



# Time to step away from the 'bright, shiny things'? Towards a sustainable model of journalism innovation in an era of perpetual change

Julie Posetti

**JOURNALISM INNOVATION PROJECT • NOVEMBER 2018**





# Time to step away from the 'bright, shiny things'? Towards a sustainable model of journalism innovation in an era of perpetual change

Julie Posetti

---







# Contents

---

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| About the Author | 6 |
| Acknowledgements | 6 |

---

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary   | 7  |
| 1. Introduction   | 8  |
| 2. Key Findings and Research Method                         | 11 |
| 3. Developing a Working Definition of Journalism Innovation | 12 |
| 4. Discussion of Key Themes                                 | 15 |
| 5. Conclusion   | 25 |

---

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| References                        | 26 |
| Appendix: Roundtable Participants | 28 |

---

## About the Author

**Julie Posetti** is Senior Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, where she leads the Journalism Innovation Project. She is a multi-award-winning Australian journalist and journalism academic who authored *Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age* (UNESCO: 2017) and co-authored *Journalism, F\*ke News and Disinformation* (UNESCO: 2018). She has previously worked as Head of Digital Editorial Capability at Fairfax Media and occupied senior reporting roles with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Posetti recently completed her PhD dissertation on the intersecting issues of media freedom, international public policy and advocacy in digital contexts.

## Acknowledgements

The author is very grateful to the international journalism innovation leaders who generously donated their time for this research in the interests of working collaboratively on questions essential to journalism's future. Thanks also go to Nabeelah Shabbir for research assistance on this project, and Alex Reid for excellent publication support in the context of competing (and very tight) deadlines. Noteworthy, too, was the valuable feedback and encouragement received from Prof Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Dr Lucas Graves, Dr Joy Jenkins, Nic Newman, Dr Silvia Majo-Vazquez and Caroline Lees. RISJ would also like to acknowledge the support of the Global Editors Network (GEN) and the World Editors Forum (WAN-IFRA) for hosting the research roundtable discussions featured in this report in association with their annual conferences in 2018.

If you have seen examples of particularly innovative storytelling or approaches to addressing digital era journalism threats and opportunities in your region, please send them to the author at: [Julie.Posetti@politics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:Julie.Posetti@politics.ox.ac.uk)

## Executive Summary

The news industry has a focus problem. ‘Shiny Things Syndrome’ – obsessive pursuit of technology in the absence of clear and research-informed strategies – is the diagnosis offered by participants in this research. The cure suggested involves a conscious shift by news publishers from being technology-led, to audience-focused and technology-empowered.

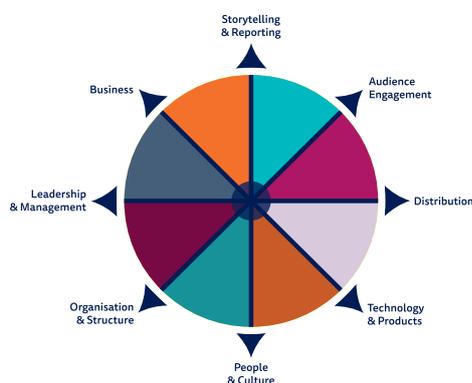
This report presents the first research from the Journalism Innovation Project anchored within the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. It is based on analysis of discussions with 39 leading journalism innovators from around the world, representing 27 different news publishers.

The main finding of this research is that relentless, high-speed pursuit of technology-driven innovation could be almost as dangerous as stagnation. While ‘random acts of innovation’, organic experimentation, and willingness to embrace new technology remain valuable features of an innovation culture, there is evidence of an increasingly urgent requirement for the cultivation of sustainable innovation frameworks and clear, longer-term strategies within news organisations. Such a ‘pivot’ could also address the growing problem of burnout associated with ‘innovation fatigue’. To be effective, such strategies need to be focused on engaging audiences – the ‘end users’ – and they would benefit from research-informed innovation ‘indicators’.

The key themes identified in this report are:

- a. The risks of ‘Shiny Things Syndrome’ and the impacts of ‘innovation fatigue’ in an era of perpetual change
- b. Audiences: starting (again) with the end user
- c. The need for a ‘user-led’ approach to researching journalism innovation and developing foundational frameworks to support it

Additionally, new journalism innovation considerations are noted, such as the implications of digital technologies’ ‘unintended consequences’, and the need to respond innovatively to media freedom threats - such as gendered online harassment, privacy breaches, and orchestrated disinformation campaigns.



The Journalism Innovation Wheel presented in this report is a visualisation of the foundational work the Journalism Innovation Project is doing to develop adaptable new frameworks to support sustainable innovation. It illustrates that journalism innovation can happen among many different dimensions, often at the same time, combining, for example new forms of storytelling with new business models, or new distribution strategies with new forms of audience engagement.

To be clear, this report does not amount to a call to stop innovating, nor justification for doing so, but it is a plea to avoid unsustainable approaches to innovation that fail to take account of potentially negative impacts – approaches that risk wasting time, effort, and money, without real returns.

# 1. Introduction

*We have such a unique industry and we are so used to change every day, and yet we still cannot seem to innovate our way out of anything.*

Raju Narisetti<sup>1</sup>

The only constant in contemporary journalism is change, and innovation is essential to the survival of the news industry. But, as this report demonstrates, leading practitioners fear that relentless, high-speed pursuit of technology-driven innovation can be almost as dangerous as stagnation. In the absence of purposeful strategy and reflective practice, ad-hoc, frantic, and often short-term experimentation is unlikely to lead to sustainable innovation or real progress. In short, the news industry has a focus problem. This problem was described as ‘Shiny Things Syndrome’ by US digital-born journalism veteran Kim Bui, a participant in this research, who identified one of the ‘syndrome’s’ main impacts as distracting from core journalistic functions:

*‘Shiny Things Syndrome’ takes away from storytelling and we risk forgetting who we are. That’s the biggest challenge.*

Kim Bui<sup>2</sup>

As Lucy Küng (2017) has warned, “‘Shiny new things’ have been a key factor in the disruption of long-term strategies. This phenomenon will not disappear; rather it is likely to accelerate.” (p43) This research, based on roundtable discussions with leading international journalism innovation leaders, supports that prediction. The need for journalists and news publishers to avoid purposelessly pursuing ‘bright shiny things’ is the main finding of this report, which analyses the dominant themes identified in discussions with 39 participants representing 27 different news publishers (approximately 50% of which were digital-born) across 17 countries.<sup>3</sup> While ‘random acts of innovation’, organic experimentation, and willingness to embrace new technology remain valuable features of an innovation culture, there is evidence of an increasingly urgent requirement for the cultivation of sustainable innovation frameworks and clear, longer-term<sup>4</sup> strategies within news organisations. To be effective, according to this research, such strategies need to be focused on engaging audiences – the ‘end users’ – and they would benefit from research-informed innovation models. The goal is to move journalism innovation from being ‘technology-led’ to ‘technology-empowered’.

## Research context

The purpose of undertaking this research was a) to understand some of the current challenges, obstacles (Steensen 2009), concerns and needs of news publishers and journalists regarding journalism innovation, as perceived by selected expert practitioners from around the world and b) another basis to inform the design and focus of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism’s (RISJ) new Journalism Innovation Project<sup>5</sup>. This project is adopting a Participatory Action Research model (Reason and Bradbury 2008), which means that it is designed as research with the ‘end

<sup>1</sup> Professor Raju Narisetti directs the Knight-Bagehot Fellowship in Economics and Business Journalism at Columbia University. Until recently, he was Chief Executive of Gizmodo Media Group, and before that he was News Corp’s Senior VP of Strategy.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Bui is Director of Breaking News, Audience and Innovation at the *Arizona Republic*. Previously, she held senior roles at NowThis and Reported.ly.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for a list of participants and their affiliations.

<sup>4</sup> It is acknowledged that ‘longer-term strategies’ in an industry prone to ‘pivoting’ in response to relentless change is more likely to be understood as 6-24 months, rather than 5-10 years.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/new-journalism-innovation-project>

user' (in this case journalists and news organisations) at the centre of a process that seeks to achieve a practical impact.

For over a decade now, five things have been clear about twenty first century journalism: it operates in a permanent state of change (Nielsen 2012); the future of news is digital, and it is bound up with social media and mobile technology (Küng 2015); traditional business models are unsustainable (Evens et al 2017); audiences are central (Bruns 2014); and threats to media freedom are growing in parallel (UNESCO 2018). The concept of 'innovation' – in its technological, economic, structural, creative and social manifestations – sits at the intersection of these factors and it is critical to journalism's survival. Pavlik (2013) described journalism innovation as 'The key to the viability of news media in the digital age.'

