



Journalist Fellowship Paper

Rebuilding trust: journalism's role in an AI-driven world

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Preface

This project was prepared by Sashka Koloff, Managing Editor of Standards & Compliance with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. It is the outcome of a three-month industry-sponsored fellowship at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, supported by the ABC.

This research has two main focuses: first, the decline in trust in news media and its underlying causes; and second, the distinct challenges, and opportunities, that generative artificial intelligence (AI) introduces in an already fragile trust environment.

Drawing on interviews with AI experts, newsroom leaders, and standards editors, as well as a review of relevant academic literature, this paper reaffirms journalism's unique value in a disintermediated media environment by emphasising the central role of human judgment, journalistic ethics, and professional standards.

Introduction

What is journalism's unique value? It's a vital question we must seek to answer amid escalating challenges.

Around the world, news organisations are shrinking or closing under sustained financial pressure. Political attacks on media have intensified, press freedoms are being eroded, and the broader information ecosystem has become saturated with mis- and disinformation, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and clickbait.

In this context, public trust in journalism has declined to historic lows in many parts of the world.¹ There is no simple solution. But one thing is clear: journalism cannot survive without upholding the ethical standards that underpin its credibility. These standards distinguish it from the flood of unverified content circulating online.

Generative AI, used carelessly, poses a fresh threat to public trust. The much-discussed case of an AI-generated book list published by U.S. newspapers reflects a deeper issue.² The real story is not about AI, but of a broken model: a hollowed-out newsroom, content outsourced to third parties, poor editorial oversight, and generative AI tools used to produce unchecked, low-quality information. The erosion of standards, rather than the technology itself.

Many media companies are already using generative AI to produce content at scale, often without formal policies. A *Thomson Reuters Foundation* report surveying over 200 journalists across 70 countries found that while more than 80% said they use AI tools, only 13% had established AI policies in their newsrooms.³ Without clear protocols, these tools risk amplifying bias, spreading falsehoods, and damaging the credibility of reliable news.

When I began my fellowship at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, I set out to explore how public service media could safeguard trust in the age of artificial intelligence. But it quickly became evident that these issues cannot be separated from deeper questions about journalism's purpose. At the heart of this

¹ Brenan, M. & Saad, L. (2025) Five key insights into Americans' views of the news media, Gallup Blog, 27 February.

² Blair, E., 2025. 'How an AI-generated summer reading list got published in major newspapers'. National Public Radio [online] 20 May. Available at <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/20/nx-s1-5405022/fake-summer-reading-list-ai>

³ Radcliffe, D. (2025). Journalism in the AI Era: A TRF Survey, Thompson Reuters Foundation. Available at: [Journalism in the AI Era: A TRF Insights survey](#) (Accessed: 18 July 2025).

inquiry lies a deceptively simple question: What unique value does journalism offer in today's information landscape?

The answer isn't new. Journalism exists to deliver information that is accurate, relevant, impartial, and independent. Its credibility depends on rigorous methods and ethical standards. These principles form an implicit contract with the public: journalism can be trusted to seek truth, verify facts, and serve the public interest.

But that contract is under severe strain. Generative AI tools like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini now offer fast, confident answers—often without attribution or verification—reducing the perceived need for traditional news sources. The disintermediation of journalism, which began with social media, is accelerating with AI. Control over information flow is shifting even further from newsrooms to a handful of dominant tech platforms.

The scale and speed of this change is extraordinary. In April, ChatGPT reported over 800 million weekly users and 1 billion daily interactions.⁴ Earlier this year, OpenAI's paid subscriptions grew from two to three million in just a few months.⁵ As tech analyst and venture capitalist Mary Meeker has noted, the pace of AI adoption is “unprecedented” and materially faster than any prior technological revolution.⁶

These developments may seem overwhelming. But this is not time for despair—it's a moment for renewal. We must ask: What makes journalism credible and worthy of public trust? What do audiences need and expect from us? And how must we evolve to meet those expectations in an AI-driven world?

This project seeks to contribute to this ongoing conversation.

A note on terminology

Journalism: Journalism in the context of this project is not defined by a specific format, platform, or medium, but by a shared set of values and practices. At its core, journalism is distinguished by its commitment to accuracy, objectivity, editorial independence, and service to the public interest.

⁴ Nolan, B. (2025). 'Sam Altman says 10% of the world now uses our systems a lot', *Fortune Magazine* [online]. Available at: [OpenAI's user base doubles in just a few weeks to 800 million, Sam Altman suggests | Fortune](#) (Accessed: 10 July 2025).

⁵ Capoot, A. (2025). 'OpenAI tops 3 million paying business users, launches new features for workplace', *CNBC* [online]. Available at: [OpenAI tops 3 million paying business users, launches new features](#) (Accessed 30 June 2025).

⁶ Meeker, M., Simons, J., Chae, D., Krey, C. (2025) Trends – Artificial Intelligence (AI), Bond. Available at: [Trends_Artificial_Intelligence.pdf](#) (Accessed: 10 June 2025).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI: In media discourse, definitions of AI are fuzzy. I do not want to add to the confusion. So, to be clear, in this paper, AI refers to systems that can make autonomous decisions within a specific journalistic context. This includes tools that generate, edit, or assist in producing journalistic content, as well as systems that support editorial choices. It does not include broader algorithmic curation, such as how stories are ranked or recommended on platforms. While public debate often equates AI with generative technologies, this paper uses the term more broadly to reflect a range of applications in journalism.

The trust ‘crisis’

“Without facts you can’t have truth, without truth, you can’t have trust.” – Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize–winning journalist

When Filipina journalist Maria Ressa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021, she gave an ominous warning: when social media “spreads lies, laced with fear, anger and hate, it turns the information ecosystem upside down”.⁷

Four years on, it is clear this inversion of the traditional information order has profoundly destabilised trust, not only in media but in democracy itself. Certainly, the core mission of journalism – to seek truth, give voice to the voiceless, and hold power to account – remains unchanged. But public confidence in the institutions and individuals responsible for fulfilling that mission is in deep decline. Trust has become a defining challenge of the modern information age.

BBC Director-General Tim Davie recently characterised this as an “epistemic crisis”, a moment where “there is no agreed backbone of facts upon which to base constructive deliberation”.⁸ In this fragmented landscape, disinformation and deliberate confusion have become tools of power. The World Economic Forum has identified disinformation as the single greatest short-term risk to global stability.⁹

This year’s global Edelman Trust Barometer links declining trust to polarisation, grievance, and the weakening of social cohesion, noting that those who feel most aggrieved are those who are most distrustful.¹⁰ On the trust metric, media and government now share the lowest scores behind business and NGOs. Shockingly, business is now viewed as the most competent and the most ethical of the four, with 70% of respondents saying they think journalists intentionally lie to benefit themselves.

⁷ Ressa, M. (2021). Nobel Prize Lecture. Available at: [Maria Ressa – Nobel Prize lecture - NobelPrize.org](#) (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

⁸ Davie, T. (2025) ‘The BBC – A Catalyst for Building Trust’, BBC Media Centre. Speech transcript available at: [The BBC - A Catalyst for Building Trust](#). (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

⁹ Elsner, M., Atkinson, G., Zahidi, S. (2025). Global Risks Report 2025, World Economic Forum. Available at: [Global Risks Report 2025 | World Economic Forum](#) (Accessed: 1 June 2025).

¹⁰ Edelman, R. (2025). 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer. Available at: [2025 Edelman Trust Barometer | Edelman](#) (Accessed 10 June 2025).

This breakdown of trust is driven by a convergence of factors. Among them is the overwhelming volume of information available, much of it contradictory or misleading. This has led to what some describe as “ambient information” – a constant flow of fact and fiction, consumed passively and without clear differentiation.¹¹ In this context, many citizens no longer feel confident distinguishing between truth and falsehood.

As *The New Yorker Magazine*’s Nathan Heller wrote following Donald Trump’s 2024 U.S. presidential election win, audiences experience news as “a mixture of facts and falsehoods circulated indiscriminately in a distracted public sphere”.

