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Disruptively regional: How women in Regional, Rural and Remote communities ‘imagine’ with and through digital and social media

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Abstract

Too often, regional, rural and remote cities and towns are configured in deficit to the metropolis. As local newspapers have closed, how are local stories gathered, understood, published and disseminated? The objective of this article probes how women leaders in the media industries deploy their lived experiences to re/shape, reimagine and sustain regional, rural and remote life through digitizing community leadership. We explore how technology provides new opportunities to share stories of women’s strength and capacity to build new pathways between information and citizens. Using original interviews, we investigate how women in these locations use the internet and digitization to share stories of their communities and culture to metropolitan environments in the absence of truly local news outlets, bypassing traditional news media and taking control of how their stories are told. This approach to the research demonstrates that alternative modes of ‘writing back’ are emerging. Certainly, analogue injustices overlay digital inequalities. However, the opportunities and potential for resistance and interventions are revealed and disseminated the courage, direction and gumption of women summoning a different mode of media leadership that is critiques and transforms traditional models of ownership, production, and consumption. The implications of this paper are important, as we offer a fresh model to think about regional media and regional media leadership. Yet the value of this research transcends media, summoning a model of social, cultural, and economic transformation, through digitization, disintermediation and deterritorialization.

Keywords: Digitization, disintermediation, deterritorialization, journalism, rural media, regional media, women in leadership.

1. Introduction

1.1. Regional businesses. Regional education. Regional politics. Regional policies. Regional government.

Ponder these phrases. In our provisional inventory, the word ‘regional’ has a mitigating function on the noun that follows it. It connotes difference, but also challenges, problems and instability.

An invisible hierarchy is assembled where the regional is a location disconnected from the mainstream, the dominant and the normal. An adjective is required to log a difference and a diminishment. The ideology of the urban weathers the subsidies the semiotic system of the regional. If this etymological experiment was repeated on and through the rural and remote, similarly agitated, and unstable meanings hover around our cursors.

1.2. Remote business. Remote education. Remote politics. Remote policies. Remote government.

Clearly, regional, rural and remote is in the eye – and the discourse – of the beholder. Yet the flooding of regional, rural and remote meaning systems with ideologies of deficit, difficulty denial and backwardness has no connection with actual places or locations. Instead, the urban – and urbanity – is centred as an economic, employment, and innovative powerhouse, leaving other places to be the sites of ‘the other’ and of othering.

Benedict Anderson summoned the nation as an ‘imagined community’ [1] He placed attention on the development of a ‘mass’ vernacular of literacy. In response, Partha Chatterjee confirmed that colonization provided the frame for this nationalism, that the ‘mass’ vernacular was based on dispossession and marginalization of languages, people and culture. He stated that, “even our imaginations must remain forever colonized” [2] While nationalism has taken a problematic turn through the proliferation of the Alt-Right (Brabazon, Redhead, Chivaura 2018), summoning slogans such as “Make America Great Again,” what happens to the spaces and ideologies of the regional, rural and remote that occupy a dissonate and ambivalent positioning in nation states? In this thrusting propulsion for greatness, do they remain edgelands, wastelands and in deficit? How are the colonizing narratives that buzz around these words critiqued, dismissed and erased?

This article explores and activates alternative pathways through the construction of this imagining and ‘imagination,’ including its privilege, and affordances. We explore how the affordances of technology and internet connectivity provide a platform for re-imagining how communities can maintain and extend relationships. We also explore commonalities across ways of using technology to build connections, while also providing platforms for entertainment, marketing, and selling goods and services. Social media provides opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to resist colonial narratives and work toward imagining and realizing alternative futures (Carlson & Frazer 2020). In the case of rural Indigenous women, this re-imagining also includes modern pathways for maintaining connection to Country and mob, sharing knowledge, and conducting cultural protocols, while also organising/protesting.

In this article, we discuss how women leaders deploy their lived experiences to re/shape, reimagine and sustain regional, rural and remote life through digitizing local government and community leadership through a reorganization of media and dissemination. We explore how technology provides new opportunities to share stories of women’s strength and leadership. We investigate how women in these communities use the internet and digitization to share stories to metropolitan communities in the absence of truly local news outlets, bypassing traditional news media and taking control of how their stories are told. Yes, analogue injustices overlay digital inequalities. However, the opportunities and potential for resistance and interventions are clear. The first part of this article configures the theoretical model to apply when enabling these interventions.