We can understand journalism innovation broadly as something new and useful, or a different way of doing things (from the incremental to the transformative) that supports the digital era development of journalism<sup>6</sup>. Innovations in newsgathering practices and storytelling, publishing and distribution, audience engagement and participation, business model design, and news organisation management have been essential to journalism's digital transformation. For example, innovation was necessary to take print online (Anderson 2013), develop networked acts of global investigative journalism (Obermeyer and Obermaier 2016), and now it will be required to reinvent audio journalism for 'voice on demand' (Newman 2018).

Such developments cannot occur in a culture that promotes stagnation. But as the technology-oriented trends and buzzwords of 2018 (Artificial Intelligence, 'voice journalism', Virtual Reality, and blockchain among them) swirl and news publishers prepare to 'pivot' yet again, this research suggests that there is a significant desire within legacy news organisations to pull back from the perceived obsession with technology's 'bright, shiny things'. Many participants in this research expressed a desire to 'slow down' in response to change fatigue and haphazard approaches to innovation. Instead, they suggested there was a need to refocus on core principles of journalism practice and foundational concepts to support the development of sustainable innovation frameworks built on solid research, analysis, reflective practice (Niblock 2007), and knowledge-sharing (within news organisations, collaboratively across industry, and via academia). Temple University's Journalism Innovation Chair, Aron Pilhofer<sup>7</sup>, summed up this perspective:

*I would just love it if this project would not fall into the trap of talking about the bright and shiny stuff, and instead talk about the foundational things. How do we define innovation? What does it mean? What are the frameworks for innovation that we can apply? And who is doing this well?*

This does not amount to a call to stop innovating, nor justification for doing so, but it is a plea to avoid unsustainable approaches to innovation – approaches that risk wasting time, effort, and money, without real returns. Such returns could include one or more of the following: deeper audience engagement and loyalty; professional prestige; social impact; digital capability building; and profit. The risks of continuing with a strategy that amounts to committing 'random acts of innovation' without a clear set of research-informed goals and objectives include the 'shiny things' obsession that unnecessarily distracts from core journalistic functions, can lead to burnout and fatigue, and risk stagnation or innovation paralysis.

In the case of digital news start-ups (Carlson and Usher 2016), however, there was a sense that there was no time to slow down, reflect and recalibrate innovation strategies. The Quint's co-

<sup>6</sup> See the definitional discussion of 'journalism innovation' in Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> Aron Pilhofer is the James B Steele Chair in Journalism Innovation at Temple University. Previously, Pilhofer was Executive Editor, Digital, and Interim Chief Digital officer at the *Guardian*. He was also associate Managing Editor for Digital Strategy and Editor of Interactive News at the *New York Times*.

founder, Ritu Kapur, said that hitting the pause button would equal 'death' to the innovation-driven Indian operation, highlighting the gradual emergence of a two-track model for journalism innovation, one that potentially separates legacy and digital born news organisations.

This report will assess the research participants' conceptualisations of journalism innovation, identify what they see as the obstacles inhibiting journalism innovation, discuss potential solutions, and foreshadow development of an 'end-user' focused research project that ultimately aims to help develop a model framework for sustainable journalism innovation.

## 2. Key findings and Research Method

### Key Findings

The main findings from this research include:

1. There is a clear desire to pull back from the high-speed pursuit of 'bright, shiny things' (i.e. the proliferation of new tools and technologies) and to refocus on foundational concepts of journalism innovation, 'end-user'/audience needs, and core elements of practice, especially within legacy news media contexts.
2. There is an identified need to develop research-informed, longer-term strategies designed to foster sustainable innovation.
3. There is concern that efforts in the field of digital journalism innovation have been too focused on distribution challenges at the expense of content and business development.
4. There is evidence of significant change fatigue and burnout that risks impacting on journalism innovation efforts (among other risks), in part caused by relentless pursuit of 'bright, shiny things'.
5. These impacts are not uniform: smaller, 'digital born' news publishers indicated that they do not have time to 'slow down', nor contain experimentation, because their survival depends upon it.
6. There is an evolving new set of innovation markers e.g. the need to consider unintended consequences of technological innovation (such as gendered online harassment and viral disinformation); the role of diversity in audience development and divergent global contexts; growing media freedom threats and limitations.
7. There is a need for innovation-oriented journalism research that:
  - a. Provides clear, foundational definitions of 'innovation' in reference to journalism;
  - b. Develops a model framework (featuring core metrics or indicators) to support journalism innovation in a range of environments, and to enable impact assessment;
  - c. Produces transferable knowledge derived from in-depth study of identified innovative journalism practices through collaborative discovery processes.

### 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<sup>8</sup> from 17 countries who operate at the forefront of digital journalism innovation. Many of them occupy senior roles within news organisations that range from start-ups (e.g. The Quint, Rappler, Civil, Kinzen<sup>9</sup>) to established global news brands (e.g. the *New York Times*, Reuters News, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and the *Washington Post*). Several have been at the forefront of digital journalism innovation for over a decade – as disruptive individual practitioners and team leaders, as digital transformation managers, as industry 'evangelists' for change, and as start-up pioneers. While these groups are not scientifically representative, participants were selected for their expertise and they collectively provide a wide variety of voices from journalism innovation practice worldwide. 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.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix for a list of participants and their affiliations.

<sup>9</sup> Previously known as NevaLabs.

<sup>10</sup> These roundtables were curated and facilitated by Julie Posetti.

### 3. Developing a Working Definition of Journalism Innovation

*What the Hell are we talking about when we discuss innovation? You would do an enormous service to the industry by helping us to define what that term even means.*

Aron Pilhofer

One of the participants' clearly expressed desires was for a working definition of journalism innovation. The word 'innovation' was too often conflated with, and misunderstood as, gimmicky technology and fads, according to these experts.

In industrial contexts, innovation is traditionally defined as the creation of new outputs, or improved goods; new organisational structures; new markets or new producers (Schumpeter 1934). Anthony (2012) described innovation as 'a process that combines discovering an opportunity, blueprinting an idea to seize that opportunity, and implementing that idea to achieve results.' (p17) It is also helpful to consider the question of definition in the context of research on innovation as it intersects with concepts of digital transformation within media organisations. Cornia, Sehl, and Nielsen (2017) describe journalism innovation as 'the introduction of new ideas, methods, and technologies' that are pursued to enhance the reputation of an organisation, 'to let journalists experiment with new forms of storytelling, and as part of wider attempts at driving organisational and cultural change.' (p7) Garcia-Aviles et al (2018) define it as:

*The capacity to react to changes in products, processes, and services through the use of creative skills that allow a problem or need to be identified and solved in a way that results in the introduction of something new that adds value to customers and thereby fosters the viability of the media organisation.*

The evolution of journalism innovation has occurred in the context of two decades of historic disruption marked by 'catastrophe and rebirth' (Anderson, Bell and Shirky 2012) necessitating constant institutional adaptation (Nielsen 2012). Innovation is seen as delivering a competitive edge to news organisations (Baregheh, Rowley, and Sambrook, 2009) at a time of sweeping and unrelenting change. As a result, it has assumed special significance (Usher 2014), with a notable (and somewhat contentious) example being the 2014 *New York Times* Innovation Report<sup>11</sup>.

