

New report examines the challenges and hurdles of journalism innovation

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has published a new report: *Time to step away from the bright shiny things? Towards a sustainable model of journalism innovation in an era of perpetual change*. The report draws on interviews with 39 leading journalism innovators from 29 publishers, across 17 countries, including South Africa, Australia, the US, UK, India, Germany etc.



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It's the first research from the Journalism Innovation Project - a 12-month study by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. It is based on an analysis of discussions with 39 leading journalism innovators, representing 27 news publishers, across 17 countries.

The report examines the challenges and hurdles of journalism innovation faced by legacy news brands and digital-born news outlets. The Journalism Innovation Project aims to develop guidelines and frameworks for sustainable innovation practices, applicable to diverse environments.

Key findings

- Journalism should stop relentlessly pursuing “bright, shiny things” at the expense of core concepts such as content, business development and audiences
- Much innovation has been too focused on distribution challenges at the expense of content and business development, and risks leaving publishers dependent on platforms
- Industry must foster sustainable innovation by developing longer-term strategies
- Most global legacy outlets acknowledge need to ‘slow down’ and think more strategically, however smaller digital-born news publishers in the study are dependent upon innovation
- Narrow pursuit of technology can lead to unintended negative outcomes
- News publishers too dependent upon the platforms for distribution
- Lack of clarity over what innovation means within journalism

Project goals

- Develop a research-informed definition of journalism innovation

- Collate and share case studies focused on innovative journalism good practice
- Develop a framework to support sustainable and measurable journalism innovation in a range of environments

Research participants argued that innovation is distracting journalism from its core objectives: “Shiny Things Syndrome takes away from storytelling and we risk forgetting who we are. That’s the biggest challenge,” said Kim Bui, director of Breaking News Audience and Innovation at the *Arizona Republic*, in the US.

Francesca Donner, *New York Times* Gender Initiative director agreed. “We need to slow down and make very conscious choices.”

Another participant, Maria Ressa, CEO and executive editor of the Philippines start-up Rappler.com, warned against over-dependence upon platforms: “The reason the oxygen has been sucked out of our businesses is because it’s all gone to distribution without any going to content. How do we redefine it so the platforms don’t eat us alive?” she said.

Julie Posetti, author of the report, *Time to Step Away from the Bright Shiny Things? Towards a Sustainable Model of Journalism Innovation in an Era of Perpetual Change*, said: “This report demonstrates an awakening by some of the industry’s prominent digital leaders to the ‘unintended consequences’ of tech-led journalism innovation.”

These include “online harassment targeting women journalists, viral disinformation and the safety risks posed to journalists and their sources by privacy breaches involving digital technologies,” Julie Posetti said. “The report also highlights the ingenuity borne of necessity in developing countries, which is novel for this type of project.”

Research method

The research featured here is based on roundtable conversations involving 39 international editors, CEOs, product managers, practitioners, academic experts and digital media consultants from 17 countries. Many of them occupy senior roles within news organisations that range from start-ups (e.g. The Quint, Rappler, Civil, Kinzen) to established global news brands (e.g. the *New York Times*, Reuters News, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and the Washington Post).

The field research took the form of two separate research roundtable discussions staged in connection with two major international journalism conferences (the Global Editors’ Network Summit and the World News Publishing Congress) held in Lisbon, Portugal, in May and June 2018.

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