2. 3D regional imaginings

“We are all librarians now and connected directly to the big fat information pipe, once the preserve of the privileged few.” [3] David Nicholas

Nicholas was right. He was also wrong. Over two decades on from his commentary on online expertise, we are all librarians now. We are also all doctors. Coaches. Commentators. Journalists. Experts. Well, we think we are. Citizens have access to an expansive diversity of webpages, tweets, videos and TikTok dances. We can mis/diagnose a brain tumour. We can confuse a tin hat apologist with a credentialled researcher. There is a profound difference between access to information and the literacy to place content in a context. There is a distinction between locating information and understanding it. Yet there remains potential in that ‘big fat information pipe’ for regional, rural and remote locations, and the citizens who live within them.

This is a 3D landscape, punctuated by digitization, disintermediation and deterritorialization [4] Digitization has many characteristics. A significant variable to monitor and research when considering social, economic and political domains is mobility. Following on from John Urry’s research [5] [6], ideas move through space and time. The original uses of the internet were very basic, including electronic mail, file transfer, bulletin boards and newsgroups. Yet even from this very basic origin and these simple applications, these early functions shaped connection, communication and community formations over geographical distances [7] An array of technological transformations – or ‘advances’ if scholars wish to summon a progressivist ideology - have allowed people, goods and money to move through geographical space in the last 200 years, including railways in the 19th century and cars in the 20th ([8]. As Innis confirmed through his *Bias of Communication* (2008), the dominant media platform of an era configures the regime of power in operation at a particular time, and how that power is actioned on citizens. Papyrus scrolls capture and execute laws, power and relationships differently from rock paintings in Arnhem land [9] [10] These innovative differences not only configure distinctive renderings of space, place and meaning, but divergent conceptualizations of meaningful time, and time keeping.

The digital movement of ideas is fast and convenient. This speed can create challenges, particularly through the proliferation of digital nonsense, requiring high levels of information literacy to intervene, shape and manage these sources. Also, for communities where information is owned by particular groups and the circulation must be managed and controlled, digital proliferation beyond these cultural and legal parameters corrodes social structures [11] [12] Simply because information can move does not mean that it should. Speed is a significant tendency to understand when investigating regional, rural and remote locations, with highly ambivalent – at best - consequences. As Paul Virilio confirmed, that which is fast dominates that which is slow [13]). Therefore, speed in and of itself – when applied to an object, idea or person – creates power, authority and dominance. Speed is an inelegant proxy for importance. It alters hierarchies and assumptions of value.

From these consequences of digitization, disintermediation emerges. Disintermediation is a characteristic of peer-to-peer networks, where links are removed from the traditional supply and distribution chain between producers and consumers. Via conventional business models, multiple layers and roles are involved in designing, creating, branding, marketing and the retail selling of a product. The person who picked the grapes did not market the wine. The person who made the fencing wire did not sell it. Through the last two decades of digitization – punctuated by user generated content – the person who creates a product can deal directly with their consumers. A musician can write and record a song in their house, mix it with software resident on their computer, and load it to Spotify, where it is heard by consumers. Content originators and an array of businesses can interface with customers without the layered mediation of wholesalers and retailers [14] Many industries have transformed through disintermediation beyond music. The publishing and banking industries, stock trading and the purchase of hardware and software have flattened, with middlemen being displaced. Librarians and libraries have also transformed ([15] While some companies such as Walmart reorganized in response to disintermediation [16]) alongside some charities [17] , real estate remains the caveat to the conversation. Real estate agents are still deployed to provide the aura of an organized and legitimate process, while also masking the chaotic inflations and arbitrary negotiations of real estate capitalism [18] Yet even in real estate, consumers conduct preliminary viewings online, truncating the process, and can select a conveyancer digitally.

