



GLOBAL MEDIA CONGRESS

الكونغرس العالمي للإعلام

معرض ومؤتمر Exhibition & Conference

White Paper: Building resilient media organisations in the age of disinformation

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Executive Summary



Over three days in November 2022, nearly 14,000 media professionals, experts, specialists, and visitors came together at the inaugural Global Media Congress in Abu Dhabi, hosted by the Emirates News Agency (WAM) and ADNEC Group. With 193 media brands involved and more than 140 different countries represented, it was a rare and truly global gathering of the media industry.

Across dozens of panel events, keynote speeches, interactive workshops, future labs, and debates, participants discussed how they can work together to shape the future of the media industry. A number of key themes emerged, not least the rise of artificial intelligence, the impact of disruptive new technologies, the demands of Gen Z consumers, and the role of the burgeoning metaverse. These are analysed at various points in this White Paper.

But what this Paper really seeks to tackle are two topics that continually concern media professionals, whether they have been in the industry for three years or fifty-three years. The first is internal, and concerns the sustainability of the very organisations they are part of. The media industry has transformed radically in recent decades, and audience expectations are altering even faster. How can legacy organisations and the traditional behemoths of the industry adapt and survive? What does a successful news company look like in the 21st century, and what are the vectors of its long-term resilience?

The second is external, and concerns what is fast becoming one of the defining trends of our era: mis- and dis-information (the difference between the two coming down to intent). Both have of course been around since time immemorial in various

guises. But the amplification, and in many cases weaponisation, of false information through real-time online communication channels has changed the game, leaving the media industry playing catch-up. How can news organisations upskill their teams and deploy new technologies to fight against this fast-moving threat? Could the decline in trust in news media – evident almost globally – prove fatal to the industry?

This White Paper presents eight different perspectives on these fundamental questions around news organisations' resilience in the age of disinformation. These perspectives are based on the anonymised contributions and insights of dozens of participants at last year's Global Media Congress. Many of these individuals – who include newsroom editors, veteran correspondents, CEOs of global news organisations, academics specialising in the field of news media, futurists, and many more – have been generous enough to expand on their verbal contributions through written submissions. Four of these expert insights are published with the authors' permission in full in this White Paper.

I hope that you enjoy reading this White Paper, and that it proves to be a stimulating basis for continuing the discussion on how we can come together to shape the future of the media industry. I furthermore hope to welcome you this November to the next edition of the Global Media Congress in Abu Dhabi.

February 2023



**His Excellency Mohammed
Jalal Al Rayssi**
Director-General of the Emirates
News Agency (WAM)

1.

On Reforming Legacy Media Sustainably

Legacy media organisations face significant challenges from the rise of online-only media, competition from social media platforms, mis- and dis-information, and a disconnected audience. Sustainable reform, according to global media experts, requires increased investment in digital offers, developing unique content, and adopting a creative approach to analysis and reporting. A key insight stressed by media executives is the importance of not getting carried away with innovation, but keeping focused on the quality of content and the organisation's long-term objectives.

Many of today's leading media organisations were established and thriving before the advent of the digital age. For decades these organisations dominated the media landscape, benefitting from monopolistic positions and public funding. Over the years, outlets such as the BBC, CNN, and Le Monde became household names and points of reference for reliable and credible information. However, in today's global media industry, their position of authority is under threat.

One of the biggest and most obvious challenges facing these legacy media organisations is the rise of digital or online-only media. With the proliferation of the Internet and the widespread adoption of smartphones, more and more people are finding and consuming their news online. Social media has become in many geographies the main source of news. According to the Thomson Reuters Institute 2022 Digital News Report, 75% of the global population now regularly seek their news from social media networks such as Twitter, YouTube, and Meta (owners of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp).

These social platforms are often more agile, turbocharged by the extensive data collected from their users, and able to quickly adapt to changes in the market. They constantly offer new and innovative ways for people to consume media and to tell their own stories too. Some legacy media organisations have struggled to keep up and adapt to the changing landscape.

What this all points to is an existential need for reform, a theme which recurred across the debates and conversations at the inaugural Global Media Congress in Abu Dhabi in November 2022. As pointed out by leading experts at the forum, it is a real challenge to turn around unwieldy global organisations. However, there are many ways to reform from within and become more innovative, while at the same time maintaining an embedded culture and strengths.

One way forward, successfully adopted by most legacy brands, is to invest in the digital sphere and develop a strong online presence. That said, simply being present online or on social media is not enough. These organisations must also prioritise the creation of digital-first content, optimised for these platforms. This can include short-form videos, podcasts, and human-interest stories.

Sustainable reform for legacy news organisations also depends on increased engagement with the communities they serve, listening and responding to their concerns and needs. This may be obvious for a local newspaper, but it is just as relevant for an international broadsheet. Community engagement involves a range of efforts, including managing relations with readers on social media and hiring local correspondents.

On the point of digital community management, this is increasingly understood as the best avenue for gathering real-time feedback from readers. By triangulating this feedback with other data, news organisations can tease out lessons and strengthen the appeal of their offer. This is where data analysis has increasingly become an indispensable skillset within news organisations.

Other media executives however stress the importance of not "getting carried away with innovation", but rather focusing first and foremost on the quality of the content. It is a delicate but perhaps crucial compromise to reach a wider audience and better engage with young consumers, while at the same time not undermining integrity or identity by obsessively chasing clicks and likes. In an example cited at the Global Media Congress, certain outlets' live reporting on the fall of Kabul in 2021

was markedly more successful than others. One news organisation was able to secure a Q&A for its online followers with representatives of the Taliban, with real-time content moderation and verification. Here we see that, with the right tools and approach, media organisations can convert the dual challenges of speed and access from a risk to an opportunity.

Investing in local or investigative reporting is expensive, but representatives across the media industry remain convinced it is a cornerstone of ensuring news organisations' future resilience. Anything less risks a gradual reduction in journalistic standards, and the dissemination of news devoid of proper local context. A salient example concerns the 2022 wildfires in the United States. Local news organisations found themselves playing not just a critical reporting role, but a public interest role by advising on best practice behaviour during the crisis. This role could only be performed to the degree that it was by reporters with proper local knowledge.

Another case for the sustainable reform of legacy news organisations put forward by practitioners is, perhaps counterintuitively, sticking to what they

know best: the fundamentals of journalism. Yes, the business model of a news organisation must remain sustainable. Like any other enterprise, they have to respond to changes in the market and to new opportunities. This may involve implementing agile working practices, fostering a culture of innovation, and cutting down on so-called vanity costs (e.g. an office in a prime location). It can also mean diversification of revenue streams beyond traditional advertising and subscriptions, such as finding new sponsors or partners, selling merchandise, or offering paid services such as consulting. But innovation should not take place for the sake of innovation.

In summary, many media practitioners believe that plans for reforming media organisations can be overcomplicated, when the actual priority is simple: building a structure that makes your business model sustainable and providing the rigorous facts and analysis that the general public demand. By keeping this in mind, legacy news organisations can become more sustainable and better positioned to thrive in the digital or disinformation age, irrespective of size, resources, or location.



An IPSOS study of **27** countries found that over a five-year period from 2014-2019, public trust in newspapers and magazines dropped by an average of **16%**.

The study also found that interest in news has fallen sharply across markets, from **63%** in 2017 to **51%** in 2022.

