

# NEXT

# GEN

Understanding  
the audiences  
of 2030

# NEWS



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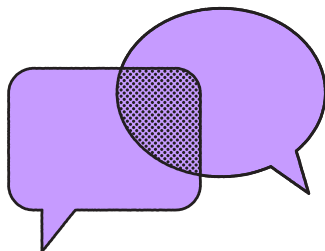
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# INTRODUCTION

# THE FUTURE NEWS CONSUMER



*“When information just pops up and is actually informative... and is what I need at that point, it’s like I just got something on a platter of gold.”* Those were the words that 25-year-old Praise, a worker living in Lagos, used to describe the news when it unexpectedly arrives in the format she desires on social media.

Jinal, a master’s student based in Bangalore, spoke about how she loves the way Instagram and YouTube provide her with updates on *“all the new things happening in [her] city”*, but the 23-year-old also expects the algorithms to shield her from *“disturbing news that [she is] otherwise forced to encounter on a daily basis.”*

In Chicago, 23-year-old Hope shared how — despite having a college degree — she doesn’t feel *“smart enough”* to even understand the news from a leading media brand that she pays for.



Hope, Research Participant, USA

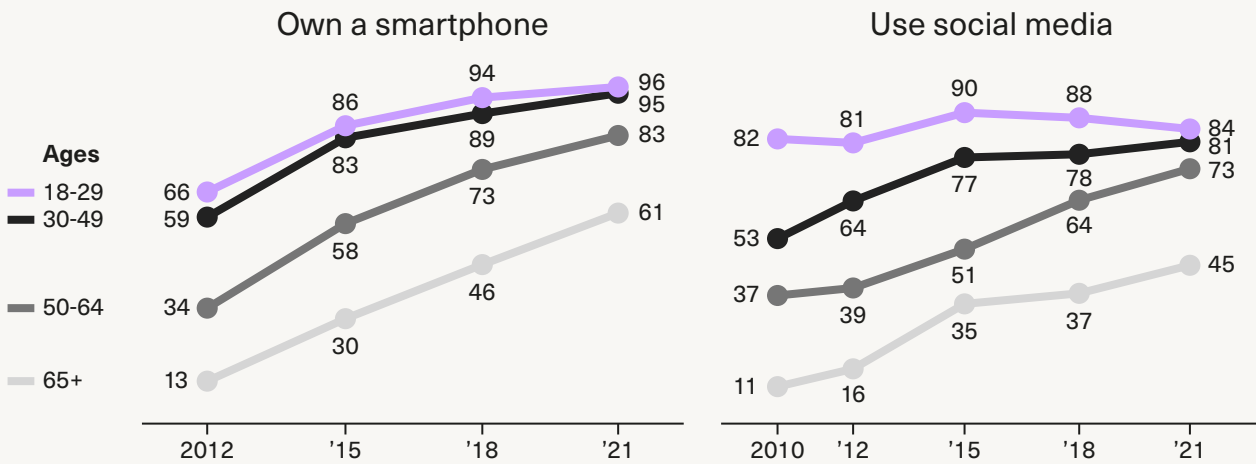
Although they come from notably different walks of life, these people — who are among 45 young news consumers who formed part of an eight-month-long research project — share one thing in common: a complex and evolving relationship with the news. They simultaneously understand the value that news can play in their lives, but are often disinterested or frustrated with how it’s being delivered to them.

There is an existing and growing gap between the news experience the next generation wants and what they’re currently being provided.

In the short term, it’s more commercially viable for traditional news brands to focus on older consumers with larger disposable incomes who are more easily monetised via subscriptions or advertising. As a result, it means they too often fail to satisfy the needs of the next generation of news consumers who will play an important role in their long-term sustainability. Reducing this gap — between now and 2030 — is crucial for the news industry and society. We considered what the news experience for consumers could look like in 2030 to help news producers prepare and plan over the long-term.

News producers can use the insights that have been drawn from our research to start building closer relationships and more frequent touchpoints with young news consumers today. More ambitiously, we hope news producers agree that by observing the needs and behaviours of the next generation of news consumers, they can anticipate the eventual behaviours of *most* news consumers in the future.

## Young people typically exhibit behaviours that older age groups later adopt



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan 25 to Feb 8 2021  
Pew Research Center

Decades of research have shown that young people are often accurate bellwethers for broader shifts in society, including changes in information consumption, technology use, and social norms.<sup>1</sup> You only have to look so far as smartphone and social media adoption between 2012 and 2021 to see that they were trendsetters for the overall population.<sup>2</sup>

The same is true in the context of news. In 2012, younger consumers were disproportionately accessing news online using smartphones and social media.<sup>3</sup> Today, that is the norm across all age groups.<sup>4</sup> Emerging research has also suggested that older adults are adopting TikTok for news consumption at similar rates — though to a lesser extent in absolute terms — to their younger counterparts.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that there can be significant knock-on benefits to catering to the needs and behaviours of the next generation of news consumers.

Regardless of your motivation, this report will bring to life some of the voices of the next generation with anecdotes, quotes, and observations, as well as insightful observations and provocations from some of the leading thinkers in the industry. The examples that we draw upon come directly from our research

participants, Advisory Board members and a review of literature on the topic from across the industry. We hope the report sparks fresh dialogue about the future of the industry and provides actionable insights on how to better meet the needs of the next generation of news consumers.



Chastity, Research Participant, Nigeria

1. [28% of Americans are 'strong' early adopters of technology](#), Pew Research Center (July 2016)
2. [Share of those 65 and older who are tech users has grown in the past decade](#), Pew Research Center (Jan 2022)
3. [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2012](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2012)
4. [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2023)
5. [More Americans are getting news on TikTok, bucking the trend on other social media sites](#), Pew Research Center (Oct 2022)

# TLDR: A SUMMARY OF OUR FINDINGS

From our research, the next generation of news consumers exhibit emerging behaviours:

01

## Digital simul-tasking

They fluidly transition between dissimilar tasks (messaging friends, buying things, playing games, catching up on socials, listening to a podcast) while they're on their phones.

02

## Filtering through trusted networks

They seek out sources of information from people that they know, or feel like they know (e.g. their favourite creator), in real life.

03

## Sensemaking via digital discourse

They rely on the personal opinions of others in digital contexts to frame and understand the news.

04

## Sophisticated searching

They have honed their own sophisticated search skills on social media platforms and in online communities to avoid information overload.

In an effort to navigate information they also adopt different modes of consumption which can occur throughout the day to satisfy different news needs:



**Sift** — they need simple, low-effort ways to keep up with and discover relevant news.



**Socialise** — they need information that they can share that makes them feel current, connected and socially validated.



**Substantiate** — they need straightforward ways to follow up on and verify news that has sparked their interest.



**Sensemake** — they need different perspectives and other accessible ways to process and understand complex topics.



**Study** — they need access to content that educates, upskills and inspires them (when they want to dive more deeply).

## TLDR: a summary of our findings

Our research demonstrates that the next generation of news consumers are not getting their information needs sufficiently met by the current ecosystem of news providers. We explain this gap through the lens of the **'Ideal News Experience'** for younger news consumers, which is broadly made up of three components:

### The Ideal News Experience

#### **Trusted Source**

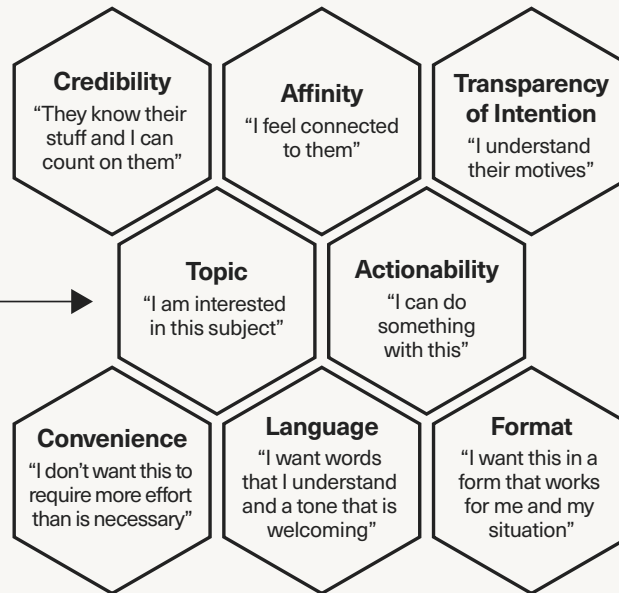
*"I want information from a source that I know and trust."*

#### **Personal Significance**

*"I want information that is significant to me and those I care about."*

#### **Desired Storytelling**

*"I want information presented in a way that works best for me."*



The Ideal News Experience highlights what opportunities exist today and the actions news producers can take now to better meet the needs of the next generation of news consumers:

**01 Build affinity with audiences** — news producers have an opportunity to build authentic, direct relationships with their audiences by partnering with creators, empowering editorial talent to share their stories, and elevating younger journalists.

**02 Enhance personalised & customised experiences** — news producers have an opportunity to improve the news experience for younger consumers by giving them control over their own formats and providing them with better filtering tools.

**03 Develop socially friendly content to build direct relationships** — news producers have an opportunity to create social-first content on their own channels, mimicking the formats and user experiences popular on social media platforms. News producers can use this to create pathways that transition younger audiences from social media consumers to direct consumers over time.

**04 Modernise language** — news producers have an opportunity to use language that is relatable, simple (without being simplistic) whilst also experimenting with new and different tones: for example, personal, humorous or entertaining.

**05 Cater to different modes of consumption** — news producers have an opportunity to develop products and user experiences around the different modes of consumption exhibited by the next generation, such as tools that help to substantiate information.

**06 Giving hope & empowering action** — news producers have an opportunity to onboard the next generation in a way that creates healthier relationships between the news and younger consumers; for example, by providing positive, actionable and solutions-based reporting.




# OUR METHODOLOGY

We interviewed younger consumers using human-centred design principles. While large-scale quantitative research is useful for understanding 'average' users, it can be difficult to identify the nuanced behaviours and needs of the next generation of news consumers. Human-centred design focuses instead on fewer users with more 'extreme' behaviours. Through this, we were able to unearth unarticulated needs and desires often present in the rest of the population which can unlock new opportunities for innovation.<sup>6</sup>

We conducted research across three continents and within geographies where a diverse group of respondents exist within close proximity of each other. To ensure that critical details were not lost in translation, we chose sites where we could find English-speaking respondents from different socio-economic classes and life circumstances. With these constraints, we selected three countries: India, Nigeria, and the United States. We chose these locations based on several demographic considerations and because of their importance in shaping global news consumption moving towards 2030.


## Why we chose India

 Earlier this year, India overtook China as the world's most populous country with 1.5 billion people.<sup>7</sup> Its working-age population will be larger than any significant economy and they are set to have significant

discretionary expenditure. Reports suggesting that per capita income will likely jump 70% by 2030<sup>8</sup> fuel the prediction that, alongside population growth, it will also overtake the likes of Germany and Japan to become the third largest economy.<sup>9</sup>

It is also a country at the forefront of the digital revolution. With its youngest demographic having leapfrogged straight into a mobile-only reality, they have distinct expectations for news distribution, particularly at a time of limited press freedom.<sup>10</sup>

## Why we chose Nigeria

 Nigeria has an informed, empowered and tech-literate demographic, with around 70% of the population under the age of 30.<sup>11</sup> By 2050, it is estimated to become the seventh youngest population in the world<sup>12</sup> and to overtake the United States as the third most populous country by 2050<sup>13</sup>, meaning that its political and economic decisions will have wider global ramifications in the future. However, it is often understudied by media researchers.