Lucy Küng's (2015) research on digital news innovation identifies several common traits of successful organisations: a clear strategic focus; senior leadership dedicated to change; a pro-digital culture; and a deep integration of editorial, technological, and commercial expertise in developing new products and services. These features have also been found as markers of successful storytelling innovation, along with clear editorial goals and integration of business and technology dimensions at the outset (Anderson 2017). Additionally, it is acknowledged that innovation does not have to be transformative and disruptive. It can also involve incremental '... improvements to existing processes and systems, usually requiring ... capabilities to be expanded or adapted.' (Küng 2013)

<sup>11</sup> In 2014, an internal document was leaked demonstrating how far the *New York Times* had to go to catch up with the digital media revolution. See: <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/05/the-leaked-new-york-times-innovation-report-is-one-of-the-key-documents-of-this-media-age/>

## How do journalists conceive innovation in their professional sphere?

Based on analysis of the data from the research roundtables under examination here, while it is still accepted that journalism innovation remains essential, there is evidence of increased understanding that it requires a multi-faceted, strategic and integrated approach that includes:

- Experimentation with storytelling formats (e.g. reassessing what constitutes a story)
- Innovations in 'people and culture' (e.g. skills development and training)
- Innovations in technology (e.g. newsroom-borne tools and solutions)
- Innovations in management and leadership (e.g. support from the top that permits innovation to flourish)
- Innovations in audience engagement (e.g. moving beyond clicks and shares to audience participation in journalism)
- Structural innovations (e.g. workflows, reporting lines, and interdepartmental collaboration)
- Innovations in revenue development (although several participants identified a 'disconnect' between corporate revenue objectives and professional journalism objectives)

Additionally, there is emphasis on the need to consider innovation in the context of 'unintended consequences', and newly identified factors that vary according to the geopolitical and geographic context of news organisations. The reality for journalists and news organisations in developing countries, fragile states, and conflict zones is that the most urgent need is often physical survival (where the murder of journalists with impunity is on the rise), or the right to continue publishing (where censorship and internet shutdowns are used as tools of oppression), rather than the recalibration of business models. For reporters and news publishers in such contexts, innovations in digital safety and security might be a more important focus than experimentation with new storytelling formats. This means that innovation efforts should not happen in isolation from these factors, but rather take account of them, and potentially focus on them.

Examples of these emerging journalism innovation considerations include:

- Technology's potentially negative and/or 'unintended consequences' (e.g. gendered online harassment; viral disinformation; consequences of over-reliance on social platforms for distribution)
- Media freedom issues (e.g. internet access restrictions/shutdowns; attacks on journalists/news producers/sources; privacy threats and associated digital safety and security risks<sup>12</sup>)

Similarly, journalism innovation needs to be understood in the context of the publication. Is its focus local or national? Smaller, local news producers have more basic needs and the costs of chasing the 'bright, shiny things' can be greater. Then, there is the question of legacy news organisations versus digital born publishers. Established global brands might be able to afford sustained periods of reflection, whereas digital-born organisations might not have the time to pause. Other factors affecting journalism innovation include new challenges such as trust erosion, audience polarisation, and political demonisation of journalists and news organisations within liberal democracies. Innovative approaches to storytelling that emphasise diversity (gender, race, class and culture) and inclusivity might be useful responses to those problems, for example. Valuably, there may also be transferable lessons for Western newsrooms to learn from ingenuity borne of necessity in the Global South, rather than the usual expectation of a reverse trajectory (e.g. lessons could be learned by Western news outlets from the innovative use of WhatsApp for audience engagement and countering disinformation in India).

<sup>12</sup> See Posetti, J. 2017. *Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age*. (Paris: UNESCO) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002480/248054E.pdf>

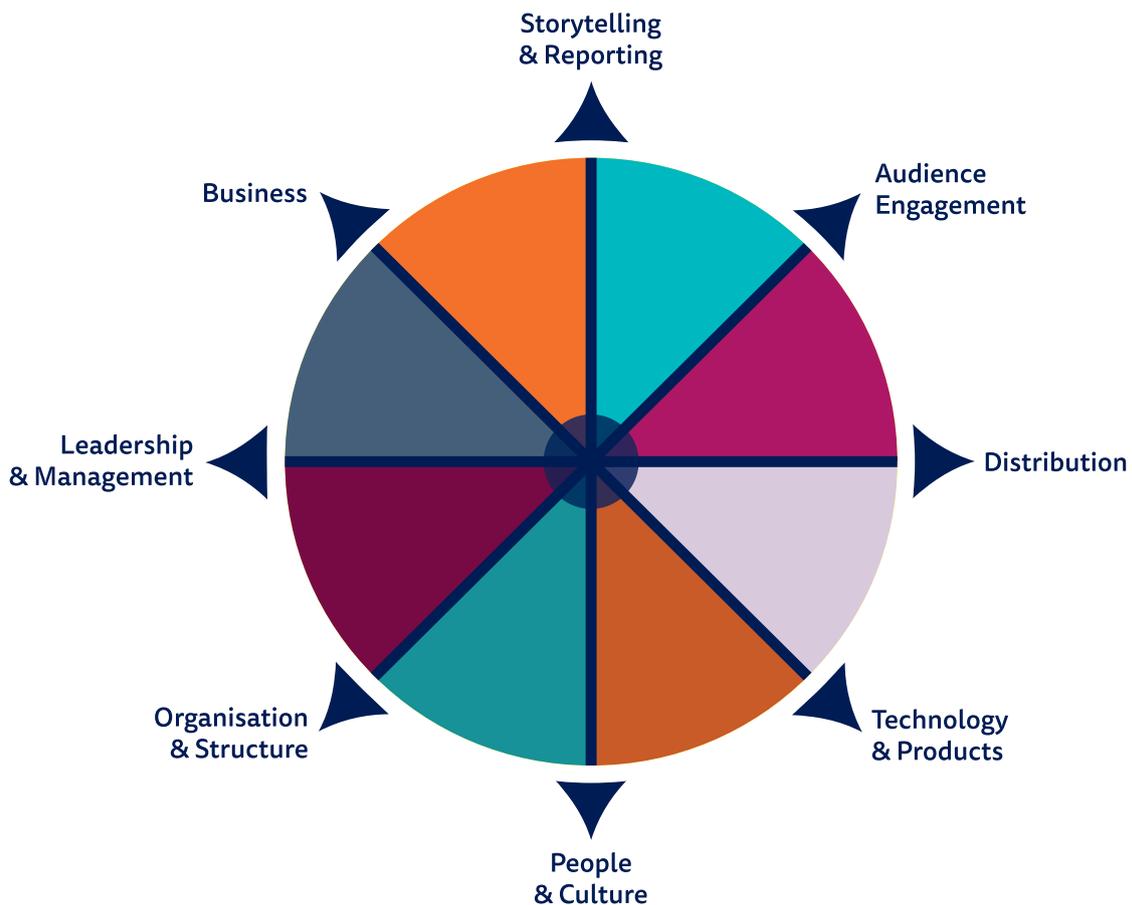
## What does journalism innovation look like?

How can we begin to visualise a model framework to support sustainable journalism innovation? Let's start with the broad definition of journalism innovation as something new or useful, or a different way of doing things. These things could be radical, disruptive and transformative interventions, or more basic and incremental steps on the innovation highway. They could manifest in the following 'spokes' of the Journalism Innovation Wheel:

1. Reporting/storytelling
2. Audience engagement
3. Technology/Product
4. Distribution
5. Business
6. Leadership/Management
7. Organisation
8. People and culture

This infograph depicts the dimensions and intersections of journalism innovation.

**Figure 1. Journalism Innovation Wheel**



During the course of the Journalism Innovation Project, the Reuters Institute will seek to develop a research-informed working definition of journalism innovation, along with a series of 'news innovation indicators', to help provide a foundational framework for journalism innovation that can be applied in a range of settings and adapted to suit a variety of news publishing models.

## 4. Discussion of Key Themes

We derived three key themes from the roundtable discussions through a process of ‘thematic analysis’, which involves pinpointing and examining themes present in data (Guest 2012). The themes identified pertain to journalism innovation opportunities, challenges, obstacles, and needs and they can be catalogued as follows:

- a. The risks of ‘Shiny Things Syndrome’ and the impacts of ‘innovation fatigue’ in an era of perpetual change
- b. Audiences: starting (again) with the ‘end user’
- c. The need for a ‘user-led’ approach to researching journalism innovation and developing foundational frameworks to support it

### a. The risks of ‘Shiny Things Syndrome’ and the impacts of ‘innovation fatigue’ in an era of perpetual change

During the first roundtable discussion Kim Bui, who had just left the start-up NowThis at the time, drew attention to what she described as ‘Shiny Things Syndrome’. What she meant by that, she explained, was the almost obsessive uptake of whatever new technological tools or trends crossed the path of newsroom managers at the expense of core tasks and problems that needed more strategic approaches to innovation. She argued that the word ‘innovation’ needed distancing from association with flashy technology. Instead, she said, ‘foundational innovation’ was required because, ‘People are looking for something that they can scale.’ This perspective resonated strongly across both groups. ‘Most of our industry’s innovation projects tend to focus on “shiny new things”’, prominent journalism innovation leader Raju Narisetti said. ‘A bunch of years after Alexa and Siri, we have our podcasts. A bunch of years after YouTube, are we actually doing something about video? After a couple of years of watching other people think about blockchain, we are all about blockchain.’ Meanwhile, Aron Pilhofer implored the Reuters Institute to avoid falling into the trap of focusing on the ‘bright and shiny stuff’ in the course of this research.