Disintermediation flattens the layers and relationships between information and those who use information. It has many causes and origins, of which the most obvious is Google. The search engine allows full text searching, ensuring that the internet suddenly became understandable and useful. Expertise was traded for accessibility [19]. Equivalence was created between information sources, resulting in “the Google effect” ([20]. The web became easier to use, but there was a transformation in the relationship between quality, popularity and usefulness. In other words, there was a proliferation of information, without the subsequent growth in information literacy. Information can be found. However the capacity for it to be checked and placed in meaningful and responsive contexts was lacking. This gap between finding information and being able to assess its quality is revealing serious impacts in health [21] and education [22]). This article reveals how women in regional, rural and remote areas have understood the ambiguity and productivity of this gap, and reintermediated media services, and media literacies.

During the early 2000s, the production of media content was simplified through WordPress and Drupal. Blogging meant that anyone with a point of view, some writing or photographic skills and the ability to use a web template could publish material. Coding expertise was not required. Good quality sound recording equipment and software became available so that – from 2008 - podcasts could proliferate. Video recording equipment – such as the early Flip Video and the improved quality of mobile phone cameras – meant that sonic and visual material could be produced both in the home

and while mobile. TikTok, Facebook Live and YouTube Live were built on accessible video recording and streaming. [23]

While the 3D model has expanded through the first two decades of the 21st century, it is now declining, with new middlemen now reintermediating cultural life [24]. Apple, Google, Netflix, Disney, Amazon, Spotify and Twitter are new mediators, shaping different relationships between producers and consumers. The issue is how to manage these challenges to expertise, as corporations not only intensify their power but sublimate information literacy skills. Disintermediation flattens media and expertise. There is a reduction in the confidence of expert intermediaries – such as journalist and researchers – and their role in aligning information and communication systems to create verifiable meaning. Disintermediation allows citizens to develop new pathways to information and people. It also offers a way to reorganize the power relationships. Specifically, power relationships are flattened, enabling a repositioning and agitation of the comfortable – and oppressive – binaries of white / black, man / woman, centre / periphery, and urban / rural. While change is always challenging, with lagging regulation and governance protocols, there are some important and resonant opportunities for regional development, and for the citizens resident in regional, rural and remote environments to ‘write back’ and reorganize power, evidence and perspective. The final ‘D’ in the 3D model confirms this capacity to reimagine power, land and leadership.

Deterritorialization describes how particular media platforms and communication systems de-emphasize and de-centre a user’s position in actual space and time, in favour of digitized space and time. While the telephone and the satellite were the 20th century manifestations of deterritorialization, the best and most pervasive platform for deterritorialization is the internet and the applications that emerge from it [25]). Our body may be in Bathurst, New South Wales, but a cricket match in Bangladesh can play ‘live’ in our lounge room or computer screen. We can eat Kentucky Fried Chicken in Alice Springs while watching – via scheduled television or YouTube - Jamie Oliver cook a vegetarian biryani in London.

Deterritorialization is powerful for regional, rural and remote communities. It activates often unstable compromises between new and old ways of organizing space and identity. This matters for education [26], and economic and social development because new modes of meeting – sharing time and not space - can take place. Such parking of space to prioritize time was witnessed through the COVID-19 pandemic where Zoom and Teams meetings created a different way of working. [27]

Similarly, leisure also transformed through deterritorialization. An array of social connections can be created through TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Sonic and visual media – podcasts and vlogs – can be carried to diverse locations to enable fitness, family and friend connectivity, and fandom. Besides asynchronous media and connections for leisure and pleasure, synchronous meetings, professional development and consultancy can also take place, carried by Zoom, Skype or Teams interfaces. Social networking continues the deterritorialization of the internet, web and the read write web. Social media offer new modes of connection, communication and community. Certainly

there are critiques. The assumption advanced by Sherry Turkle in her book *Alone Together* is that the screen and social networking have isolated us [28]. Her fear of social atomization is intriguing. Intimacy, connection and communication are changing. The degree of emotional investment varies. Is a friend on Facebook really a friend? What is the relationship between the followed and the follower on Twitter? There is a widening portfolio of intimacy and expressions of connection. New emotional geographies are being constructed. What is clear through COVID-19 is digitized connectivity increased and social distancing of bodies intensified.

The ambivalent consequence of deterritorialization and disintermediation is that many of us can be disconnected from our present most of the time and develop relationships and allegiances in a digitized mobile space of denial and displacement. Users build a digitized, disintermediated and deterritorialized network of friends and distribute content to them. This content is comprised of photographs, video and words. This is an odd cultural movement. Billions of people are now prepared to share very personal (and political) information each day.