Although there are high levels of emigration due to the quality of education and disillusionment with the country's political leadership, its growing middle class is expected to hold more power within the country. This is likely to fuel demand for a robust and healthy news ecosystem.<sup>14</sup>

6. [Problem Solving, Human-Centered Design, and Strategic Processes](#), Stanford (2015)
7. [Policy Brief No. 153: India overtakes China as the world's most populous country](#), UN Desa (April 2023)
8. [India's per capita income to jump 70% by 2023, reach \\$4000: Report](#), Mint (July 2023)
9. [India may become the third largest economy by 2030, overtaking Japan and Germany](#), CNBC (December 2022)
10. [Reporters Without Borders: India](#), RSF (2023)
11. [Nigeria's large, youthful population could be an asset or a burden](#), Premium Times (July 2022)
12. [How a Vast Demographic Shift Will Reshape the World](#), New York Times (July 2023)
13. [Nigeria's population boom: Path to poverty or prosperity?](#), Deutsche Welle (July 2023)
14. [Nigeria's ongoing middle-class brain drain is costing it two generations in one swoop](#), Qz (May 2019)

## Why we chose the United States



Although media research often has the United States at the forefront due to its rate of adoption of new technologies, it is a worthwhile counterpoint to Nigeria and India given demographic shifts predicted between now and 2030. The proportion of underrepresented race groups is due to increase significantly and non-Hispanic white people are predicted to make up slightly less than half of all Americans.<sup>15</sup> This makes it more important to expand coverage to address the information needs of historically underserved communities. This diversity is particularly true of the Gen Z demographic which roughly equates to a quarter of the population today.<sup>16</sup>

Within these countries, we sought respondents from a range of urban, suburban, and rural geographic areas. In India, we interviewed people in Delhi and Bangalore, while our Nigerian interviews took place in Abuja and Lagos. In the US, we conducted interviews in the Bay Area of California; Birmingham, Montgomery and Tuscaloosa, Alabama; and Chicago, Illinois.

To ensure diversity, we recruited 45 research participants between the ages of 18 and 25 with varied backgrounds. Among them, we had:

- **A balance of gender identities**
- **A mix of ethnicities**
- **A spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds**
- **A range of education levels**
- **A variety of news consumption habits**

In attempting to understand the consumption patterns of young news consumers, this study has the limitation of not directly assessing the needs of young people living with disabilities. We advocate future studies focusing on these populations.

Our field protocol mixed conversational interviews with hands-on exercises intended to uncover behaviours and implicit beliefs respondents might — intentionally or inadvertently — leave out of direct responses. Our local partners in India (Quantum Consumer Solutions) and Nigeria (Reach Africa) adapted the protocols to suit local circumstances, recruited respondents and led the interviews in those countries.

To complement our field research, we completed a thorough literature review of leading secondary research to distil critical themes and factors that have shaped, and are expected to continue shaping, the news industry. We also convened an Advisory Board made up of 19 professionals with a broad range of experience across media and technology, many of whom have deep knowledge of or a personal connection to India, Nigeria, or the US. These experts were individually interviewed and participated in four board-wide working sessions to deepen our understanding of specific markets, inform our approach and challenge our thinking.

<sup>15</sup>. These are the dramatic changes the U.S is going to see by 2030, WEF (January 2020)

<sup>16</sup>. How a Vast Demographic Shift Will Reshape the World, New York Times (July 2023)

# The Next Gen News Advisory Board



**Bayo Olupohunda**  
Editor-in-chief,  
Opera



**Carolyn Powers**  
Director for  
US Programs,  
Internews



**Chanpreet Arora**  
Board Member,  
Internews Europe



**Chris Krewson**  
Executive  
Director, LION  
Publishers



**Jack Kelly**  
Founder &  
Content Creator,  
TLDR News



**Jeff Yang**  
Research Director,  
Institute for  
the Future



**Jocelyne Muhutu-Remy**  
Managing  
Director  
Sub-Saharan  
Africa, Spotify



**Jodie Jackson**  
Director, News  
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**Joseph Teasdale**  
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**Kirsten Eddy**  
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**Olivia Ma**  
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Partnerships,  
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Initiative



**Pradeep Gairola**  
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Business Head,  
The Hindu Group



**Ruona Meyer**  
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Media Trainer &  
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**Trei Brundrett**  
Non-Exec Board  
Member,  
The Guardian



**Yvette Uloma Dimiri**  
Director, Stears  
Insights

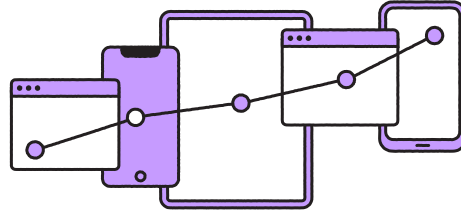


# AUDIENCE TRENDS

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This section synthesises the findings from our primary research interviews, culminating in both a set of emergent behaviours and distinct modes of consumption.

# EMERGENT BEHAVIOURS



We found that the next generation of news consumers' emerging behaviours are distinct in four ways:

## 01 Digital simul-tasking

Younger news consumers can't remember life before the smartphone. Since childhood, they have been surrounded by digital devices. To an unprecedented degree, they rely on smartphones for work, learning and entertainment. Previously, news producers thought of mobile as a second screen; but for younger news consumers, it's usually mobile-only. The selection of apps that populate these younger consumers' home screens are thoughtfully curated and intentional. This deep familiarity with their devices enables fluid pivoting and task-switching. These users exhibit a simul-tasking behaviour where they fluidly transition between often unrelated tasks. This is slightly different to multitasking behaviour where users try to do two wholly different things at once, like reading emails whilst listening to a conference call.

## 02 Filtering through trusted networks

For younger news consumers, a legacy news organisation's reputation is not a guarantee of trust. Confidence in information sources is defined more by proximity and affinity. They actively seek out information from people they know (or feel like they know) in real life. These sources — not established corporate brands — drive news discovery. Witnessing news or having established expertise on a subject still matters, but often only after a connection helps to make them aware of the news in the first place. We saw this in our interviews, with younger news consumers referencing friends from church, a musician they admire, a scientist who shares their love of skateboarding, or even a pesky, oversharing coworker, as entry points into news.

## 03 Sensemaking via digital discourse

Once they find their way to information, younger news consumers rely on the personal opinions of others to frame and understand the issues. Sometimes, they skip over much of the story or go straight to the comments to help make sense of what's happening. They are also inclined to trust that people in online spaces are knowledgeable and more likely to explain difficult issues in more approachable language — or, lacking trust, they still value gathering multiple, diverse perspectives. They also take topics to private messaging groups to process and understand all kinds of information. Although sensemaking has always existed, what has changed is that it has moved online and now includes a much larger, and more diverse, set of perspectives.

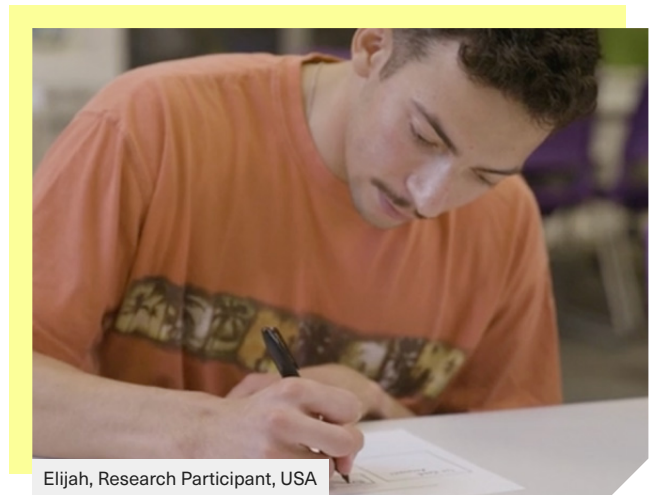
## 04 Sophisticated searching

Younger news consumers continually scan information streams such as social media, notifications, private chats and headline aggregators. These sources can trigger a desire to pursue further depth and perspectives on a news topic. Their exploration extends beyond conventional search engines and includes search-like behaviour within platforms like TikTok and Instagram directly.

# MODES OF CONSUMPTION

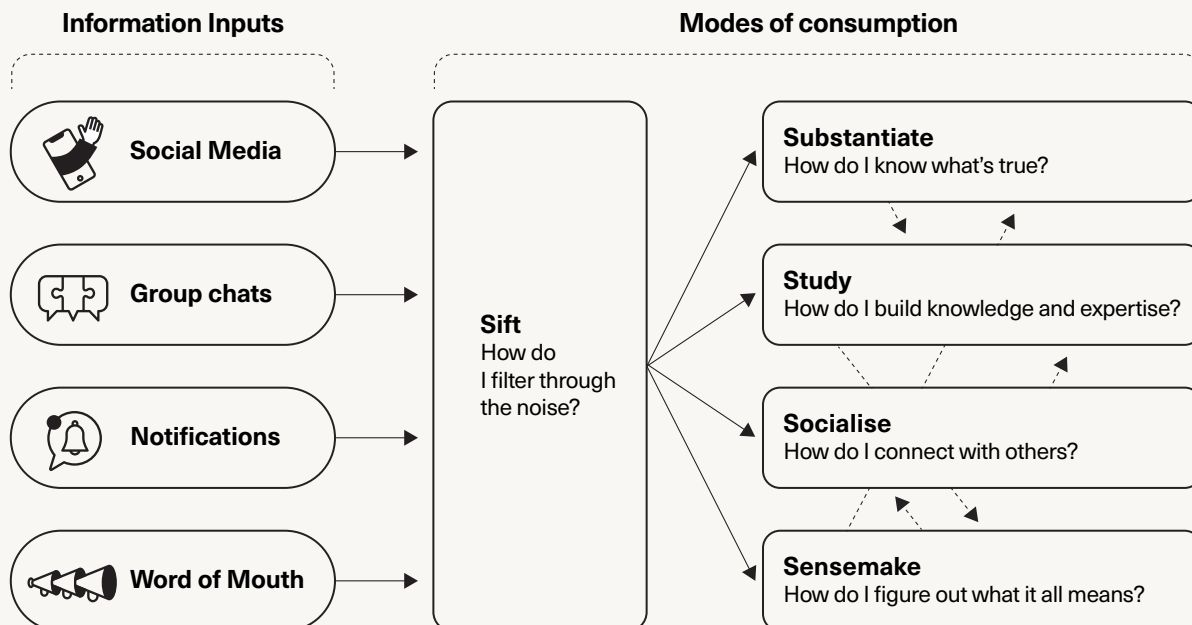
From the emergent behaviours, we have extracted a set of five modes that can be used as lenses to understand the behaviours more fully. While the concept of audience modes is familiar to many organisations, how they apply to the next generation of news consumers provides a new lens to think about future formats, engagement and distribution. These modes are not exclusive or strictly linear. Much like the five senses, these five modes exist separately but can also overlap and influence one another.

The five modes that make up this framework — Sift, Substantiate, Study, Socialise and Sensemake — emerged as the most resonant for the participants of this research.



Elijah, Research Participant, USA

## Our modes of consumption framework





**Sift**

How do I filter through the noise?

In this mode, the next generation of news consumers need simple, low-effort ways to keep up with and discover relevant news and information amidst a glut of available content. They want to feel updated and in-the-know, without feeling inundated. Often sifting involves passive news consumption and can lead to consumers transitioning into the other modes.



**Substantiate**

How do I know what's true?

In this mode, the next generation of news consumers need straightforward ways to follow up on and verify news that has sparked their interest. They want to do this in a self-directed way that allows them to feel a sense of agency in arriving at their own version of the truth.



**Study**

How do I build knowledge and expertise?

In this mode, our research shows that the next generation of news consumers are willing to dive deep to learn about the topics that pique their interest or support their personal/professional development. Even though they spend much time sifting through news, when they enter a study mode, they crave spaces that have high active engagement with content that educates, upskills and inspires.



**Socialise**

How do I connect with others?

In this mode, the next generation of news consumers are building and maintaining affinity networks which play a key role in their filtering and sensemaking. They pass on links, information and other content to different groups in a way that makes them feel current, connected and socially validated through their consumption choices.



Nikita, Research Participant, India



**Sensemake**

How do I figure out what it all means?

In this mode, the next generation of news consumers need accessible ways to process and understand complex topics. They want to weigh information and different perspectives as part of a broader quest to understand and consequently form their own opinions and beliefs.

Like the emerging behaviours mentioned above, these 'modes' crop up at various points during the rest of the report. We have called out the specific modes that apply during different parts of the Ideal News Experience.