Daniel Sieberg, co-founder of the blockchain-based start-up Civil<sup>13</sup>, acknowledged that as a journalist he was ‘...guilty of trying to follow the “shiny objects” as they pertain to innovation. I was always like, “Hey, let’s try this thing, how about we do this type of storytelling” ... it was a sense of just experimenting for experimentation’s-sake.’ However, CEO of the UK-based local journalism focused start-up RADAR, Alan Renwick, pointed out that: ‘One person’s bright, shiny object is another person’s “thing we’ve been doing for 25 years”’. He meant that something that seemed revelatory and cutting edge to one news publisher might be normalised practice for another because levels of capacity for innovation vary widely across the industry. That was an insight echoed by Reuters’ Global Head of Multimedia, Jane Barrett:

*There are a lot of needs at the base level which aren’t sexy or shiny but are actually quite cheap. If you just chucked a few thousand dollars in, you could make the wheels turn so much more smoothly. They don’t get the nice bright shiny project title of ‘innovation’ but could probably make the biggest difference to our industry.*

<sup>13</sup> Sieberg has since departed Civil and he says he is taking legal action for unfair dismissal. It is noteworthy that the operation is struggling to attract investors. See: Bromwich, A.E. 2018. ‘Alas, the Blockchain Won’t Save Journalism After All’, *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/01/style/blockchain-journalism-civil.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fstyle&action=click&contentCollection=style&region=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=sectionfront>

The *New York Times*' Gender Initiative Director, Francesca Donner also focused on this theme: 'We tend to get distracted by the bright and shiny things,' she said. 'That's still that mindset of so many people who are doing news. We like *new things!*'

Daniel Sieberg observed a disconnect between how much news organisations felt that they should act like they are *leading* on innovation and how much they were *actually chasing* innovation. 'There's always this pressure to "keep up with the Jones's";' he said. 'Like "so and so is doing VR [Virtual Reality], how about it?"' That was a view also shared by the then Founding Editor of WikiTribune and former President of the Global Editors Network, Peter Bale. 'About 90% of the innovative projects I see have absolutely no commercial value other than intellectual masturbation among the people involved,' he said<sup>14</sup>. In response, Aron Pilhofer quipped that he had led teams frequently accused of such 'indulgence', but he maintained there was a place for organic experimentation. However, he acknowledged that there was pattern of backlash against high profile acts of innovative storytelling.

While the industry is now fixated with 'machine learning' and AR (Augmented Reality and Automated Reporting) and AI (Artificial Intelligence) – technological developments which may well prove to be transformative – Pilhofer expressed his frustration with what he perceived to be an ongoing obsession with 'shiny things'-oriented innovation levers. 'If we got in a time machine and went back seven years, we'd be sitting here talking about data visualisation and Snowfall!<sup>15</sup>' he said.

At the opposite end of the spectrum was pioneering mobile journalist Yusuf Omar, founder of HashtagOurStories. He passionately defended pursuit of technology-led experimentation and he sat through the second research roundtable wearing Snapchat Spectacles to demonstrate his point.

*I hear 'stop doing too many things, go back to core principles' but if we don't do 'too many things' we will never realise the potential of those things or know how to use them. I was banned in every newsroom I've worked from wearing these glasses that have cameras in them because they creep the fuck out of people. But if we don't wear wearable technology, we don't know how to use wearable technology. And we have to figure out how the all these things apply to journalism.*<sup>16</sup>

Greg Barber, the *Washington Post*'s Director of Newsroom Product, argued in defence of the (reasoned) pursuit of technological experimentation. He said the solution was finding a balance between competing approaches. 'If we ignore all the shiny things, we might not find the one shiny thing that could actually create new ground. We need to find the balance between the two,' he said. Barber's position represents an instructive strategic approach to the problem of 'Shiny Things Syndrome'. It also reflects a method highlighted by Küng (2017), in which the problem of unwieldy pursuit of innovation that distracts from core missions and saps resources is combated by screening developments against key strategic goals and business models, with external investors sought to underwrite more costly 'innovation plays', like VR experimentation.

<sup>14</sup> Bale later provided two examples of genuinely innovative journalism practice that he said fitted into the 10% of impressive 'innovation plays': 1) Reuters' series on climate change impacts, 'Ocean Shock' [https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ocean-shock-flounder/?fbclid=IwAR3pLxSjtZ3fPUutPnWFMN\\_4rMH8A7GJpN1SeGBwdltdwsK\\_fIMl32raH5s](https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ocean-shock-flounder/?fbclid=IwAR3pLxSjtZ3fPUutPnWFMN_4rMH8A7GJpN1SeGBwdltdwsK_fIMl32raH5s) and 2) the *New York Times*' mobile journalism project '40 Years of Chinese Economic Growth' <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/18/world/asia/china-rules.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&fbclid=IwAR1i4rXhd7HspkFQ7nAODiRKE07et8QQTKhurgyswUszXfx5fMF2N1-VjLM>

<sup>15</sup> Snowfall was a 2012 expression of immersive journalism produced by the *New York Times* that attracted so much praise for its innovation it triggered an industry backlash. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/index.html#/?part=tunnel-creek>

<sup>16</sup> However, privacy risks associated with wearable technologies raise legitimate concerns about their role in reporting. See discussion of 'unintended consequences' of innovation in Chapter 4a.

## TIME TO SLOW DOWN, REFLECT AND RETURN TO FUNDAMENTALS?

*I just want to make sure that in all of the talking about platforms and change and the thousand things that we need to do, that we don't lose sight of the journalism at the core of it.*

Joanne Lipman<sup>17</sup>

In the quest to remake journalism in response to convergent crises and opportunities over the past two decades, there has been too much emphasis on technology, distribution channels, the platforms and their algorithms, at the expense of content and journalism's core mission (i.e. serving audiences through publication of verifiable information in the public interest in engaging ways) according to many of the expert participants in the roundtable discussions. In resonance with the 'slow journalism' movement (Le Masurier 2015), one of the strongest themes to emerge was the urgent need for time. Time and space to 'pause', 'reflect', 'learn', 'consider', 'collaborate', devise 'longer term strategies' and produce creative storytelling responses to journalism's problems across the spectrum. The idea of time as an important indicator for fostering journalism innovation is, ironically, quite an innovative concept in an age of permanent connectivity, instantaneous interaction, perpetual change and incessant deadlines. 'If you're going to break things and move fast, you need to be able to stop, pause, and take a look at the outcomes,' Kim Bui said. Former Editor and co-lead of the Guardian Mobile Innovation Lab, Sasha Koren, said that news organisations needed to learn that sustainable innovation is as much about 'mindset shifts' as it is about understanding how to build new things, and it is equally about 'putting together good projects and learning what you can [from them].'

This requires critical reflective practice (Lawrence 2011), impact assessment and knowledge sharing that feeds learning back into new projects<sup>18</sup>. And it still involves a commitment to training (Porcu 2017). Esra Dogramaci, then Senior Editor for Digital at Deutsche Welle and previously in digital transformation roles with BBC and Al Jazeera, highlighted that time out to develop skills is central: 'Carving out time could be a vital act of innovation. You need a culture shift that recognises this is not "time-wasting"'. For Ritu Kapur, CEO of Indian start-up The Quint, training is essential and needs to be ongoing: 'We have rolling workshops all the time and make everyone learn all the skills because that's survival for us,' she said. But skills development requires structured training designed to embed learning, supported by strategic knowledge sharing (like getting those involved in innovation-focused projects to conduct lunchtime seminars about what they learned and writing up the lessons in a systematic way for sharing).

Journalists can be '... spectacularly bad at thinking long term and the constant churn makes it difficult to really step back to craft longer term strategies,' according to the *Washington Post's* Director of Audio, Jessica Stahl. 'And I think that leads to some of the panic – the approach of "I tried all the things, but I have no idea if any of them worked in any useful way."' This is an experience that was familiar to the *New York Times'* Gender Initiative Director Francesca Donner when she moved from Editorial into Strategy. 'I totally had a newsroom mindset. I was going to try everything.' But she had to learn to prioritise and temper her desire to experiment at speed in the absence of strategy, even in the context of a well-resourced news organisation:

*I think when you're in a newsroom mindset you're basically working on the 24-hour cycle. You get the story done, deadline rolls around, you either did it or you didn't do it, tomorrow's a new day we*

<sup>17</sup> At the time of participating, Joanne Lipman had recently stepped down as Editor-in-Chief of *USA TODAY*.