According to IPSOS, the proportion of news consumers who say they avoid news often or sometimes has increased sharply across most countries.

This type of selective avoidance has doubled in Brazil (**54%**) and the UK (**46%**) over the last five years, with many respondents saying news has a negative effect on their mood.

Expert Insight: Accelerating high-value journalism through AI



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The crisis of economic sustainability in the media sector is well documented, with organisations and journalists facing mass layoffs, closures, salary cuts, and furloughs. Media leaders must consider how the application of new digital capacity generates opportunities for increased efficiency – reducing costs, while creating new value by centering human work. Three trends emerging in the use of AI present notable promise:

With AI, media outlets can repurpose journalistic investigations to build content designed for segmented audiences

AI empowers reporters to produce dynamic and responsive content based on the interests of the target population. While the reporter continues to drive the investigative process and craft a compelling narrative, generative algorithms can help repurpose those narratives to reach a broader audience. Using the same core reporting, AI can help a reporter synthesize new prose to transform one body of reporting into breaking news articles, long-form reports for respected journals, and short-form, accessible content on social media platforms.

AI paves the path for new forms of data-driven journalism and ground-breaking stories

The capacity of data analytics and predictive modelling built on top of immense datasets equips reporters to tell stories previously left untold. They can harness AI technologies to reveal surprising patterns, uncover mass-scale injustices, make

credible predictions, and help influence future policy. From revealing racial biases in eviction patterns, to uncovering human rights abuses by major corporations, the combination of big data and AI enables an investigative capacity that supplements and accelerates public interest storytelling.

AI can automate low-intervention tasks, cutting costs while freeing up time and resources for high-value journalism

Creation of media content aggregates different tasks, ranging from low-skill, tedious labour to empathy-driven, critical thinking and creative development – generally referred to as uniquely human work. AI has the potential to become an augmentation device for reporters. By automating lower-intervention or time-consuming tasks, reporters can redirect their time, resources, and attention to not just the facts and figures, but the human connections and stories behind them.

The ongoing digital transformation of the media industry is often viewed as a threat to traditional media institutions. As journalists look ahead, innovation and widespread adoption of digital tools are necessary to sustain the capacity for fact-based reporting that serves the public. By applying these three AI-driven interventions at scale, a newly agile, cost-efficient, and high-value organisational model is well within reach. Developing a pathway to both leverage and work alongside the AI of today will provide a compass for the AI-driven journalism of tomorrow.

2.

The evolving balance between entertainment, profitability, and information

Media organisations are pulled between the necessity to please their investors on the one hand, and audiences on the other. It is important for media organisations to not only provide engaging and entertaining content, but to find ways to monetise that content and generate revenue all while providing accurate and reliable information to their consumers. This can be a difficult balance to strike, and different media organisations approach it in different ways. Some prioritise entertainment and profitability, while others focus more on providing information and news.

The balance between entertainment, profitability, and information for media organisations is constantly evolving as technology and consumer preferences change. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the demand for 'infotainment', resulting in a shift towards more audience-focused and engaging formats. At the same time, there is a growing demand for high-quality, accurate, and reliable information, particularly during conflicts, in the wake of mass events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rise of disinformation. Media organisations must navigate this complex landscape to ensure that they meet the demands of their audience, while also generating profits for their shareholders.

The elephant in the room is the reliance of most media organisations on investors to continue operating, particularly as public broadcasters worldwide face deeper cuts to their funding. Investors prefer to focus on the metrics: the number of readers and viewers, the

number of clicks, or the time spent on websites, which in turn determine their profit. This has pushed the media sector towards entertainment-style journalism, theoretically in the pursuit of larger audiences. Journalists increasingly comment on demands to make headlines or ledes as controversial as possible, especially as their managers have precise access to data on who reads or views their employees' work.

New technologies have equipped the media with the ability to report quasi-instantaneously on what is happening around the world. There is a real pressure for media organisations to have a voice everywhere, including Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, besides TV, radio, or the written press. This has some downsides as journalists are now urged to get the story out, whatever the form and however verified (or not) the information is. Twitter saw dozens of journalists around the world desperate to report on Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's passing last year as breaking news before it was formally announced to the wider public.

Media organisations need to build a structure that makes their business model sustainable, and that means balancing their interests with those of their main investors and the expectations of advertisers.

The emergence of new technologies has also changed the type of media that is requested by audiences. If lengthy pieces and documentaries were once praised for the level of detail and insight they could provide, nowadays short and sensational videos on TikTok or Instagram appear to be the most popular format. This trend has moved the emphasis away from the content and drawn the spotlight back onto the ability to tell a



story in a compelling way – often a synonym for the shortest way possible.

As much as there are challenges in this evolving balance between entertainment, profitability, and information, there are also opportunities. Industry leaders have seen a clear shift in how their audiences want to engage in the stories, going from mere spectator to active participant in the content. As a result, media organisations are increasingly turning to formats that allow for greater audience participation and engagement. This can include interactive content – think live voting and polls, user-generated content, and participatory journalism – where audiences contribute their own stories, opinions, and perspectives.

The rise of user-generated content and social media has given individuals the ability to directly create and interpret events. This has led to a more democratised media landscape where individuals have greater control and agency over the content they consume and create. At the same time, it begs a broader question around the distinction between news and opinion.

Media organisations need to be cautious about what can be qualified as news and what constitutes opinion. Gen Z in particular has proven highly receptive to opinion-based journalism and often seeks out news from media outlets that reflect their

own views on the world. This poses significant issues for overall media literacy and how to engage with someone who does not share their opinions. “Social media is a place for opinions; media for objective reporting”, said one leading practitioner at the Global Media Congress. Yet this line is increasingly blurred.

Some media companies have opted for a subscription model for their content and services, meaning that users must pay a fee to access certain content and features. Example cases include the famous Financial Times, BuzzFeed, or France’s BrutX which offers paid-for long-form videos alongside its free snappy videos on social media. This model enables media organisations to generate revenue from their content and services, while also providing users with a more tailored experience. Subscribers to the platform have access to exclusive content, as well as personalised recommendations and alerts based on their interests and preferences.

This, however, isn’t necessarily aligned with better news and does not remove the weight of commercial pressures. While the subscription model works well for the Financial Times, Brut. have shifted course again to a “freemium” model. The rationale behind “freemium” is that content can be accessed on a single platform for free in a limited way, then users can pay for a subscription to access content in full. Brut. thinks it has now found the perfect formula, but

this case shows us the complexity of finding a balance between entertainment, profitability, and information.

Does all of this mean the media would be better off as a public asset? Publicly funded media can arguably provide unbiased and independent reporting, access to quality journalism, and greater understanding or empathy among different communities. However, there are also potential challenges and drawbacks, including concerns about objectivity. Media industry practitioners are concerned about polarisation of the media. Many of them recommend that newspapers do not endorse one political candidate over another.

One expert from Europe highlighted that for news outlets to receive money from a political party might pose credibility issues, as well as put their objectivity in question.

Ultimately, the success of media organisations in this evolving landscape will depend on their ability to strike a balance between entertainment, profitability, and information, and adapt to changing consumer preferences and market conditions.

GENERATION Z



8 seconds

Gen Z typically have an attention span of just 8 seconds; a few seconds shorter than millennials, who come in at approximately 12 seconds.