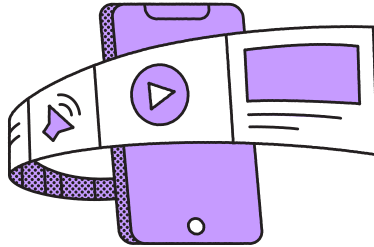
# THE IDEAL NEWS EXPERIENCE

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This section explores the Ideal News Experience of the next generation of consumers. We have included quotes from our research participants and Advisory Board members to provide additional context and colour.



# THE IDEAL NEWS EXPERIENCE



If you were to ask a traditional news producer what the ideal news experience looks like for younger consumers, they might say mobile, accessed through social media and primarily video. Few people would claim that assessment was wrong, but it lacks nuance and tells us little about how to meet audiences where they are in 2030.

What's more, in our fieldwork, respondents made it clear that their news experience today is rarely *ideal*. Repeatedly, we heard that incumbent news producers, focused primarily on the quality and accuracy of content, were nevertheless coming up short.

There were clear gaps between where they *were* and where younger consumers *wanted them to be*.

The questions we posed to 45 research participants in human-centred design interviews sought to find out exactly what constitutes news and the role it plays in their lives. We quizzed them on their news values, monitored their phone usage to see their go-to sources over time, and ran live exercises to better understand their current and future ideal news experience.

When we synthesised their responses, we found that the ideal news experience for our 18-25 year old respondents revolved around three important factors:

## 01.

### Trusted Source

'I want information from a source that I know and trust'

## 02.

### Personal Significance

'I want information that is significant to me and those I care about'

## 03.

### Desired Storytelling

'I want information presented in a way that works best for me'

Over the next few pages, we'll unpack the different factors in more detail and share quotes from our research participants to evidence the gaps. Reference quotes from our Advisory Board will give shape to the opportunity at hand for news producers.

Throughout each section and at the end of the report, we share a series of opportunities, prompts and provocations that are designed to unlock new thinking and fresh perspectives about how news producers can address these preferences and needs.

# 01. Trusted Source

## "I want information from a source that I know and trust"

Like most news consumers, younger consumers seek information from the sources that they trust. However, our research found that their idea of what constitutes trustworthiness can be somewhat different from previous waves of consumers.

This is partly due to blurring the boundaries between *who or what* produces the news and *where* a young person typically consumes it, which is increasingly on platforms. The internet era has resulted in content from individuals and independent creators mixing freely with posts from traditional media outlets, leading to an information context collapse (a phenomenon where information is divorced from its original context and shared in ways that may alter its meaning or significance).<sup>17</sup> This effect, compounded by a greater supply of low quality and misleading information and decreasing trust in institutions

at large, has made it more complex for younger consumers to assess trustworthy news.<sup>18</sup>

Unsurprisingly, our research participants shared that there was no definitive rule of thumb for determining a piece of content's trustworthiness. Rather, there are three subfactors that they weigh up:

**01 Credibility**  
*'They know their stuff and I can count on them'*

**02 Affinity**  
*'I feel connected to them'*

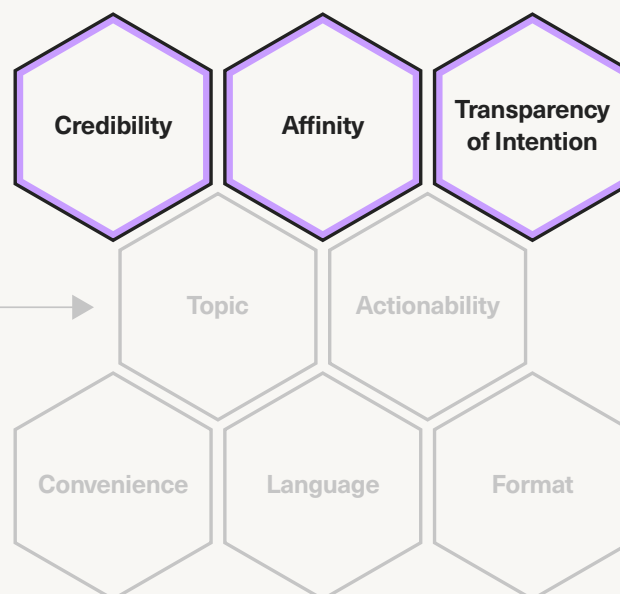
**03 Transparency of Intention**  
*'I understand their motives'*

### The Ideal News Experience

Trusted Source

Personal Significance

Desired Storytelling



17. Sources on social media: Information context collapse and volume of content as predictors of source blindness, Sage Journals (March 2020)

18. 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report, Edelman (2023)

# Credibility

**"They know their stuff and I can count on them"**

Historically, news producers have built trust by asserting their credibility through their reputation. In practice, that has meant adopting strong journalistic standards and processes, emphasising brand qualities such as independence and accuracy, recruiting world-class reporters, relying on their historical track record and winning industry prizes. Although these credentials are still valued by younger people, broadly speaking, their relative importance is diminishing.



Advisory Board



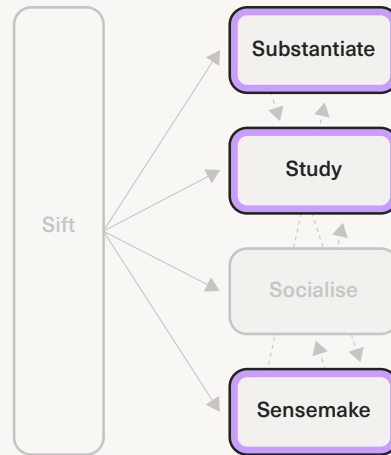
Younger audiences in particular feel a personal connection with the creators they see on social media. There's a unique authenticity to these individuals and how they share information. This change is something everyone in news and tech should be aware of and evaluate for their own brands."

**Olivia Ma**, Former Senior Director of News Partnerships, Google News Initiative

## The value of lived experience and expertise

For younger news consumers today, credibility is much more about the lived experiences — including the experiences, challenges, and perspectives — that an individual accumulates throughout their life. Our respondents spoke at length about how social media personalities' lived experiences boosted their authenticity and relatability when it came to certain topics:

## Key modes to consider in Credibility



Research Participant



I got into watching the YouTuber College Info Geek's videos because I thought productivity and study strategies were super interesting. ... That fuelled my love for psych and neuroscience. I trust a lot of what he says because I know he will put effort into researching things for the content of his videos."

**Rylie**, 20, Female, Chicago



Research Participant



I want to know about things which interest me. Which is why I follow specific accounts on Instagram. They give new information on things like baking, what's happening in Delhi and fashion. Even my friends do the same. A lot of my male friends follow fitness influencers. In fact, I have a friend who even follows a scientist because he is very interested in science."

**Ashmeet**, 19, Female, Delhi



Research Participant



I trusted the people who lived through that experience, over those that were reporting on the experience."

Faith, 24, Female, Lagos

Our Advisory Board members noted these insights through their own observations, speaking to the opportunities and consequences of boosting credibility through lived experiences:



Advisory Board



Clodagh [a reporter at The News Movement] has actually invented a new language around drug harm reduction at festivals because she is — and therefore looks like — a festival goer. My daughter follows Clodagh because she also goes to festivals and has the same kind of vibe, so she is willing to listen to her."

Kamal Ahmed, Editor-in-Chief & Co-founder, The News Movement



Advisory Board



For those [media brands] in which the [personal experience of the] editor isn't clear and they aren't showing themselves to the community there will continue to be distrust against those papers and institutions. It's an ingrained experience that people have had historically where they don't feel represented or meaningfully engaged with them."

Carolyn Powers, Director for US Programs, Internews

### The role of reacting to feedback and correction

While younger consumers value and expect accurate information from their news sources, they also recognise the importance of admitting mistakes and making corrections. Across traditional brands and individual creators, in Nigeria in particular, we perceived a tolerance of fallibility so long as brands admit when they get it wrong:



Research Participant



I'm always one to be like 'this was a mistake or the person that posted this was an intern or the person was just being salty'... but if it's a pattern then I don't trust it anymore."

Mike, 25, Male, Abuja



Research Participant

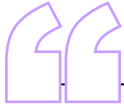


There are times when I have listened to [FT News Briefing and The Economist] and they have given wrong information, but then they always tend to correct that information almost immediately... so I think that has built up trust with me."

Longji, 25, Male, Lagos

## 01. Trusted Source

A member of our Advisory Board explained how he used responding to feedback as a way to boost credibility and spark dialogue with his viewers on YouTube:



Advisory Board



Every six months or so, we make a video [at TLDR News] where we exclusively respond to negative feedback from our community... These are some of our most highly-engaged videos with great feedback in the comment sections."

**Jack Kelly**, Founder & Content Creator, TLDR News

According to Jack, this type of content on TLDR News' channel typically elicits a positive response from its audience because it demonstrates that he and the team are open-minded and willing to address issues raised by viewers. One of the top upvoted comments in a [recent example](#) perfectly captures how it develops trust: *"You are a model to other news channels on YouTube. Transparent, self aware, and good-humoured. Well done!"*

### Evolving perceptions of international brands

Despite some of these gaps, it is worth noting that our research participants still regard some international brands as highly credible, particularly in Nigeria:



Research Participant



If I'm looking for any information about the economy, for example, an economics [specialist] newspaper online would be great. Bloomberg would obviously be a good source because I know that they really research their information."

**Faith**, 24, Female, Lagos



Research Participant



I can't remember the last time I actually opened the [FT, CNN and WSJ] apps, but the notifications are a very big part of my day, every day"

**Longji**, 25, Male, Lagos

In the US, we saw this play out especially through podcasts, which allowed younger consumers to stay up-to-date in a way that was convenient to them but also because of the more personal nature of the format itself:



Research Participant



I really like The Daily podcast [from the New York Times] because I trust it. And it's something I would listen to if I'm on a drive or like if I'm outside running. It's really easy to digest, especially if I am multitasking with other things, but still allows me to stay in touch with the news."

**Angie**, 22, Female, Palo Alto



Research Participant

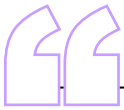


I also like to take a 15-minute walk every day, and during that I will listen to a Spotify podcast. And that could be any of the following: The Journal from the Wall Street Journal, The Daily from the New York Times, or something from the Washington Post."

**Sam**, 23, Male, San Lorenzo

## 01. Trusted Source

Other research participants told us that they gravitate towards international brands during major news events or to conduct additional research when they are alerted about an event by a family or friend. This reflects previous research that suggests that younger consumers tend to value legacy news brands during times of crisis or when the information is of particularly high stakes (to them, their community or the world). As Reuters Institute explains, this is when *“their (international news brands) professionalism, reach and resources come into their own.”*<sup>19</sup>

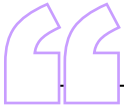


Research Participant



I compare [NBC News, Fox and New York Times] to get a more general sense of what's consistent, so I know what's true.”

**Lena**, 18, Female, Chicago



Research Participant



During election time, I needed to know, particularly the results, and what was happening in different places. Was the election actually fair?... My sources were INEC and obviously during the elections the TV was on Channels TV and Arise news.”

**Faith**, 24, Female, Lagos

At the same time, the credibility of legacy news brands with younger consumers is not universal or enduring. For many, their credibility is undermined by real or perceived ulterior motives, such as sensationalising the news to drive traffic or manipulate public opinion. This is further explored in the Transparency of Intention section of the report.

While younger consumers' interest in mainstream brands may evolve as they grow older, we do not expect them to naturally gravitate towards a brand they have no prior relationship with or, indeed, have a negative perception of. In fact, there could be a scenario where young consumers actively avoid specific mainstream media brands as they look to hold their reporting (or lack of reporting) to account. This challenge is further explored in the Personal Significance section of the report.

19. The Kaleidoscope: Young People's Relationship with News, Craft and Reuters Institute (September 2022)

## What's the Credibility gap and what opportunities does that create between now and 2030?

In the most extreme cases, news producers...	But younger consumers want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rely solely on their brand as a way of establishing credibility with younger audiences</li> <li>• Assume that credentials alone are the most important way of establishing trust</li> <li>• Hide or diminish the lived experiences and profiles of those creating the news</li> <li>• Fail to own their mistakes or issue corrections openly or transparently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalists who have lived experiences related to the topic they are reporting on and demonstrable subject matter expertise</li> <li>• News sources to communicate their mistakes, address criticism head on and proactively seek to improve their reporting</li> </ul>



### Consider...

How might we better make use of the lived experiences and personal stories of journalists and other subject matter experts to build deeper connections with the next generation without undermining journalistic notions of balance and fairness?

