Newsgathering 3.0

Developing stories in a polarized world to build trust, engagement and audience
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Never has news been more important.

Our globalized world faces complex challenges and, for many news organizations, the most basic responsibility is to provide citizens with facts so they can form their own opinions.

As Stephen J. Adler, president and editor-in-chief, Reuters, recently noted in a memo to staff, “We make a difference in the world because we practice professional journalism that is both intrepid and unbiased.”

As facts fight fake in an environment that is more challenging for journalism and news publishing than ever, it’s clear that the media industry is crackling with innovation, energy and ideas. It is an ecosystem where digital-born and legacy media productively cross pollinate and in which the fundamental human need for trusted information is creating opportunity for transformation and new methods of monetization.
In this report, we at Reuters News Agency introduce some of the approaches to comprehensive newsgathering that successful news businesses can adopt to survive in our digital, social and mobile world. These approaches will be examined in a more detailed series throughout the year.

For many news organizations, comprehensive newsgathering means providing individuals with the tools and training to develop a 360-degree digital and legacy skill set. At an organizational level, it means innovating to facilitate versatility in newsgathering. This deepens and broadens the scope of the stories found, the formats in which they are told and the channels through which they inform and engage audiences.

We’ll introduce these ideas in more detail, but first, let’s take a look at the news landscape in 2017.
A problem diagnosed: post-truth politics

In November last year, Donald Trump’s victory in the U.S. presidential election blindsided America’s media establishment. Their mistake, as diagnosed by the Atlantic’s Salena Zito, was that ‘the press takes him (Trump) literally, but not seriously; his supporters take him seriously, but not literally’.1

Politicians are used to being called ‘out of touch’; when journalists are accused of the same toxic mix of elitism, ignorance and naivety, it hurts. After all, being in touch is our purpose.

Alongside the discomfort of being ignored and/or disbelieved by a large swathe of the U.S. electorate, the biggest news brands in the U.S. faced a new problem. The New York Times and the Washington Post were used to competing with the web’s copious supply of free content. In 2016, it became increasingly clear, they were also competing with fake content.2

On the one hand, false news sites were run as money-spinning ventures, drawing millions of clicks and resulting ad revenue.3 On the other, some claimed that so-called alt-right news sites like Breitbart4 appeared to be monetizing ‘anger and anti-immigrant sentiment’. By normalising populist views which might once have been regarded as extreme, Breitbart grew its readership from 2.9m unique visitors in 2012 to 17m in 2016, making it the biggest right-wing news site in the US.5

A critical and complex issue, we will discuss fake news in more detail throughout the year.

‘We were not having a reality-based conversation.’

CNN anchor John King on the network’s coverage of the presidential campaign.


2012 2.9m
2016 17m
Journalism’s mission critical

In the BBC’s Future of News report, James Harding, director news and current affairs, defined the task of public service as delivering:

- **what really matters** story selection, impartiality and fair treatment
- **what’s really going on** accurate reporting, courageous coverage without fear or favour and long-running investigations
- **what it really means** explanatory journalism, rigorous analysis and requiring people to account for themselves.6

The same criteria apply to news organizations around the world that take their fourth estate obligations seriously.

But if much of our primary mission remains the same, plenty has changed. We’ll come to the issues of news monetization, distribution and engagement later in the year – for now, let’s look at the fundamental shift in where our stories come from, and how we tell them.

Content marketing taught brands to create and sustain relationships with customers. ‘Our strategy,’ explains Marc Mathieu, senior vice-president marketing at Unilever, ‘is around sustainability, transparency and trust. And that’s enabled by changes in how people communicate, which technology has made more open and real-time.

‘Today (...) we can build a direct relationship with people by having a conversation with them. (...) We’re looking for ways to share a truth, to invite in the audience and let them take ownership and share it with others.’

For newsgatherers, ‘having a conversation’ with users means an end to top-down, desk-bound reporting.

Comprehensive news sources include the local; the personalized; stories found on, or generated by, social media; collaborative and citizen journalism; and issues only revealed by the intelligent analysis of big data – to name but a few.

Using digital and tech to meet mainstream audiences is part of the answer. There’s also the deeper drill down, delivering the specialist knowledge for which, the Quartz curve teaches us, users will pay.