3-5 screens

On average, millennials bounce between 3 screens at a time while Gen Z tends to juggle 5 screens at once

Covid 19

Due to COVID-19, 73% of users reported spending more time on their smartphones, with the biggest increases occurring among Gen Z and millennials.

TikTok

TikTok experienced a significant surge in users during the COVID-19 pandemic. During March 2020, the platform added over 12 million users, and the average user time went up 48%.

Sources: Forbes, 2017; Statista 2022

3.

Tackling public media illiteracy in the age of disinformation

In what is widely being described as the age of disinformation, individuals and media organisations face unprecedented challenges in navigating a polluted information environment. Interaction with false information has become an inevitable part of daily life. Traces of its harmful effects on international security and human health are already visible. If the COVID-19 pandemic is any indication of how fast societies can become polarised through inaccurate information, it also serves as a sign of the importance of media literacy in the public space.

Disinformation can be traced back to the invention of the printing press, and indeed to the dawn of recorded history, though historical uses tended to be for a specific purpose. Today, as the cost of production has significantly decreased and the use of social media has drastically increased, the rise of misinformation and the spread of disinformation have never been so overwhelming. For clarity, the distinction between the two concerns intent, with misinformation classed as the spread of misleading, false, or out-of-context content without the intent to deceive.

The toxicity introduced as a result of both trends has generated damaging effects on the media industry, arguably threatening its survival in the long run. In such a polluted information environment, journalists are increasingly maligned as disruptors rather than

gatekeepers of the truth, with a long-term impact on public trust. It is perhaps no surprise that violence against journalists is growing exponentially, with more reporters being killed outside war zones today than at any other time in history.

Attacks from world leaders targeting the media as 'the enemy' and attempts to discredit journalists are evidence that the prevalence of disinformation suits the political agenda of many governments across the Global North and the Global South. Left to its own devices, Web 3.0 could make it even harder to identify, monitor and track the extent and circulation of misinformation and fake news.

Recent developments within the media industry – such as the introduction of a Digital Services Act in the EU, the review of the Online Safety Bill in the UK, or even the acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk – speak to these growing concerns around public trust.

Those at the heart of the media industry speak of a need to shift the public mindset. The question of how the general public understands objective journalism has never been more salient. This cannot happen, however, without a significant uptick in investment in media literacy, strengthening young generations' ability to think critically and assess major information flows.

Wide-scale and sustainable media literacy training would help maximise advantages and minimise harm in the new information, digital, and communication landscapes. It represents an investment in people,

and particularly young people's psychological, informational, and even physical wellbeing. It enables people to engage with information, content, institutions, and digital technologies responsibly and effectively.

For this reason, media industry practitioners insist on the long-term benefits of offering media literacy training at schools, universities, and in all professional environments – either on a regular or ad hoc basis. Learning the importance of understanding biases, thinking critically, and fact checking from a young age could transform the way information is used and distributed.

Checking the veracity of content before it is shared, particularly with social media platforms such as Twitter loosening their policies related to content moderation, remains an industry-wide challenge. Social media algorithms of course perpetuate the recycling of misinformation. Given that social media is increasingly the preferred method of communication for the younger generations, they must be engaged in order to win the battle over disinformation in the digital space. Governments should work with social media platforms to better self-regulate by generating standards applicable across cultures and languages.

Again, this cannot happen without providing media literacy education to politicians and policymakers to help them understand the tenets of digitalisation



and how these can inform regulations addressing disinformation. This approach should help overcome any lack of interest in adopting existing recommendations that enhance the capacities of policymakers, educators, and youth organizations in this area. A prime example is the Policy and Strategy Guidelines for media and information literacy developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In the absence of political support for public media



literacy, media organisations can take matters into their own hands. Big newsrooms can address the issue of disinformation by recruiting experts that offer specialised trainings to journalists. Smaller newsrooms could take advantage of technological advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI), not only to further develop safeguards for citizens in the form of fact checking, but also as a training tool to reach a wider audience. In addition, media practitioners suggest that media organisations

commit to delivering at least 20% of their reporting straight from the ground, accompanied by visual and authentic content.

Ultimately, by boosting public media literacy, the interpretation of media data in a transversal manner could yield effective and long-lasting results in the fight against misinformation and benefit the resilience of the industry.

24 countries have taken steps to develop national policy and strategy on media and information literacy.

From September to November 2020, 57.7% of misinformation captured by Instagram contained content about COVID-19 and 21.2% of misinformation posts contained content about vaccines

In February 2022, between 45 and 55% of news consumers worldwide had witnessed false or misleading reporting on COVID-19, followed by political affairs (34-51%), celebrities (20-48%), climate change (15-32%), and immigration (9-27%).

At the beginning of 2021, over 35% of surveyed Generation Z and Millennials confessed they would usually ignore COVID-19 information shared by others on social media or messaging platforms that they knew was false.

All according to a survey conducted by Statista

Expert Insight:

The beginning of endless content



Author: Sofie Hvitved is a Futurist and Head of Media at the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies, where she is currently working on the future of the Metaverse and how it will affect our lives and businesses.

Imagine a scenario ten years from now in which artificial intelligence has continued to develop as it has over the past few years. A future where it will be difficult to consume content that hasn't somehow been shaped by AI, and up to 99% of the content we consume will be computer-generated.

We are seeing a democratisation of AI software with products like ChatGPT and Midjourney – similar to what WordPress accomplished for web page production. As AI technology grows in popularity, efficiency, and capacity, media professionals are starting to consider how these new technologies may affect their industry and how it will shape the role of future media and creativity. Generative AI tools can be used to produce stories, images, movies, voices, and immersive 3D content, and the quality continues to improve. This will undoubtedly raise the bar for creative talent and put pressure on some tasks and positions within media companies.

The tip of the iceberg

We have only seen the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the use of AI and automation in the media industry. No matter how fast or in what direction it develops, we are looking into more user-friendly versions and consumer-orientated products using AI.

And it's not as far-out as it might sound. We have already seen the first AI covers on magazines like Vogue, Cosmopolitan, and The Economist. AI computer-generated music created by Boomy has reached over 11 million songs, equivalent to almost 11% of the world's recorded music according to their own numbers.

AI tools can help with much more than content creation. It can help identifying important stories, automate routine tasks, and increase readership through new kinds of audience engagement by

creating more personalised communication. The list goes on. But using AI can also result in negative interactions with audiences, for example creating articles that are unintentionally biased or even spread misinformation.

The media market may rapidly be flooded with synthetic content and deep fakes that spread fast and are hard to detect. Via automatic translation, it can be multiplied by ten million in every language imaginable, without any human intervention. The worst-case scenario is that the Internet – and eventually the metaverses – could be flooded with content that is not telling the truth. Will the audience be able to tell the difference between that kind of synthetic generated content and journalistic content created by a human editorial?

Hype or long term impact?

Working as a futurist means dealing with a lot of uncertainties for the long-term perspective. Obviously, the media business must avoid focusing strategy on new emerging technologies and narratives that are based on assumptions and little evidence. However, we should not let the scarcity of data overshadow the fact that the media sector is undergoing massive tectonic shifts with an urgent need for radical, future-driven innovation.

AI is not going to revolutionise the media industry overnight. Regulation will help with that. But it is a wakeup call from the future that can help us understand the future of content creation. And that future is potentially one with endless content created by AI. The media industry has to be ready for that.

4.

