



REUTERS  
INSTITUTE for the  
STUDY of  
JOURNALISM

## Press release

**Embargoed: 00.01 (GMT), December 6, 2016**

### **Digital-born players succeeding where legacy media is weakest – but do new and traditional players have more in common than it seems?**

Digital-born news media in Europe are succeeding best in countries where traditional legacy media is weak, according to a new report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

The report, **Digital-Born News Media in Europe**, by Tom Nicholls, Nabeelah Shabbir and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, is released as part of the RISJ's Digital News Project, and examines 12 digital-born news media organisations across France, Germany, Spain and the UK.

It finds that new digital-born players tend to be more prominent in France and Spain where the legacy media is weaker than in Germany and the UK, where their legacy counterparts remain strong.

*“European digital-born media are clearly rooted in the profession of journalism. Their success depends more on gaps in the existing national media than on how many people are using the Internet in their countries, or on strength of the local advertising market,”* says lead author of the report, Tom Nicholls.

The report also finds that unlike US digital-born players, European organisations tend to bear more similarity to traditional media, and are clearly rooted in the journalism profession, rather than the fields of technology or business. They are usually launched and developed by journalists, often with senior experience of working within a legacy organisation themselves. Producing quality journalism, or having social impact tend to be their primary ambitions over delivering digital innovation or building a lucrative new media business.

Other key findings include:

- European digital news media are strategically similar to their legacy counterparts. Interesting journalism is being done, but the funding models, distribution and editorial strategy is not markedly different from the digital strategy of legacy organisations, reflecting European digital-born news media's roots in journalism, rather than business or technology.
- Digital-born and legacy media in Europe also face very similar challenges online, particularly around funding and off-site distribution. Video, native advertising, various pay models and commercial diversification are all approaches being pursued by digital-born as well as legacy players.

The report looks in details at funding models, distribution strategies and editorial priorities.

“A huge range of funding models are being tried to fund online media in Europe. Native advertising is increasingly important, and many subscription-funded and donation-funded funding models have been developed. Nevertheless, online journalism in Europe still isn’t highly profitable,” says Nicholls.

**ENDS**

---

## **Editors’ notes**

### **About The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism**

The Thomson Reuters Foundation is the core funder of the RISJ, based in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. The RISJ was launched in November 2006 and developed from the Reuters Fellowship Programme, established at Oxford 33 years ago. An international research centre in the comparative study of journalism, the RISJ aims to be global in its perspective and provides a leading forum for scholars from a wide range of disciplines to engage with journalists from around the world. See <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/>

#### About the authors

**Tom Nicholls** is a research fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. His main research interests include the dynamics of digital news and developing new methodological approaches to studying online activities using digital trace data. Most recently he has been using large-scale quantitative methods to analyse the structure, scope, and interconnectedness of government activity online, the effectiveness of electronic public service delivery, and the Internet’s implications for public management. He has published in various journals including *Social Science Computer Review* and the *Journal of Information Policy*.

**Nabeelah Shabbir** is a freelance journalist, formerly of the *Guardian*, who specialises in pan-European journalism, global environmental coverage, and digital storytelling.

**Rasmus Kleis Nielsen** is director of research at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and serves as editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Press/Politics*. His work focuses on changes in the news media and on political communication, and the role of digital technologies in both. He has done extensive research on journalism, American politics, and various forms of activism, and a significant amount of comparative work in Western Europe and beyond. Recent books include *The Changing Business of Journalism and its Implications for Democracy* (2010, edited with David A. L. Levy), *Ground Wars: Personalized Communication in Political Campaigns* (2012), and *Political Journalism in Transition: Western Europe in a Comparative Perspective* (2014, edited with Raymond Kuhn).

For more information on this report, contact Hannah Marsh, Marketing and Communications Officer, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism: [hannah.marsh@politics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:hannah.marsh@politics.ox.ac.uk) / 01865 611 301.