

INTEREST IN LOCAL NEWS
and its effect on
COMMUNITY SATISFACTION
AND ATTACHMENT



CONCLUSION

Small towns face unique challenges in competing with larger cities within the context of an increasingly globalized economy. Prior research demonstrates that towns that thrive within competitive regional, national, and global systems focus upon locally generated civic improvements and business entrepreneurship. Community satisfaction and attachment can foster such initiatives to the extent that these feelings are linked with higher voter participation, increased entrepreneurial activities, and the creation of productive social capital. Much previous research on small town development has noted that key factors affecting satisfaction with community services and feelings of attachment to the community include population characteristics, the quality and quantity of economic activity, the quality and availability of community and government services, length of residence, density of friendship networks, civic participation, and the quality of neighboring.

This study investigated the extent to which an interest in local news might significantly improve community satisfaction and attachment. Previous studies provide some indication that an interest in local news can improve community satisfaction and attachment. These studies, however, tend to rely upon anecdotal information and are limited in scope to just one or two communities. This study conducted a scientific survey of adults residing within 486 small towns located within a selected 10-state sample, wherein each state shows potential for the development of wind-aided electricity. The study was supplemented with a sample of donors to the Iowa Public Television Foundation. These respondents, most of whom reside in Iowa, represent a total of 322 places, some of which are large cities and others of which are small towns and rural areas.

The study found that:

- Residents' interest in local news contributes significantly to their satisfaction with community services and their feelings of attachment to their community. The greater an interest in learning about community events and relying upon local news sources, the greater the satisfaction and attachment.
- Residents' interest in local news is closely associated with other determinants of community well-being, such as economic vitality, civic participation, friendship density, and the perceived quality of neighboring.
- Respondents within both samples expressed a strong interest in learning about local news and events.
- Respondents within the donor sample expressed more interest in local news than did respondents within the 10-state sample. Respondents within the donor sample placed more trust in traditional sources of national and local news, such as the television and newspaper. In comparison, the younger respondents within the 10-state sample expressed more trust in web-based sources of news.
- Respondents in both the 10-state sample and the sample of donors to the Iowa Public Television Foundation expressed the most trust in news broadcast by PBS stations. This finding was consistent when considering both national and local news.
- Donors to the Iowa Public Television Foundation expressed greater satisfaction with and attachment to their community than did respondents within the 10-state sample. Donors were more satisfied with community services and government services. Donors were more active in civic clubs and organizations, reported greater friendship density within their community, and expressed more satisfaction with the quality of neighboring in their community. Donors were more likely to vote in Presidential and city/county elections and were more likely to donate money to candidates for city/county elected positions.

In summary, we have learned from this study that residents' interest in local news can significantly improve their satisfaction with community services and their feelings of attachment to their community. We know from previous research that local television, in particular, can enhance one's interest in learning about local news and events. Unfortunately, rising electricity costs taken within the context of rising costs for other aspects of operating a local television broadcasting station threaten the sustainability of providing local news to residents of small towns and rural areas. Broadcast Wind, LLC has developed the technology to enable wind turbines to be sited on land near television broadcast towers without causing interference to the television broadcast signal. This approach to reducing costs can enhance the economic feasibility of local television broadcasting and, as indicated by this research, because it can promote delivery of local news might improve the long-term social and economic sustainability of small towns located in nonmetropolitan areas.