Gen Z (dis)loyalty: An opportunity to re-imagine media coverage and reporting

Media industry practitioners are concerned by traditional media organisations' engagement with younger generations. Media consumption habits differ between age groups, with Gen Z primarily interested in visual, short content. There is a desire in the industry to bridge this gap through the use of technology, fresh storytelling methods, and more on-the-ground reporting. Vocally applying the basic principles of journalism – integrity, transparency, accountability – can also strengthen credibility among the younger generations.

As the first generation to be born in the digital age, Gen Z uses social media as its preferred medium to seek out information about local, national, and world news. This generation's shift in focus away from mainstream media towards social media speaks to its lack of trust in mainstream media reporting, in particular that of legacy media organisations.

In the eyes of Gen Z, traditional news brands do not necessarily reflect the realities of the modern world. There is often scepticism as to the truthfulness and validity of their coverage. At the same time, opinion-based journalism has blurred the lines between opinion and fact, making it harder to get a real understanding of the situation at hand. As a result, alternative websites and methods of reporting which at least appear to address the concerns of younger generations are considered more authentic and thus more worthy of their trust.

Media and tech professionals are asking if this is the end of traditional media reporting, and by extension

of legacy news organisations. Without the support and loyalty of younger generations, their future is hanging in the balance. At the same time, this is an opportunity to re-evaluate and re-imagine the way that they cover news stories. While Gen Z might not have particular loyalties to media and news organisations, nor the longer attention span required to consume traditional news reporting, they remain curious to learn about the different challenges faced in different parts of the world. They are highly engaged in calling out injustices and advocating for what they believe in.

As HE Shamma Al Mazrui, UAE Minister of State for Youth Affairs, put it in her keynote address at the 2022 Global Media Congress: "Content is king. Yes, they want it to be enjoyable, but they want to be entertained differently. They want to be intellectually challenged. They want to be thoughtfully provoked. They want to be able to learn new skills and gain new insights from the media. They want to be able to answer life's most pressing questions. They want to be able to find meaning through finding solutions to their society and their generation's problems."

This is undoubtedly a demanding checklist for news organisations to complete. In short, the challenge is how to give Gen Z access to news as quickly as possible in the concise and visually attractive way they demand. Responding to concerns by veteran journalists and policymakers, many media practitioners agree that moving into the space of content creation along the lines of Gen Z's interests should not be seen as threatening to media organisations, but rather as an accelerated return to the core elements of news reporting: delivering accurate and reliable information.

To this extent, some journalists and media industry professionals insist on the need for news organisations to become more agile and responsive. One way to achieve this, they argue, is by boosting direct reporting, that is bringing in a new breed of journalists trained to respond to events in real time and report in a fast, visual, and concise manner. Whether that involves employing local or international journalists with regional expertise, it is imperative that these reporters apply the key principles of respect and honesty when dealing with their sources to guarantee credibility.

Another way that media organisations can inspire loyalty and ensure their future resilience is by improving their media literacy practices through greater investment in fact checking and content moderation. Media experts recognise that this requires significant investment from media houses to handle the wealth of data in the public domain – even with the increasing availability of quality open-source technologies. Channelling additional funding to enhance the capacity of media organisations – specifically of public broadcasters – could help them build up their integrity and credibility, free up time for critical journalism, and positively impact their interactions with Gen Z.

At the same time, social media platforms have a central role to play in bridging this gap. This is because they offer greater power to set the road for change than any other medium. The Gen Z creators on TikTok are the ideal illustration of this. Whether through standing up for social justice causes, speaking up about their values, or producing ideas to improve the world, creators are putting everything online in a short, digestible, but fun and punchy format, because they can quickly reach large audiences by 'going viral', regardless of the size of their following. This ability feeds into this generation's overarching need to amplify their voice and advocate for their beliefs.

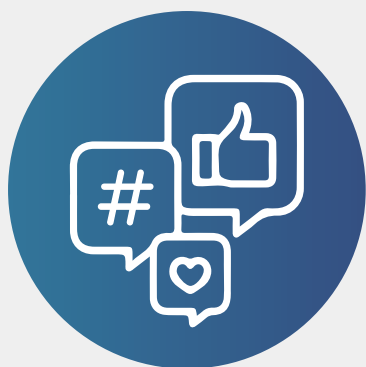
“Content is king. Yes, they want it to be enjoyable, but they want to be entertained differently. They want to be intellectually challenged. They want to be thoughtfully provoked. They want to be able to learn new skills and gain new insights from the media. They want to be able to answer life’s most pressing questions. They want to be able to find meaning through finding solutions to their society and their generation’s problems.”

HE Shamma Al Mazrui, UAE Minister of State for Youth Affairs, at the 2022 Global Media Congress

Recognising this, some legacy news organisations have already taken steps to engage younger audiences, for example by live tweeting news as they occur, by publishing feeds on Tik Tok, and by hosting podcasts featuring young leaders, activists, and artists.

Media practitioners are, in the interests of shaping a sustainable future for the industry, calling for a diversification of the ways by which news is reported. Social media enables people to remain aware of what is going on everywhere in real time. This means working with journalists in all corners of the world, creating or expanding regional offices to facilitate direct reporting from surrounding areas, and increasing collaborations with neutral, national broadcasters. Making use of diaspora communities in the West could also serve as a bridge between the Global South and Global North.

Despite some progress, there is still a long way to go to gain Gen Z’s trust and loyalty. It is up to mainstream media outlets and organisations to get in sync with current and future generations or risk being left behind.



94%

Approximately 94% of Gen Z use social media every day.

10.6

The average Gen Z'er spends more than 10.6 hours online each day.

Sources: Morningconsult; Adobe; AP-NORC

79%

79% of Gen Z receive their news via social media.

2022

The top social media platforms used by Gen Z in 2022: Snapchat (96%), TikTok (91%), YouTube (87%), Instagram (83%).

5.

Into the metaverse:

A revolution for the media industry?

Facebook's rebrand to Meta thrust the once niche idea of the metaverse into the mainstream. The opportunities presented by this immersive world for news organisations appear extensive - whether it be boosting engagement, access, advertising revenue, or social impact. But hesitancy abounds, and much of the media industry is yet to take a leap of faith, citing concerns around cost, regulation, and audience interest. The challenge of delivering credible reporting in the face of rampant disinformation remains, for many media practitioners, a more critical issue than the medium by which information is transmitted. Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive.

"The metaverse may be virtual, but the impact will be real". At least, this is what the company formerly known as Facebook wants us to believe. When Mark Zuckerberg announced a rebrand to Meta in October 2021, it was a clear statement of intent by his company that it wanted to effectively 'own' the burgeoning metaverse. This next iteration of the Internet will in theory see the convergence of the physical and digital worlds, creating a so-called 'phygital' experience where the physical moves into the digital and the digital moves into the physical. This phygital existence will be filled with immersive virtual experiences that can be accessed using digital avatars, as well as augmented experiences that change our perception of reality.

Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, and in particular generative AI of the likes of ChatGPT that has taken the internet by storm in recent months,

will define this 4D internet. And these technologies could be game changing for the future resilience of the media industry, providing journalists with immersive and engaging ways of both gathering verified stories, countering fake news, and reporting accurately to their audience.

Undoubtedly, journalism has always adapted and evolved in line with the latest technological innovations. So, are we on the cusp of another genuine revolution for the news media, at the level of the printing press or the invention of the World Wide Web? It appears at first glance to be the case.