<sup>18</sup> See Fairfax Media case study in fostering newsroom innovation through skills development and knowledge sharing; Posetti, J. and McHugh, S. 2017. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/phoebes-fall-podcast-wins-gold-award-at-new-york-radio-festival-20170619-gwucgh.html>

*start again. But in product or strategy you can (and should!) slow down, do focus groups, assess and analyse. It was totally beyond the scope of how I worked before.*

Donner said it took her two years to shake the 'newsroom mindset':

*Before I finally realised 'Oh my goodness, I don't have to do all these things, I shouldn't do all these things. I can do 25 things, but I won't do any of them well. I won't be able to measure them. I won't be able to understand the impact. My users will be overwhelmed with everything I'm throwing at them'. We need to slow down and make very conscious choices ...*

Many newsroom people don't understand how to think 'really long-term' and make choices to properly invest in products that might take six to nine months to build, according to Donner.

Aron Pilhofer said one of the biggest impediments to sustainable innovation is journalists' fixation with 'the tummy compass': 'If it feels like the right thing to do, it must be. We are by nature a very instinct-driven profession and fighting that is hard – up to and including the industry that writes about journalism innovation.' His point was that much industry reporting on trends perpetuates the 'shiny things' obsession. 'How innovative publisher X uses fancy technology Y to cover stories. We have got to demand better. How do you know this is good practice? There are so many so-called best practices which we now know are bullshit,' he said.

Rather than adding to the never-ending list of tasks, deadlines, new tools and products that newsrooms are daily bombarded with, the emphasis should be on reducing output, formally strategising, and structuring innovation, according to many participants. 'The theme underlying everything is subtraction, subtraction, subtraction. How do we simplify? How do we make it easier? How do we make it more consumable? How do we distil this down? Journalism needs to get a whole lot better at this because too often the solution is just to do more – longer stories, more photos, more video, more everything,' Francesca Donner said. CEO of Digital for the Indian Express Group, Durga Raghunath, agreed. 'The more we can subtract and narrow down, and just say okay at least four things are non-negotiable, and then we innovate the Hell out of that, but not just try to be all of everything in the room, that would be very useful,' she said.

However, The Quint's Ritu Kapur brought a fledgling business reality-check to the conversation. Describing her publication as 'young, scrappy and dirty,' Kapur said organic innovation was essential to their survival because they had nobody else to learn from.

*Yeah, chill and listen, and read, and think. I can agree with all of that. But, we are three years old, had we not organically innovated we wouldn't be here. I have also seen how doing less can just slow you down and it can also be a justification for a lot of other things. We would be dead if we only looked at what legacy organisations were doing.*

This discussion was effective shorthand for tensions that cut across both groups of participants – between those proponents (largely coming from digital-born operations) of unfettered experimentation, and others within legacy media houses calling for a more strategic response to perpetual change and relentless experimentation.

Founder of Poland's successful gender-issues focused site NewsMavens, Zuzanna Ziomecka, also said it was time to hit the pause button: 'I feel that we need to move back and look at the core issues to try to figure out what's best for our industry and our readers before we figure out how best to innovate for it.'

This was a point also made by Joanne Lipman, who described a ‘disconnect between what is perceived as success on the business side and what is accepted as success journalistically’. She reflected on a conversation that she’d recently had with a financial executive at a media company that had just won a Pulitzer. ‘I said congratulations and the [executive] responded, “It doesn’t make us any money, it doesn’t really count.” That’s the world we’re living in, and so we really do need to understand what we are fighting for and make sure that that is at the heart of whatever we’re talking about.’ This anecdote highlights the sometimes disconnected and competing innovation goals across divisions within news organisations and further points to the need for an integrated, focused journalism innovation strategy.

## INNOVATION FATIGUE AND BURNOUT IN AN ERA OF PERPETUAL CHANGE

*I feel it’s really very hard for people in our newsrooms to be under this permanent pressure and never to have the feeling of rest. Our biggest danger is actually burnout. So, how do we avoid that?*  
Wolfgang Krach<sup>19</sup>

Feeding the widely expressed desire to slow down, reflect, rein in pursuit of the ‘bright, shiny things’ and innovate more strategically, is deepening fatigue within an industry in a permanent state of change and reinvention. Editor-in-Chief of Germany’s leading quality newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Wolfgang Krach, expressed concern for his staff in this regard:

*We have been in this process of transition and change for more than ten years. We’re changing our own structure and workflows every few months. And my staff say to me ‘When will we be ready?’ And I say to them ‘As long as we are in this profession we will never be ready.’ This is a permanent process of change, but I feel a great desire for resting. They want to see the end of this process.*

‘Our industry is experiencing a stress reaction,’ Zuzanna Ziomecka said. And it is no wonder. Wolfgang Krach said this stress compounded his concerns about burnout in the context of perpetual pivoting: ‘There is a real question “Do we have a future at all?” and combined with all this is the uncertainty of business models, and the permanent pressure of changing processes and workflows and I just fear that people are tired of it.’ Underlining Wolfgang Krach’s concerns, the International News Safety Institute’s Director, Hannah Storm, said that burnout connected to unrelenting high-speed change in such an environment is a genuine safety issue: ‘And I think it’s staggering that many newsrooms aren’t taking it seriously enough.’

## RESPONDING TO THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF INNOVATION AND NEW EXTERNAL THREATS

*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?*  
Maria Ressa<sup>20</sup>

One of the more interesting sub-themes to emerge from this research was the need for journalists and news organisations to consider and assess the risks of ‘unintended negative consequences’ associated with digital journalism innovation (while leveraging its potential), particularly regarding technology, ahead of implementation. Maria Ressa, founder of the Philippines-based start-up Rappler, pointed to what she perceived as the risks of platform-dependent journalism, having herself built a social media-powered digital news organisation. She also highlighted the negative consequences of personalisation applied to news distribution, including potential to increase audience polarisation (Eskens et al 2017):

<sup>19</sup> Dr Wolfgang Krach, Editor-in-Chief of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

<sup>20</sup> Maria Ressa is CEO and Executive Editor of the Philippines start-up Rappler.com.

*I think personalisation is really, really bad for journalism. That's why we're in echo chambers, right? We tried personalisation but we realised that coming from search, the click through rate is three times better for related content than personalisation.*

The potential 'unintended consequences' of re-paywalling journalism, and shifting audience engagement to more closed networks, were also raised in the research roundtables. The suggestion was that this process could lead to deeper knowledge gaps and increased audience polarisation by limiting access to reliable information.

Additionally, Ressa warned that lessons need to be learned from the weaponisation of digital age tools used for freedom of expression and audience engagement (such as social media platforms). She described the targeted online harassment of women journalists and orchestrated digital disinformation campaigns as manifestations of this problem (Posetti 2018). Ressa suggested that defensive responses to the problem of 'unintended consequences' arising from acts of journalism innovation focused on new technologies should involve more critical assessment at the point of considering uptake.

Social platforms and search engines (including Facebook and Google) were described as journalism's 'frenemies', in reference to the destruction of traditional business models associated with their capture of digital advertising, and news organisations' varying levels of dependence on them for content distribution. The buffeting of digital innovation strategies by the constant need to recalibrate in response to Facebook's algorithm changes was mentioned, as was the need to 'uncouple' distribution strategy from the platforms, and the failure of platform publishing's 'walled garden' approach to hosting content and attracting news publishers (Bell and Owen 2017). As Kim Bui put it, 'The consequences of our innovations could include the creation of new problems that become survival threats for us.' Italian data journalist Marzia Bona pointed to the frequent correlation of technology, industry upheaval and job losses: 'I worry that when we say 'innovation' it means machine learning and layoffs.'

The point was made that in many parts of the world, the risks of physical harm (including the murder of journalists with impunity), state crackdowns on news publishing (including forced closures), and state-backed disinformation campaigns designed to undermine trust in credible journalism and swamp it, are more urgent threats to the future of journalism than business-model crises. It is therefore necessary to understand that digital innovation in news cannot happen in isolation from these other external threats that both potentially intersect with and undermine the role of innovation in securing a sustainable future for quality journalism practiced in the public interest.

