or not to make a purchase an individual takes into account the decision of other individuals who affect their relationships in relation to the same situation. Therefore, if the majority is making a purchase, it is possible that the individual will be inclined to make it as well.

Granovetter (1977) introduces the theory of strong and weak ties as a way to understand the influence of social networks in marketing decisions, based on the strength of the different social ties between individuals. The author understands that the strength of a bond derives from the combination of time employed, intimacy, emotional intensity and reciprocity.

Strong ties are characterized by belonging to the same cluster, common identities, a high level of credibility and, therefore, influence in decisions. Weak ties would be bridges between clusters, characterized by greater diversity, a high level of information flow and great importance for breaking the isolation of a group and integration of the individual into society (Granovetter, 1983).

Granovetter (1983) exposes the great importance of weak ties so that transactions of all kinds can happen, as well as innovations. The author also states that individuals who only have strong ties tend to be limited to the views of their intimate contacts, which on the other hand side have greater emotional importance. The author uses a diagram to represent strong ties as nodes and weak ties as bridges, as can be seen below:



Granovetter's diagram of strong and weak ties

Putnam (2000) considers economic sociology from another perspective. The author refers to social ties as “social capital”, which would be the whole framework of ties that an individual can have. The notions of physical and human capital are also added, which form a person's material and intellectual inventory, respectively.

Not only physical and human capital can increase economic productivity –both individual and collective–, but also social. Putnam (2000) insists on the importance of social relations for social and economic development.

Putnam (1993) points out that a close look at social capital and its influence on the individual is essential for the formulation of development strategies, since their objective is the achievement of superior market results and should be taken into account by countries around the world when drawing up economic policies.

The concept of social capital encompasses both the relationship networks, as well as the concepts of trust and reciprocity between individuals that derive from them. For Putnam (2000), social capital can be classified in several ways, the most important being the distinction between “bonding (or exclusive)” and “bridging (or inclusive)” social capital.

Whether by necessity or choice, relationships can be exclusive or inclusive. Social capital classified as bonding encompasses relationships based on homogeneous groups, which reinforce the identity of its members, as well as the feeling of belonging. Putnam (2000) exemplifies bonding with ethnic movements, female religious reading groups and country clubs.

Other groups seek to include new members, in order to encourage diversity, the flow of information and the creation of new relationships, as is the case with civil law movements, voluntary work groups and ecumenical religious organizations, which are Putnam’s (2000) examples for social capital classified as bridging.

Putnam (2000) quotes Granovetter (1983), reinforcing the relationship between the classifications of bonding and bridging social capital with the strong and weak ties theorized by the latter. Like strong ties, bonding relationships have dense networks and connect intimate people in niches, while bridging relationships resemble weak ties by connecting people from different social circles.

Helliwell & Putnam (2004) state there is a strong correlation between social capital as a network of personal relationships and people’s well-being, directly impacting factors such as happiness, satisfaction and even health. According to the authors, relationships based on trust and reciprocity benefit collective life as a whole, including minimizing social problems, allowing individuals to live more fully.

Like Putnam, Bourdieu (1986) presents three distinctions of capital: economic, cultural and social. The first includes elements such as salary, income and material goods, which can be compared to Putnam's physical capital. The second is similar to Putnam's human capital, encompassing the individual's knowledge, intelligence and experience. Finally, the author understands the third form of capital as the resources derived from the social ties a person has formed.

Thus, social ties, more or less structured connections, and belonging to groups, whether institutional or not, enable individuals to have effective or potential resources for different aspects in their lives. The size of this social capital is related to the number of social ties that can actually add value to the individual's life and to the volume of economic, cultural and social capital belonging to connected individuals (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1986) also states that social ties derive from a personal or collective investment, whether conscious or unconscious. These generate short or long term relationships which entail personal feelings, such as gratitude, respect and friendship, as well as positive guarantees, such as rights.

#### ***2.4. Hospitality And Social Ties***

Relevant authors in the field of hospitality are already studying its relationship with social ties. Santos & Baptista (2014) assure that the notions of hospitality are present in all types of social ties, permeated by forms of welcoming and interacting, recognizing, receiving and hosting within the most different types of networks, commercial or not.

Portugal (2007) indicates that concepts related to hospitality such as exchange, gifts and reciprocity are intrinsically related to the way social ties interact in order to move social networks. According to the author,

whether or not an individual belongs to a certain group is a major factor for the interaction of ties, as well as the circulation of the gift and the establishment of debt and symmetry between the individuals who interact.

### **3. Methodology**

Due to its breadth and credibility, the Scopus database was used to carry out a systematic review of the literature on the topics relevant to this research, aiming to verify the frequency in which hospitality and social ties are related to the reduction of emotional vulnerability in the literature. A total of five searches were carried out on this basis, using the terms “hospitality”, “social ties” and “emotional vulnerability”.

According to Knopf (2006), literature reviews are summaries of the general panorama of studies on a given subject that provide notes on how the literature in the studied area is developing. The author indicates that this type of work allows the identification of gaps and potential studies, thus suggesting new lines research in an assertive and non-repetitive manner, contributing to the advancement of the area.