Video, particularly short-form video of the type exemplified by TikTok or reels, has cemented its position as a core storytelling mechanism for the generation now coming of age. Simultaneously, the ease of access to publishing tools means content production has been massively democratised. Every willing individual with an internet connection can be a citizen-reporter. On paper, there can be no better medium for exploiting these trends than the metaverse, an environment where every video and story can come to life around - and in interaction with - every user.

Such citizen-led or immersive journalism is already happening, with news outlets deploying 360° videos to give consumers a first-person experience of the situation being reported. As virtual reality pioneer Nonny de la Peña has demonstrated through documentaries such as Hunger in Los Angeles, immersive journalism can engender unprecedented levels of empathy and engagement from the audience. For news organisations navigating a tricky economic



climate and seeking to build resilience, any innovation that can strengthen their relationship with readers or viewers is not to be overlooked.

Major news interviews are already taking place in the metaverse. In December 2021, the Financial Times' Chief Features Writer Henry Mance met the UK's former Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg in the metaverse for a chat about the future of immersive digital worlds and the challenges of regulation. At the inaugural Global Media Congress in Abu Dhabi last November, the head of the UAE's national news agency Mohamed Jalal Al Rayssi appeared to onlookers to walk off stage and straight into an artificial world for a live interview with a virtual host.

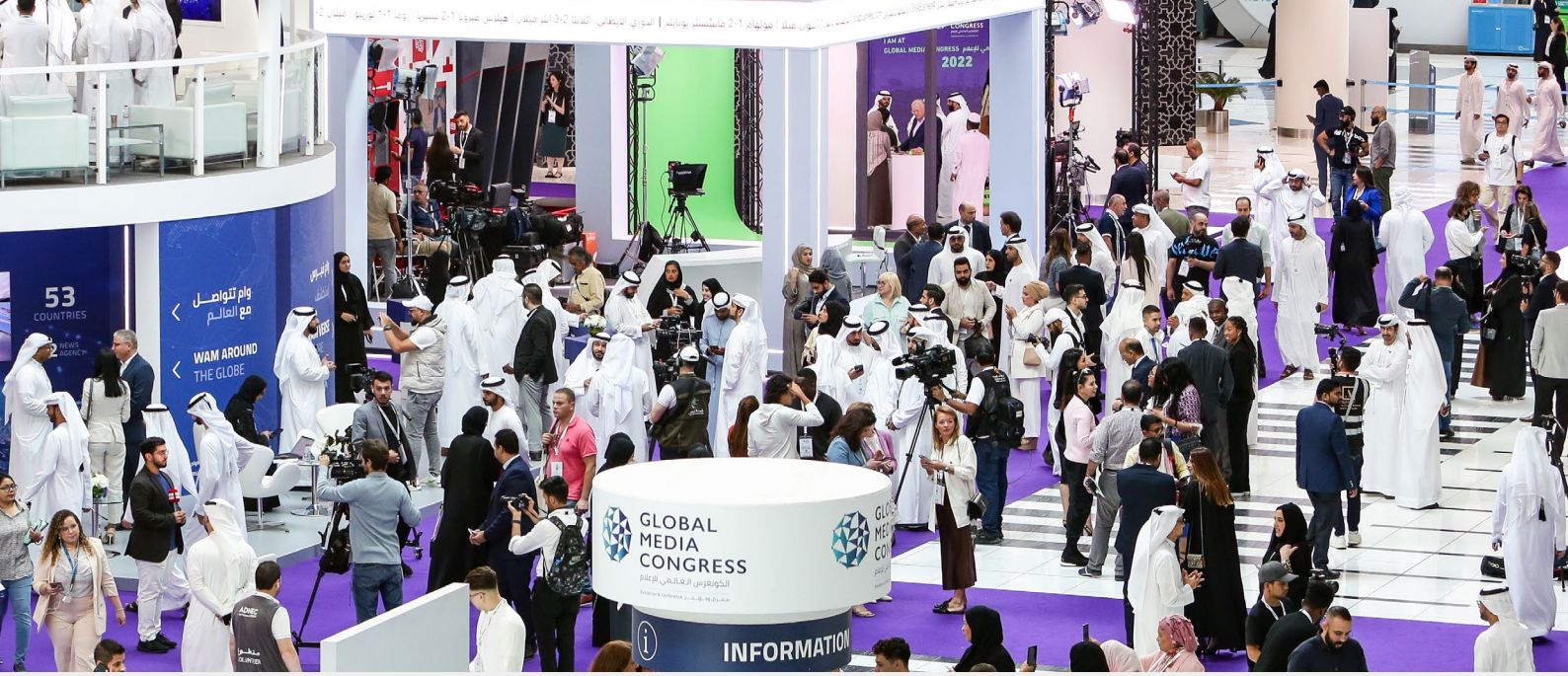
With the right application, this technology can close the often-vast gap between interviewer and interviewee in milliseconds – rather than, say, 20-hour flights – and boost accessibility for everyday consumers. It can close the gaps within news organisations too, as Vice Media Group has sought to do with the launch last year of a virtual HQ in the Decentraland Metaverse to serve as a global meeting point for colleagues.

The metaverse provides a favourable environment for the deployment of technologies such as blockchain-powered fact-checking and content verification on a massive real-time scale, which again with the right application could be revolutionary for the media industry. And for advertisers the metaverse provides unparalleled potential for targeting audiences in novel ways and with instant access, albeit this must be done with care to avoid unsettling consumers.

Questions and concerns naturally abound. AI technologies are costly to develop and adopt, leaving cash-strapped news organisations hesitant to take the plunge. Many journalists, editors, and media executives are unable to devote time to understanding – let alone implementing – such innovations. And almost no one has a good answer to how the metaverse can be regulated, or subscribe to universally acceptable ethical credentials, or protect underage or vulnerable users.

And then there's the question of whether the metaverse really represents a revolution, or whether it is just another social media platform for journalists and media execs to get their heads around. A notable proportion lean towards this latter position. At the Global Media Congress in Abu Dhabi, representatives of even the most innovative news organisations voiced scepticism as to their audiences' interest in engaging through the metaverse. And, critically, they said the challenges facing the media industry will remain exactly the same, even if there was a significant shift to the virtual world. Whether via current mainstream media, social media, or virtual media, consumers still demand accuracy, credibility, and relatability. Delivering this in the face of mis- or dis-information remains a more salient issue, they said, than the medium by which information is transmitted.

With the exception of a handful of bold pioneers with the requisite financial and human resources, not to mention a willingness to fail, the metaverse could seem stuck on the sidelines of the media industry.



It would however be short-sighted to dismiss the potential of the metaverse and its associated technologies, from augmented reality through to blockchain-powered content verification, for the media industry. The excitement associated with disruptive technologies in the past has often been followed by disappointment and doubt – arguably where we are now – before an eventual boom as it hits the mainstream and becomes widely affordable. News organisations would be wise to stay connected to this virtual land of opportunity, and to engage futurists for advice on how to engage with and within this space.

Above all, they should focus on where blockchain technology can add the most value in the immediate. That may not be deep immersion into a virtual world, but it could well be the application of AI across the newsroom to free up journalists’ time and tackle disinformation.

It won’t be simple, nor will the coming years of growth in the metaverse be linear. But its emergence as a – albeit not necessarily the – dominant platform for human interaction appears inevitable. Taking it seriously is therefore an existential matter for the media industry.

