Dissertation Resume: Social-psychological Determinants for the Development of Interpersonal Trust in the Sphere of Friendly and Business Relations

The dissertation titled "Social-psychological Determinants for the Development of Interpersonal Trust in the Sphere of Friendships and Business Relations," authored by Plamen Iliyanov Petkov at the Institute for Population and Human Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 2025, constitutes a significant social-psychological inquiry into the mechanisms of trust formation. The primary objective of the research is to identify, evaluate, and compare the specific determinants that drive trust in two distinct social contexts: personal friendly relationships and professional organizational environments, while also considering the macro-social backdrop of political uncertainty. The study addresses a gap in the literature by juxtaposing these two spheres to understand whether trust is a unitary construct or a context-dependent phenomenon influenced by different psychological and environmental drivers.

The theoretical framework of the dissertation is built upon a dualistic approach, examining trust through both behavioral and psychological lenses. To understand the roots of dispositional trust, the author utilizes Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development and John Bowlby’s attachment theory, positing that early life experiences and the security of the mother-child bond create a "basic trust" that serves as a prototype for future social interactions. For the organizational context, the research relies heavily on the Integrative Model of Organizational Trust developed by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman. This model identifies three critical characteristics of a trustee that predict trust: Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity. Furthermore, the study integrates Schwartz’s theory of human values and Self-Determination Theory to analyze how cultural internalization and higher-order values—such as Universalism and Benevolence—mediate the propensity to trust.

The empirical methodology employed a quantitative approach involving 423 participants, with a balanced gender distribution of 197 men and 226 women and a mean age of 41 years. To ensure the validity of the data within the Bulgarian context, the author compiled and adapted a comprehensive battery of psychometric instruments. These included scales for Cultural Internalization, Higher-Order Values, Reward and Punishment Responsivity, Organizational Trust, Trust in Community Groups, Childhood and Adolescent Experiences, Affiliation, Political Uncertainty, and Conformity. The data was analyzed using correlation analysis, multiple and hierarchical regression analysis, and hierarchical cluster analysis to isolate the specific predictors for each type of trust.

The results of the study reveal that trust is a dynamic and multi-layered phenomenon that functions differently depending on the social domain. In the sphere of friendly relations, trust is identified as an affective, "bottom-up" process driven by authenticity and emotional safety. The statistical analysis identified "spontaneity in social contact" as the strongest positive predictor, suggesting that individuals who are open and authentic in their interactions are more likely to build trust. Additionally, social and family support received during adolescence proved to be a robust predictor, confirming that positive social experiences during this critical developmental stage foster a lasting capacity for interpersonal trust. Conversely, the study found that external motivation for cultural internalization—adopting

values solely to fit in or avoid social disapproval—acts as a significant negative predictor. Furthermore, the "avoidance of confrontation" was negatively correlated with trust, implying that the inability to navigate conflict hinders the depth of friendly relationships. A notable finding in this context was the impact of systemic political uncertainty; the analysis showed a statistically significant negative effect, suggesting that when the macro-social environment is perceived as unstable, individuals become less trusting even in their close personal circles.

In sharp contrast, trust in the organizational context was characterized as a rational, "top-down" process heavily dependent on cognitive evaluations of the other party. The dominant predictor for organizational trust was "perceived trustworthiness," specifically the components of Ability and a combined factor of Benevolence-Integrity, which together explained over 56% of the variance in the model. This confirms that in a professional setting, trust is instrumental and pragmatic, based on the competence and moral reliability of colleagues and leaders rather than on emotional intimacy. Universalism—a value orientation focused on social justice and tolerance—was also found to be a significant positive predictor, indicating that employees trust organizations that align with broader ethical standards. Interestingly, while motivation for reward was a significant driver for trust in both friendly and business contexts, the study found that political uncertainty had no statistically significant impact on organizational trust. This suggests that the workplace functions as a distinct ecosystem where internal dynamics of competence and fairness override external political instability.

The dissertation concludes that while there are overlapping psychological mechanisms, such as the motivation for reward, the architecture of trust differs fundamentally across contexts. Friendly trust relies on authenticity, shared identity, and emotional security rooted in early development, whereas business trust is constructed upon demonstrated competence, consistency, and moral integrity. The author also notes a counter-intuitive finding where perceived parental warmth in early childhood showed a weak negative correlation with friendly trust, suggesting that over-protection might limit social autonomy, a hypothesis warranting further qualitative research. The scientific contributions of the work include the validation of a new theoretical model of trust determinants and the successful adaptation of several key psychometric scales for the Bulgarian population. These findings provide actionable insights for organizations aiming to build high-trust cultures and offer a nuanced understanding of how macro-social instability can erode the social capital inherent in personal relationships.