

## **Mining News Deserts: Impact of Local Newspaper's Closure on Political Participation and Engagement in Rural Australian Town of Lightning Ridge**

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**Abstract :** This article examines how a local newspaper's closure impacts the way everyday people in a rural Australian town are informed about and engage with political affairs. It draws on a two-month focused ethnographic study in the outback town of Lightning Ridge, New South Wales and explores people's media-related practices following the closure of the towns' only newspaper, The Ridge News, in 2015. While social media is considered to have partly filled the news void, there is an increasingly fragmented and less vibrant local public sphere that has led to growing complacency among individuals about political affairs. Local residents highlight a dearth of reliable, credible information and lament the loss of the newspaper and its role in community advocacy and fostering people's engagement with political institutions, especially local government.

**Keywords :** public sphere, political participation, local news, democratic deficit

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