### News producers have an opportunity to...

- Hire or work with creators and reporters with deeper personal connections and subject matter expertise related to the topics they are reporting on. Business brand Morning Brew has established a Creator Program that allows social media personalities to work for the company while remaining independent.<sup>20</sup> Our Advisory Board also recommended news producers create new roles — such as Head of Creator Relations at The News Movement — to help with partnership scoping and outreach
- Highlight the lived experiences and credibility of their existing journalists. French investigative publication Guiti News, which focuses on migration, has written short biographies on each of its journalists. Each is written by a newsroom colleague and typically explains both why they want to cover the topic and what makes them suitable to do so
- Improve their corrections policies to be more consistent and transparent about mistakes and subsequent changes to coverage. Research from The News Co/Lab and Dartmouth College showed that the combination of making “exceedingly few errors” and handling “the necessary ones even more earnestly” was the key to boosting trust over time<sup>21</sup>



Oladele, Research Participant, Nigeria

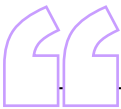
20. Morning Brew building creator program, Axios (August 2022)

21. The corrections dilemma: Admitting your mistakes increases accuracy but reduces audience trust, a new study finds, Nieman Lab (March 2023)

# Affinity

## "I feel connected to them"

Younger news consumers have shown a desire to feel connected to the people and brands that they are receiving information from. This was one of the most commonly observed factors throughout our research and cut across audience segments and markets. We believe there is a significant opportunity for news producers to adapt to this preference in order to engage more authentically with the next generation of news consumers, as highlighted by one of our Advisory Board members:



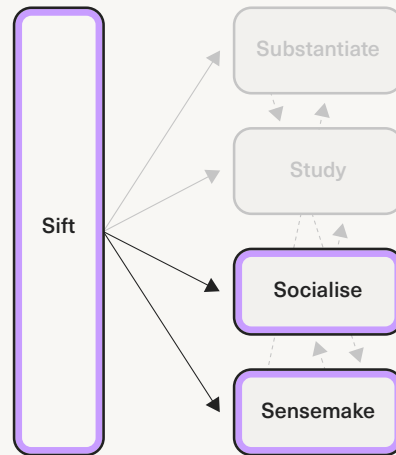
Advisory Board



Influencer culture is still going to be big. It has played, and continues to play, an increasingly important role all over the world with people turning to influencers to do the job that some newsrooms don't do: aggregating the news for them and telling it to them in a more authentic way."

**Ruona Meyer** Freelance Media Trainer & Researcher

## Key modes to consider in Affinity



## The value of people over organisations

Younger news consumers expressed a greater affinity towards individuals that they know and were familiar with compared to traditional news organisations. During our research, participants referenced numerous creators, citizen journalists, celebrities, community members, family and friends as common sources of news. While news producers should not necessarily mimic these creators, they can be a helpful reference point for understanding who younger audiences are turning to. Some of the names mentioned during interviews included:

### In Nigeria

- Maha Maven — Licensed Attorney, Mentor & Content Creator
- Edmund Olotu — FinTech Entrepreneur, Founder/CIO of Bloc
- David Hundeyin — Investigative Journalist, Founder of West Africa Weekly Substack

### In India

- Faye D'Souza — Journalist, Content Creator & Founder of Beatroot News
- Puneet Rao — Fitness Influencer
- Sandeep Maheshwari — Motivational Speaker, Entrepreneur & YouTuber
- ThatBohoGirl — Fashion & Lifestyle Influencer, Founder of ThatBohoGirl
- Ashneer Grover — Entrepreneur & Shark Tank India Judge

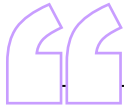
### In the US

- Plain Bagel — Investing/Personal Finance Content Creator & YouTuber
- Marques Brownlee — Tech Content Creator & YouTuber at MKBHD
- iDubbz — Comedy YouTuber & Documentary Filmmaker
- HasanAbi — Online Streamer & Political Commentator



## 01. Trusted Source

These individuals primarily act as a filtering mechanism for young people in their decision making about what to read and who to listen to. When we asked what made them worthy of their time, an individual's skills and personal achievements were commonly referenced:

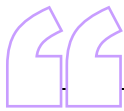


Research Participant



There's this guy I follow on Twitter. His name is [prominent Nigerian entrepreneur]. I won't say I trust everything he says but I listen to what he says, like I always consider his opinion as very valuable... I think his business mind is really interesting to see. This is someone that always hits the nail on the head with his takes and opinions in terms of what I agree with."

**Mike**, 25, Male, Abuja



Research Participant



I don't trust traditional news sources, I have people for that. That's what Hasan Abi is for. Besides, I don't want to hear [traditional news sources] analyse information. I just want someone to mention that it's happening."

**Trevor**, 21, Non-binary, Chicago



Research Participant



My hero is Ashneer Grover, because he started his business from nothing, and now he has created such a huge empire. He is now investing in other businesses, and he is a judge on Shark Tank. I like to listen to his interviews."

**Vibhav**, 24, Male, Delhi

Among our research participants, we saw that there was a greater affinity for individual producers that they could relate to or share an aspect of identity. For example, younger women involved in our research frequently pointed to women who were creating the news. Faye D'Souza, Maha Maven, Cleo Abram and Brielle Biermann were just some of the names that came up across the geographies.

We also found that sources that younger news consumers have grown up with benefited from a halo effect. A number of our research participants believed a source — whether an individual or brand — was reputable because it had been a part of their lives from a young age:



Research Participant



[I've watched iDubbbz go from a] grease ball... into someone who produces good journalism... It's fascinating to watch someone grow publicly like that."

**Trevor**, 21, Non-binary, Chicago



Research Participant

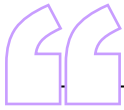


Twitter is an app that I've grown up on. I've been on Twitter since I was like nine or ten. So I've seen Twitter at its best and at its worst... I still find it to be more credible than all these other sources."

**Hugh**, 24, Male, Abuja

## 01. Trusted Source

In some sense, these personalities and creators acted like a second family, something that one of our Advisory Board members commented on:



Advisory Board



Youth consumption is just this endless rabbit hole of niche media stuff, influencers and creators. Young people know these creators like family. They're more likely to trust things that they hear from these personalities that they know and follow, which can be endlessly corruptible and lack transparency."

**Chris Krewson** Executive Director, LION Publishers

Being an individual creator does not inherently boost credibility. Rather it is through their ability to connect with their audiences through shared language, lived experiences, and relatability that makes them popular among younger audiences.

### The role of family and friends

Our research showed that family and friends also play a critical role in news consumption. These personal connections emerged during interviews as a vital way that 18-25 year olds filtered information and honed in on specific stories that mattered to them. This was particularly striking among our Indian research participants, who leaned on relatives for guidance and protection as they make their way through the world:



Research Participant



Even though I don't enjoy watching it as much, in the evenings I sit and watch the news with my parents and grandparents. It is just for us to spend time together as a family."

**Chahat**, 23, Female, Delhi



Research Participant



During breaks between classes, my friends and I find an empty classroom and sit and watch an episode of a [news] show together. It has become like a ritual for us. We always spend this time with each other."

**Ashmeet**, 19, Female, Delhi



Research Participant



I 100% get most of my news via social media and also word of mouth talking to friends to hear what's going on. I definitely don't watch cable. I don't really read newspapers."

**Lucas**, 21, Male, Palo Alto

News encountered through personal connections also plays a valuable role in understanding topics more deeply. Research participants across geographies used conversations with friends and family to learn about different opinions and perspectives and to help them decide their own view on a topic:



Research Participant



If [my friends] send it, I feel they've read it and I can ask them questions about it."

**Hope**, 23, Female, Chicago



Research Participant



I don't like some popular Indian TV news channels because they are so dramatic and keep shouting, but my family back home watches them, so even I keep it on and keep myself updated on what is happening so I can talk about it with my family..."

**Sneha**, 24, Female, Bangalore

## 01. Trusted Source



Research Participant



Another thing that makes me trust [my Dad] is that when he says something and I don't agree with one part of it... And then when I explain myself, his rebuttal or response is always well thought out so I'm like okay, it means that he read both sides of the argument and understands perfectly what he said to me."

Mike, 25, Male, Abuja

However, it's important to note that younger news consumers don't always trust family members with whom they typically have a strong affinity. One research participant noted that she looked into a story about the reinstatement of Covid-19 restrictions as part of an effort to establish the correct information:



Research Participant



It was mainly for me to correct my dad, and to inform myself."

Lena, 18, Female, Chicago



The degree of affinity that an individual has towards an information source differs between groups and lies across a spectrum. But from our research, and despite the many connections that digital technology facilitates, family and friends continue to maintain a high level of affinity for 18-25 year olds, as does parental modelling.<sup>22</sup>

## What's the Affinity gap and what opportunities does that create between now and 2030?

In the most extreme cases, news producers...	But younger consumers want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote and elevate journalists with the longest tenure, even if they do not represent their audiences in terms of identity or shared experience</li> <li>Underestimate the importance of building relationships with younger consumers during their early lives, assuming that they will become aware of their brands and transition to their content when they grow up</li> <li>Strive to convey objectivity by avoiding personal opinion or reference to personal experiences</li> <li>Fail to recognise that family and friends play an important role in younger people's news consumption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Testimonies and accounts from journalists who authentically and transparently represent them and their communities</li> <li>News sources that grow up with them and consistently provide them with their preferred news experience on the platforms where they spend their time</li> <li>The news to be the beginning of a conversation with their wider community which helps them understand different perspectives on topics and issues</li> </ul>

<sup>22</sup>. Do parents still model news consumption? Socialising news use among adolescents in a multi-device world, New Media & Society (January 2017)



### Consider...

How might we develop brands that 'grow up' alongside consumers rather than expecting those brands to suddenly become relevant to consumers at a point in the future or only be useful at one specific life stage?

### News producers have an opportunity to...

- Build greater affinity with audiences by becoming more representative of the communities that they serve. The first step is to hire and promote diverse talent — based on age, gender, racial or ethnic origin, disability and beliefs — and to provide them with a platform. One example is [Vice](#), which hired and empowered younger editors and journalists as part of an effort to attract a younger target audience<sup>23</sup>
- Work with individual journalists within their organisation to develop personal brands to increase visibility. Social media platforms can provide a means for these individual journalists to authentically reach audiences and grow affinity. Our Advisory Board pointed to The Washington Post's Taylor Lorenz and Sophia Smith Galer, formerly at the BBC and Vice News, as good examples of this
- Create content formats that are easily shareable on private social platforms where interactions with family and friends are more common, including Instagram Stories, carousels, memes/GIFs, interactive games and short audio clips for distribution on social platforms and private chats. [Literally Media](#), a company that owns a portfolio of digital comedy and culture brands like Know Your Meme or Cracked, is a good example<sup>24</sup>



Riley, Research Participant, USA

23. [Attracting Young\(er\) Audiences: A guide for small\(ish\) Legacy Organisations](#), Ethar El-Katatney (August 2022)

24. [Why Literally Media is partnered with a TikTok lumberjack](#), The Rebooting (August 2023)

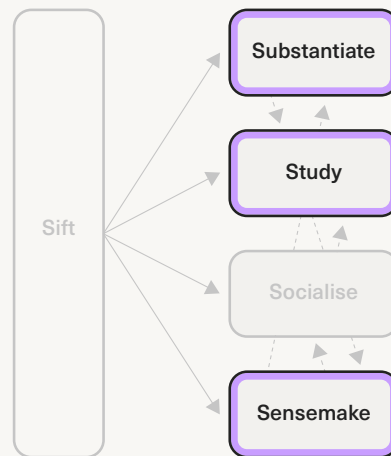
# Transparency of intention

## "I understand their motives"

Having spent their formative years during the rise of online misinformation and disinformation, younger news consumers have proven to be sceptical of the information they come across. Rather than accepting information at face value, they are concerned about ideological manipulation. In addition, young consumers are also sensitive to potential commercial conflicts of interest between news producers and their audiences.<sup>25</sup>

Research has shown that younger consumers tend to start from a position of assuming that information cannot be trusted and that it is often intentionally misleading. A study by the Reuters Institute found that *"almost all young people believe that all information is put in the public realm for a reason, and is not to be trusted or taken at face value."*<sup>26</sup>

### Key modes to consider in Transparency of intention



Research Participant



Everything we read now is not going to be the truth."