These three Ds – digitization, disintermediation and deterritorialization – offer a key lens to explore the transformations of media and citizenship in the last twenty years. To render them useful in research, we map them over quadrants that reveal the exciting and diverse permutations available for media professionals, regional development, policy makers, and citizens.

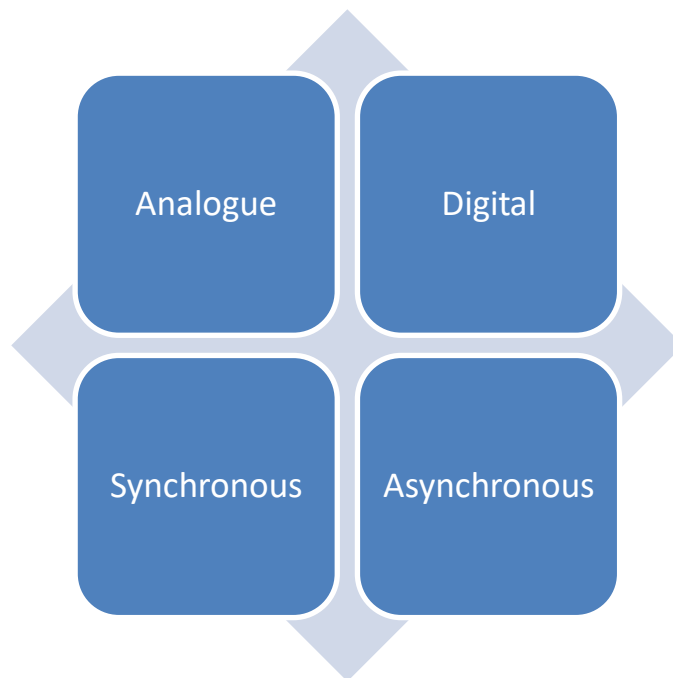


Fig. 1. The four quadrants: analogue, digital, synchronous and asynchronous.
Source: Original diagram by Tara Brabazon

Analogue synchronous platforms include news conferences. Analogue asynchronous platforms incorporate reading books, reports, newspapers or magazines. Digital asynchronous platforms house emails and reading blogs. Digital synchronous platforms encompass Zoom or Microsoft Teams meetings. Each of these sectors, and the media they contain, dialogue, develop and spark innovative platforms and options for journalists and citizens. This matrix builds community, communication and collaboration. Thinking about analogue and digital – synchronous and asynchronous – ensures that researchers remember and explore the architectures of identity. Who we are transforms through digitization, deterritorialization and disintermediation. Yet simply because technology exists does not mean that it should be used, or that it will be used well. Therefore, when citizens make a choice with consciousness, while being aware of the alternative options, they activate the interfaces and platforms that work for them in a particular time and place.

When digitization, disintermediation and deterritorialization operate in regional, rural and remote locations, new models and modes of “place branding” [29] are summoned. Diverse forms of storytelling are possible, with place narratives emerging through the careful and respectful dissemination of appropriately selected and dissemination Indigenous histories, alongside an array of histories of food, work, sustainability and families.

3. Digitization, disintermediation and deterritorialization at work in RRR communities

Examples of digitization, disintermediation and deterritorialization emerged in a series of open access interviews with women who lead and work for local news outlets in regional, rural and remote communities. They use digital platforms to share stories that are important to their communities, to the maintenance of existing publics and to build new ones for their news outlets. They decide how to tell those stories in ways that best suit the needs of their communities. Digitization has expanded the potential for engagement with those outside of the areas served by this local news, through the online news sites and the social media accounts that support their activities. More importantly, some are using these digital technologies to build cooperative relationships with RRR communities whereby journalism is more than just talking at audiences. It becomes about talking with publics and in that process, a collective endeavour. This is journalism that is co-produced by journalists and the communities in which they reside. Co-production involves sourcing news that matters to local communities from the people who live and work there. It means people can share their stories in ways that contribute to their communities. It involves partnerships with communities that are designed to develop and implement solutions to issues and problems that communities face. This is a different kind of approach to news provision than typically adopted by mainstream news media. Despite the challenges that digitization, disintermediation and deterritorialization could present, the women journalists interviewed have harnessed the potential and power of the internet to spread their stories beyond their backyards and to garner new audiences beyond the geographical boundaries of their communities.