In the first search, all three terms (“hospitality”, “social ties” and “emotional vulnerability”) were used and no article was obtained as a result. With the intention of envisioning a possible relationship between the terms, but in a less specific way, the second search was carried out. The same terms were used, except only the word “vulnerability” was typed in instead of “emotional vulnerability”. One article was obtained.

The third search included the terms “hospitality” and “social ties”, and resulted 22 articles. The fourth search included the terms “hospitality” and “emotional vulnerability”, and resulted in 3 articles. The fifth search included the terms “social ties” and “emotional vulnerability”, and resulted in 14 articles.

In order to improve the research and to check the results of the Scopus database, the sixth and seventh searches used the three terms in the Web of Science and JSTOR databases. Once again, no articles were obtained.

In all searches, in addition to the number of articles, aspects such as years of publication, repetition of authors, themes, relevance in citations, countries of origin and area of knowledge were analyzed. Results are presented in the next section.

### **4. Results, Analysis and Discussion**

As follows the results of each search will be presented through their own terms as well the analysis of their respective results as proposed by the research.

- First search (“hospitality” + “social ties” + “emotional vulnerability”): the absence of articles resulting from this research evidences a gap in the literature regarding studies that seek to associate hospitality and social ties as minimizers of emotional vulnerability.

- Second search (“hospitality” + “social ties” + “vulnerability”): the only article found was published in 2017 in the United Kingdom in the area of social sciences. It involved shelters granted to travelers by sanctuaries in Ancient England. Despite the presence of the three terms, the relationship between them was not the same as the object of research, as hospitality and social ties were not treated as coping, but only as hospitality. Social ties appear as a consequence of the support to the traveler and the relationships that are created. Furthermore, vulnerability in the article is much more related to the physiological needs of travelers, such as shelter and food, and not to their emotional state. This, again, evidences a gap in the literature regarding the link between the three topics of interest.



- Third search (“hospitality” + “social ties”): the resulting 22 articles, distributed mainly in the areas of social sciences (10 articles) and business (10 articles), were published between 1984 and 2019. The years with the most productions were 2016 and 2018, both with five published articles. The most frequent themes are refugees and tourism, and the most cited article has 96 mentions. There were only two articles by the same researcher. The country of greatest production was Hong Kong with two publications, while several other countries appear with only one publication, such as Brazil, Portugal and Turkey.

- Fourth search (“hospitality” + “emotional vulnerability”): of the three articles found, two were published in 2016, belonging to social sciences, and one in 2014, belonging to the area of medicine. The latter was the most cited, having three mentions. The countries of origin are Spain, the United States and Germany. The papers addressed immigrants, terminal patients and aesthetic experiences. All articles considered hospitality as a tool to minimize emotional vulnerability.

- Fifth search (“social ties” + “emotional vulnerability”): the resulting 19 articles were published between 1978 and 2019. The study published in 1978 was the most relevant, with 340 citations; while the year with the highest number of publications, 2014, had four publications. No repetition of authors was observed. The country with the highest production was the United States, with six publications. The areas of knowledge to which the articles belong are social sciences (nine articles), medicine (seven articles) and psychology (three articles). There is a lot of dispersion on the topics, with issues like friendship between men with AIDS, suicidal behavior, marriages, among others. The articles are basically about social bonds that are created in situations of emotional vulnerability and not social bonds as a strategy to minimize emotional vulnerability itself.

- Sixth and seventh searches (“hospitality” + “social ties” + “emotional vulnerability”) in the JSTOR and Web of Science databases: the absence of articles resulting from this search confirms the existence of a gap in the literature regarding studies that seek to associate hospitality and social ties as minimizers of emotional vulnerability, or even relate the three.

The discussions of the product research enabled some successful conclusions that will be shown below.

#### ***4.1 Theoretical Contributions***

This article’s main theoretical contribution is to emphasize the gap, that there is in subjects such as hospitality vulnerability and social bounds as a whole. Having as a target, developing this rich field for new studies and consequently, growing the area.

#### ***4.2 Practical Implications***

In a practical manner, the implications and collaborations of this review can be in action areas that for some reason, aim to diminish people’s vulnerability, as in fields like health or political sciences. Those fields could obtain a huge gain if they consider the decrease of that vulnerability.

#### ***4.3 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations***

The main barrier of this study is the fact that most researches were done by using Scopus platform, excludes a wide number of valuable journals, which could change the research results. Therefore, one should consider other search platforms in order to obtain broader results.

### **5. Conclusions**

It was possible to verify that hospitality, social ties and emotional vulnerability are in fact related in prior studies, yet only pairing the terms two at a time. This circumstance, together with the only article found that related hospitality, social ties and vulnerability of travelers, allows to identify a compatibility between the themes, while demonstrating a gap in the literature. This gap is evident in the absence of studies of these three themes together, as well as in the lack of literature that links hospitality and social ties with minimizing emotional vulnerability, evidencing a potential line of research in the future.

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