**Makenzie**, 19, Female, Birmingham



Research Participant



Everything is kind of just an op-ed; you can only learn about current events and then put the news together yourself."

**Trevor**, 21, Non-binary, Chicago



Research Participant



I don't trust anything I see online. I need to learn about it and verify it myself."

**Harsheet**, 18, Male, Delhi

Typically this leads younger consumers to side with news sources where they understand conflicts of interest, agendas or biases that the author may have. One research participant explained that *"most of the people I follow [for the news] are people I already know what they believe personally"* (Gavin, 21, Male, Birmingham). Transparency of intention matters to them.

25. Ipsos Thinks: Beyond Binary: The lives and choices of Generation Z, Ipsos Mori (July 2018)

26. The Kaleidoscope: Young People's Relationship with News, Craft and Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (September 2022)

### Sensationalism and negativity

When we probed our research participants about why they did not trust a source, the most commonly referenced reason was sensationalism and the perception that a source focused on incendiary topics or angles to drive engagement, advertising revenue and subsequent profit:



Research Participant



I hate the way they show news on TV. Everyone just keeps screaming at each other, and no one makes any sense. They bring in random people to discuss trending topics. If they are bringing in people, they should bring in experts."

Sneha, 24, Female, Bangalore



Research Participant



Sharing unverified content or something they are not sure of, just for engagement's sake, that's something that would make me lose trust."

Faith, 24, Female, Lagos



Research Participant



I'm like okay, this was written by a for-profit company trying to generate clicks? I'm sure there might be some good ideas in here, but certainly not in the way they presented it."

Lucas, 21, Male, Palo Alto

Sensationalism has been a challenge in news media for centuries and is generally the byproduct of competitive pressures in the industry.<sup>27, 28</sup> Jodie Jackson, a member of our Advisory Board and founder of the News Literacy Lab, explained why the negativity bias persists:



Advisory Board



We've always had a negativity bias in the news, but the problem now is that there's an excess of it. When you move into levels of excess, it moves from being adaptive to maladaptive — from helpful to harmful and we see that across so many different types of news... This is how it's worked for a long time because the 'if it bleeds, it leads' mantra has supported the traditional business model of news."

Jodie Jackson, Director, News Literacy Lab

27. All The News That's Fit To Sell, James Hamilton (2004)

28. Proving the Obvious? What Sensationalism Contributes to the Time Spent on News Video, Paul Hendriks Vettehen (2017)

## Manipulating public opinion

Concern over news manipulating public opinion in support of specific agendas is not a new phenomenon. There is a significant body of academic work that supports the existence of ‘folk theories’ among the general public, where media is perceived to be guided either by partisan political agendas or commercial considerations.<sup>29</sup> With a landmark year of elections ahead, the likelihood and awareness of political manipulation (for personal gain) will increase.

We heard these concerns in Nigeria in particular, where there has long been significant government interference in the media and press freedom continues to be curtailed.<sup>30</sup> During our research, the 2023 Nigerian presidential election had recently taken place and so this issue was heightened for research participants:

“

Research Participant

I feel like the fact that [the news] can be weaponised is scary. There was a time on Twitter where news came out that influencers were being paid by political parties to shape public opinion in favour of one person over the other. I find it scary because it shows how social media can be weaponised essentially.”

Longji, 25, Male, Lagos

“

Research Participant

The [large television network in Nigeria] is even worse; let's start with that because I don't think anything on [that network] is legit anymore, they just share what they want people to see. They know what exactly is happening because it's national TV but they won't give out the information to people. I don't know whether they are trying to avoid certain controversies that are happening but they just dish out what they want people to receive or hear.”

Praise, 25, Female, Lagos

## What’s the Transparency of Intention gap and what opportunities does that create between now and 2030?

In the most extreme cases, news producers...	But younger consumers want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise content and headlines that are designed to spark emotion and engagement, irrespective of whether it is incendiary, sensationalised or inaccurate</li> <li>• Fail to clearly distinguish between accounts of what has happened and opinion or analysis of the event</li> <li>• Lack transparency about their ownership structures, large donors, advertising clients, political affiliations — all of which could create ulterior motives, conflicts, agendas or biases</li> <li>• Do not include a balance of perspectives in relation to controversial or sensitive topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content that is thoughtful and slower, especially for those who have less of an interest in news<sup>31</sup></li> <li>• To quickly distinguish between what has happened and the author’s opinion or personal view</li> <li>• Transparency about a news producer’s sources of funding and political interests<sup>32</sup></li> <li>• A variety of sources in one place that allow them to make their own judgement on a topic</li> </ul>

29. Fair and Balanced”: What News Audiences in Four Countries Mean When They Say They Prefer Impartial News, Mont’Alverne et al (2023)

30. Nigeria ranks 123rd out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index 2023, Reporters Without Borders (2023)

31. The Digital News Report 2023, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (June 2023)

32. Facebook, Google and the Canadian government must set funding transparency standards for news, Press Gazette (November 2022)



### Consider...

How might we openly and consistently communicate our values, mission, sources of funding and political interests to mitigate claims of bias and impartiality (without undermining the brand's legitimacy)?

### News producers have an opportunity to...

- Be transparent and open about who funds their work, both in terms of their ownership structure and revenue sources. One example of a news producer already doing this is Jack Kelly at TLDR News who created a [YouTube video](#) to explain the revenue breakdown of his channels as a way of addressing viewer concerns about being funded by a larger corporation. It is important to note that greater transparency doesn't always equate to higher levels of credibility, although our research suggests it remains an important factor for younger consumers<sup>33</sup>
- Open the door so audiences can see for themselves how the news is sourced and produced. [Tortoise Media's ThinkIns](#) is an example of a newsroom that creates spaces where audiences can directly speak to editors
- Give multiple perspectives in the same place to boost transparency around disputed opinions and perspectives. News producers can take inspiration from [Semafor's](#) articles, which are split between news, analysis, counterargument, alternative perspectives and onward journeys



33. [The more, the better? Effects of transparency tools and moderators on the perceived credibility](#), Henke et al, 2021



# 02. Personal Significance

## "I want information that is significant to me and those I care about"

With so many sources of information at their fingertips, consumers have more power than ever to choose what they pay attention to. So what determines whether a young person scrolls past a piece of content or dives deeper into it?

Our research, reinforced by other recent studies<sup>34</sup>, found evidence that the idea of what is considered 'newsworthy' is changing drastically. In the past, editors at recognised outlets decided what was relevant and important in local, national, and international communities; this was a process shut off from consumers, whose best recourse was to send in a letter or email to the publication. However, as the number of sources of information exploded and platforms became the go-to place for navigating the day's events for many people, power has increasingly shifted to the consumer to judge for themselves what is 'news' to them. This trend has been accelerated by the transition from evening bulletins to the 24-hour, all-consuming and never-ending online news cycle.

Our research participants reflected this in their answers, making it clear that not all 'news' is equally important and differs based on their perception of what high-stakes versus low-stakes information is. What is important to one consumer, they said, may not be to another. Further, it appears that as consumers progress through different life stages, their own definition of what they consider to be critical information is likely to shift as their priorities do.<sup>35</sup>

This section aims to uncover the criteria that contribute towards Personal Significance within the ideal news experience:

**01** **Topic** — "I am interested in this subject"

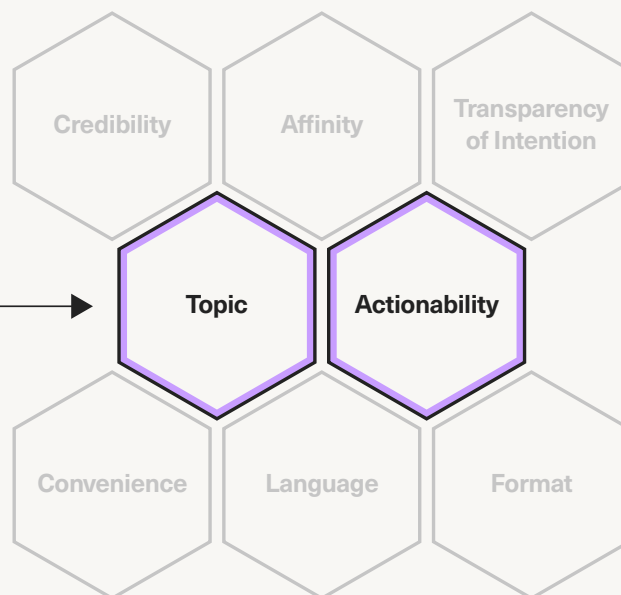
**02** **Actionability** — "I can do something with this information"

### The Ideal News Experience

Trusted Source

Personal Significance

Desired Storytelling



<sup>34</sup>. The Kaleidoscope: Young People's Relationships with News, Craft and Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (September 2022)

<sup>35</sup>. The Digital News Report 2022, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, page 44 (June 2022)

# Topic

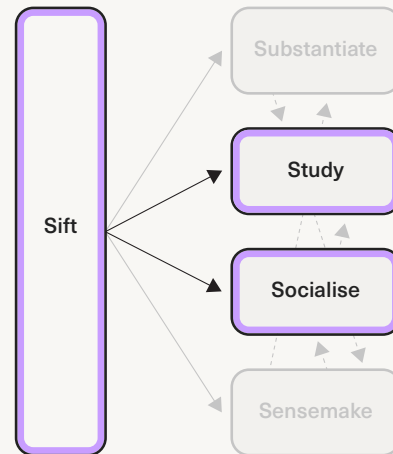
## "I am interested in this subject"

Perhaps one of the biggest changes in the news industry has been the evolving definition of news. Historically, news has been thought about in terms of 'hard news', which is viewed as serious, worldly and important (by those in power, at least), and 'soft news', often considered to be frivolous, distracting, and entertaining. Legacy news producers have traditionally prioritised their resources on covering 'hard news' topics (politics, economics, crime) and tend to structure their newsrooms accordingly.<sup>36</sup>

While the next wave of consumers seem aware of these definitional divides, with some calling news "a public update on topics like politics and crime that's meant for everyone" (Harsheet, 18, Male, Delhi), in practice, we observed that their consumption habits suggest that news is "anything new that happens that's relevant and timely" (Ashmeet, 19, Female, Delhi).

The broadening definition of what constitutes news has led to the rise of 'infotainment' which mixes information found in traditional news topics, such as politics and economics, with entertainment. In practice, this often means that the next generation reaches important topics (e.g. social justice) through side-doors — such as creators or celebrities. This was a consistent trend in all the geographies we researched and something that our Advisory Board members were particularly cognisant of:

### Key modes to consider in Topic



Advisory Board



There will be more diverse coverage as people are moving away from pure politics, which has dominated Indian society. People are saying the news is not just about politics, but about many other things, and ultimately it's about curiosity."

**Mohit Jain**, Board Member & Executive Director, Times India Group



Advisory Board



[Hard news coverage] will reduce significantly... but coverage of local celebrities is likely to grow because digital-only platforms will keep focusing on that."

**Jocelyne Muhutu-Remy**, Managing Director, Sub-Saharan, Africa Spotify

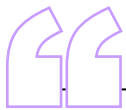
36. All of It Matters: On hard and soft news, Columbia Journalism Review (Fall 2021)

## 02. Personal Significance

It is important to say that young news consumers are not exclusively interested in entertaining content or 'soft news' topics. Rather they feel that anything *can* be categorised as news so long as it's of interest to the audience. Ultimately, consumers, rather than editors, will decide what is newsworthy given that *"The distribution of power within news has changed from producers to audiences... Therefore, what the news will look like in 2030 is what the audience wants and needs in 2030"* (Kamal Ahmed, Advisory Board). News producers should view this as an opportunity to reconsider the idea of 'newsworthiness' to different audiences and experiment with topics, beats and stories that push boundaries. In addition, news producers may benefit from mixing traditional news topics with entertainment to create accessible entry points to news.