In the face of the disruption that occurred between 2019 and 2022, with the closure of many of Australia’s RRR news outlets and the full stop that could have been the end of these outlets, those interviewed took responsibility for the continuation of the supply of local

news. They did this by establishing new news outlets and continuing to operate existing independent ones. The provision of news in RRR communities is no longer in the interests of major news organisations who previously owned and operated many RRR news outlets. The RRR local news space has shifted into digital environments, opening new opportunities for news ventures operated by sole operators and small or medium-sized operations whose mandate is to cover what people in these communities want to hear about: news from their own backyards. Local news outlets in RRR communities shift the dynamics and the relationship from news producers and towards audiences, building new networks between news producers and publics, disrupting their reliance on what mainstream news organisations decide to provide by way of local news in these communities. The people who produce local news in-situ know their communities. The interactions between local news providers and those who use that news, is very different from the relationships between consumers and mainstream news media. It is a closer connection, one built on mutual understanding of what communities need. The news producer is known by their first name and is recognisable when walking down the street. That analogue and synchronous relationships transfer into the digital domain – the digital asynchronous domain - where the direct connection people feel to the journalist migrates. This connection builds from synchronous to asynchronous communication. A series of other affiliations, bonds, alignments and power structures wash around this movement.

This power shift means that local community members in regional, rural and remote locations can choose to support those who care about providing news and information that matters. In the absence of care in the form of local news coverage by mainstream news media, the consumer has the power to decide who to support and who to disregard. The relationships are what matters: those between in-situ local news producers and those using that news. Disintermediation gives citizens the power to support the provision of news for their communities. For example, owner and editor of *The Biloela Beacon*, Jen Gourley places the viability and continuation of her news outlet in the hands of her community by ensuring its members can decide how much, how often and when they contribute to the costs of local news provision through a donation or a regular sponsorship. The news she produces for *The Biloela Beacon* is still freely accessible by those who do not donate or sponsor. This approach disrupts the increasingly common pay wall model adopted by many mainstream news media outlets which has benefits as Gourley explains:

I'm not a fan [of the paywall] and again I may be being too idealistic about this but I like the idea of information being available to everybody. I can see that people resent the fact when something comes up and they can't access it because it's behind a paywall and some people are happy to pay a subscription, but a lot of people aren't. I am trying a different way of funding the Beacon. I'm doing it through sponsorship. I am asking businesses and individuals to become sponsors and that way there is still the opportunity for advertising but I've realised from experience that advertising, there's just not the demand for it, particularly in these areas like there used to be so you have to think outside the box. I think it's very important that the information is free and that everybody has access to it but it has to get funded somehow, that's the problem. [30]

This approach reconfigures the circulations of power between news users and producers, putting the choice to support the continued provision of local in the hands of community members. In a larger operation such as that of Region Media, where no paywalls exist, the power lies with those reading the online news content to continue to access it and, in that process, to support the venture through data that shows readership to advertisers who are the main source of income for this news media outlet.

These types of changes are challenging, just as are the shifts that social media has brought to the Australian news media. They have posed challenges for traditional news media outlets calling into question their relevancy, their capacity to build audiences and relate to publics, and in breaking and following news. These challenges have been keenly felt by metropolitan regional, rural, and remote news outlets. Despite this, the women journalists interviewed highlight that social media have helped to extend a sense of connectivity for their communities and have complemented their provision of local news. For Gourley, Facebook had provided an important additional platform to develop new audiences for The Biloela Beacon while connecting with existing readers. Social media is a more immediate means for Gourley to reach audiences – through the speed of dissemination and delivery – and enables audiences to reach out to their families and friends outside the Biloela region by tagging them in news stories. The news site’s Facebook page attracts sponsorship from local business which contributes to the sustainability of the news outlet. Region Media deploys a variety of social media platforms to direct traffic to the website and build readership. Genevieve Jacobs explains:

I think though what has really happened is because we dovetail in through social media people pick up in their feeds and constantly see news stories coming up. They see names and faces that they trust. They see the way that we approach stories, and we are doing this, we are proving it by doing it and probably that’s the contrast with a number of other people who try to do this that might have good editorial ideas but don’t necessarily have the business skills. We’ve been able to find a way to do it that’s economically sustainable [31]

She says that people who live outside metropolitan areas are digitally connected and that enables Region Media to “broker a new model that really gives people access to the tools of production,” meaning they could “give voices to communities, we can work with stories that come from communities” [31]. In three and a half years since its establishment, Region Media had increased unique readers a day from 10,000 to 25,000, publishing between 130 and 140 stories per week on two platforms – The Riot Act and About Regional. A key consideration for those using social media to promote news outlets was their ability to ensure that journalists could continue to make a living and social media enabled that by expanding their reach.

3.1 Case study

A new Australian news venture, independently owned and funded by a combination of investors and philanthropic support, called Paradigm Shift (PS) Media was established in 2022. PS Media is configuring a new model of journalism in three communities in

Australia. They are: Logan (in South-East Queensland); Brimbank (in Melbourne, Victoria Australia); and Port Phillip (on the central coast of southern Victoria). One of PS Media's directors Margaret Simons says the approach is "that journalism at a local level can be collaborative and co-owned with the community and that it's still possible to do good, hard-hitting journalism that looks at difficult issues and problems but as an active collaboration with communities" [32]. The start-up provides free access to news from each of the three aforementioned areas via its website. The PS Media site states:

Our vision is a fairer, better-informed, more involved society. We believe everyone should have access to unbiased, reliable, local news. We're building a collaborative platform, co-created with your community. We would love you to get involved, to contribute what you know. We strive for accuracy, and truth. We hold ourselves accountable. We learn as we go. If we make reporting errors, we publicly correct them, fast. To let us know how we are doing, contact us [33]

PS Media's Logan news site is particularly important in the context of this article and the application of the three Ds. The Logan Shire local government area sits between the cities of Brisbane and the Gold Coast and extends to the border of the Scenic Rim in Southeast Queensland. It contains a mix of regional, rural, and fast-growing suburban housing developments. There are tensions between retaining land use for agricultural purposes and allocating land to housing sub-divisions. The area is home to a diverse population, with 4.2% of the population Indigenous, 36% of the population whose parents (both) were born outside of Australia. In Logan 7.1% of residents were born in New Zealand, 3.3% in England, 13% in India, 1.1% Philippines, and 0.7% in Samoa. Average incomes are low compared with average State and national incomes, with 32.3% of the area's population not in the labour force. There is significant reliance on personal transport rather than public transport. Logan shire has a higher percentage of one parent household than state and national averages [34].

The diversity in the Logan area presents unique challenges to PS Media but also provides opportunities. PS Media's cooperative, co-partnership approach to covering news is very different than typical mainstream news media approaches to reportage in the Logan Shire, where coverage in the latter news outlets focuses on crime, domestic violence, drug use and other negative stories. The approach is what Simons describes as "bottom-up journalism" asking people in communities about the issues they face and then taking those matters to politicians. This approach can shift power relationships, making politicians accountable to their constituents. Simons explains the benefits of this approach:

I think that's a more promising way of helping people to see how and why politics might matter to them and so I wanted to explore journalism and here I've been influenced by people like Jay Rosen for example the American journalism academic that could be part of helping people to understand the problems that they're facing and can be solutions focused as well. I've always thought that are far more interesting and useful way of reporting politics would be to do it from the ground up so to start with what's happening

in the school or the hospital and maybe you end up you know in Canberra and Spring Street asking questions as a minister but to start at the [32].

This approach does not simply disrupt the power relationship between politicians and citizens. It also disrupts the traditional power relationship between news media and their audiences. Simons explains:

Logan would be an example of what I talked about earlier which is when a [non-local] journalist comes to town it's nearly always bad news for the community. Just the fact that the journalist is there, and communities very rarely feel properly represented or depicted in that sort of reporting. It doesn't necessarily mean the reporters are getting it wrong, that they are reporting it from the point of view of 'Oh dear you know there's this terrible problem, bad people', and then they go back to their city offices and leave the community to deal with the fallout from that [32].