This confusion is not accidental. Political actors have exploited it for strategic gain. Steve Bannon, former advisor to President Trump, articulated this openly in an interview with *Bloomberg* columnist Michael Lewis, saying: “The real opposition is the media. And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with shit.”¹²

This tactic – relentless attacks on the media, repetition of constructed or “alternative facts”, the use of charged phrases like “fake news”, and branding journalists as “enemies of the people” – is aimed at delegitimisation and is core to President Trump’s communications strategy. He admitted as much off camera to *60 Minutes* reporter, Leslie Stahl. When she asked him why he constantly attacks the media, he told her, “I do it to discredit you all, and demean you all, so when you write negative stories about me no one will believe you.”¹³ This is beyond a political tactic. It is a war on truth.

The effects are global. Since 2012, the Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute has documented the severity of the decline in trust. In this year’s report, 100,000 people from 48 countries were surveyed, and while trust has remained relatively stable for a third consecutive year, it is still depressingly low. Globally, only 40% of people say they trust most news most of the time.¹⁴

¹¹ Heller, N. (2024). “The battle for attention. How do we hold on to what matters in a distracted age?”, *The New Yorker Magazine* [online]. Available at: [The Battle for Attention | The New Yorker](#). (Accessed 10 June 2025).

¹² Lewis, M. (2018). ‘Has anyone seen the President?’, *Bloomberg News* [online]. Available at: [Has Anyone Seen the President? - Bloomberg](#) (Accessed 10 June 2025).

¹³ Deadline Club (2018). Deadline Club Awards 2018 Dinner Conversation with Judy Woodruff and Lesley Stahl. YouTube. Available at: [Deadline Club Awards 2018 Dinner Conversation with Judy Woodruff and Lesley Stahl - YouTube](#) (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

¹⁴ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025. Reuters Institute. Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

In Australia, trust is slightly higher, with 43% of respondents expressing confidence in the news.¹⁵ Among those with higher news literacy, that figure rises to 53% – a strong indication Australia would benefit from a national media literacy strategy.

Importantly, trust in news media varies significantly across different parts of the world. In countries like Finland and Norway, where trust in public institutions and government is high, trust in news tends to be high as well. In contrast, political polarisation can deepen distrust, as attitudes toward the media become increasingly tied to ideological identity. Some larger European countries, such as the UK and Germany, have seen a notable decline in trust over the past decade – dropping by 16 and 15 percentage points respectively – often linked to rising political division.¹⁶

In polarised societies, research shows that citizens are more likely to distrust news that challenges their worldview and to group all media – partisan, independent, or public service – under the same umbrella of suspicion.¹⁷ According to A.G. Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*, vulnerability intensifies distrust and often reduces journalism to a binary question in the eyes of the public: “Are you with us, or against us?”¹⁸

Further complicating the trust landscape is the increasingly blurred distinction between news and partisan commentary. Media organisations with markedly different editorial missions, ranging from partisan cable networks like Sky News, to public service media such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, are grouped together under the broad label of “the media”. This conflation diminishes public understanding of what journalism entails and the professional standards it seeks to uphold. In an information environment where factual reporting and opinion are encountered side by side, the public’s ability to distinguish between the two weakens, resulting in a corresponding decline in trust.¹⁹

¹⁵ Park, S., Fisher, C., McGuinness, K., Lee, Y.J., McCallum, K., Fujita, M., Haw, A., Nardi, G. (2025). Digital News Report: Australia 2025. University of Canberra. Available at: [Digital News Report: Australia 2025 - University of Canberra](#). (Accessed 18 June 2025).

¹⁶ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025. Reuters Institute. Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

¹⁷ Nielsen, R., Fletcher, R. (2024). Public perspectives on trust in news, Reuters Institute. Available at: [Public perspectives on trust in news | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#) (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

¹⁸ Sulzberger, A.G. (2024). 2024 Reuters Memorial Lecture. Reuters Institute. Available at: [Full text of A. G. Sulzberger's 2024 Reuters Memorial Lecture: Journalistic independence in a time of division | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#) (Accessed 10 June 2025).

¹⁹ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025, Reuters Institute. Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

“Social” media has exacerbated this erosion. Increasingly, people, especially younger and hard-to-reach audiences, consume news incidentally online. It appears in their feeds rather than through intentional selection. Online, sources of news are not only less trusted but are more likely to elevate influencers and celebrities over trained journalists.²⁰ Unlike traditional journalists, “news influencers” are not bound by editorial ethics or accuracy standards, yet their voices carry significant weight.²¹ Audiences often encounter unvetted information in a context devoid of traditional credibility markers and the most basic journalistic standards. The result is a public that is more sceptical of *all* information.²²

It is striking that *The Joe Rogan Experience* appeared in the 2025 *Digital News Report* as one of the most frequently mentioned “news podcasts”.²³ That an opinion-driven show known for promoting conspiracy theories and playing fast and loose with facts is regarded by some survey respondents as a news source reflects the crisis in how the public identifies and values credible information.

Journalists themselves cannot be excluded from the trust equation. We must acknowledge our share of the responsibility for its erosion. Errors in reporting, perceived bias, and lapses into sensationalism, undermine the very trust we strive to cultivate. Fergus McIntosh, Research Editor for *The New Yorker Magazine*, articulated the ethical dimension of this challenge: “If people are to trust journalists, we need to earn it.”²⁴ Earning that trust requires more than procedural accuracy – it demands a sustained commitment to independence, transparency, and editorial rigor.

Public service media around the world, including my employer the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), have directly recognised trust as a strategic priority. The ABC champions its role in promoting, “truth in a world of increasing

²⁰ Toff, B. et al. (2021) Listening to What Trust in News Means to Users: Qualitative Evidence from Four Countries, Reuters Institute. Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/listening-what-trust-news-means-users-qualitative-evidence-four-countries> (Accessed 10 June 2025).

²¹ Newman, N., Arguedas, A. (2025) ‘Trust in the News Media: A global and Audience Perspective’ in Kirkland, T., Fang, G. (ed) *Age of Doubt*. Monash University Publishing, pp.105-116.

²² Callo, J. (2022). ‘The Kaleidoscope: Young People’s Relationship with News’, Reuters Institute/ Craft. Available at: [The kaleidoscope: tracking young people’s relationships with news | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/kaleidoscope). (Accessed 20 June 2025).

²³ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025. Reuters Institute. Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report-2025) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

²⁴ McIntosh, F. (2025). ‘What’s a Fact Anyway?’, *The New Yorker Magazine* [online]. Available at: [What’s a Fact, Anyway? | The New Yorker](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/what-a-fact-anyway) (Accessed 25 June 2025).

lies”.²⁵ While Australia may be less polarised than some other media landscapes (in that our society continues to value the notion of an “objective truth”), it is nevertheless caught in a broader culture war, in which right-leaning media and some politicians actively seek to discredit the ABC, thereby deepening social division and damaging trust.

The ABC is not immune from error, of course. It has made its fair share of mistakes. Earlier this year, the Federal Court of Australia found the ABC had unlawfully terminated fill-in radio host Antoinette Lattouf, because of her political opinion opposing the Israeli military campaign in Gaza and to appease pro-Israel lobbyists.²⁶ This seriously harmed public perceptions of the broadcaster’s independence. The impact of this, and some significant editorial failures in recent years, is reflected in the ABC’s trust metrics. These metrics show that trust is closely linked to reputation.²⁷

Given all of this, regaining trust may prove an elusive goal. While efforts such as fact-checking, transparency measures, and campaigns aimed at promoting journalism’s mission are well meaning, the evidence supporting their long-term effectiveness is limited.²⁸ As Dr Anya Schiffrin, director of the technology and media specialisation at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, and others have noted, journalism’s trust deficit cannot be disentangled from broader societal shifts: the erosion of institutional authority, the strategic manipulation of information, and the fragmentation of public discourse.²⁹

It is unhelpful that academic research on media trust also remains fragmented, often contradictory, and inconclusive. There is no standardised measure of trust – nor even a universally accepted definition.³⁰ While questions about what information to trust have existed since the beginning of the printed word, in an

²⁵ Williams, K. (2024). 2024 Menzies Oration. Speech transcript available at: [ABC Chair Kim Williams AM delivers the 2024 Menzies Oration - About the ABC](#) (Accessed 10 July 2025).

²⁶ Rangiah, J. (2025). Federal Court Australia. Judgement available at: [Lattouf v Australian Broadcasting Corporation \(No 2\) \[2025\] FCA 669](#) (Accessed 30 June 2025).

²⁷ 2025 ABC Internal Trust research data.