Social journalism, as theorized by Jeff Jarvis, director of the Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism at the City University of New York, advocates a move from journalism-as-product to journalism-as-service. ‘Such an approach invites the media to partner with communities to help them tell their stories and achieve their goals, thereby delivering a service which is neither exploitative, patronizing nor misrepresentative.’

By engaging with the widely varied sources of information outlined above, news can reach people where they live, reflecting and representing - as well as informing and challenging - their reality.

1 http://futureofmarketing.eiu.com/
2 http://www.onlydeadfish.co.uk/only_dead_fish/2014/10/the-quartz-curve.html
Greater reach, deeper engagement

In 2016, 54% of the 130 leading editors, CEOs and digital leaders surveyed by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism said that ‘deepening online engagement’ was now their top priority.3

The reason? Audience engagement is critical to monetization. As the FT’s new head of audience engagement Renée Kaplan puts it, her ‘metrics of success’ include ‘Increasing the audience’s connection with our content, creating more loyal subscribers, growing a sense of loyalty, creating dependence on our content.

‘We’re focusing on our existing subscribers — what we know about them, what they like, how they want to consume our content. We’re also growing our audiences, thinking about who might be interested in the stories we’re telling in different formats and on different platforms.’10

In the Institute’s survey of media leaders, the figure prioritizing audience engagement was near matched by the 41% who cited ‘driving greater reach’. As Jeff Bezos, Amazon CEO and owner of the Washington Post puts it, ‘We have historically made a relatively large amount of money per reader on a relatively small number of readers. And we need instead to make a relatively small amount of money per reader on a much larger number of readers.’

Growing your (paying) audience can be a tough task, however keep in mind that establishing your brand identity can help. As Paul Armstrong, technologist, author, journalist, and founder of Here/Forth puts it, ‘If you can get people to love your brand, they will buy your brand – look at Apple, it’s a brand people love so much they’ll get into fights about it. The first thing they (news organizations) need to do,’ Armstrong continues, ‘is focus on their brand in the way, for example, the New York Times and the Economist have. News organizations have to tell me where they stand.

‘Then they have to restore or develop the trust they lost in 2016. News media have held up a massive mirror and been told they have failed to represent reality accurately.’

If they can fix that, he believes, they can monetize their content. ‘It’s actually a bizarre concept that people wouldn’t spend money on news. It’s just that news doesn’t make it simple to pay them by using, for example, Apple Pay or Android Pay.’

3 http://digitalnewsreport.org/publications/2016/predictions-2016/
Personalized and local

When it comes to local news, legacy media has fallen down on the job. U.S. commentators like Burt Herman, director of innovation projects, Institute for Journalism in New Media in Philadelphia, have recently bemoaned the way in which ‘Local journalism has been decimated by the decline of newspapers and industry consolidation’.

According to Newspaper Death Watch, 28 local U.S. newspapers have either closed down or reduced their frequency or print presence since 2007.

Towns with no local newspaper or TV network have fewer officially recognized channels for making their voices heard, or holding local government to account. And centralized media outlets have little hope of covering local news at any sort of granular level.

Yet despite admitting that journalism ‘has a huge blind spot in coverage of much of the United States, something that became glaringly obvious with the surprise many felt in Donald Trump’s presidential election win,’ Herman is optimistic.

He points to native digital startups like Spirited Media (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh), and Whereby.us (Miami and Seattle) using new tech infrastructure and business models to make local news pay.

William Perrin is a digital innovator and founder, Talk About Local, a UK consultancy fostering digital inclusion for individuals, communities and organizations.

‘I’ve worked with local websites,’ says Perrin, ‘and I’ve seen how they gather news in their own way. They’ve developed a native, independent set of skills thanks to the fact that anyone who can write and hit the return key can publish online.

In the UK, the BBC surveyed adults and found that 56% thought ‘more local news’ would be a positive development. The BBC’s local news programmes are watched more than anything else in the organization’s news offering.

However, continues Perrin, ‘Big broadcasters and newspapers rely on an existing infrastructure supporting a stereotyped means of production with a fixed production schedule. It doesn’t come naturally to them to disrupt that.’