400m

400 million unique monthly active users accessing a metaverse platform (as of mid-2022).



51%

Over half (51%) of active users of the entire metaverse virtual worlds market are aged 13 and under (statistics provided by Metaversed consultancy, March 2022).

\$5 trillion

Potential economic value of the metaverse = \$5 trillion by 2030 (according to McKinsey, October 2022).

Expert Insight: How the metaverse will revolutionise media



Author: Dr Mark van Rijmenam, a.k.a. The Digital Speaker, is a strategic futurist, keynote speaker and five-times author. His latest book, *Future Visions*, was written, edited, and designed by AI in just one week.

The metaverse might seem like a too-expensive hobby project of Mark Zuckerberg, but it will redefine media as we know it in the coming years. The next iteration of the internet, or the immersive internet, will significantly change the media industry by offering new opportunities to create unique and immersive experiences, generate revenue, and change how media is distributed and consumed.

The metaverse is the convergence of the physical and digital worlds, where the physical moves into the digital world and the digital moves into the physical world. While it is a myth that the metaverse equals Web3, virtual reality (VR), or gaming, it can be all of the above.

When the metaverse has arrived, in the next 5-7 years, the most important devices to access the internet will shift from laptops, tablets, or smartphones to VR and AR headsets. In fact, in the next decade, many smartphone manufacturers will stop making smartphones because sleek AR glasses will offer a much better experience to access the internet than a smartphone. This paradigm shift will revolutionise media consumption, requiring media companies to act today to be ready tomorrow.

The metaverse will enable media companies to create unique and immersive experiences, such as AR concerts and theatre performances, which merge the physical and digital worlds in a way that has never been possible. One of the most exciting brands to enter the metaverse is Walt Disney, which filed a patent for a "virtual-world simulator" in December 2021. This technology would allow users to

experience highly immersive, individualised 3D virtual experiences without the need for AR viewing devices. Walt Disney has also released its first AR-enabled short film on Disney+, showcasing the potential of AR for storytellers as the experience literally enters a person's living room.

More importantly, the metaverse will open vast new revenue opportunities. Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) which allow artists and media companies to sell digital assets and interact directly with their fans in novel ways, drive both loyalty and revenue, while immersive advertising will offer advertisers unique ways to interact with your viewers or readers.

Imagine an augmented reality experience during a TV show, bringing a show into the living room and allowing users to purchase augmented assets provided by advertisers, sold as NFTs, directly from that experience. If done correctly, such immersive experiences will undoubtedly create a buzz.

The metaverse will enable millions of such unique experiences, and anyone can now become a media creator and reach an audience of millions. Especially with the developments around generative AI and synthetic media, it is rapidly becoming easier for creatives to create unique media content in weeks or even days without the large budgets currently required for media productions. The first AI-produced film, *Salt*, created using synthetic media is already a fact, and that was created before the hype of ChatGPT and all the other generative AI tools that came to market at the end of 2022.

Of course, with generative AI and synthetic media entering the game, the metaverse will raise ethical concerns. The rapid rise of deepfakes threatens the well-being of individuals, businesses, society, and democracy and may even worsen the already waning trust in the media. Hence, media companies should implement the right measures to avoid being sucked into a deepfake rabbit hole or contributing to increased polarisation as people spend more time in their own virtual worlds.

Whether we like it or not, the metaverse is the future of the internet, so any media company that does not want to be left behind should explore this new paradigm today. Start small and experiment so that you understand how to act in this digital world when the metaverse finally arrives.

6.

Taking the Fight to the 'Great Attrition'

Post-pandemic, the media industry like others worldwide is experiencing what many are describing as a 'great attrition', and a sense of record-breaking struggles with employee retention. Yet many of the challenges news organisations face with retaining, upskilling, and motivating journalists pre-date COVID-19. Investment in training staff and equipping the media sector with the tools to handle massive information (and disinformation) flows is more important than ever for building resilient organisations. Disruptive and intelligent technologies have a role to play in enabling journalists to refocus on the core principles and rewarding elements of their role.

The global disruption and sadness caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been followed by a number of societal aftershocks. One of these was described last year by the consultancy McKinsey as the Great Attrition and refers to the record number of employees across numerous sectors who are voluntarily quitting their jobs. It is not news to report that grief, loss, and burnout were common experiences during successive lockdowns to fight the pandemic. Neither is it news to appreciate that this experience encouraged many individuals to reconsider what matters to them in their professional lives.

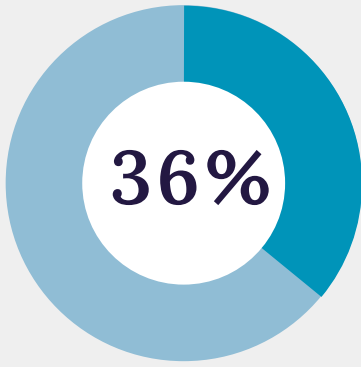
The media industry, like many others, is experiencing an inflection point as it comes to terms with our reshaped post-pandemic lives. On the one hand, a generation of journalists and media executives are demanding a better work-life balance, while on the

other hand audiences are demanding more and more real-time, accurate news.

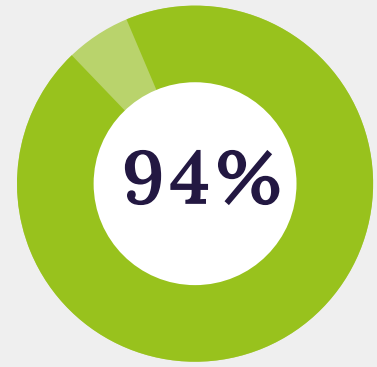
Many of the challenges news organisations face in retaining, upskilling, and motivating talented employees pre-date the pandemic, but have been exacerbated since. Speak to almost anyone in the media industry, and there is widespread acknowledgement that the sector needs a comprehensive reset to come to terms with – and invest in – the skills required for journalists and newsrooms now and in the immediate future. It's time to take the fight to the Great Attrition.

Journalism is, for many of those who practise it, a way of life. It is widely accepted as being critical to contemporary society in democracies and non-democracies alike. And there has rarely been a period in history with more breaking news, more uncertainty, and more possibility to cover unreported stories. These factors combine to mean that the passion for journalism, at least in principle, among young adults remains as strong as ever. But those within the industry suggest that the reality of the role can quickly extinguish this passion and cause young employees to look elsewhere, or leave the profession altogether.

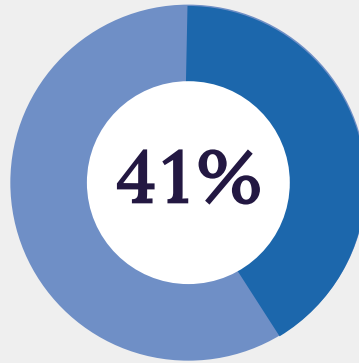
The tight economic climate has restricted news organisations' financial resources. Publicly-funded broadcasters have been asked to make significant cuts to their operations, with the steady dismantling of the BBC World Service serving as a clear example of this trend. This makes journalists' jobs harder to do, with pressure from executives to show value for money with every story, every meeting with a source, and every hour of research. This is not an environment in which



36% of news leaders said flexible and hybrid working had weakened staff's sense of belonging to the organisation (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022)



94% of employees say they would stay at a company longer if it invested in helping them learn (LinkedIn, 2019)



41% of white-collar employees are at least somewhat likely to leave their current job within six months (McKinsey, 2021)

quality or in-depth journalism can flourish. It can lead to hurried reporting, inaccurate stories, and click-bait journalism that provides little professional satisfaction.

