

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL:
THE POWER TO EMPOWER

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SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA, JULY 2004

Statement of originality

I, Rosa Maria McManamey, am the author of the thesis entitled *The relationship between community newspapers and social capital: The power to empower*, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare that the material is original, and to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution.

Rosa Maria McManamey

Date

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the powerful and beautiful grace of Our Lord Jesus in all who touched on the shaping, assistance in and encouragement of this thesis, and give thanks for his ever presence.

My grateful thanks to the Faculty of Education for providing the research funding without which, this thesis would not have been possible.

I am greatly indebted to a remarkable lady, Associate Professor Sue Kilpatrick, my supervisor, for her patience, guidance and support in the preparation of this dissertation and for her great generosity of spirit over the course of its development. My sincere thanks also, to Dr Michael Woolcock, for his advice and assistance, particularly in relation to the framing of this thesis.

My gratitude and thanks to colleagues: Susan Johns for her contribution to discussion over the entire process of the thesis and for editing areas of the work; Tony Smith for his presences as a sounding board; and both for their great friendship. This dissertation would not have been completed without the assistance, encouragement, and professionalism of editor and good friend Margaret Falk.

Also, I would particularly like to thank each of the following for their valued generosity in contributing their expertise to the shaping of the dissertation: Associate Professor Margaret Barrett, Dr Claes de Vreese, Professor Ian Falk, Dr Des Fitzgerald, John Guenther, Lesley Harrison, Dr Natalie Jackson, Dr Dianna Kendall, Dr Lawrence Kendall, Tom Langston, Professor Eric Loo, Dr Thao Le, Antonio Luciano, Professor John Williamson, and former staff and members of the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia.

PhD research is noted for its heavy toll on family life. I would like to pay tribute to a most wonderful group of individuals, my family, who have contributed in a great many ways and taught me about a most precious gift over the period of the study. Deepest thanks to: my husband David, for his love, support, encouragement, and strong belief in ‘persistence and determination’; my mother Teresa Concetta Luciano, for her wisdom, gentle motivation and beautiful support; my brother Antonio for his encouragement and ever-ready, practical expertise; to Dorothy Josephine McManamey and Pauline McCormack I thank you for your prayers and love; to each of my children—Linus, Magnus, Kam and his partner Karina, Kip and his partner Alex—most grateful thanks to you for your enthusiasm and the individual and caring ways you have each contributed to his thesis.

To my father Giuseppe Luciano, this thesis is for you.

Evangelical cost. Bassompierre, French Ambassador to Spain, was giving his Sovereign, Henry IV., an account of the manner of his entry into Madrid.

"I was mounted on the very smallest mule in the world," said the Ambassador.

"Ah," said the King, "what an amusing sight to see the biggest ass mounted on the smallest mule!"

"I was your Majesty's representative," rejoined Bassompierre.

It is the temper of the highest hearts, like the palm-tree, to strive most upwards when most burdened.

Huon Times 29 July 1910, p. 4.

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Abstract

Research confirms the positive relationship between commercial newspaper readership and social capital. However, the relationship between independent community newspapers and social capital is largely overlooked in social science research. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between community newspapers and social capital by analysing the newspaper content, and investigating the timing of the establishment and production of independent community newspapers published in Tasmania between 1910 and 2000.

Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and a mixed-method case study, the study explores the number and distribution of community newspapers in Tasmania, the issues presented, and the relationship between community newspapers and social capital. Data were gathered through a content analysis of the community newspapers, as well as semi-structured interviews with newspaper editors/coordinators. The content analysis framework incorporates four dimensions of social capital identified from the literature: *elements*, *networks*, *knowledge and identity resources* and *incorgov*. Content of a sample of 16 independent community newspapers was coded into Excel and was analysed using SPSS; results are presented as frequencies and cross-tabulations.

Findings indicate that community newspaper numbers in Tasmania between 1970 and 2000 tripled. Community newspaper establishment was closely related to the periods of highest emigration and economic change throughout the century. This suggests that community newspapers contribute to higher community cohesion in ‘difficult times’. The content analysis identified a changing focus of the papers’ content from *human interest* and more global information in the earliest decades, to *community* and local issues and interests after 1950.

The study supports the literature in finding that trust is a key factor linked to the establishment and increasing circulations of new publications. It is also a core element of social capital, functioning at a number of levels in the process and continuity of community newspapers. The process supporting the relationship between communities and their community newspapers is identified in this study for the first time as *cyclical* reciprocity.

The study provides valuable insights into community dynamics and patterns of social capital. This has implications for community development practice and policy. The study classifies the broad term ‘community newspaper’ into three levels, allowing independent community newspapers ‘of geographic locale’—established as a result of community initiative—to be

identified as a unit, which may aid future media research. The study contributes a new perspective to social capital research by devising a content analysis framework to explore both the quality and quantity of social capital. Unlike other social capital research, the framework provides a means of analysing historical data and profiling social capital by means other than interview and survey. This has implications for expanding future social capital research.