Yet the opportunities are there, for businesses willing to innovate for a highly personalized and locally specific news feed. Dubbed ‘news you can use’, this approach delivers information that is genuinely useful to readers and viewers.

To take a UK example, during storms Desmond and Eva in the winter of 2015/16, would maps and bulletins explaining which roads were blocked by floodwater have proved more useful to residents than footage of correspondents seconded from London to wear thigh-high waders in freezing water – however dramatic?

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11  http://www.niemanlab.org/2016/12/local-news-gets-interesting/
12  http://newspaperdeathwatch.com/
If you really want to meet the needs of your audience, a personalized format for news can be a game-changer. The Reuters TV app, for example, was devised to reinvent ‘the news bulletin away from a mass, linear newscast into an algorithmically generated but still TV-quality news show’. Viewers can create a bespoke, five to 30-minute length programme covering the issues that concern them.

For some, fully automated personalization is the logical extension of such an approach.

Bytedance is a mobile content aggregator based in Beijing producing news apps for mobile. Its flagship product is the Today’s Headlines app, which uses a recommendation engine to deliver news likely to be of interest to the user. The company is proud to have ‘no editorial staff, no production content, no stand and no values’ – its news is sourced elsewhere. 78.4% of its traffic is Chinese and as of September 2016, Bytedance had 580 million active users, with continuing, stratospheric growth.

Snapchat’s Live Stories gives the local a social twist. Snap’s human editors have curated footage taken by the app’s many users to give a unique perspective on events ranging from the Louisiana floods in 2016 to an attack on students at Ohio State University. Snap’s presentation of these events was refreshing, showing video from inside people’s houses, shelters and schools - in stark contrast to conventional TV coverage.

APPs, INNOVATORS & TECH TO WATCH

Semantic analysis and artificial intelligence tech delivering interactive podcast news.

Amazon’s Alexa
Google Home
Siri

15 http://bytedance.com.2compete.org/
Searching social media for news

For many commentators, the epidemic of fake news transmitted via the world’s global platforms – most particularly Google and Facebook – impaired coverage of the U.S. election.

Those platforms are now under intense pressure to put their houses in order. In the meantime social media remains a fertile source of news, trends and on-the-ground accounts.

Alex Krasodomski-Jones is a researcher at the UK thinktank Demos’s Centre for the Analysis of Social Media. ‘I do remain optimistic that social media is inherently a positive thing,’ he says. ‘Everyone with a mobile is now a source, and the resulting ‘citizen journalism’ is more sophisticated than a simple eye-witness account. It’s first-hand coverage of anything and everything around the world and, in most cases, the sources of information are relatively strong.’

‘A major challenge for legacy media comes from a sourcing point of view’ asserts Jon Bernstein, former digital director of the New Statesman and former multimedia editor at Channel 4 News. ‘So if you were covering the evacuation of eastern Aleppo last year, would you follow the BBC, Reuters newswires or the Twitter feed of the International Red Cross?’

‘The guys on the ground are now able to tell their story unmediated. Once the source of your news, they’re now broadcasting directly as a consequence of the internet. But even the Red Cross has its own agenda – so how do you supply the mediating context and interpretation, the all sides considered view of the story?’

Reuters News Tracer was developed to find breaking news on Twitter and assess its accuracy, answering ‘an existential question for the news agency,’ as Reg Chua, Reuters’ executive editor of data and innovation, explains. ‘A large part of our DNA is built on the notion of being first, so we wanted to figure out how to build systems that would give us an edge on tracking information posted on social media at speed and at scale. This isn’t something that you can solve simply by throwing more people at the issue; it takes the marriage of human smarts and machine intelligence.’

Reuters News Tracer is one of many applications designed to stay ahead of the changing landscape of information in the social age.

News organizations should also take hope from the fact that social media platforms do not only act as conduits for ‘vast flows of information, fantasy, leaks, conspiracy theories, expressions of benevolence and hatred’ as the FT’s Christopher Caldwell put it.
According to the Reuters Institute 2016 Digital News Report, **31% of the population in 26 countries surveyed used social media to become ‘proactive participants’ in news.**

These sophisticated, savvy consumers of online news, we might speculate, are similar to the demographic that have made Blendl a Dutch success story. Selling journalism via micropayments, the tech startup now has 250,000 users in the Netherlands, most under 35 years old, and recently signed licenses to sell The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post.