²⁸ Latvala, J., (2023). The mirage in the trust desert: Challenging journalism’s transparency infatuation, Reuters Institute. Available at: [The mirage in the trust desert: Challenging journalism's transparency infatuation](#) (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

²⁹ Schiffrin, A., (2019). Credibility and trust in journalism. Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Communication.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

increasingly fragmented information environment, publishers must continue to confront the issue with renewed urgency and purpose.³¹

³¹ Riggs, A., & Burke, P. (2009). *A social history of the media: from Gutenberg to the Internet*. Cambridge: Polity.

Trust vs trustworthiness

What makes journalism trustworthy in the eyes of the public? Unfortunately, there is no clear answer. I do think a helpful starting point, however, is understanding the distinction between “trust” and “trustworthiness.”

As already discussed, trust is inherently subjective. People often place trust in sources that affirm their worldview, even when they lack accuracy or integrity. In this sense, public trust can be misplaced, rooted more in familiarity or ideological alignment than in factual reliability.³²

Trustworthiness, by contrast, aims to be objective. It speaks to whether a source *deserves* trust based on the quality of its reporting, its adherence to ethical standards, and its commitment to transparency and editorial rigor. Professor Charlie Beckett, Director of Polis at the London School of Economics, argues that chasing universal trust is “a complete misunderstanding of what trust is and why people trust things”.³³ The effort is often futile because people won’t trust journalism that doesn’t align with their personal values or opinions. Professor Beckett believes the obsession with trust metrics is pointless for news organisations and suggested there’s a critical difference between “blatant trust” and “trustworthiness”. In short, news organisations hoping to earn the trust of everyone are chasing a fantasy.

In recent years, “transparency” has emerged as a strategy to demonstrate trustworthiness. Rather than striving to be universally trusted, many news organisations are now focused on proving they are worthy of trust. This shift reframes the challenge: from expecting audiences to believe, to showing them why belief is justified.

Whether the strategy is working remains uncertain. In a review of the available academic literature on the subject, journalist Jussi Latvala found: “Transparency and its potential to build trust have been academically studied, and what research

³² Nielsen, R., Fletcher, R. (2024). Public perspectives on trust in news, Reuters Institute. Available at: [Public perspectives on trust in news | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#) (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

³³ Conversation between the author and Professor Charlie Beckett, Director of Polis at the London School of Economics, 20 June 2025.

finds is that often transparency has no effects on trust. Sometimes quite modest positive effects are observed, sometimes it has even decreased trust in journalism.”³⁴

I am a little more hopeful. It seems newsrooms are too, as they step up efforts to implement transparency measures. These include better explaining how stories are produced, why editorial decisions are made, publicly acknowledging mistakes, and focusing on direct audience engagement.

While it is too soon to know if any of this will have a tangible impact on trust long-term, it does reflect sound journalistic practice and a commitment to continuous improvement. Professor Beckett put it more bluntly: “Have guidelines, check things, tell your audience you’re doing it. These are all good things to do. But, to me, they’re kind of a no-brainer. If you’re not doing them, then I’m not sure what planet you’re on.”

³⁴ Latvala, J.(2023). 'The mirage in the trust desert: Challenging journalism's transparency infatuation', Reuters Institute. Available at: [The mirage in the trust desert: Challenging journalism's transparency infatuation](#) (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

Approaches to tackling the trust problem

This section examines how four legacy media institutions are working to demonstrate trustworthiness: the BBC, the *New York Times*, Schibsted Media, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

Despite differing approaches, and vastly different geographical, political, and societal contexts, they share a common belief: transparency, audience engagement, and relevance are essential to earning public trust.

How four newsrooms are tackling the trust problem

This table distils the main approaches four organisations are taking to build and maintain trust.

Organisation	Context/challenge	Main initiative(s)	Trust-building approach	Limitations/critiques
BBC	Criticism over bias (Brexit, Gaza), scandals denting reputation. Still most trusted in UK.	BBC Verify – 60-person verification unit; global expansion planned.	Transparency: “show how news is made”; verification explained to audiences; potential AI tools.	Critics: rebranding of existing practice; risks implying other content is “less verified”.
New York Times	Low US news trust (30%); polarisation, political hostility (“fake news” attacks).	Trust Team (2021); transparency initiatives; “Reporter Reply”; video explainers; corrections visibility.	Emphasis on transparency, context, direct engagement; adapting formats for social/TikTok; subscriber growth.	Readers still struggle to distinguish opinion vs reporting; uncertain reach with disengaged/young audiences.
Schibsted Media	Nordic context of high trust (Finland 67%, Yle 81%).	Trust Initiatives Team, Trust Tracker, IN/LAB co-creation with youth; “ethics boxes”.	Audience-defined drivers: credibility of process, content, and personal relevance; co-created products (e.g. “news as music”).	Early stage: some gains in survey data, others flat; balancing AI disclosure without undermining trust.
ABC (Australia)	Fragmented trust; audience scepticism; shifting digital consumption.	Trust Signals embedded in stories; ABC News Verify; diversity projects; community engagement plans.	Embedding explainability into reporting; long-term relationships via children’s/educational programmes; emotional bonds with presenters.	Lack of formal change management plan slowed initial implementation. “Trust boxes” intrusive on mobile devices, so were scaled back.

BBC: transparency and verification

In recent years, the BBC has faced sustained criticism over perceived bias, most notably in its coverage of the Israel-Gaza war and, earlier, Brexit.³⁵ High-profile scandals involving presenters have further dented its public image and shaken audience trust.³⁶

Despite these challenges, the BBC remains by far the most widely used and trusted news organisation in the UK. While overall confidence in news in the UK remains low, with only 36% of people saying they trust most news most of the time, the BBC stands out, with 60% saying they trust its reporting.³⁷ According to the 2025 *Digital News Report*, the BBC News website ranks among the top sources used to verify whether information is false, misleading, or fake in both the UK and the US.

Over the past two years, the BBC has made transparency a defining feature of its trust strategy. BBC News chief executive Deborah Turness believes, “If you know how it’s made, you can trust what it says.”³⁸ In 2023, she announced a new verification team of 60 journalists called BBC Verify. When it launched, Turness said: “BBC Verify is transparency in action – fact-checking, verifying video, countering disinformation, analysing data, and explaining complex stories in the pursuit of truth. This is our promise to consumers – we understand that their trust must be earned, and we will show them how we are doing that each and every day.”³⁹

BBC Verify builds on a tradition of fact-checking efforts at the BBC dating back to 2010. What distinguishes this latest initiative is that the team not only verifies claims, but attempts to explain the verification process, offering audiences a clearer understanding of how facts are checked and why they are reliable. Although less well-known than the main news site, the brand is gaining audience recognition.⁴⁰

³⁵ Patel, K. (2025). ‘Caution has turned to cowardice’, *The Guardian* [online]. Available at: [Caution has turned to cowardice – the BBC is failing viewers with its Gaza coverage | Karishma Patel | The Guardian](#) (Accessed: 15 July 2025).

³⁶ PA Media. (2024). ‘BBC ‘let down’ by present and TV show scandals, says director-general’, *The Guardian* [online]. Available at: [BBC ‘let down’ by presenter and TV show scandals, says director-general | BBC | The Guardian](#) (Accessed: 15 July 2025).

³⁷ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025, Reuters Institute. Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

³⁸ Turness, D. (2023). Trust In News. BBC Trust In News Initiative (Panel discussion). Available at: [Trust in News 2023](#) (Accessed 1 June 2025).

³⁹ BBC Media Center (2023). Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/bbc-news-transparency-bbc-verify> (Accessed 10 June 2025).

⁴⁰ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025, Reuters Institute. Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

However, critics say BBC Verify is a simple rebranding of existing journalistic practice. In functional terms, that's accurate: verifying and contextualising information remains a core responsibility of *all* newsrooms. Some BBC journalists have also raised concerns internally that labelling certain stories as "verified" could imply the rest of the BBC's reporting is less trustworthy. Whether this distinction matters to the public remains unclear, but it reflects broader tensions around how trust is framed and communicated.

The potential value of BBC Verify may become more apparent considering recent decisions by Meta and X to dismantle their third-party fact-checking programmes, a significant retreat from previous policies to contain online misinformation.⁴¹ In this shifting environment, BBC Verify could play an increasingly vital role, particularly in countries without a free press, where misinformation often spreads unchecked.