Media practitioners are almost universal in their plea that proper news reporting remain properly financed, with ample training and development support provided. "We cannot beat on-the-ground reporting", they say. Building in overreliance on social media users, rumour, or hearsay is a dangerous track to follow - although, they hasten to add, there is absolutely a place for citizen-reporters and user-generated content within journalism.

There is significant space for the deployment of disruptive technologies to help free up journalists' time, allow them to do their jobs properly, and ensure the role is enjoyable and professionally rewarding. AI can automate elements of the role, from transcribing and translating interviews in real-time, to flagging disinformation, and intelligently compiling the factual background for an article so the author can focus on what is new. New technologies are also fundamental for creating engaging journalism that can compete with the multitude of entertainment options available to consumers (as explored in other chapters within this White Paper).

Several speakers at the Global Media Congress in Abu Dhabi last November highlighted that journalists are

expected to be active across many more platforms than just a couple of decades ago. Some referred to it as the number one skill required to make a successful career in journalism now: the ability to not only write good newspaper articles, or deliver a solid radio report, but to do both equally well, at the same time as publishing scoops on Twitter, appearing on TV panels, and participating in a regular podcast. There is a key lesson here for training colleges and universities, many of which have already radically adapted their curriculum in response to the new formats sweeping the sector, not least the Asian College of Journalism in Chennai.

UNESCO recently said that the world needs independent factual information more than ever. To a significant extent, this means rigorous and well-resourced journalism. Yet, despite the growth of the global media industry, there is a sense among many practitioners that journalism itself has shrunk. By seeking to be everywhere at once or be the first to report a breaking story, some major news organisations have spread themselves too thin. One leading media CEO said at the Global Media Congress that certain media organisations have got "carried away with innovation" and failed to ensure their core business model is sustainable.



Refocusing on the core principles of journalism is necessary. Consumers still have the same basic expectations of accuracy and credibility. Good reporting does not mean the fastest reporting, and the quality of storytelling should be primordial at any self-respecting news organisation. These are the calls that those on the frontline of the media sector are repeatedly making, both for the survival of the industry but critically for their own professional enjoyment and investment in their roles.

Equipping journalists and newsrooms with the tools and skills to process the vast quantities of incoming content, to verify their sources, to fact-check their information, and to publish it in multiple accessible formats is an enormous challenge for the profession. But it is fundamentally how news organisations will retain quality people and sustain their workforces' investment in the industry. Investing in upskilling and training, as well as diversifying routes of entry into the profession, is a short-term outlay for a long-term gain.

7.

Advocating for agile media rules and guidelines

Providing direction to the media is a challenging task and it begs a consistent, yet dynamic and flexible approach. In that regard, social media platforms might be the pioneers the industry needs, however even the tech giants are struggling with the task at hand, attesting to the complexity of the issue. Even if there is no silver bullet, there are some innovative options, a combination of which can help strike the balance – between the traditional role of the media in our societies with the need to ensure that the information being disseminated is accurate and not harmful.

Systematically, there are multiple challenges associated with setting up comprehensive rules and guidelines for the media industry. There is no global standard applicable to all markets and cultures, some outlets are championing very specific topics, others do not have full editorial control over the content and, overall, not all outlets have the same means, all of which is compounded by the ultra-fast evolution of topics and themes that drive the news each day.

Can social media platforms, then, set the example? The European Union recently rolled out its Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act, which provides for increased liability for social media tech giants with regards to “illegal content”. Even before such initiatives, the increase in misinformation on social media had spurred demands for vast increases in content moderation on the leading digital platforms. According to a survey by Morningconsult, 80% of respondents want to see hate speech removed from these platforms. In response to increasing frustration from its users, Meta committed to allocating 5% of

the firm’s revenue in 2019 to the challenge, which totals around \$3.7 billion.

The argument goes that self-regulation, in which the media industry is responsible for setting and enforcing its own rules and standards, can be ineffective for a number of reasons. First, it can be susceptible to conflicts of interest. Media organisations may be more focused on protecting their own economic interests than on ensuring the accuracy and fairness of their reporting. Second, self-regulation can be insufficient to address issues such as the spread of false or misleading information, as media organisations may not have the incentive or ability to effectively fact-check and police themselves. Thirdly, self-regulation can be inadequate to ensure representation or protection of vulnerable groups – such as minorities or marginalised communities.

It could thus be inferred that self-regulation of the media – traditional and digital outlets alike – can be inadequate in ensuring the accuracy, fairness, and diversity of the information being disseminated, and may not be effective at protecting the public from harmful or misleading content.

However, public supervision of the media may be equally susceptible to bias. It might gradually shift the focus of outlets to topics that are important to the supervisory body. In addition, public regulation can be difficult to implement and enforce in a fair and transparent manner and can pose challenges with respect to the traditional role of the media. Supervisory bodies can create challenges and concerns that must be carefully considered – a conversation that has repeatedly been instrumentalised over the last decade.

There is broad consensus in the media industry that, so far, there are no universal rules and guidelines available to ensure the resilience of the industry. But some recommendations have the potential to empower media and bring further credibility to news organisations, while ensuring a fair and balanced stream of information. One such recommendation is to promote media literacy among the public, as explored elsewhere in this White Paper.

Another avenue is to establish clear rules and standards regarding the funding of media organisations. One academic at the Global Media Congress pointed out that the credibility of the BBC is, to a significant degree, guaranteed by the transparency of its revenue model. Such an approach has the potential to not only be extended to private media organisations, but also to individual media professionals and key opinion-makers, in the form of public declarations of interest.

A critical next step for the industry and supervisory bodies is to reach a consensus on what constitutes a

balance between freedom of expression and the need for credible information – across both traditional and digital media.

To put this into perspective, one media expert pointed to the outdated approach of representing both sides in a news debate. They used climate change as an example. This is a conversation in which climate deniers are no longer a legitimate part of the debate, but limiting their contribution to the story can be maligned as censorship. This is an area where self-regulation has more potential, for example through codes of ethics.

If consensus on this key issue was reached, it could enable a roll out of frameworks that would empower media organisations to protect free speech and maintain the flow of information, while also ensuring that the information being disseminated is accurate, representative and, above all, not harmful to society.

An obvious additional step is to employ technology to keep up with the increasing complexity of today's





80%

According to a survey by Morningconsult, 80% of respondents want to see hate speech removed from social media.



\$3.7 billion

In 2019, Meta committed to allocating 5% of the firm's revenue, i.e. around \$3.7 billion, to better regulation, per the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.



6% global revenue

The Digital Services Act enables the EU to fine platforms such as Facebook, Google and Twitter up to 6% of their global revenue.

media landscape. The potential benefits of such advanced tools are laid out in other chapters in this Paper, but it is important to also understand the need for a comprehensive set of rules to guide their use.

A related insight is to transform some of the standard practices endorsed by the likes of the UN into binding and non-discretionary recommendations. Valuable recommendations provided by UNESCO are not implemented because they are not mandatory. For any technological or regulatory initiatives to gain momentum there is a need for wide-ranging solidarity - which could be achieved through consultations with

the media industry as well as the general public. These options can help balance the traditional role of the media in our societies with the need to ensure that the information being disseminated is accurate and not harmful to society. A smart direction for the media can help to create a media landscape that is fair, diverse, and trustworthy, and that serves the needs of all members of society.