AJ+ is widely regarded as one of the most successful digital innovations to come out of the Middle East. An online news platform owned and operated by Al-Jazeera Media Network of Doha, AJ+ is live in the U.S. also operates Spanish and Arabic language sites.

AJ+’s slogan (‘Experience. Empower. Engage’), branding and content target a generation of young news consumers eager for stories from around the world.

On Medium, for example, AJ+’s long-form content is described as ‘news for the connected generation, sharing human struggles, and challenging the status quo’. Just as importantly, AJ+’s presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube promises to deliver ‘news made for where you are’.

Like the ‘proactive participants’ identified in the Reuters Digital News Report, AJ+’s ‘connected generation’ – call them social media users with a social conscience – seem invested in sharing their experiences. For news, that’s a potentially fruitful and informative partnership.

**APPS, INNOVATORS & TECH TO WATCH**

First Draft News a free-to-use verification and debunking tools website.
Big data and robo-journalism

In his seminal work on entrepreneurial journalism, Geeks Bearing Gifts, Jeff Jarvis writes, ‘Data is an attitude. It is one tool that can help realize the larger ideal of openness in government, business, journalism and society. Acquiring data and making it available to the public so anyone can investigate its meaning is an act on behalf of transparency’.

‘What journalists have to ask,’ Jarvis continues, ‘is how they add value to data by helping to gather it (with effort, clout, tools and the ability to convene a community), analyze it (by calling upon or hiring experts who bring context and questions or by writing algorithms), and present it (contributing, most importantly, context and explanation).

A data journalist is now an essential member of any newsroom team but global trends (in climate change for example) call for a different approach.

Robin Pembroke is director of news product and systems in the BBC’s design and engineering division: ‘As public bodies and companies open their data sources,’ he says, ‘we can use machine-learning capabilities to monitor interesting trends in large data sets.’

‘For me, that is a much more interesting use of ‘robo-journalism’ than the generation of stories covering financial results and so on.’

In 2016, German digital publisher Axel Springer partnered with Samsung to create UPDAY, a news aggregator pre-loaded onto Samsung’s Galaxy phone for customers in four European countries, with plans to expand to 16 in 2017.17

What makes UPDAY different, CEO Peter Würtenberger has said, is that intelligent machine learning works in tandem with editorial curation to deliver ‘news you need’ and ‘news you want’: ‘While other aggregators rely solely on algorithms when providing content, it’s this dynamic between human interaction and data science that sets UPDAY apart.’

As American analyst Ken Doctor put it, ‘The pinball effect of smart tech and smart editors will give UPDAY its value to readers. While aggregators from Google to News Republic rely on the almighty algorithm, it’s the play between the algo and the human that will tell us whether Springer has really broken new ground here.’18

17 https://www.ft.com/content/8503415e-ea37-11e6-967b-c8845122616f
18 http://www.politico.com/media/story/2016/01/upday-ups-the-ante-on-mobile-news-aggregation-004369

APPS, INNOVATORS & TECH TO WATCH
Platfora big data discovery app
Collaborative and citizen journalism

In November last year, viewers of Channel 4 news were moved by the video testimonies of doctors, teachers and parents inside Aleppo, soon to fall to Syrian government forces. In locations closed to professional journalists and foreign correspondents, witnesses become powerful, if partial, sources of information.

But even when location isn’t an issue, user-generated content (UGC) can be an important adjunct to professional reporting, as the BBC learnt in the wake of London’s 7/7 bombings. It became clear, says the BBC’s Trushar Barot, that ‘the audience knew more than us on the story; they helped us tell the story faster; they helped us tell the story better.’

Today, the user-generated content unit sits at the heart of the BBC’s main newsroom and is staffed by 20 journalists covering domestic and international stories.

As the BBC’s Future of News report notes, ‘News organizations that develop collaborative journalism with audiences can yield real benefits – building stronger relationships and identifying a wider range of stories of interest to them.’