Regarding access to information and the impact of digital age disinformation, Reuters News' Chief Operating Officer, Reg Chua said:

*In some cases, we're all fighting for the same audience and yet there are huge chunks of the world that don't have any credible news. We need to be working on that as much as thinking about how to make the Times or the Post or the Guardian better.*

One way of combating these problems might be to focus some innovation effort on developing approaches to newsgathering and storytelling that help combat these problems while informing and engaging audiences. Rappler's deployment of 'big data'-based investigative journalism to map state-linked 'troll networks' targeting journalists is one example of this practice (Posetti 2018). Another example is The Quint's reporting and storytelling strategies for combating disinformation on WhatsApp<sup>21</sup>, a closed and difficult-to-penetrate network, which has become a viral distribution

<sup>21</sup> WhatsApp is owned by Facebook, the funders of this project.

platform for deadly expressions of disinformation in India (McLaughlin 2018). At The Quint, audiences collaborate with reporters on identifying and debunking disinformation through crowdsourcing efforts targeting WhatsApp users. Digital and physical verification techniques are combined, and stories that serve as narrative debunking and fact-checking exercises are shared via WhatsApp groups with a view to countering viral disinformation memes (Flueckiger 2018). According to Ritu Kapur, these stories also deliver significant traffic from highly-engaged users.

While fear should not be an impediment to innovation, failure to take account of potential risks could result in undermining innovation efforts. Similarly, journalism innovation strategies should involve cognisance of other external media freedom threats and factor them in where relevant. In summary, 'unintended consequences' and external threats should be considered, and defensive tactics built into journalism innovation strategies<sup>22</sup>.

## b. Audiences: starting (again) with the end user

*We have ignored the user experience for so long, how can we make sure we're not making the same mistake in 2020? And we must find better ways to connect with younger people*  
Helje Solberg<sup>23</sup>

The second clear theme identified through this research is the need to cement audiences or 'end users' as the main focus of strategic innovation, because too much time chasing 'bright shiny things' inevitably leads to the eye being taken off the 'end user' ball. The bottom line: innovations in audience engagement and development are more important than technological innovations (although the two are usually interrelated in digital contexts). As NRK's Helje Solberg observed, young people as end users remain mysterious and elusive to many news publishers and it warrants repeating that this situation must change quickly if legacy news organisations still dependent upon aging audiences are to have a future. Former Editor and co-lead of the Guardian Mobile Innovation Lab, Sasha Koren was direct: 'You need to look to your audience for signals of where you can do better.'

But while many news organisations are still working on retrofitting their digital innovation strategies to place the 'end-user' firmly at the centre, others are trying to build new systems from the ground up to achieve the same result. Kinzen (formerly NevaLabs), is the journalism start-up co-founded by former Storyful founder and Twitter executive Mark Little who participated in this research. 'What would it look like if you reinvented journalism from the point of the end user ... focusing on an array of machine learning and AI to give power and control to the user first and foremost?' Little asked. Kinzen's objective is to develop a user-centric news app that 'allows users to control the technology, not the other way around' (Slattery 2018) – a strategy that avoids the potential 'unintended consequences' of user privacy concerns raised around personalisation.

But 'user-led' innovation doesn't stop at 'user experience' in the technological sense. It also needs to be considered in terms of socio-political structures (e.g. closed vs open governments) and norms (such as gender, racial, and class diversity/inclusivity) reflected in approaches to newsgathering, sources, audience engagement and storytelling. There was recognition that needs and challenges regarding audience innovation vary markedly between countries and regions, and

<sup>22</sup> See for example AFP's innovative approach to tackling disinformation through partnerships like InVid <https://media-innovation.news/media-lab/invid-video-verification-project-involving-developers-academics-journalists/> and CrossCheck [https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/crosscheck\\_qual\\_EN.pdf](https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/crosscheck_qual_EN.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Helje Solberg is News Director at Norway's public broadcaster NRK. At the time of her participation in this research she was CEO and Editor of VG TV.

within them<sup>24</sup>. Several participants were critical of approaches that seek to export Western news organisations' innovation success stories globally because, as Kim Bui said, 'the problems of a media outlet in a repressive regime are very different from those faced by the *New York Times*', so the questions 'What's your user story? Who are you trying to solve the problem for?' need to be asked in recognition of varied regional contexts<sup>25</sup>. For HashtagOurStories founder Yusuf Omar, technological innovation (like mobile-enabled User Generated Content) is part of the solution to the problem of news organisations' failure to adequately reflect diverse audiences: 'I am sick of being the only brown person, young person, Muslim person in the room', he said. 'We need to change that, and we can use technology to bring in new and more diverse voices.'<sup>26</sup>

This may require creative reinventions of storytelling modes and formats. 'We need to interrogate the very notion of a 'story' – one of the main obstacles is the lack of imagination,' Rishad Patel, co-founder of Singapore's Splice Media said. There's also room to revamp narrative frames, and that's the mission of one of the participants – former Danish editor Ulrik Haagerup, who founded the Constructive Network. 'A lot of journalists see their microphone or their pen as a dagger to stab people, that's the best kind of journalism we know,' he said. 'An increased number of people are getting sick and tired of that approach, especially women, especially young people. And you see that all over the world, and people turn their back to that narrative.' The theories of 'Constructive Journalism' and 'Solutions Journalism' (Hermans and Gyldensted 2018) support humane, empathetic modes of journalism designed to encourage an emphasis on problem-solving, rather than accusation and blame.

Linked to these ideas are the themes of trust and audience polarisation, which are issues of both media economics and social cohesion. Former founding Editor of WikiTribune (a news publication with audience contributors at its core), Peter Bale, neatly summarised these interlinked concerns through a series of questions:

*How do you make media work for people to don't have access to news, or don't have media they can trust? How do you talk to people at the local level about things they care about? How so you scale that and make it commercially successful?*

The *New York Times*' Francesca Donner said her strategic approach to audience-centred innovation was to reflect carefully, and in an informed way, on what the end user wants: 'Take a step back, do a little bit of analysis, think about it from the reader perspective. What do they want? Maybe they don't want more. Maybe they don't necessarily want 50 Facebook Lives and podcasts to choose from? Maybe they want us to be selective and whittle down and make choices.' Her point was not to eschew innovation and revert to 'column inches journalism' but to emphasise the need to be precise, thoughtful, reflective and strategic about innovation, beginning with the end-user.

But The Quint's Ritu Kapur countered:

*How do I know what to subtract? How do I lose something? How can I just say 'Oh, this innovation didn't work for [the] New York Times, so it won't work for me'? My audience is completely different. They're very, very young. How do I presume that they don't want more? How do I assume that some percentage of that population isn't consuming the Facebook Live video while someone else is listening to the podcast because she has poor connectivity and therefore cannot access the video?*

<sup>24</sup> Note: the point was made by Daniel Sieberg that innovation research and reports emphasising high-end (e.g. VR) technology trends can problematically lead to imitation by small regional news publishers that seek cheap solutions with poor quality outcomes.

<sup>25</sup> See an example of innovative and creative mobile storytelling responding to audience needs in Africa from CNNi Digital: the 'period poverty calculator' was developed as part of a suite of stories addressing women's health needs in Tanzania. <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/10/health/period-poverty-calculator-asequals-intl/>

<sup>26</sup> See an example of an innovative technological solution for gender inequality in news sourcing introduced at the *Financial Times*. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/nov/14/financial-times-tool-warns-if-articles-quote-too-many-men>

Kapur described an ongoing need to experiment in a nimble, audience-responsive way, emphasising the role of ‘users’ in innovation strategy: ‘We don’t just talk about leadership and newsroom behaviour, we talk about user participation.’ She illustrated this point with an example of organic, audience-focused storytelling innovation via WhatsApp. The story involved a politician’s son stalking a young female radio host while she drove home at midnight, and it triggered a rich conversation among The Quint’s audience, many of whom are young women, about their experiences of being stalked.

*... people sent in their reactions on videos via WhatsApp to us and we said we’re going to put in a petition to make stalking a non-bailable offence because it can escalate to rape and acid attacks, and that led to further user participation and innovation on collecting user content in areas of low connectivity.*

Kapur said there was opposition to establishing a microsite for the project as it developed based on the widespread view that they ‘don’t attract traffic’. But the microsite<sup>27</sup> went ahead and she said that the significant user participation around the stalking story made the site incredibly dynamic. She used this case study to illustrate the need for her digital-born news organisation to take a more organic approach to innovation, allowing experimentation to flourish, and not ‘saying no’. ‘The priority has to be strong journalism on the ground, but how do you say what not to try doing?’

However, the *New York Times*’ Francesca Donner didn’t see a strategic disconnect. ‘You put the users first and listened to them,’ she said to Kapur. ‘I would never suggest for a second that we don’t innovate, but you looked right in front of you and you heard what was going on, you took advantage, you leveraged the thing that had happened, you listened to the voices and you responded to their need quite specifically.’