In May, the BBC announced the global expansion of the brand. A branch of BBC Verify will soon open in the United States. In a speech focused squarely on the issue of trust, Director-General Tim Davie outlined the organisation's fact-checking ambitions, hinting at incorporating AI: "We want to empower audiences as they seek answers – combining agentic AI with trusted BBC journalism to create a new gold-standard fact-checking tool. Our aim is to work globally with other public service broadcasters to ensure a healthy core of fact-based news."⁴²

Whether these efforts will make any difference to audience trust remains to be seen. Rather, the bet is on a business model that drives audience growth by delivering trusted and true information.

As David Jordan, Editorial Director of the BBC, told me: "The BBC hasn't really fallen foul of the general crisis in trust in journalism or institutions. We have maintained very high trust levels. They do occasionally get dented by particular scandals; the Jimmy Saville paedophile scandal did us more damage than any other single event. But then we rebuilt. So, we are investing in these mechanisms to retain or improve trust, as a way of making sure we don't suffer a decline, rather than addressing a decline that we've had. So, in that way, success is difficult to measure."

⁴¹ McMahon, L., Kleinman, Z., Subramanian, C., (2025). 'Facebook and Instagram get rid of fact checkers', BBC News online. Available at: [Meta to replace 'biased' fact-checkers with moderation by users - BBC News](#). (Accessed: 1 July 2025).

⁴² Davie, T. (2025) The BBC – A Catalyst for Building Trust. BBC Media Center. Speech transcript available at: [The BBC - A Catalyst for Building Trust](#). (Accessed 20 June 2025).

The 'New York Times': creating a dedicated 'Trust Team'

In 2021, the *New York Times* created a dedicated Trust Team with the stated aim of developing “innovative ways of deepening our audience’s trust in our mission and in the credibility of our journalism, no matter where it is encountered”.⁴³ Rather than responding to a single crisis, the initiative reflects a broader recognition that building trust is a strategic and ongoing priority. As Deputy Standards Editor Mike Abrams explained: “That work was happening scattershot all around the company. The team was a way of trying to bring some order and scale to the work.”

The impetus for institutionalising trust initiatives has been shaped by a shifting external context. In the hyper-polarised United States, overall trust in the news remains at the lower end of the international survey – just 30%.⁴⁴ Abrams cited the increasingly antagonistic political climate as a significant factor, noting that “the trust deficit accelerated when you had politicians directly sort of egging on their followers... calling us enemies of the people, fake news.”

In response to this hostility, the organisation has acknowledged the limitations of assuming that journalistic quality alone would secure public trust. Abrams said: “We used to operate in an environment where we thought the work stands for itself. But we understand the reality is that we have to more forcefully defend what we’ve done and make sure people see that we’re humans and we make mistakes and that we’re correcting them honestly.”

Emphasis on transparency

An emphasis on transparency has become central to the Trust Team’s strategy. Key initiatives include enhanced bylines that provide details about the author, their location and contact information; explanatory articles that describe how the reporting was conducted; and disclosures around sourcing, particularly in the use of anonymous sources. These efforts aim to render journalistic processes more visible and real for the audience, reinforcing credibility through openness.

This is also reflected in how the *Times* presents complex or sensitive reporting. Multi-format storytelling, combining core articles with video explainers, for example, ensures that audiences engaging across platforms receive sufficient context. In its opinion journalism, the organisation has

⁴³ NYT Company (2021). NYT Co company announcement [online]. Available at: [Deepening Our Commitment to Standards | The New York Times Company](#) (Accessed 2 June 2025).

⁴⁴ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025, Reuters Institute. Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

taken deliberate steps to address potential misperceptions about its editorial stance. By pairing polarising commentary with editor newsletters and links to relevant reporting, it aims to provide context and reinforce the distinction between opinion and news coverage. However, Abrams acknowledged a persistent gap in audience understanding: “Most readers don’t care or don’t know the difference,” he told me. “We do it well, but I also think most readers won’t see the difference, even if it’s clearly marked.”

Visibility through video

Video, particularly short-form vertical content designed for social media platforms, has become a central tool in recent *Times* trust efforts. Reporters, speaking straight to camera, sometimes from the field, are intended to foster familiarity and accountability. “You can see them speaking to you about their story. You can see for yourself who wrote it,” Abrams noted. These videos also appear prominently on the *Times*’s homepage, reinforcing what Abrams describes as a “seeing is believing” dynamic.

Audience engagement

Direct engagement with readers has also been elevated as a trust-building mechanism. The “Reporter Reply” function, which facilitates direct exchanges between journalists and readers, has in some cases reshaped dynamics. As *Times* book critic A.O. Scott reflected in a story he wrote for the *Times Insider*, the feature has “transformed” his experience of the critic’s job by highlighting shared stakes in public discourse: “Every writer is a reader, and every reader awaits a reply.”⁴⁵

Institutional responsiveness has likewise become more explicit. While the *Times* has long issued corrections, there is now a heightened emphasis on visibility and proactive public communication. In May, for example, the *Times* published an essay adapted from a speech by publisher A.G. Sulzberger titled, *A Free People Need a Free Press*.⁴⁶ The piece offered both a principled defence of journalism’s democratic role and a pointed critique of efforts by President Trump to undermine press freedom through litigation and regulatory intimidation. Sulzberger argued that, “When we stick to our values and do

⁴⁵ Scott, A.O. (2024). ‘In the Comments Section, Writerly Discourse Awaits’, *The New York Times*. Available at: [In the Book Review’s Comments Section, a Critic Engages With Readers - The New York Times](#). (Accessed 1 July 2025).

⁴⁶ Sulzberger, A.G. (2025). ‘A Free People Need A Free Press’, *The New York Times* [online]. Available at: [Opinion | A.G. Sulzberger: A Free People Need a Free Press - The New York Times](#) (Accessed 14 May 2025).

our job with rigor and fairness, we benefit from deeper trust and growing readership in the long run.”

Reaching disengaged audiences through adaptation

Despite these initiatives, substantial challenges remain. Chief among them is the task of reaching disengaged or sceptical audiences, particularly younger readers. Deputy Standards Editor Mike Abrams emphasised the importance of adapting formats and distribution strategies to reflect changing media consumption habits: “Meet people where they are,” he urged, whether that is on TikTok, Instagram, or elsewhere. “Just because I think that maybe right now there are people who have tuned us out doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try to reach them.”

Abrams’s gut feeling is that their efforts are making a difference – in the first quarter of 2025, the *Times* announced it had added 250,000 digital subscribers taking their total subscriptions to 11.66 million worldwide.⁴⁷ “Our numbers have gone up, people continue to subscribe to the *Times*,” said Abrams. “Despite all the criticism, despite the concerns about trust, there’s a part of the society that is sort of bucking the trend of trust decline – or at least indulging what we’re offering. We never had that kind of reach with just print.”

Whether such strategies can overcome deeper structural, social, and ideological barriers remains uncertain. Nonetheless, the *Times*’ approach exemplifies an emerging model: not to demand trust, but to earn it through sustained, transparent engagement directly with the public.

Schibsted Media: audience-centric trust

While much of the global debate on media trust is preoccupied with its erosion, the Nordic context offers a contrasting landscape – one where media trust remains comparatively high, closely tied to strong public confidence in democratic institutions.⁴⁸ In Norway, for example, trust in the public broadcaster Yle is 81%, and in Finland overall trust in news is 67% – the highest in the world.

⁴⁷ Robertson, K. (2025). ‘New York Times Adds 250,000 Digital Subscribers’, *The New York Times* [online]. Available at: [New York Times Adds 250,000 Digital Subscribers - The New York Times](#) (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

⁴⁸ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025, Reuters Institute. Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025). Page 78.

Within this ecosystem, Schibsted Media, a leading Nordic media group known for its wide-reaching commercial news brands and pioneering use of AI in editorial and audience operations, has adopted an explicitly audience-centric approach to understanding and cultivating trust. The company has stated publicly, “Trust is our most important currency. It is the foundation of everything we do.”⁴⁹

In 2024, Schibsted formalised its commitment by establishing a dedicated Trust Initiatives team and commissioning a large-scale study titled *Drivers of Trust in Media*. Uniquely, the project sought not to impose an internal or expert definition of trust but instead asked audiences directly what drives their trust in media. The study included 3,000 participants aged 16 to 74 across Sweden and Norway, with sampling conducted by the research firm Noustad to ensure demographic representativeness across gender, age, and education.