### Evolving interests with life stage

One question that commonly arose during the research process was: do all younger consumers naturally like soft news but grow to like 'hard news' as they age? While this is likely to be true to some degree — given they have more 'at stake' as they age — we found research participants were still regularly and consciously consuming topics and content that we would consider 'hard news'.



Research Participant



I will pay attention to some of the things that are really big, like political topics. The two that most come to mind are LGBTQ rights and stuff with women's reproductive rights."

**Rylie**, 20, Female, Chicago



Research Participant



There was a conversation about increasing the salaries of politicians in Nigeria. I wasn't necessarily looking for that. It was just something someone was talking about. I came across this just scrolling on Twitter. I looked at my notifications bar and I saw that Opera News had posted about it and I went to read about it again."

**Mike**, 25, Male, Abuja

Interestingly though, their conscious consumption was often triggered by their entry into a new life stage, such as starting university, job searching, or investing for the first time. One participant referenced entering the workforce as her catalyst for reading the news:



Research Participant



When I was much younger in university I wasn't actively looking for news nor was I getting it... once I got into the job market, I realised that you have to be more informed, you can't be sounding ignorant out in these streets, so that caused a shift for me."

**Ifechi**, 25, Female, Abuja

Similarly, another participant shared that she started reading the news six months prior because her dad thought it would help her with job interviews.



Research Participant



It's not my interest but I have to become interested."

**Chahat**, 23, Female, Delhi

Overall, younger news consumers seemed to acknowledge the need to engage with more serious news topics as they matured, despite it often being viewed as a necessity rather than a hobby.

**What's the Topic gap and what opportunities does that create between now and 2030?**

In the most extreme cases, news producers...	But younger consumers want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assume everyone is interested in 'hard news' and therefore over-index reporting on topics such as politics, international affairs, economics, and science</li> <li>Brand themselves as knowing what is and isn't considered news, especially breaking news</li> <li>Maintain a strict distinction between 'hard news' and 'soft news' topics</li> <li>Don't develop specific content to onboard younger consumers at different life stages, such as university or entering the job market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A broader definition of news that incorporates infotainment</li> <li>The space to engage with 'soft news' topics without it being diminished or devalued in society as frivolous or unimportant</li> <li>To decide for themselves what topics are interesting to them</li> <li>Entry points into more difficult topics, especially as they enter new life stages</li> </ul>



**Consider...**

How might we adopt a broader definition of news that doesn't prioritise 'hard news' over 'soft news' and caters to changes in topic preference and needs over a consumer's lifetime?

**News producers have an opportunity to...**

- Take 'hard news' topics and intersect them with entertainment and 'soft news' topics to make them more digestible — acting as an entry point to news. [John Oliver's Last Week Tonight](#) was cited as a prominent example by both our Advisory Board and research participants, especially given its nature to only publish once a week, creating a slower and more digestible news cycle in and of itself
- Use audience signals and tools to inform the news agenda around what people are curious about. [Mutante](#), a Colombian investigative news producer, has created a 'cycle of conversations' in which they create spaces for audiences to share difficult stories (eg: sexual assault) leading to a news agenda that reflects their stories
- Provide the next generation with practical information that helps them to understand the world and succeed in their ambitions. For example, [FT Schools](#) provides a weekly newsletter that highlights key readings for younger readers who are looking to transition from education to work

# Actionability

## "I can do something with this information"

Repeatedly, we observed that younger consumers wanted the news and information that they consume to empower them to take action. This could amount to helping them to make a decision or make positive changes in their lives/for their communities. Without this sense of a path forward, research participants expressed feeling powerless in the face of events going on around them.



Research Participant



If I see a new source, I read it, I hear it. And then I try to apply it: 'What does this mean for me? What does this mean for the person who this article affects? What should we do about it? What's the call to action for it?'"

Gavin, 21, Male, Birmingham

So, what does news look like that is both relevant and actionable for a younger consumer?

### News that improves your daily life

Research participants describe highly practical day-to-day situations where they needed basic information on things like the weather, traffic, and local crime:



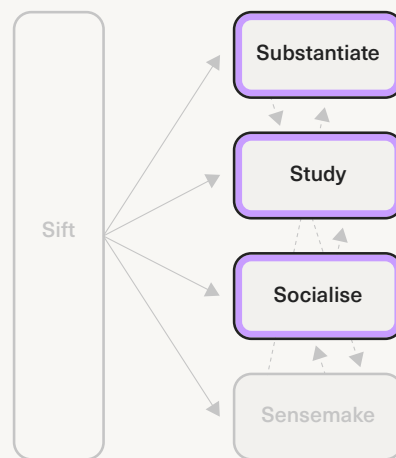
Research Participant



Before leaving the house I would want to know if there's anything that would possibly affect my transit to where I'm headed or what's generally happening around me."

Tobi, 24, Male, Abuja

### Key modes to consider in actionability



Research Participant



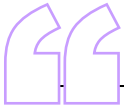
I like to know what is happening in my city: it is good to keep yourself updated. I know all the new cafes, and during the rains our classes got cancelled so it was important to know which areas were affected."

Ashmeet, 19, Female, Delhi

While seemingly simple, this kind of news was especially valuable in regions where access to basic information could be unreliable or misleading. Carolyn Powers, a member of our Advisory Board and an advocate of local news, notes the difficulty in upholding high-quality standards when the majority of news is accessed through social media, "Information is so decentralised now, which allows young people to find the spaces that feel right to them. But the flip side is that there's more misinformation and disinformation."

## 02. Personal Significance

Similarly, there was a strong desire for educational content that allows younger news consumers to further their personal and professional goals, with several participants seeking out explainers and tutorials for guidance on how to improve their skills. These behaviours were commonly associated with trying to get ahead in life and were especially prevalent in cultures and communities that place a greater emphasis on being self-made or entrepreneurial:

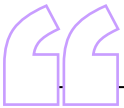


Research Participant



In our generation, we try to learn new things. It is okay if you don't succeed but you should try to learn something."

**Harpreet**, 23, Male, Bangalore



Advisory Board



In Nigeria, there's more of a hustle and start-up culture than in places like Kenya or South Africa, so young Nigerians have a strong appreciation for that type of content."

**Justin Arenstein**, Founder & CEO, Code for Africa

Beyond that, participants also noted a strong interest in engaging in hobbyist content that would further their development in areas they are passionate about. For example, one participant spoke at length about chefs she follows:



Research Participant



I follow this baker called Shivesh: he shows recipes you can easily make at home. I have tried lots of people's recipes but I especially like him because he shows the proper way to do things"

**Chahat**, 23, Female, Delhi

When possible, this presents an opportunity for news producers to promote content that empowers consumers to make better decisions, try new things and hone both their skills and passions.

### Sparking community change

Naturally, not all news content will have a direct impact on a consumer's daily life, nor should it aim to. Coverage of social issues, politics, and economics helps to create awareness and understanding of issues that matter to consumers and tends to increase participation in democratic processes.<sup>37</sup> However, in recent years, we have seen an increase in news avoidance amongst the general public from 28% in 2017 to 36% in 2023, which is a particularly pertinent trend amongst under-35-year-olds. One of the commonly cited drivers of this trend was that the news, and especially certain topics, can be depressing and anxiety-inducing.<sup>38</sup>

We found this to be the case in our own field research with both participants and members of our Advisory Board speaking to the futility they felt when engaging with emotionally draining news content.



Research Participant



In 2019, I was having really bad anxiety attacks and part of the advice I was given was that I should reduce my screen time and most of my forms of receiving news were off the screen... I deleted all the apps from my phone, deactivated my social media accounts, so the only way I got information was when my friends would FaceTime me."

**Hugh**, 24, Male, Abuja



Research Participant



It's good to be informed, but there's a fine line between being informed and being consumed in it [so much] that it makes you anxious."

**Margaret**, 21, Female, Jamison

37. [How we know journalism is good for democracy](#), Democracy Fund (September 2022)

38. [The Digital News Report 2023](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (June 2023)



Advisory Board

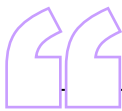


The nationalisation of politics and news in the US is an epidemic which is turning a lot of people off news because it's so politicised and disempowering. It feels like this is the main content young people are trying to avoid."

**Trei Brundrett**, Non-Exec Board Member,  
The Guardian

Interestingly though, not all the participants we interviewed wanted to tune out of these important social issues entirely. Rather, they were left feeling overwhelmed and anxious because the information presented to them was not actionable; most wanted to understand how to join the conversation and be a part of the solution.

One of the most common ways of doing so was by raising awareness through social media for issues such as hate crimes, natural disasters, and political corruption. For example, one participant spoke about one of the few times he shared content on social media:



Research Participant



I felt emotional after reading an article... I also saw the footage on Instagram and it was hard to watch. I posted after with the trending hashtag to try and build awareness and hold the criminal accountable."

**Hrishik**, 18, Male, Bangalore

Research shows that the Next Gen is especially interested in communal forms of activism, with Gen Z being 92% more likely to protest than other generations and twice as likely to think collective action would enable them to be more engaged.<sup>39</sup> One of our Advisory Board members spoke about this dynamic at length in his recount of the backlashes against the local government in Nigeria:



Advisory Board



In 2020, there were huge protests against police brutality. Young people have become really empowered because of social media and its ability to lead to change... Young people are changing their opinion on their own country because their relationship with news has changed."

**Bayo Oluphunda**, Editor-in-chief, Opera

When thinking about the opportunities this insight presents, both interview participants and Advisory Board members were quick to point out the desire for solutions journalism, a reporting format that focuses on how audiences can act to fix a shared societal problem. Jodie Jackson from our Advisory Board called this out explicitly, stating that *"Something I see especially in my work is how much demand there is for solutions journalism by younger audiences. There was even a BBC World Service Survey that showed that 64% of under 35-year-olds wanted the news to report solutions to problems. It was actually their top content request."*

39. [What Business Needs To Know About The Generation Changing Everything](#), Oliver Wyman Forum and The News Movement (January 2023)

## 02. Personal Significance

Throughout our research, it was clear that *knowing* about the news was not enough on its own for the participants we interviewed. Rather, younger consumers appeared eager to filter for relevant and actionable information that they could use to improve their lives. Consequently, when developing content for this group, the industry needs to explicitly ask itself:



Advisory Board



How does this information impact different groups of people, including young people, and why should they care?"

**Ruona Meyer** Freelance Media Trainer & Researcher

## What's the Actionability gap and what opportunities does that create between now and 2030?

In the most extreme cases, news producers...	But younger consumers want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share constant streams of news and information that updates the audience rather than explains its impact on communities</li> <li>• Fail to provide the context behind the story, so that young readers can take action on the assumption that all consumers are heavily engaged in the news cycle and follow stories religiously</li> <li>• Overuse breaking news alerts and banners to draw attention when not always relevant to the audience</li> <li>• Produce content on emotionally draining and disturbing topics (e.g. hate crimes, natural disasters) without providing any calls to action that allows consumers to be a part of the solution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand how a piece of news directly impacts their life and those around them</li> <li>• Context and explainers to bridge the gap in their knowledge and help them grow personally and professionally and take action</li> <li>• To feel part of the solution and take collective action alongside their community on big social, political, and economic issues</li> </ul>



### Consider...

How might we better recognise the toll that it takes to consume the news regularly and empower young consumers to take action by providing constructive or solutions-focused reporting?