PS Media reports on the issues that communities are talking about and that they want to address by working collaboratively with communities to find answers. Simons recognises that the answers to these issues are not always easy, and in some cases there may be no solutions. PS Media will hold community forums to discuss issues, involving experts, residents, local government, and others with a stake in the issue. The forum and its discussions would be covered by PS Media. Simons says this approach was so that the news outlet would be “seen as part of the community as it wrestles with issues and problems, but not everything is about problems, we would also be reporting on the strength of the community” [32]. Simons says the Logan community is an example of this, with its strong Pacific Islander community with an incredibly complex history was a significant community and – if visible - can provide important lessons for others in relation to family values and cultural matters. Disintermediation through digitization was crucial for an area such as Logan, which had a significant rural base and agricultural communities, while also being located on the edge of a major city. The potential for deterritorialization with this approach involves creating new spaces online for community discussion and action.

While some regional, rural, and remote communities have been damaged by problematic approaches to reporting stories, PS Media’s method is to help locally based reporters think about how news coverage can be improved in a collaborative manner with communities. This is an example of disintermediation at work with the flattening of the power relationships between journalist and communities resulting in new and useful collaborations. Simons elaborates:

I would appeal to local communities to join with us in thinking through how can this be done well and to help us learn. We bring skills. We bring certain experiences, but we need to learn from the communities about how we can do this with all the traditional journalistic virtues of you know impartiality and factual accuracy and so on but better reconceive it to make a paradigm shift. We are after a paradigm shift in the conception of journalism. We'd like to be a voice in state and federal politics and possibly employing in a journalist who report federal politics for example but for the

communities in our reporting on issues which arise from the communities and to be successful of course in Australian media having proved that the community a community collaborative co-owned model can work and is sustainable [32].

The implications of this new model of journalism for the people living in the very culturally, socio-economically, and geographically diverse Logan Shire are significant. The Logan news space of PS Media provides a digital place in which individuals and community groups can engage with journalists for example by booking meetings with them. Those using the site can see the products of their engagements with journalists in the form of news stories and coverage of community meetings produced in a digital space. They can also see how journalism can be created, built and disseminated differently by shifting the focus from problems to solutions and producing journalism that seeks to explain regular problems that individuals may encounter in their daily lives, for example what you can and cannot put in the recycling bin and how to interpret flood maps. The aim is to reconnect disconnected individuals and communities with each other, through journalism that matters to them.

4. Conclusion

The women whose interviews are cited in this article are committed to providing alternative, important, and safe spaces where local news can flourish, serve the needs of the communities for which it is produced and flatten the layers between those accessing the news and those who produce it for regional, rural and remote communities. This disintermediation has created innovative spaces for communities that have been underserved or ignored by mainstream news media. Much of this has occurred through digitization which has facilitated entrepreneurial journalism that has a social conscience. Some of these spaces are decolonised as they focus on groups whose voices would not typically be heard in mainstream news media, unless they were framed as problematic or stereotyped.

Disintermediation and digitisation are facilitated through the use of social media and the websites of regional, rural and remote news outlets where active engagement between publics and news producers occurs from scheduling meetings with reporters, to building new relationships with audiences and publics outside the local area, for example connecting family and friends to news from the location where their loved ones live. This is possible because of the digital platforms that enable direct engagement between communities, individuals and those writing and producing the news. The distance between the news consumer and the producer is not just shortened or truncated, it all but disappears. These are also sites of resistance where women are subverting mainstream news media approaches to reporting issues that problematise them, and working with communities to solve those problems or to report them through other lenses that de-emphasise conflict, challenge stereotypes and build new understandings across and within communities. The women journalists interviewed use social media and their online news sites to de-territorialize the news in the process facilitating new connections within communities, while those who have temporarily or permanently left those communities it facilitates a sense of ongoing connection with the people and places they have left behind.

Journalism immersed in the three Ds facilitates collaborations between news outlets and communities in which they are based, such as the examples provided in this article. It recognises the power of knowledge held by members of communities, their potential expertise in helping to design and develop solutions to issues and problems in their own backyards and values local knowledge, thus disrupting the traditional relationship between news producers and consumers. Disintermediation, digitization, and deterritorialization allow news users to move in and out of imagined communities, while connecting them to the geographical communities in which they live, work and play.

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