Methodologically, the study avoided relying solely on direct survey questions about trust, knowing that stated attitudes often diverge from actual perceptions. Instead, it looked at patterns in the data and grouped similar themes to find what really drives trust from an audience perspective. From an initial pool of 49 attributes identified by respondents, four [categories](#) were found to have the most consistent and significant impact across trust, engagement, and willingness to pay for content:

- Credibility of the journalistic process
- Credibility of the content
- Personal relevance, and
- Selectivity.⁵⁰

An in-depth look at three of the categories with consistent trust impact

1. Credibility of the journalistic process Credibility involves being transparent about journalistic methods, such as naming the editor and reporter, explaining how the story was researched, and openly admitting errors. Respondents also said that showing how editorial decisions were made would make them trust the news more, so in March this year Schibsted Media introduced “ethics boxes” for relevant articles in their Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*. Early indicators show a measurable increase in user trust.

2. Credibility of content Respondents said that objective “fact-based” journalism obtained by journalists with “boots on the ground” was the main driver in their willingness to pay for content. While people said they wanted to know when AI is involved in producing news content, excessive disclosure paradoxically eroded their

⁴⁹ Corporate website, Schibsted Media. Available at: [Trust and transparency is our currency | Schibsted](#). (Accessed: 1 June 2025).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

trust and made the content *less* credible. This finding has led the company to recalibrate its AI transparency policy in recent months.

3. Personal relevance Participants valued journalism that was useful in everyday life, provided deeper insights into issues affecting their lives, and was reflective of their lived reality. However, Schibsted Media has consciously avoided tailoring content to reinforce pre-existing beliefs. Instead, the company focuses on showing audiences a range of different viewpoints—an editorial approach it sees as essential for healthy democratic debate and a way to counter the echo chambers that can erode public trust.

IN/LAB

Schibsted Media has put its trust-building strategy into practice through the IN/LAB initiative, an innovation lab focused on creating more inclusive news experiences to reach people who don't trust or don't consume editorial news media. The focus is on young people (15-25 years old), driven by the concern that younger demographics, increasingly consuming news on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, are turning away from traditional news outlets, a behaviour that will continue as they age.

IN/LAB follows a co-creation approach, involving young people in the development of products via direct engagement, workshops, and building prototypes together. This is a shift from talking about these groups to talking *with* them, reflecting the company's broader strategic goal of building trust with what it describes as its "future audience."

One notable example is the "News as Music" project undertaken in collaboration with *Aftonbladet*. Working with young people from outer Stockholm, the aim of the project was to illicit direct feedback on the relationship young people have with news.⁵¹ Whilst participants expressed a clear desire to understand both global and local issues, they said the conventional news format failed to engage them. In response, a project to reimagine news stories as AI-generated rap songs was developed, transforming traditional articles into a format more aligned with the audience's media habits and preferences.

Building on these insights, IN/LAB is now launching an initiative with news influencers to find out how these creators operate and what audiences expect from them. The goal is to learn from news influencers, rather than view them

⁵¹ Press Release (2023). Published online by Schibsted Media. Available at: [News as music – Aftonbladet and IN/LAB explore the journalism of the future | Schibsted](#) (Accessed 20 May 2025).

solely as competitors. This, the company hopes, will help foster a better understanding of shifting patterns of news consumption in young people.

The Trust Tracker & Trust Task Force

Schibsted Media introduced two new trust initiatives at the end of last year. A Trust Tracker survey is conducted three times annually with the same 800 participants. This allows for continuous direct feedback on key trust metrics. An internal Trust Task Force was also established and includes people from different departments of all 15 Schibsted Media brands. The task force meets monthly to assess performance, share insights, and refine practice. Each brand has created individual action plans with stated objectives for building trust, *Aftonbladet's* “ethics boxes” is one example. This internal governance structure reflects an ongoing institutional commitment to embedding trust across all brands and layers of the company.

Louise Barkenäs, interim Head of IN/LAB, is hopeful these strategies will yield results, but told me it's too early to tell what's working: “We have done two Trust Tracker surveys so far. We are about to do the third. So far, there has been a little difference from the first and the second. Some of the magazines went up a bit, but one also went down a bit. So, I think we must do a lot more work before we can see a big jump up.”⁵²

Australian Broadcasting Corporation: embedding Trust Signals

As trust in news continues to fragment, more Australians are questioning traditional forms of reporting. As the 2025 *Digital News Report* laid bare, people in Australia are looking for news that feels relevant, honest, and connected to their daily lives.⁵³

This shift is being driven not just by worries about misinformation, but also by the influence of digital platforms, new voices, and changing ideas about what makes information trustworthy. In this context, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) understands that relying on its reputation as Australia's most trusted news provider is not sufficient for maintaining public trust in today's rapidly changing media landscape and has made trust a corporate strategic priority.⁵⁴

⁵² Conversation between the author and Louise Barkenas, interim Head IN/LAB, Schibsted Media, 28 May 2025.

⁵³ Park, S., Fisher, C., McGuinness, K., Lee, Y.J., McCallum, K., Fujita, M., Haw, A., Nardi, G. (2025). *Digital News Report: Australia 2025*. University of Canberra. Available at: [Digital News Report: Australia 2025 - University of Canberra](#). (Accessed 18 June 2025).

⁵⁴ ABC Corporate (2023). *ABC Five-Year Plan 2023-2028*. Available at: [ABC Five-Year Plan 2023-2028 - About the ABC](#). (Accessed: 30 June 2025).

ABC's 'Trust Signals' Initiative

This year, the ABC's News Division has added Trust Signals to its editorial processes describing this as, “an opportunity to tell our audiences about how we create content for them, and to stand by the decisions we make”.⁵⁵ Built into the commissioning stage of story production, editors take responsibility for deciding how to embed Trust Signals, whether in the copy itself, additional explanatory “trust boxes”, or stand-alone articles that delve into the behind-the-scenes aspects of the reporting.

For the ABC, the preferred method is embedding Trust Signals directly into the narrative of a story, effectively “pulling back the curtain” to show how the journalistic work was done. This includes explaining how facts were verified, how right of reply was sought, or why a story matters. Journalists are encouraged to tailor these signals to the audience and story type.

News Standards Editor Matt Brown explained: “It’s trying to include in the story all the answers to your sceptical questions: ‘Where did this really come from? How do they know that?’ Not in a clumsy or long-winded way but trying to still wrap that into a very tightly structured bundle of meanings, that tells you how that information was arrived at.”⁵⁶ The goal is a more nuanced, audience-aware demonstration of trustworthiness that goes beyond generic disclosures to focus on what Brown described as “explainability.”

Brown said the project was designed to help audiences see that ABC stories are credible by being transparent about the reporting process. The aim, he said, is to show trustworthiness through the content itself, rather than making public statements about being trustworthy. As he put it, the approach “creates less of a declaratory statement about the world and more of an explanation of the information that you’re being given.”

The rollout of the initiative has encountered some logistical challenges. While more than 25 editorial teams were briefed, the absence of a formal change management plan initially limited widespread adoption. Some teams have embraced the model with success, including the Canberra Parliament House team and regional investigations reporters. As an example, a story on the Free Birth Movement embedded sourcing and verification into the

⁵⁵ Internal ABC memo announcing the Trust Signals initiative, 3 July 2024.

⁵⁶ Conversation between the author and Matt Brown, News Standards Editor, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, on 12 June 2025. Mr Brown left his position at the ABC in August 2025.

narrative.⁵⁷ Brown said that readers could, “understand exactly where that came from and how it was done”.

Initial efforts to incorporate visual explanatory “trust boxes”, however, have been scaled back due to user experience issues, particularly on mobile platforms. The boxes, designed to contain roughly 60 words, proved effective on desktop but intrusive on smaller screens. As a result, the emphasis has more firmly shifted to embedding trust signals directly into story copy.

The ABC plans to make the implementation of Trust Signals a Key Performance Indicator, requiring managers to show how trust signals are being embedded in reporting. Still, measuring the impact is tough. Limited resources and shifting digital platforms make it hard to evaluate what works. Brown is realistic about that. The Trust Signals project, he said, was launched not because the ABC could track its success precisely, but because it aligns with “good journalism” and responds to a public that’s, “more sceptical, a bit more resistant to journalism as a craft”.

ABC News Verify

In early 2024, ABC News announced the establishment of ABC News Verify to act as a “centre of excellence for scrutinising and verifying information in online communities, in addition to uncovering original stories”.⁵⁸ It is a major investment by the ABC that aligns with global efforts by other public service media including the BBC and Sweden’s SVT, which have also established verification teams. The clearly stated aim is to create a place audiences know they can come to for trusted information in an increasingly crowded and noisy media landscape.