Expert Insight: A just approach to people-centric news



Author: Suha Mohamed is a Senior Manager at the Aapti Institute, a global public research institution focused on the intersection between technology and society.

Growing polarisation within our societies is changing how we connect, listen and learn from one another. This is complicated further by a media landscape already fraught by a trust deficit. In this time, it is also challenging for the media to function as the fourth pillar of democracy - one we expect to represent diverse perspectives, enhance transparency, and act as a pathway for greater accountability. While social media platforms offer a decentralised stage for multiple viewpoints to be shared, the reality is that most content is amplified based on entrenched power structures, leaving smaller content creators/users to the mercy of opaque algorithmic workings.

The terrain of media has also rapidly transformed through digitalisation. Overburdened by the vast volumes of information, individuals and communities have limited room to be heard and often are not equipped with the critical capacity or tools to escape carefully constructed echo bubbles. Disinformation, misinformation, and co-option of narratives for political ends are just a few of the harms that must be addressed in defining a more just future for media.

There is scope to examine how we can address these disparities and explore more proactive approaches to dispel disinformation at the root. This requires thinking more deeply about how to build systems where community voices are amplified, and trust is rebuilt through more agential media forms. One dimension of the solution is to co-build ecosystems that enable secure access to responsibly collected and governed data which can serve as a foundation for evidence-based journalism, fact-checking, and investigative reporting. This will also require

reconceptualising data as a relational and public good - one that communities can contribute to, govern, and leverage in reclaiming power over their narratives.

Shaping credible data ecosystems through collective efforts have already demonstrated immense success most evident in the work of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and the release of the Panama Papers. In another example, organisations like Tattle's 'WhatsApp archiver' have proposed ethical approaches to pool or scrape information from closed-messaging apps to support researchers and civil society organisations committed to tackling misinformation. Related to the collection and governance of data, ensuring news is people-centric requires the exploration of bottom-up reporting methodologies, innovations and support for the intermediaries or stewards that enable this work.

Examples emerging in this space include 101Reporters which has built a platform that encourages and enables local grassroots journalists to contribute to and connect to a network of international media houses/publications. Responding to calls for shaping more diverse multimedia content for our digital communities, Video Volunteers are building capacity among citizens located in rural parts of India to transform into community producers and be a part of NGO media units. This model represents one approach to contextualised storytelling and showcases how citizen journalism can be translated into a more sustainable and meaningful practice.

Initiatives like these are structured to maximise participation in the process of data gathering, enrichment (by grounding stories in lived realities and experiences) and dissemination - involvement of citizens in these phases should be prioritised in narrative building exercises. Whether directly or through last-mile intermediaries, we must continue to identify how communities' can be empowered as stewards of their own data and narratives - a powerful approach that must be part of the shift towards a just, agential, and representative future of media.

8.

The Case for Local News by Local People

Western media organisations have long held a disproportionate influence on the global news scene. Local reporting by local people can provide a better perspective on the events, issues, and stories that are relevant to their context, and can help to foster a sense of belonging and connection among residents. Local news also plays a critical role in holding local officials and organisations accountable, providing a platform for community members to voice their concerns and opinions. This promotes transparency and credibility, and embeds long-term resilience among news organisations.

The 'Global South' is in reality a highly diverse range of cultures, perspectives, and experiences, which represents a fast-growing proportion of the world's population. For a long time, its story has been told internationally by media based in the 'Global North', more often than not Western, and questions have rightly been raised in recent years about the sustainability of this situation.

Diversity has been a challenge in the media industry for years. When a community group isn't represented, their stories aren't either. Western media has at times presented a biased view of news from the Global South, reinforcing stereotypes and misrepresenting the complexity and diversity of these regions. Some countries have suffered from the way certain stories have become a defining factor in shaping the way they are perceived globally.

A topical example of this is the way Western media reports on the organisation of major events in the

Middle East. From the 2022 World Cup to COP28, the default position is pessimism, as opposed to any active search for balance – let alone positives. In the case of the UAE, Western media give little or no space to the country's bold and ambitious policies in the face of climate change, and choose to focus only on its oil and gas history, thereby presenting a skewed perspective of COP28 a full year before the event begins.

Statistics typically show that citizens in the Global South are more worried about misinformation than their counterparts in the Global North. The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report of 2021 revealed that 74% of people are worried about misinformation and disinformation in Africa, compared to 54% of Europeans having those same fears.

Global inequalities play out and are consolidated within the media, for example when foreign news reporting is prioritised over authentic reporting by local journalists. In the case of reporting on conflict or within war zones, this has historically been due to the disproportionate protection offered by Western passports.

"Lazy reporting" has all too often been allowed to proliferate. Nowadays, journalists do not necessarily travel to the places where the story is happening and instead resort to secondary information gathered from less-than-reliable third parties. That said, such user-generated content – if verifiable – can be an excellent way to gather local intelligence and reporting on stories for a global audience without "parachuting in journalists" who lack the necessary context. Media organisations could make better use of the diaspora that already exists in the West to act as a bridge between the Global North and the Global South. As experts of their own regions, they

can provide valuable insight, perspectives, and connections that can help media organisations to better understand and report on news from around the globe. By engaging with citizens and journalists from the diaspora and incorporating their voices and perspectives into their reporting, media organisations can ultimately provide a more nuanced and accurate view of the wider world. This can in turn challenge stereotypes and biases.

For decades, media houses worldwide have looked up to the BBC as the ultimate news model to follow. The BBC Academy is similarly seen as a model to follow in terms of continuous development, training, and upskilling. However, BBC reporting can show similar tendencies to resort to bias and relay a perception of the world rooted in stereotypes. It is not an accident that a mere 5% of journalists in the UK are journalists of colour. Some scholars have even argued that the current picture of journalism is the result of a forced colonial and post-colonial nation-building exercise.

The creator economy has unveiled a number of opportunities for journalists in the Global South to have their voices heard beyond borders, and to counter skewed perspectives on world events. In recent years, several platforms have launched initiatives for journalists to build products that can then be monetised while cultivating a global news

community. Such is the case of the Google News Initiative (GNI) that offers grants of up to \$50,000 to independent journalists who use YouTube. Almost half of GNI grant recipients are based outside of North America and Europe. Such initiatives enable the media industry to cultivate a diverse, innovative, and inclusive community of journalists, from international news desks to local newsrooms.

If such programmes are appealing to journalists in the Global South as they bid to grow more global audiences for their platforms, a wider use of new technologies outside the West and China will also help newsrooms in their information sourcing, organisation, and story distribution. The Reuters' Institute 2020 Annual Report underlined concerns about the disparity between news organisations with the capacity to incorporate machine learning and automation, and those with limited means. More funding towards the education of future leaders in the Global South's media industry, as well as capacity-building, can offer a way forward to an industry whose future will depend on its ability to diversify voices and rebalance historic inequalities.



The Digital News Report 2021 revealed that 74% of people are worried about misinformation and disinformation in Africa, while only 54% of Europeans have those fears.



GLOBAL MEDIA CONGRESS

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If you would like to find out more about any of the perspectives, questions, or recommendations discussed in this Paper, we would be pleased to hear from you.

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