It’s an approach followed through by the Trinity Mirror newspaper group, who now recruit ‘community content curators’ to ‘establish, maintain and develop excellent relationships with content suppliers within the community’. Tellingly, the company are at pains to point out that ‘This is not a role that is suitable for someone who has preliminary journalism qualifications or ambitions to be a journalist.’

Instead, the community content curator provides an intelligent conduit for local voices – along the way, helping Trinity Mirror’s Regional Network achieve a 70 per cent year-on-year increase in web traffic.¹⁹

Collaborative and citizen journalism

UGC was also a key insight in the New York Times’s influential Innovation Report.²⁰ Invite specialists and experts to contribute op-ed pieces to the paper, and you build credibility, engagement and audience.

But citizen and collaborative journalism is more than just a shot in the arm for legacy media. It also ignites digital-born products, like the Curious City project in the US. Started in Chicago by radio station WBEZ, the project invites questions from the community and asks listeners to vote on their favourite. The station’s reporters then investigate, with the help of followers.

So successful was Curious City that it evolved into the Hearken app, founded by WBEZ journalist Jenn Brandel. Hearken bills itself as ‘next level audience engagement’ and is now available to newsrooms around the US.


APPS, INNOVATORS & TECH TO WATCH

**Hearken** helps news organisations listen to their audiences, engaging them from pitch to publication

**Newsflare** user-generated video content marketplace
Global voices, untold stories and the art of the drilldown.

For decades, television’s nightly news bulletins have dominated the news agenda.

When television delivered breaking news better than anyone else, these shows were required viewing. But for Richard Sambrook, director, Centre for Journalism at Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, that model can no longer sustain broadcasting.

‘To survive,’ says Sambrooke, ‘broadcasters have to add value to the audience’s consumption of news and information(...) they need a different proposition – a broader agenda covering stories that you can’t find elsewhere, reflecting the views of a greater number of people by expanding the news agenda’ Sambrooke argues.

Digital-born online news sites investigating the stories that wouldn’t otherwise get heard include the Pulitzer Prize-winning ProPublica.21 Founded and largely funded by Herbert and Marion Sandler, the site is not-for-profit and frequently collaborates with newspapers on investigations.

With a 60% non-white staff, meanwhile, Fusion champions diversity and approaches ‘news and entertainment through a lens that celebrates all voices in today’s world’. Fusion has won prizes for its coverage of industrial farming (Cock Fight) and prison for juveniles (Prison Kids).

‘Broadcasters should also consider going niche,’ says Jon Bernstein. ‘A global audience makes even the smallest niche sizeable and potentially profitable. The internet means no geographical boundaries and lower distribution costs.’

‘Just as TV packages have been “unbundled” by users who watch their chosen shows online, so audiences have also been unbundled.

There are fewer watercooler moments (where a single show brings in a huge national audience) but if you can work out how to monetize your niche audience that’s fertile territory.’

21 [https://www.propublica.org/](https://www.propublica.org/)
Whether your point of difference is political polemic, authentic diversity, or the kind of specialist information supplied by the Financial Times or the Wall Street Journal, a USP is essential, says Ian Burrell, News Business columnist at thedrum.com.

‘The critical thing is to offer something different from the rest of the market,’ says Burrell.

‘I am excited by the fact that quality journalism appears to be a key to monetary success.

The legacy news brands that currently look to have the most viable futures are combining substantial subscription revenues for digital and print products that carry the same brand values but are distinct offerings.

‘They support this with live events and branded content studios that, again, uphold the same quality controls. In some cases, news brands are able to additionally offer editorial products aimed at specialist professional audiences and coming at a premium price.

‘This is a model that will only work for news providers of genuine quality which have a unique offering within their competitor set.’

An example might be Business Insider launching another iteration of what has become an ever expanding global brand since its U.S. launch in 2007.

Its French editor-in-chief, Marie-Catherine Beuth, describes herself as a ‘journopreneur’ and already has one successful start-up under her belt (News on Demand, founded 2014).22

Business Insider’s USP are its ‘deep verticals’ in finance, media and tech, and the U.S. site is now the largest business news site in the world.