For the ABC, building on consistent community engagement and meaningful touchpoints within the community may offer more scope. As Brown explained, the aim is to “engage in a conversation” with communities that may hold concerns or past grievances. “The goal,” he said, “is not to deflect criticism, but to listen, explain, and respond meaningfully.”

⁵⁷ King, C, Burns, A. (2024). ‘ABC reporters detail challenges of investigation into freebirth in Australia’, ABC News Online. Available at: [ABC reporters detail challenges of investigation into freebirth in Australia - ABC News](#)

⁵⁸ ABC News staff memo announcing the establishment of ABC News Verify, 20 February 2024.

Relationships and representation

Recognising that trust is often built through long-term emotional connections, the ABC continues to focus on building relationships with audiences over time. Its long-running educational program *Behind the News*, which has been shown to school-aged kids in classrooms across Australia for decades, helps foster early habits of news consumption. Programmes like *Playschool* and *Bluey* serve as early brand touchpoints that cultivate familiarity and emotional connection, both critical drivers of trust according to a recent study from the Reuters Institute.⁵⁹

Emotional bonds also play a central role in building trust. The ABC's visible, long-serving journalists, particularly on television and radio, have cultivated parasocial relationships with audiences over time. Reuters Institute research shows that viewers and listeners often trust presenters they've "grown up with", whose personalities and delivery styles feel familiar and reassuring. These one-sided but powerful emotional connections often carry as much weight as judgments about content quality.⁶⁰

Representation also plays a role. In recent years, the ABC has pushed for greater diversity on air, knowing that people are more likely to trust outlets that reflect their identities. Distrust, meanwhile, often stems from feeling excluded or misrepresented.⁶¹ The ABC has pioneered several initiatives focused on increasing diversity, including the establishment of a staff led News Diversity Advisory Group, a 50:50 Project aimed at achieving equal gender representation in news content, and the creation of the National Indigenous Reporting Team – a dedicated unit focused on expanding and amplifying coverage of Indigenous affairs across ABC news platforms.

AI and trust

The ABC has cautiously explored generative AI. Uses to date include piloting tools for generating summaries, alt text, and headline suggestions, all with human oversight. Brown is wary of extending these tools to audience-facing applications, warning of the opacity and lack of accountability associated with unmediated AI-generated content. He underscored the need to evaluate

⁵⁹ Nielsen, R., Fletcher, R., Toff, B., Alverne, C., Arguedas, A. (2023). 'Ritual Reinforcement: Habit, Emotion, and Identity as Attributes of Trust in News', *Journalism Studies*, Volume 25, 2024 - Issue 15, pp 1875-1892.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

AI adoption through the lens of public value. Does the technology serve the audience better? Does it enhance clarity, accuracy, or access?

For Brown, the true editorial value of AI lies upstream, not in automating content production, but in enabling new forms of reporting, such as the analysis of large datasets or the monitoring of social trends at scale. This, he argued, aligns with journalism's enduring mission: "We generate new information. We create knowledge. That's what journalism has always done. Tell me something I didn't know. AI can't do that. We do that."

Generative AI: the new frontier for trusted information

Two-and-a-half years ago, German magazine *Die Aktuelle* published a story that stunned the world. The weekly women's glossy splashed what appeared to be an exclusive: *Michael Schumacher, the first interview*. The story featured smiling photos of the German Formula One legend, who had not been seen in public since suffering a serious brain injury in a skiing accident in 2013.

The article, entirely fabricated, had been written using generative AI. The scandal cost the editor her job, with the publisher condemning the story as “tasteless and misleading”.⁶²

It wasn't the first time generative AI had been used to deceive the public. Two years earlier the documentary *Roadrunner: A Film about Anthony Bourdain* used AI-generated audio to recreate the deceased Bourdain's voice without disclosing it to the audience, a move that provoked widespread ethical debate across the media.⁶³

In Australia, the popular Australian Radio Network station CADA secretly used an AI-generated DJ called “Thy” for six months without disclosing it to the audience. Taking the deceit further, the station published an AI-generated photograph of the fake DJ on its website to publicise the show.⁶⁴

These examples are not failures of the technology itself; they reflect poor editorial judgment. Generative AI does, however, create new opportunities to mislead audiences. It also tempts publishers to take shortcuts and shift editorial responsibility onto the technology when things go wrong.

⁶² AP wire copy. (2024). ‘Michael Schumacher's family win case against publisher over fake AI interview’, *The Guardian* [online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/article/2024/may/23/michael-schumacher-family-win-legal-case-against-publisher-over-fake-ai-interview> (Accessed: 2 June 2025).

⁶³ Rosner, H. (2021). ‘The Ethics of a Deep Fake Anthony Bourdain Voice’, *The New Yorker Magazine* [online]. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-gastronomy/the-ethics-of-a-deepfake-anthony-bourdain-voice> (Accessed: 10 June 2025).

⁶⁴ Geraets, N. (2025). ‘Thy has been on the radio for 6 months. Turns out she isn't real’, *The Sydney Morning Herald* [online]. Available at: [AI host: ARN radio station CADA called out for failing to disclose AI host](#) (Accessed: 10 July 2025).

Since those early forays, media use of generative AI has grown rapidly. High-profile errors in accuracy and attribution have harmed the reputations of media companies and raised concerns about accountability.

Generative AI, accuracy, and attribution

Earlier this year, *Bloomberg News*, the financial publisher, had to issue corrections to dozens of AI-generated article summaries after discovering multiple errors.⁶⁵

Among the problematic summaries was one accompanying a breaking news story on President Trump's proposed auto tariffs. While the main article remained factually correct, the AI-generated summary misrepresented the timeline for the broader tariff rollout.

In a statement responding to the mistakes, *Bloomberg News* defended the role of AI in its newsroom: "We're transparent when stories are updated or corrected, and when AI has been used. Journalists have full control over whether a summary appears – both before and after publication – and can remove any that don't meet our standards."⁶⁶ *Bloomberg News* also claimed that "currently 99% of AI summaries meet our editorial standards" and stressed the summaries are "meant to complement our journalism, not replace it". It is a risky strategy when even small errors can mislead readers and potentially influence high-stakes business decisions.

In another humiliating episode, several U.S. newspapers, including the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, published a summer reading book list that featured made-up titles by famous authors. The list had been generated using AI. The freelance contributor behind it took full responsibility, telling National Public Radio: "Huge mistake on my part and has nothing to do with the *Sun-Times*. They trust that the content they purchase is accurate and I betrayed that trust. It's on me 100%."⁶⁷ Yet the incident exposed a glaring lapse in editorial oversight and a failure of accountability by the publisher. It also speaks volumes about the state of the industry when the craft of writing book reviews is handed over to generative AI.

⁶⁵ Matthews, B. (2025). 'Bloomberg's use of AI summaries for its articles leads to numerous corrections', *The Washington Times* [online]. Available at: [Bloomberg's use of AI summaries for its articles leads to numerous corrections - Washington Times](#) (Accessed: 7 May 2025).

⁶⁶ Robertson, K. (2025). 'Bloomberg Has a Rocky Start With A.I. Summaries', *The New York Times* [online]. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/29/business/media/bloomberg-ai-summaries.html> (Accessed: 7 May 2025)

⁶⁷ Blair, E. (2025). 'How an AI-generated summer reading list got published in major newspapers', *National Public Radio* [online]. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/20/nx-s1-5405022/fake-summer-reading-list-ai> (Accessed: 15 June 2025).

A similar mistake occurred at Denmark's largest broadsheet, *Politiken*, when a "fact box" in its Saturday Book section fabricated details about an author's background and body of work. The summary was generated using Magna, the company's proprietary AI tool.⁶⁸ The so-called "hallucinations", whereby generative AI makes up information, drew internal and public scrutiny.

Senior editors acknowledged the error, attributing it to both the AI system's limitations and a lapse in human oversight. Although internal protocols at the newspaper require that all AI-generated content be reviewed and fact checked by a human before publication, that step had been skipped. In response, editorial leaders issued a correction, suspended the use of Magna's fact box feature, and promised to replace outdated internal AI guidelines which lacked clarity around editorial responsibility. Crucially, editors reiterated a key principle: AI should not be trusted for factual accuracy. As one editor said in a staff email, "AI is only a tool – we always have the final responsibility."⁶⁹

Collectively, these incidents only serve to further damage an already fragile public trust. At a time of eroding public confidence in news media, rigorous fact-checking and sound editorial judgment remain the linchpins that separate credible journalism from generic, low-quality content. Journalists cannot abdicate this duty to AI and then shift the blame; the responsibility is, and must remain, ours. As Professor Charlie Beckett put it: "AI brings new challenges which require us to be more vigilant, but the additional problem with AI is that it can make you lazy."