### **c. The need for a ‘user-led’ approach to researching journalism innovation and developing foundational frameworks to support it**

*A laundry list of tools is the last thing we need. We need things that could endure longer than one cycle of ‘bright and shiny’.*  
Kim Bui

This call for enduring Journalism Innovation Project outputs was underscored by Raju Narisetti: ‘At a very high level, what can we extract from model [news organisation] DNA? Thinking about it in that framework is more interesting to me than ‘here’s how we go about doing XYZ’.’ Maria Ressa suggested the project to begin with a reset: ‘If we have to create a new information ecosystem today, with distribution and content separated, what would that look like? What can we do that would be helpful, and how can we collectively use our clout to punch for that?’

Responses to these prods could involve research that collaboratively builds a model framework for sustainable journalism innovation based on extracting ‘good practice’ indicators from exemplary news publishers that place an emphasis on strategic design. Narisetti’s goal is to build the capability for journalists to ‘change ahead of something rather than being followers.’ He emphasised that this pattern of innovation also needs to be taken up by the commercial divisions of news organisations, because newsroom transformation in isolation is not sufficient – business innovation needs to happen in parallel. The *Washington Post*’s Director of Newsroom Product, Greg Barber, wants the Project to take it one step further, asking: ‘How do we become incubators for innovation?’

<sup>27</sup> See: <https://www.thequint.com/topic/talking-stalking>

There was also a strong emphasis on collaborative solutions: collective action, openness and cross-boundary knowledge sharing. 'There is so much to learn, and everyone is nodding, nodding, because we're all experiencing the same stuff. So, let's pool our ideas and see what we can come up with,' the *New York Times*' Francesca Donner said. For Durga Raghunath of the Indian Express Group, such approaches could beneficially be drawn from the ground floor of organisations: 'Based on insight which is deeper, maybe bottom up from all our organisations.'

What could such frameworks look like? What would the indicators or metrics be? 'Are they behaviour change, are they ways of transacting? What would innovation actually mean? I would love to figure that out and see how we can use the word', Durga Raghunath said, taking us back to foundational definitions of innovation.

For Reg Chua, Reuters News COO, a framework that modelled success in journalism innovation could be an important outcome: 'You have to have some framework for what success means. Sometimes it's winning a Pulitzer, and sometimes it's getting a product out the door. But most newsrooms don't have that structure, so that would be very worthwhile,' he said. The need for indicators or metrics for sustainable journalism innovation that were portable – across geographic and cultural boundaries, but also across news publishing models (from digital-born to legacy, and from local to global in coverage remit) – was also noted by Temple University Professor and Chair of the Solutions Journalism Network, David Boardman: 'I love the notion of coming up with principles of constant evaluation but with the clear recognition that the end result and answers are probably going to be very different depending on the circumstance,' he said. According to Kim Bui, we need not just metrics to foster innovation but also 'a framework for understanding' and deciding 'Should we do this or not? Would this be innovative for us or not? What could the outcomes be?'

An assessment of international case studies focused on examples of journalism innovation success and failure (including storytelling projects and organisations) could feed a transferable model for sustainable journalism innovation. Such a framework could be supported by indicators addressing:

- Common foundational principles for journalism innovation
- Criteria for success
- Known roadblocks/obstacles
- Failure signals
- User-focused goal setting

## 5. Conclusion

This analysis focuses on 39 high level industry research participants' conceptions of innovation (as they pertain to the practice and sustainability of journalism), the challenges and hurdles that they collectively identify in association with journalism innovation, and their needs regarding the insights and outputs of the Journalism Innovation Project. Perhaps the most surprising theme emerging from this research is the emphasis placed by global journalism innovation leaders on the need to step away from the 'bright and shiny things' to avoid unfocused pursuit of innovation.

The danger of lack of experimentation is stagnation, but ad-hoc, frantic, and often short-term pursuit of new technologies carries with it the risk of wasted efforts and absence of results. As the roundtable discussions document, news organisations interested in developing sustainable strategies for journalism innovation need to be willing to experiment across a wide front, but also to identify specific objectives and dimensions along which they want to progress. Important, too, is the warning to consider the 'unintended consequences' of digital journalism innovation.

This is not, however, a signal to stop innovating, nor is it a suggestion that technological change be avoided. It is rather an entreaty for more critical reflective practice and research-informed approaches to developing integrated journalism innovation strategies that help sustain news publishing. Strategies that start with, and focus clearly on, the needs and behaviours of 'end users'.

'Being open is critical', Amedia's Pal Nedregotten said in Lisbon. 'We need to talk to each other. And share.' The collaborative dissection of innovation strategies between experienced journalism innovators underscored the potential value of cross-cultural, cross-organisational, facilitated conversations as spaces for developing broad strategic approaches to innovation. Such approaches, involving time out from the daily production grind, allow for shared experiences, the cross-pollination of ideas and the seeds of potential future collaborations.

## References

- Anderson, C. W., Bell, E., and Shirky, C. 2012. *Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present*. Tow Center for Digital Journalism. <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8N01J57>
- Anderson, C. W. 2013. *Rebuilding the News: Metropolitan Journalism in the Digital Age*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Anderson, K. 2017. *Beyond the Article: Frontiers of Editorial and Commercial Innovation*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/it-time-media-move-beyond-article>
- Anthony, S. D. 2012. *The Little Black Book of Innovation: How it Works, How to Do it*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Baregheh, A., Rowley, J., and Sambrook, S. 2009. 'Towards a Multidisciplinary Definition of Innovation', *Management Decision* 47, 1323–1339.
- Bell, E., Owen, T., Brown, P., Hauka, C., and Rashidian, N. 2017. *The Platform Press: How Silicon Valley Re-engineered Journalism*. The Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia University. [http://towcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The\\_Platform\\_Press\\_Tow\\_Report\\_2017.pdf](http://towcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/The_Platform_Press_Tow_Report_2017.pdf)
- Bruns, A. 2014. 'Media Innovations, User Innovations, Societal Innovations', *The Journal of Media Innovations* 1, 13–27.
- Carlson, M., and Usher, N. 2016. 'News Start-Ups as Agents of Innovation: For-Profit Digital News Start-up Manifestos as Metajournalistic Discourse', *Digital Journalism* 4, 563–581.
- Cornia A., Sehl A. and Nielsen R. K. 2017. *Developing Digital News in Public Service Media*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/developing-digital-news-public-service-media-o>
- Eskens, S., Helberger, N., and Moeller, J. 2017. 'Challenged by News Personalisation: Five Perspectives on the Right to Receive Information', *Journal of Media Law* 9, 259–284.
- Evens, T., Raats, T., and von Rimscha, M. B. 2017. 'Business Model Innovation in News Organisations', *Journal of Media Business Studies* 14, 167–172.
- Flueckiger, S. 2018. *How the Quint is Tackling Misinformation in India*. World News Publishing Focus. <https://blog.wan-ifra.org/2018/06/29/how-the-quint-is-tackling-misinformation-in-india>
- Garcia-Avilés, J. A., Carvajal-Prieto, M., Arias F., and de Lara-González, A. 2018. 'Journalists Views on Innovating in the Newsroom. Proposing a Model of the Diffusion of Innovations in Media Outlets', *Journal of Media Innovations*. <http://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/TJMI/article/view/3968>
- Guest, G. 2012. *Applied Thematic Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Hermans, L. and Gyldensted, C. 2018. 'Elements of Constructive Journalism: Characteristics, Practical Application and Audience Valuation', *Journalism* 0, 1–17.
- Küng, L. 2013. 'Innovation, Technology and Organizational Change', in Storsul, T., and Krumsvik, A. H. (eds.), *Media Innovation: A Multidisciplinary Study of Change*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, 2–12.
- Küng, L. 2015. *Innovators in Digital News*. London: I.B.Tauris.