### News producers have an opportunity to...

- Establish a set of clear actions to take after consuming a piece of news content, including onward journeys. [HumAngle](#) in Nigeria, which reports on conflict and humanitarian crises, makes sure that its human-centred journalism spells out the clear policy implications and/or calls out who is accountable once a crisis occurs. As they explain, "Our work provides more credible information and context for mediation, better policy-making, and scholarly research"
- Follow up on stories related to social issues to provide a sense of satisfaction to the audience that progress is being made and/or justice has been served. The Smithsonian Magazine [Planet Positive](#) edition, for example, focuses on stories about rebounding endangered species or innovations that reduce carbon footprint to "show what's working in wildlife and environmental conservation". Generative AI chatbots can also enable audiences to pause and follow up on stories over a longer period
- Encourage audiences to connect and share content with their digital communities to take part in collective action. For example, the publication [Reasons To Be Cheerful](#) has created a project called [We Are Not Divided](#) to highlight stories about positive collective action to inspire audiences to "explore the many ways we bridge our divides"



# 03. Desired Storytelling

## "I want information presented in a way that works best for me"

Young consumers' definition of engaging storytelling looks very different to the traditional news report or typical television broadcast segment. The mass appeal of social media platforms and the explosion of new storytelling methods — including video, personalised interactives and documentary-style podcasts, to name just a few — has shifted consumer preferences towards being more visual and graphic, more immersive and more readily available.

Nowadays the question of how best to tell a story has become as much of a question for editors as *what* the story should be about. As Ethar El-Katatney, former Young Audiences Editor at the Wall Street Journal, neatly put it in her guide to attracting younger audiences: *"If there is one main takeaway from this guide, it should be: storytelling first."*<sup>40</sup>

We see this trend in our research, in which it is clear that the next generation of news consumers have strong preferences for particular storytelling formats that meet one or more of the following criteria:

**01 Convenience**  
*"I don't want this to require more effort than is necessary"*

**02 Language**  
*"I want words that I understand and a tone that is welcoming"*

**03 Format**  
*"I want this in a form that works for me and my situation"*

We'll explore each of these in this section, as well as the opportunities that arise as a result of the gaps between current supply and consumer demand.

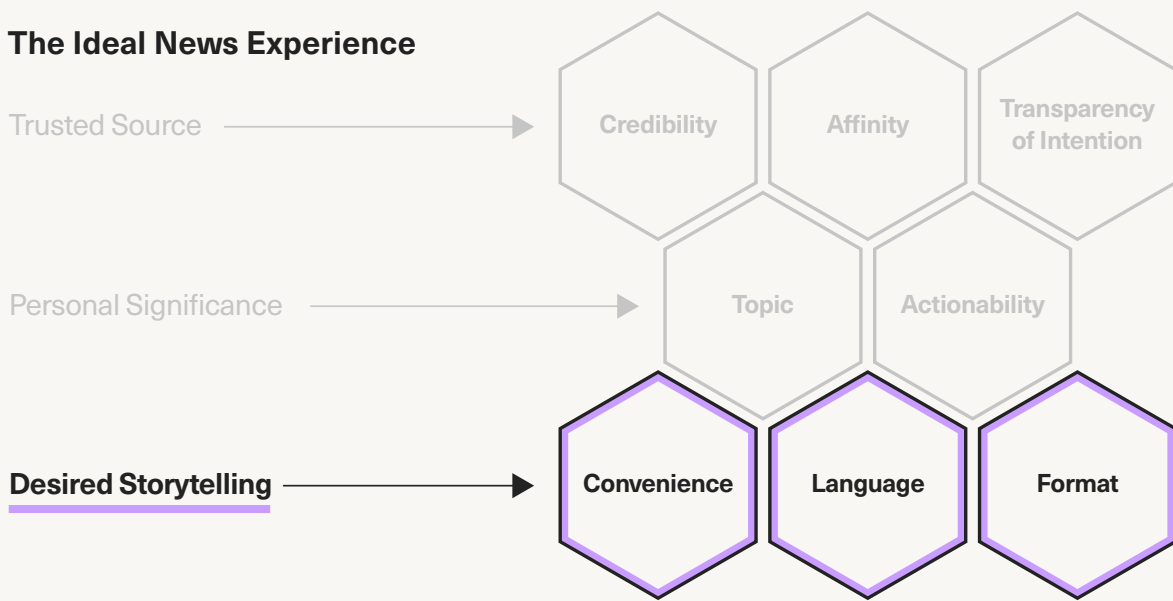
It is worth noting that there is a school of thought that consumer preferences for storytelling formats evolve over a lifetime and that young consumers will move towards more traditional mediums as they reach specific life stages. However, we don't see evidence of this among our research participants. Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has been quick to warn that *"platform preferences rarely regress... there are no reasonable grounds for expecting that those born in the 2000s will suddenly come to prefer old-fashioned websites, let alone broadcast and print, simply because they grow older."* In short, the changes in medium and format preference are likely to persist.



Precious, Research Participant, Nigeria

40. Attracting young(er) audiences: A guide for small(ish) legacy organizations, Ethar El-Katatney (August 2022)

### The Ideal News Experience



Before we go into more detail, it's worth noting that, in this section of the Ideal News Experience in particular, we highlight consumer preferences based on research that have the potential to be over-generalised; for example, younger consumers only watch funny, short-form videos. Such generalisations are overly simplistic and unhelpful and can prevent the news industry from opening its frame of reference to new approaches to storytelling which engage younger audiences. The reality is that there is a specific time and a place for every kind of storytelling, but it has to facilitate the 'mode' that the consumer is in, as we explained in the Audience trends section of this report.



# Convenience

"I don't want this to require more effort than is necessary"

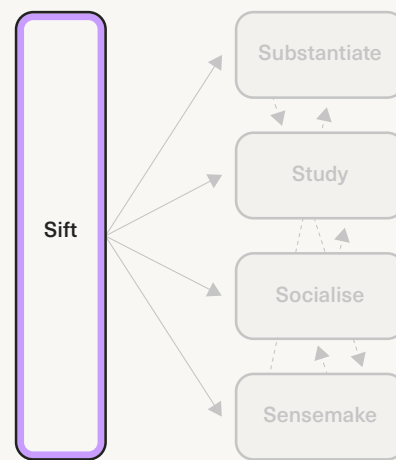
Most young consumers want their online, media and news experiences to be as convenient as possible. These consumers are spending more time than ever engaging with different forms of digital media from a multitude of sources.<sup>41</sup> As a result, many of the research participants we heard from were very mindful of how they allocate their time online.

When it comes to news, younger consumers want it to be easily available on select platforms that they prefer, customisable and personalised to them, digestible without being dumbed down and devoid of any barriers to entry. If these criteria are not adhered to, they are much more likely than previous generations to go without.

## Readily available

We have seen a trend over the last decade of young people relying primarily on social media as their primary source of news and information. The most recent edition of the Digital News Report<sup>42</sup> found that *"younger groups everywhere are showing a weaker connection with news brands' own websites and apps than previous cohorts — preferring to access news via side-door routes such as social media, search, or mobile aggregators"*. But the reason for this underlying behaviour is a little less understood.

## Key modes to consider in Convenience



During this research, multiple members of our Advisory Board raised the importance of incidental news consumption as a route to younger consumers understanding key topics in the public domain:



Advisory Board



On the whole this generation is just out of the habit of intentional, traditional news consumption. Of course, there definitely is some intentionality, as people are still choosing to watch our videos or go to news apps or news sources, but I think there's an expectation that the news comes to you."

**Jack Kelly**, Founder & Content Creator, TLDR News

<sup>41</sup>. [The global media landscape](#), GWI (June 2023)

<sup>42</sup>. [The Digital News Report 2023](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (June 2023)

### 03. Desired Storytelling



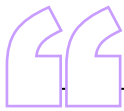
Advisory Board



People really don't want to inconvenience themselves, even for things they care about... So I think the more that you can make it convenient for people to make better choices [about news consumption], the more likely they are to make those choices."

**Jodie Jackson**, Director, News Literacy Lab

This expectation and preference was also evident amongst a number of our research participants across all geographic regions:

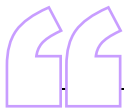


Research Participant



It's really accessible [social media]. If I want to watch [news] channels, I'd have to be in front of the TV, but as I'm going about my day, if I need to know about something, I could just open Twitter and check what's happening."

**Olaide**, 25, Female, Lagos

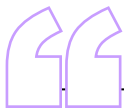


Research Participant



Whatever news makes it to Instagram is what I'm going to get..."

**Olivia**, 23, Female, Brighton



Research Participant



I like reading news from the apps I have, because the newspaper and the TV channels give so much information it is not easy to understand."

**Harsheet**, 18, Male, Delhi

A number of our participants referenced positive experiences of the news incidentally finding them via their social media feeds, echoing previous research that flagged the benefit of having news media shared in the context of their friends' updates<sup>43</sup>:



Research Participant



For information that just pops up and is actually informative, it's like you just got something on a platter of gold, I didn't have to stress about it and I have access to it now."

**Praise**, 25, Female, Lagos

One of our Advisory Board members who has seen the explosion of Twitter and TikTok in parts of West Africa believes that publishers will become quicker to experiment with using these platforms, in part through necessity:



Advisory Board



I've seen publishers being slower on these new social media platforms and you can see the disparity that emerges between the publishers that get on there faster and the ones that take longer to do so. I think that in the future we're going to see publishers adapt in terms of how quickly they're able to jump on these platforms and grow their reach early, which is the key benefit of moving first."

**Yvette Dimiri**, Director, Stears Insights

Although we heard clear evidence about the need for news content to be easily discoverable and convenient, monetising audiences from social media remains a challenge for news producers. The safe bet, for now at least, remains transitioning followers from social media platforms to an owned and operated environment in which news producers have first party data about these consumers and can monetise them accordingly (read our Calls-to-action section for more details).

43. How Young People Consume News and The Implications For Mainstream Media, Flamingo x Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (October 2019)

### 03. Desired Storytelling

In addition, there is also growing evidence that social media organisations are deprioritising news content on their platforms, both overtly — for example, Meta blocking news on feeds in Canada — and covertly — namely, adjusting algorithms to downrank news in users' feeds. This creates uncertainty around news producers continuing to rely on social media platforms.

#### Personalised content and customisable experiences

Alongside easily available information, one of the strong callouts from our research was that younger consumers want the information that they see to be relevant to them and their interests. This demand for personal relevance, which spanned geographies, is the direct result of news provider fragmentation and the next generation growing up with algorithmically-powered feeds on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and TikTok:

Our research participants largely appreciated the role of algorithms as helpful tools to filter through an endless stream of information. When asked about their ideal future news experience, several participants mentioned that they wanted a tool that curates the news for them based on their individual preferences. But other respondents, particularly in the United States, also seemed acutely aware of the drawbacks:



Research Participant



In the evening while at home, I want to be able to scroll through articles that are informative, unbiased and then give me all the details that are most pertinent to me."

**Longji**, 25, Male, Lagos



Research Participant



I'm only ever seeing the things that I want to see... then how am I expanding my world view and educating myself? That's super important too."

**Margaret**, 21, Female, Jemison



Research Participant



The algorithm is really good at hooking you. It's not good at anything else. It doesn't really provide you with interesting things. It provides you with repetitive things very often."

**Trevor**, 21, Non-binary, Chicago



Research Participant



It feels good to be able to consume what I want to consume and things that I like, but it's also freaky because that's weird. How do you know what I want to see?"

**Margaret**, 21, Female, Jemison



Research Participant



There are people who just consume the same thing over and over again. And because that's all they consume, maybe they rely so much on this bubble of consumption. It kind of limits how they see, or understand, or how sympathetic they can be to other people in life..."

**Mike**, 25, Male, Abuja



Research Participant



I like when the algorithm knows what I am interested in because then it only gives that kind of content. Otherwise there is so much content out there, it becomes difficult to find things that interest me."

**Jinal**, 23, Female, Bangalore

### 03. Desired Storytelling

While research has shown that few people get caught in filter bubbles or echo chambers and that their effects tend to be overblown,<sup>44</sup> it was interesting to hear that the next generation of news consumers wanted to both benefit from the convenience of personalisation whilst also maintaining a degree of control over their consumption. This desire for customisation took the form of following certain pages, turning on notifications, blocking specific accounts and other behaviours designed to deliver a better social media experience:

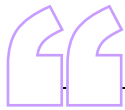


Research Participant



I'm on Twitter a lot and I have a couple of pages that I turned on post notifications for, just because I find it very hard to get that sort of niche news elsewhere."

**Longji**, 25, Male, Lagos



Research Participant



I feel a little pigeonholed, honestly, with, like, [popular social media platforms], because they know what gets me going. But sometimes I want to watch things outside of it, you know? And I think that it's honestly me trying to teach the algorithms what I want to learn. And that can be kind of hard."