Generative AI and online information

The bigger challenge lies online, where the surge of misinformation and disinformation threatens to overwhelm both the public and journalists. A multi-country study undertaken earlier this year underscored these concerns, revealing that both journalists and audiences are deeply uneasy about generative AI's potential to mislead and deceive.⁷⁰ Journalists said they feel "poorly equipped" to detect fake, AI-generated material, and most newsrooms lack clear systems to verify it.

⁶⁸ Thobo-Carlsen, J. (2025). 'AI tool hallucinated and gave incorrect information. Now Politiken's editor-in-chief apologises', *Politiken* [online]. Available at:

<https://politiken.dk/kultur/medier/art10427429/AI-redskab-hallucinerede-og-gav-forkerte-oplysninger.-Nu-beklager-Politikens-chefredakt%C3%B8r> (Accessed: 10 July 2025).

⁶⁹ Internal staff email, 25 May 2025.

⁷⁰ Thomson, T.J., Thomas, R., Riedlinger, M., Matich, P. (2025). 'Generative AI and Journalism: Content, Journalistic Perceptions, and Audience Experiences', RMIT University. Available at: [Generative AI and Journalism: Content, Journalistic Perceptions, and Audience Experiences](#)

Sophisticated AI tools can now generate synthetic content – images, audio, video, and text – that is virtually indistinguishable from human-created journalism. The growing challenge was highlighted by a recent viral video claiming to show a fire at Iran’s Evin Prison. As reported by ABC News Verify, the video was found to be AI-generated, featuring visual inconsistencies and fabricated elements that misled many viewers, and sadly some news organisations, too.⁷¹

These problems will only intensify as tools become increasingly sophisticated and accessible, representing a new battleground for newsroom fact-checkers. AI is worsening an already fragile trust environment. As Dr Anya Schiffrin told me: “Nobody trusts anything anymore. And I think AI is making it worse. You’ve got a hard job in that situation. Journalists need to keep trying, but it is difficult to see our way out when there is that massive confusion.”

What does the public think about AI-generated news?

Unsurprisingly, public attitudes toward AI-generated news remain cautious, even among consumers of trusted news brands.⁷² In the U.S. and Europe, fewer than one in five people say they’re comfortable with news produced mainly by AI. While many support AI for behind-the-scenes functions, most audiences strongly prefer human-led editorial decision-making.

In the Global South, it’s a different story. In countries like India and Thailand, for example, where newsrooms have more openly experimented with AI, acceptance is notably higher.⁷³ Thailand’s Nation TV introduced its AI anchor “Natcha” last year, followed by Mono 29’s launch of “Marisa”. Public broadcaster Thai PBS is also advancing its AI initiatives but is emphasising a cautious approach, recognising the need to balance cost, credibility, and legal factors when deciding between human presenters and AI avatars.

AI adoption

The adoption of generative AI in western newsrooms has been, in the words of AI expert David Caswell, “broad but shallow” – driven more by efficiency than big ideas. The technology has introduced new risks and dilemmas, but most mistakes

⁷¹ Taouk, M., Hair, J. (2025). ‘Video explosion at Iran’s Evin Prison suspected of AI manipulation’, ABC News [online]. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-06-25/verify-is-this-video-of-evin-prison-ai-generated/105454536> (Accessed: 10 July 2025).

⁷² Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025. Reuters Institute (Page 29). Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

⁷³ Newman, N. (2025). Reuters Digital News Report 2025. Reuters Institute (Page 156). Available at: [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025](#) (Accessed 17 June 2025).

stem from a failure to adhere to the most basic standards of journalism – accuracy and attribution.

As younger, AI-native generations become a larger segment of the audience, comfort with AI-generated content will certainly grow. But this evolution also raises the stakes. Without clear guidelines, editorial guardrails, and a good understanding of what generative AI can and cannot do well, this shift threatens to further undermine public trust.

Newsrooms of the future

While the previous chapter explored the missteps and ethical dilemmas that accompany the misuse of generative AI, this section shifts focus to a more urgent and constructive question: how can journalism harness the power of AI effectively and responsibly whilst maintaining public trust?

The rise of generative AI is expanding opportunities for media companies to increase relevance and reach. It is also transforming the investigative journalist's toolkit in powerful new ways. One of the most promising aspects of the technology is its capacity to rapidly analyse vast datasets, revealing patterns and connections that might otherwise be missed. Investigative reporters have been among the earliest adopters, already producing impressive results, as demonstrated by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism projects that have incorporated generative AI into their reporting.⁷⁴

But the rise of AI platforms has also intensified a longer-term shift in the media ecosystem and concerns about the further disintermediation of journalism. This concern is not new. Three years ago, AI researcher Dr Felix M. Simon was already warning that “infrastructure capture” would shift more control to tech platforms, deepening the industry's dependence and allowing these firms to control both the production and distribution of news.⁷⁵

His prophecy is being borne out by reality as models like Google's AI Overviews summaries provide audiences with direct answers to questions without linking to original news sources.⁷⁶ AI interfaces look likely to further reduce traffic to news sites by giving users narrative-style responses to news queries.

Meanwhile, adoption of generative AI in most newsrooms has remained iterative and cautious. The focus has been on low-risk tasks and pilot projects, not bold reinvention. One reason is structural: legacy media organisations often struggle with what AI expert Caswell describes as “bureaucracy, legacy assumptions, and risk

⁷⁴ Deck, A. (2024). 'For the first time, two Pulitzer winners disclosed using AI in their reporting', Neiman Lab [online]. Available at: [For the first time, two Pulitzer winners disclosed using AI in their reporting | Neiman Journalism Lab](#). (Accessed: 15 July 2025).

⁷⁵ Simon, F.M. (2022). 'Uneasy Bedfellows: AI in the News, Platform Companies and the Issue of Journalistic Autonomy', *Digital Journalism* 2022, Vol.10, No.10, 1832-1854.

⁷⁶ Waugh, R. (2025). 'Google AI Mode is undermining original journalism', Press Gazette [online]. Available at: <https://pressgazette.co.uk/platforms/how-google-ai-mode-is-undermining-original-journalism/> (Accessed: 15 July 2025).

avoidance”.⁷⁷ In other words, even when the opportunity is clear, organisational inertia gets in the way.

But by doing nothing – or too little, too slowly – media companies risk disempowerment. As Jane Barrett, Head of AI Strategy at Reuters told me: “When it comes to AI, we need to change our thinking. Humans should be in control, not just in the loop.”

AI strategist Nikita Roy also argued that newsrooms must lead the conversation, not follow the pace set by tech companies: “Journalism needs to get in front of AI. We need to understand it. We need to start building tech that aligns with our values, not just adopt tech that is being pushed on to us.”

If we don’t take bold and strategic steps now, media companies risk once again being reactive, watching from the sidelines as tech companies shape the future of information.

⁷⁷ Borchardt, A. (2024). 'News Report 2024: Trusted Journalism in the Age of Generative AI', EBU News Report. Available at: [News Report 2024: Trusted Journalism in the Age of Generative AI | EBU](#) (Accessed: 20 July 2025).

Navigating the AI future: six priorities for newsrooms

Conversations with AI leaders at Reuters, the BBC, StoryFlow Ltd, Newsroom Robots, Agency France Press, Austrian news agency APA, the *New York Times*, and others, have revealed six key areas newsrooms need to focus on now, to navigate an AI-driven future while safeguarding trust.

1. Train and educate your staff

Newsrooms can no longer treat generative AI as optional. It's already reshaping how the public interacts with information. While AI tools like Microsoft Copilot are quietly appearing on newsroom devices, many journalists haven't been told what they are, let alone how to use them safely or effectively.

This is massively risky and points to a significant problem: the lack of AI literacy in many media organisations. As Nikita Roy pointed out, training and open conversation are essential, but remain scarce: "When I'm doing a workshop or training with journalists, or even at a conference, I always do a poll: 'How many people here have at least played around with a tool like ChatGPT?' On average, only 40% say they have."