22 https://www.linkedin.com/in/mcbeuth

APPs, INNOVATORS & TECH TO WATCH

Bridge by Meedan translates the social web

Drone journalism will reach the parts human reporters can’t (think forest fires, police chases, hurricane destruction and tornado paths).
Social journalism: from journalism-as-product to journalism-as-service

However they approach the conundrum of monetization, few news organizations fundamentally question the nature of their journalism. An independent, high-quality press is fundamental to functioning democracy, goes the mantra – the question then is how to pay for it.

But at the City University of New York, Jeff Jarvis champions a new journalism, one fully committed to a public service ethos.

In 2016, Jarvis wrote in his blog Buzzmachine: ‘We must fundamentally reinvent journalism: its relationship with the communities it serves, the forms it takes, the business models that support it’.

He explains how journalism’s business salvation lies in its social utility: ‘What the net killed was the mass media business model and with it mass media’. Instead, Jarvis argues, ‘we need a relationship strategy’ which delivers ‘greater relevance and value to people, shifting from journalism-as-product to journalism-as-service. The only way to give you greater relevance is to know you as an individual or member of a community.

‘The only way to serve you well is to listen to you, understand your needs, and empathize with those needs. For the service of journalism will be about helping you meet your goals.’

These new values rescue journalism from a traffic-seeking black hole of ‘cats and Kardashians and clickbait candidates’, says Jarvis.

Social utility makes business sense for South African Pierre van der Hoven, whose Tuluntulu mobile news aggregator supplies African content to meet the needs of African users.

The decreasing cost of smartphones, tablets and data means that ‘Africa is a continent experiencing explosive growth in mobile penetration and usage,’ says van der Hoven. Since its launch in 2012, the Tuluntulu app has been downloaded over 263,000 times in 154 countries, most frequently in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania and Kenya.

The app is free to download and free to use, a business model chosen to maximize audience reach and engagement. It also happens to give anyone on the continent with a smartphone access to global and locally relevant information, from news and lifestyle to education and documentaries. ‘I’m passionate,’ says van der Hoven, ‘about technology, sport and making a positive contribution to a prosperous Africa.’

APPS, INNOVATORS & TECH TO WATCH

The Coral Project
Free, open-source tools to help journalists and communities engage

Brigade
Founded by Napster’s Sean Parker, encourages civic action and empowers users to seek change
Whether your organization’s newsgathering goes deep or reaches wide, finding the stories that resonate, that have salience, while still honouring the highest journalistic standards, is fundamental.

In what has been described as a new phase of media disruption\(^3\), it’s necessary for news organizations to prioritize versatility in newsgathering, primarily achieved through innovation.

\section*{6 approaches to comprehensive newsgathering}

1. Personalized and hyperlocal
2. Searching social media for news
3. Big data and robo-journalism
4. Citizen and collaborative journalism
5. Away from the mainstream
6. Social journalism: from journalism-as-product to journalism-as-service

These approaches bear a striking resemblance to the areas identified in Santa Clara University’s trust project: nine trust indicators of which newsrooms should be mindful.

The list includes using diverse voices, actionable feedback for public and newsroom, and local reporting.\(^4\)

At Reuters, the integrity, independence and freedom from bias we hold dear is combined with 2,500 journalists in nearly 200 locations around the globe delivering award-winning international and national news coverage with speed, impartiality and insight – comprehensive newsgathering on the world stage.

Through trust and accuracy, we are able to deliver engagement and growth – and we can help you do the same.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{23} Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism Digital News Report 2016, p.29

\textsuperscript{24} The Trust Project, Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University, U.S. Backed and funded by Google}
The Trust Principles

1. That Thomson Reuters shall at no time pass into the hands of any one interest, group or faction

2. That the integrity, independence and freedom from bias of Thomson Reuters shall at all times be fully preserved

3. That Thomson Reuters shall supply unbiased and reliable news services to newspapers, news agencies, broadcasters and other media subscribers and to businesses, governments, institutions, individuals and others with whom Thomson Reuters has or may have contracts

4. That Thomson Reuters shall pay due regard to the many interests which it serves in addition to those of the media

5. That no effort shall be spared to expand, develop and adapt the news and other services and products so as to maintain its leading position in the international news and information business.

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