- Kueng\*, L. 2017. *Going Digital: A Roadmap for Organisational Transformation*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/going-digital-roadmap-organisational-transformation>
- Lawrence, L. 2011. 'Work Engagement, Moral Distress, Education Level, and Critical Reflective Practice in Intensive Care Nurses', *Nursing Forum* 46, 256–268.
- Le Masurier, M. 2015. What is Slow Journalism? *Journalism Practice* 9, 138–152.
- McLaughlin, T. 2018. 'Disinformation is Spreading on WhatsApp in India and it's Getting Dangerous', *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/09/fighting-whatsapp-disinformation-india-kerala-floods/569332/>
- Newman, N. 2018. *The Future of Voice and the Implications for News*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/future-voice-and-implications-news>
- Niblock, S. 2007. 'From "Knowing How" to "Being Able"', *Journalism Practice* 1, 20–32.
- Nielsen, R. K. 2012. *Ten Years that Shook the Media World*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/ten-years-shook-media-world>
- Obermayer, B. and Obermaier, F. 2016. *The Panama Papers: Breaking the Story of How the Rich and Powerful Hide their Money*. London: One World
- Pavlik, J. V. 2013. 'Innovation and the Future of Journalism', *Digital Journalism* 1, 181–193.
- Porcu, O. 2017. 'Exploring Innovative Learning Culture in the Newsroom'. *Journalism* 0, 1–17.
- Posetti, J. 2018. 'Combating Online Abuse: When Journalists and Their Sources are Targeted' in Ireton, C. and Posetti, J. (eds) *Journalism, Fake News and Disinformation*. Paris: UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002655/265552E.pdf>
- Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (eds). 2008. *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. Sage.
- Schumpeter, J. 1934. *The Theory of Economic Development*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Slattery, L. 2018. 'Mark Little's Kinzen News App to Launch in January'. *The Irish Times*. <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/mark-little-s-kinzen-news-app-to-launch-in-january-1.3673180>
- Steensen, S. 2009. 'What's Stopping Them? Towards a Grounded Theory of Innovation in Online Journalism', *Journalism Studies* 10, 821–836.
- UNESCO 2018. *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development 2017/2018*. UNESCO: Paris. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002597/259756e.pdf>
- Usher, N. 2014. *Making News at the New York Times*. The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor.

\* This report was published with an alternative spelling of Küng.

## Appendix: List of Research Roundtable Participants

All designations were correct at the time of participation

| Expert Panel A – May 30th 2018 |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Peter Bale                     | Digital media consultant/formerly WikiTribune, the Center for Public Integrity, UK  |
| Greg Barber                    | Director of Newsroom Product, the <i>Washington Post</i> , US   |
| Jane Barrett                   | Global Head of Multimedia, Reuters, UK  |
| Marzia Bona                    | Editor/Researcher, European Data Journalism Network, Italy  |
| Kim Bui                        | Director of Innovation, the <i>Arizona Republic</i> /formerly NowThis, US   |
| Reg Chua                       | Chief Operating Officer, Reuters News, US   |
| Esra Dogramaci                 | Digital media consultant/formerly BBC/Al Jazeera English/Deutsche Welle, Germany  |
| Sasha Koren                    | Digital media consultant/former Editor, Guardian Mobile Innovation Lab/formerly Deputy Editor, Interactive News, <i>New York Times</i> , US |
| Mark Little                    | Co-Founder, KinZen (previously NevaLabs)/formerly Storyful, Twitter, Ireland  |
| Gaven Morris                   | Editorial Director, ABC News, Australia   |
| Sharon Moshavi                 | Senior Vice President of New Initiatives, International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), US   |
| Rishad Patel                   | Co-founder, Splice Media, Singapore   |
| Aaron Pilhofer                 | Temple University/formerly with the <i>New York Times</i> ; <i>Guardian</i> , US  |
| Alan Renwick                   | CEO, RADAR, UK  |
| Daniel Sieberg                 | Digital media consultant/co-founder Civil/formerly Google, CNN, US  |

| Expert Panel B – June 7th 2018 |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Fergus Bell                    | DigDeeper Media, UK  |
| Erik Bjerager                  | Editor-in-Chief/Managing Director, <i>Kristeligt Dagblad</i> , Denmark   |
| David Boardman                 | Temple University/Chair, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press/ Chair, Solutions Journalism Network, US |
| Dave Callaway                  | CEO, The Street/President, World Editors Forum, US   |
| Francesca Donner               | Director of the Gender Initiative, <i>New York Times</i> , US  |
| Ulrik Haagerup                 | The Constructive Institute, Denmark  |
| Kalle Jungkvist                | Senior Advisor, Schibsted, Sweden  |
| Ritu Kapur                     | CEO/co-founder, The Quint, India   |
| Wolfgang Krach                 | Editor in Chief, <i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> , Germany  |
| Joanne Lipman                  | Author/former Editor-in-Chief, <i>USA Today</i> , US   |
| Lisa MacLeod                   | Head of Digital, Blackstar Media, South Africa   |
| Raju Narisetti                 | Columbia University/formerly Gizmodo Media, US   |
| Pal Nedregotten                | Executive VP of Innovation, Amedia, Norway   |
| Yusuf Omar                     | Founder, HashtagOurStories, South Africa   |
| Durga Raghunath                | CEO Digital, Indian Express Group, India   |
| Maria Ressa                    | CEO/Executive Editor, Rappler, Philippines   |
| Rana Sabbagh                   | Executive Director, Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), Jordan                                 |
| Mariana Santos                 | Chicas Poderosas, formerly the <i>Guardian</i> , Portugal/Brazil   |
| Vivian Schiller                | Digital Media Consultant/Formerly NPR, NBC, Twitter, US  |
| Helje Solberg                  | News Director NRK/formerly CEO and Executive Editor, VG TV, Norway   |
| Jessica Stahl                  | Director of Audio, <i>Washington Post</i> , US   |
| Hannah Storm                   | Director, International News Safety Institute, UK  |
| Denis Teysou                   | AFP Medialab R&D Editorial Manager, France   |
| Zuzanna Ziomecka               | Editor-in-Chief, Newsmavens, Poland  |



# Selected RISJ Publications

REUTERS INSTITUTE GLOBAL JOURNALISM  
SERIES with COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

NGOs as Newsmakers: The Changing Landscape of  
International News  
Matthew Powers

SELECTED RISJ BOOKS  
(published jointly with I.B.Tauris)

Journalism and the NSA Revelations  
Risto Kunelius, Heikki Heikkilä, Adrienne Russell, and  
Dmitry Yagodin (eds)

Journalism in an Age of Terror  
John Lloyd

SELECTED RISJ CHALLENGES  
(published jointly with I.B.Tauris)

The Right to Be Forgotten: Privacy and the Media  
in the Digital Age  
George Brock

The Kidnapping of Journalists: Reporting from  
High-Risk Conflict Zones  
Robert G. Picard and Hannah Storm

Innovators in Digital News  
Lucy Küng

SELECTED RISJ BOOKS

Global Teamwork: The Rise of Collaboration in  
Investigative Journalism  
Richard Sambrook

Something Old, Something New: Digital Media  
and the Coverage of Climate Change  
James Painter et al

SELECTED RISJ REPORTS

Interested But Not Engaged: How Europe's Media  
Cover Brexit  
Alexandra Borchardt, Felix M. Simon, and Diego Bironzo

Indian News Media and the Production of News in  
the Age of Social Discovery  
Zeenab Aneez, Sumandro Chattapadhyay, Vibodh  
Parthasarathi, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

The Emotional Toll on Journalists Covering the  
Refugee Crisis  
Anthony Feinstein and Hannah Storm

DIGITAL NEWS PROJECT PUBLICATIONS

The Future of Voice and the Implications for News  
Nic Newman

Digital News Report 2018: Turkey Supplementary  
Report  
Servet Yanatma

Private Sector News, Social Media Distribution,  
and Algorithm Change  
Alessio Cornia, Annika Sehl, David A. L. Levy, and  
Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Digital News Report 2018  
Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Antonis Kalogeropoulos,  
David A. L. Levy and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

The Digital Transition of Local News  
Joy Jenkins and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Public Service News and Social Media  
Annika Sehl, Alessio Cornia, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

The Global Expansion of Digital-Born News Media  
Tom Nicholls, Nabeelah Shabbir, and Rasmus Kleis  
Nielsen

Bias, Bullshit and Lies: Audience Perspectives on  
Low Trust in the Media  
Nic Newman and Richard Fletcher

Going Digital: A Roadmap for Organisational  
Transformation  
Lucy Küng

Developing Digital News Projects in Private Sector  
Media  
Alessio Cornia, Annika Sehl and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Mapping Online News Discovery for Computer  
Users in the UK  
Nic Newman and Antonis Kalogeropoulos

'I Saw the News on Facebook': Brand Attribution  
when Accessing News from Distributed  
Environments  
Antonis Kalogeropoulos and Nic Newman

Virtual Reality and 360 Video for News  
Zillah Watson