In comparison, the public is moving fast, with AI tools being adopted especially rapidly by younger generations.⁷⁸ This disconnect highlights a growing generational and professional divide. Newsrooms must urgently bridge it – not just by silently rolling out AI tools, but by guiding, educating, and empowering staff to understand how the technology works, the risks as well as the potential.

2. Build hybrid newsrooms

In large legacy media organisations, silos often block innovation. Product teams may not fully understand editorial work, and vice versa. The newsroom leaders I spoke with who report the most success in driving AI innovation emphasised close collaboration between editorial, product, and design teams.

⁷⁸ Fletcher, R., Nielsen, R. (2024). 'What does the public in six countries think of generative AI in news?', Reuters Institute. Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/what-does-public-six-countries-think-generative-ai-news> (Accessed: 20 June 2025).

Many described “hybrid newsrooms” where these groups work together to deliver results. At the *New York Times*, a five-person AI team that combines tech and editorial experience is led by Zach Seward. The team runs an “AI roadshow” visiting newsroom desks to inspire ideas about AI’s potential and develop tools that are both useful and aligned with editorial values. Their approach focuses on identifying workflow “pain points” and creating solutions that fit naturally into how journalists already work.⁷⁹

At global news agency Reuters, uniting product and content is vital for success. As Jane Barrett, told me: “If you don’t bring them together, journalists will go and solve their own problems at the end of the day. They are quite resourceful, and impatient! So, the closer you can bring product and editorial together the more you can take advantage of the opportunity.”

A few months ago, BBC News established a dedicated team to lead the adoption and integration of Generative AI in the newsroom. Led by Olle Zachrisson, the broad goal is to “accelerate things”. He told me: “We’re going to focus on what *to do* with AI, not what *not* to do, because there has been a lot of focus on that. Of course, we must balance everything with responsible AI and ethics and editorial guidelines and the rest. But the thing is, there are scores of committees like that at the BBC, so we need a team that is more forward looking. There’s the question of risk and concern, but then there’s the desire for acceleration.”

3. Put yourself in the shoes of your audiences

At the Nordic AI Summit this year, Gard Sterio, Editor-in-chief and chief executive of VG, Norway’s largest news website, proclaimed “the article will die” and “should die”.⁸⁰ It was clearly a provocation, but the idea challenges us to question legacy assumptions. As Caswell pointed out, “the industry has not been serving huge portions of our populations. In fact, most of our populations.”⁸¹ The reason for that, he said, is the news industry has a fundamental expectation that audiences must adapt to what the news industry produces. He described this as a “massive societal failing”. Generative AI tools give media organisations a chance to address this

⁷⁹ Newsroom Robots (2025) How a Five-Person AI Team is Powering Innovation at The New York Times. Podcast. Available at: <https://www.newsroomrobots.com/p/how-a-five-person-ai-team-is-powering> (Accessed: 1 July 2025).

⁸⁰ Nordic AI Summit (2025) News Journalism and Future Information Ecologies. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8tY52eqEzo&list=TLGG-FZhTumFYjwyMDA3MjAyNQ> (Accessed: 5 July 2025).

⁸¹ Nordic AI Summit (2025) Liquid Content and Hyper Personalization. YouTube. Available at: [Liquid content & hyper personalization - Couch panel](#) (Accessed: 5 July 2025).

failing by adapting to how audiences want to consume content, rather than the other way around.

There are experiments already under way to create what is being described as “liquid content” – where audiences get to choose how they receive a story, be it text, video, or audio. Whether this is the future of information delivery is unclear, but there is an urgent need for media companies set aside legacy assumptions and engage directly with audiences to better understand what they want.

4. Know your value and your “red lines”

What does your audience expect and value? At Reuters, it is clear. For them, the photograph is sacred. As Jane Barrett told me: “The absolute red line is no image generation. If you see a news photograph or watch a news video, it must reflect reality. We do not use generative AI for images or video.” Reuters does have plans to automate news summaries using generative AI, but they’re not there yet. Accuracy remains a problem. As Barrett explained: “News is what happened, you mustn’t make that up.”

For Reuters, the real value of journalism is “being there” at important moments with reporters on the ground. If generative AI can handle basic tasks like summarisation, freeing up journalists to spend more time in the field, that is a win. As Barrett put it: “If I flip it to the positive and the opportunity... in these big moments of change, you must think, what is the value that I bring to my audience? And really double down on that.”

To take advantage of the opportunities generative AI presents, media companies must get clear on their “red lines” and build from there.

5. Make your AI guidelines clear, but expect them to change over time

A study published late last year examined 52 newsrooms that had established guidelines for using generative AI.⁸² While most referenced common “principles” like “transparency” and “human oversight”, few offered concrete guidance in practice. When and how to label AI-generated content remains an ongoing debate.

There is no clear consensus. The BBC’s Olle Zachrisson told me he was once a “transparency fundamentalist” but has since reconsidered. He now thinks constant disclaimers are confusing for audiences and may even undermine trust. An overly rigid approach can be counterproductive, he said. For AI generated summaries, he

⁸² Becker, K. B., Simon, F. M. and Crum, C. (2025) ‘Policies in Parallel? A Comparative Study of Journalistic AI Policies in 52 Global News Organisations’, *Digital Journalism*, pp. 1–21.

pointed out, “You don’t want the disclaimer to be longer than the summary itself.” Another editor told me: “There’s so much discussion around transparency, and if we’re publishing content made by generative AI or using it substantially, do we need to tell our audiences? But when and how do we do that? When is the use significant enough for disclosure?”

Media companies should not deceive or mislead the public. That would damage trust. But as both technology and public understanding evolve, newsroom policies must be flexible and offer clear, actionable guidance – beyond broad “principles”.

Katharina Schell, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the Austria Press Agency put it best: “I think we are in a transition. Soon AI will be so infused in everything we are doing in journalism that we won’t have to talk about labelling to the degree we are now.”

Her project on this issue for the Reuters Institute provides a useful framework for media companies grappling with this issue, urging “specific transparency” rather than a vague catch-all approach to labelling.⁸⁵

6. Adopt a “first principles” mindset

AI is not just another tool; it represents a fundamental shift in infrastructure. It demands a rethinking of journalism’s role and unique value. As Nikita Roy argued, we must approach this moment from “first principles”, asking what journalism would look like if we were starting fresh today, without legacy assumptions. Just as radio once transformed news delivery, generative AI presents similarly radical possibilities. As Roy said: “The question now becomes what is journalism really for in an age where AI can completely remix your content and produce completely personalized podcasts and newsletters? Why do people truly need us? It’s about going back and drilling down to the foundations of why we exist in the first place and building up from there.” Many media organisations are asking the wrong questions, she said: “How do we plug AI into our existing workflows? How do we make our CMS a little smarter? How do we push more content onto more platforms?” This, Roy warned, is merely retrofitting yesterday’s workflows with today’s tools.

Meanwhile, the tech industry is operating from a first-principles mindset, reinventing how people access and engage with information, and building platforms

⁸⁵ Schell, K.(2025). ‘AI transparency in journalism: labels for a hybrid era’, Reuters Institute. Available at: [Key AI concepts to grasp in a new hybrid journalism era: transparency, autonomy, and authorship | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism](#) (Accessed: 10 May 2025)

that are often misaligned with journalism's values. "They are talking about a complete reinvention," Roy said, "while we are stuck adapting and following the lead of tech platforms who do not follow our values."

Without a fundamental reset in how journalism thinks about and responds to AI, we risk repeating the same missteps made during the rise of social media: reacting rather than leading.

Conclusion

AI is no longer a distant prospect. It is already reshaping how information is created, distributed, and consumed. This is happening at a moment when distrust in the information ecosystem grows. Journalism cannot afford to ignore this transformation, nor should it surrender to it uncritically. The profession must adapt with urgency, but also with ethical clarity and a firm grip on its core purpose. Journalists and publishers are not powerless in the face of technological change; they must take an active role in shaping how AI is deployed – ensuring it is guided by journalism's values and used to serve the public interest, not merely to increase speed or reduce costs.

In this moment of upheaval, journalism has a rare and urgent opportunity: to reassert itself as the source people turn to when they no longer know what, or who, to trust. But trust must be continually earned through transparency, rigour, and a steadfast commitment to ethical standards. It also requires doing what AI cannot: engaging directly with audiences, exercising human judgment, and telling stories rooted in care and curiosity.

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