**Angie**, 22, Female, Palo Alto



Research Participant



I have a super-long 'blocked' list on TikTok or YouTube. Why? If I see something recommended from a YouTuber that I am just not fond of, for one reason or another, then I would probably block them. Because especially if I know for a fact that there are other YouTubers who are in that same community who are providing or generating the same kind of content, but like better and would give a better perspective on it, then I don't need that in my feed"

**Sam**, 23, Male, San Lorenzo

These kinds of behaviour, it should be said, are still in the minority because users have limited understanding about the signals that go into content ranking algorithms, as one of our Advisory Board members explained:



Advisory Board



From our own research, we've noticed that people don't really know how to control their feeds and so they don't control it. The feeds, by definition, don't provide a lot of controls. You can like certain things, and you can ban certain things, but it's not clear what that will do to your feed: will it essentially remove the entire source of news from your feed or just the subject? Or will it downgrade that person in your algorithm? The formula for what's present in your feed is like a magic lamp: you rub it and things pop up — maybe things you like, maybe things you don't — but, whatever the case, there's no real sense that you have control."

**Jeff Yang**, Research Director, Institute for the Future

The key takeaway here is that there is a pronounced difference between young consumers who seek convenience through personalisation — the implicit changing of a user's content by media/platform owners, like algorithms — and those who seek customisation — that is, the explicit change of a user's content by their own action. There are several clear opportunities for news producers to take a more proactive role in creating more relevant news experiences, which we identify at the end of this section.

44. Echo chambers and filter bubbles don't reflect our media environment, Center for Media, Technology and Democracy (May 2023)

### Short form and information-dense products and content

Convenience also appeared in our research through young consumers' desire for information-dense experiences that allowed them to quickly identify and learn about topics that they may be interested in.

Research participants mentioned digital apps and products that support this behaviour. In addition to familiar social platforms such as Reddit, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram, a number referenced specific news apps and aggregators that are designed to cater to this specific need. These included:

- **Inshorts** (India), a popular news app that provides users with 60-word summaries of national and international news sources, available in both English and Hindi
- **Dailyhunt** (India), an app that provides “news that matters in time that matters” by aggregating local language content in 14+ regional languages
- **Opera News** (Nigeria), a personalised news aggregator that “refines the noisy daily news cycle into one powerful feed”
- **Apple News** (United States), a news aggregator app from Apple that claims to bring users “the world’s best journalism, all in one place”

The ease with which these apps made consuming news from a variety of sources possible was key to why younger consumers opted for these products over traditional news producers:



Research Participant



We don't have the time to be able to sit down and read the whole thing [...] I prefer reading shorter articles online that give the gist of what is happening... they go too in-depth with the news. I just want to know what sticks out the most.”

**Harpreet**, 23, Male, Bangalore



Research Participant



[Multinational news channel] and all those are for older people. ... They go too in-depth with it. I just want to know what sticks out the most. I don't care too much about the Republicans, the Democrats and all that.”

**Carlos**, 19, Male, Montgomery



Research Participant



I like a combination of the notifications from the news apps because it gives me an idea of the headlines or what is happening or should be happening and I like the Twitter format because it gives me an idea quickly of what the headline is about without having to read in depth.”

**Mike**, 25, Male, Abuja

As well as digital products, younger consumers' preference for convenience is also met by the creation of 'information-dense' content. This is content which communicates key information in an intentionally succinct fashion.

As Josh Constine, former editor-at-large at TechCrunch, has noted: *“If a creator truly respects their audience's attention, they cut out the noise and deliver pure signal.”*<sup>45</sup> This need for storytelling efficiency was explained in more detail by a member of our Advisory Board:



Advisory Board



We see in our videos, people in our audience really don't like it when we make less information-dense content. It doesn't always have to be short-form, but it does have to have the density and efficiency that can be achieved in that format.”

**Jack Kelly**, Founder & Content Creator, TLDR News

45. Content density: Why TikToks trounce Stories, Constine's Newsletter (August 2020)

### 03. Desired Storytelling

Few news producers cater to this specific way of behaving beyond article summaries and TL;DR boxes at the top of stories. We believe there's an opportunity to replicate these information-dense products and experiences and to facilitate younger audiences' desire to Sift and then deep dive into related and adjacent content.

#### Barriers to entry

When going deeper into a story, younger news consumers typically want a convenient experience without any friction or barriers. Our research participants pointed to two major obstacles related to news consumption — the cost of data and paywalls/registration walls. These were experienced differently across the three markets included in our research.

The cost of data was most commonly referenced in Nigeria, where mobile internet service providers have increased the cost of data plans over the last few years.<sup>46</sup> As a result, low-cost browsers such as Opera and Phoenix, as well as news notifications, have become a key source of information for younger news consumers:



Research Participant



I'll turn on my data and use my Opera Mini [low-cost browser] to check what's going on in the country."

**Faridah**, 20, Female, Lagos



Research Participant



I looked at my notifications bar and I saw that Opera News had posted about it and I went to read about it again."

**Mike**, 25, Male, Abuja



Research Participant



I felt very bad [during the End Special Anti-Robbery Squad protests]. During that time I was on my phone 24/7. Even when I didn't have data, I would borrow. I don't have power, I can't do anything, so I was just on my phone, just checking online."

**Olaide**, 25, Female, Lagos

One of our Advisory Board members provides broader context on how data costs impact source preferences in Nigeria versus other African countries:



Advisory Board



[Content preferences are driven partly by] local context and access to technology. By that I mean the cost of data, which is a big determinant of what platform and format is most prevalent in a specific country. Data costs in Nigeria, specifically metro areas where you can also leach off [company] Wi-Fi, are less important than in say Ethiopia or some of the other large population centres."

**Justin Arenstein**, Founder & CEO, Code for Africa

News producers often have to balance the need to bring people into their own proprietary apps or sites, which tend to have high data costs, versus being where the consumer can afford to be. This data barrier and its consequences are often overlooked by news producers in developing countries, creating unintended information asymmetry in society.

Paywalls and registration walls also came up in some interviews as a reason why younger news consumers didn't click on or read news content:



Research Participant



I got tired of my friends sending me [news] articles where I'd click them, and then it's, like, you need to pay \$0.25 for this article. I just got annoyed."

**Hope**, 23, Female, Chicago

46. [The cost of living crisis has come for internet data plans in Nigeria](#), Qz (October 2022)





Research Participant



I can't remember the last time I actually opened the app [Financial Times, CNN, Wall Street Journal] but the notifications are a very big part of my day, every day... maybe that's why I actually don't open it because if you want to read the articles you have to pay, but then if you just download it and keep it on your phone you get all the notifications and things for free.”

**Longji**, 25, Male, Lagos

Several of our Advisory board members also raised this as a concern, particularly for audiences that don't have disposable income, such as students, and those who are yet to see the value of news:



Advisory Board



To what extent are paywalls interfering with people's sift and study mode? To what extent is there an opportunity for news producers to lower the barriers to entry in relation to this mode of behaviour?”

**Yvette Dimiri**, Director, Stears Insights

However, in practice, comments about paywalls did not come out as strongly as we might expect. Even among our research participants from the United States, where over two-thirds of publishers operate some kind of paywall, comments about being “locked out” or excluded were not prevalent.<sup>47</sup> This suggests that younger consumers' trusted sources do not utilise pay models or that they are not making it to traditional news producers' owned and operated sites, where they are more likely to be prompted to pay or register.

Although understanding younger consumers' propensity to pay for news was beyond the scope of this project, we expect that the investment by traditional news producers in reader revenue models is reducing their focus on the next generation and the ability to cater to these behaviours. We hope that there will be additional research into this topic in the near future.

47. [Pay Models for Online News in the US and Europe: 2019 Update](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (May 2019)

## What's the Convenience gap and what opportunities does that create between now and 2030?

In the most extreme cases, news producers...	But younger consumers want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poorly repackage content onto social media platforms where younger consumers spend most of their time. This limits how much news they are exposed to — because the content is not promoted by the algorithm.</li> <li>• Fail to deliver on the highly personalised/customised experience that the next generation comes to expect when they engage with media</li> <li>• Use outdated news formats e.g. 800-word articles or five-minute broadcast segments</li> <li>• Create barriers to entry, such as paywalls or high bandwidth sites/apps, that prevent the next generation from developing an interest in the news</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant news that is surfaced on social media platforms where they spend their time and for this to add value to their daily lives</li> <li>• Personalised content and the ability to customise and control the overall news experience</li> <li>• High-density content that helps them to quickly get the 'gist' of stories and identify opportunities for content deep-dives</li> <li>• Few or limited barriers to entry for consuming content</li> </ul>



### Consider...

How might we better leverage the platforms that younger consumers use regularly to build brand awareness in such a way that leads to a direct relationship over the longer term?

### News producers have an opportunity to...

- Create content that is socially friendly and is intertwined with the social media experience. Immersive storytelling publisher Seen does this by utilising augmented reality tools, such as filters and lenses on Snap and Instagram, to tell stories about the lived experience of mental health, domestic violence, entrepreneurship and more.<sup>48</sup> Ensure that you transition these audiences to direct consumers by collecting data through personalisation features, events, rewards and other methods
- Provide next-generation consumers with relevance and serendipity, for example through e-commerce-style search functionalities or alternative product experiences like generative chatbots. The website of Italian outlet Will Media invites consumers to first 'choose a theme' and then search from a catalogue of stories produced for its social media channels.<sup>49</sup> Another example is specialist travel publication Skift, which has created a generative chat experience called Ask Skift
- Collect additional, voluntary data from audiences that can be used to increase engagement by optimising for topics they are interested in, for formats they like and for how often they like to be notified. For example, the Axios app encourages users to declare 'what matters' to them — this data is then used to curate their news feed
- Create specific forms of value exchanges for the next generation of news consumers. This could mean expanding content sampling for younger readers, providing free subscriptions for a limited period or having affluent subscribers gift a year of independent journalism, as Spanish news publisher El Diario has done<sup>50</sup>
- Create products that are data-conscious including 'lite apps', particularly when targeting regions where this could be a barrier to entry. For example, Opera Mini compresses articles and content down to as little as 10% of their original size to help Nigerian audiences prevent "bill shock"

48. How Seen's mobile journalism reaches 7 million people across platforms, Nieman Lab (May 2023)

49. With a focus on millions of young followers, Will Media is changing journalism in Italy, Reuters Institute (September 2022)

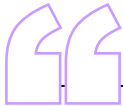
50. Give the gift of a year of independent journalism, El Diario (2023)

# Language

"I want words that I understand and a tone that is welcoming"

Another critical factor, when thinking about desired storytelling for the next generation of news consumers, is language. Language is a tool that can be used by news producers to make content resonate with audiences, turning a story that means little to them into something that captures their attention.

The reverse is true too. Language can inadvertently make news feel distant, impersonal and unapproachable. The result can be off-putting and alienating for younger audiences, in particular; one research participant who attended a top-tier US university and subscribes to the New York Times told us: *"Sometimes, if I have the courage, I'll read through a whole article in The New York Times"* (Anna, 18, Female, Palo Alto).



Advisory Board

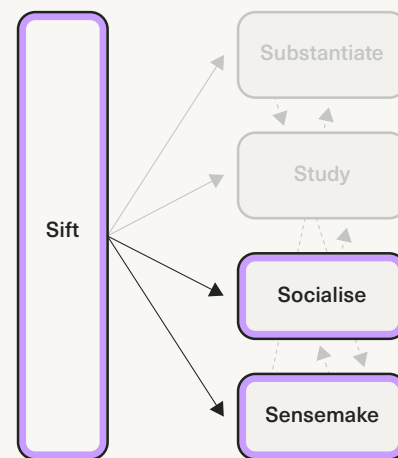


Traditional news organisations need to get rid of their dogma [about language] — if you really want to reach young people, you need to use emojis, memes and new formats of language as well as leveraging creators as distribution tools. Either get with the dialect or leave the core business."

**Ruona Meyer**, Freelance Media Trainer & Researcher

In this section, we look at four aspects of language that came up in our interviews with younger news consumers: vocabulary, tone, hopeful over negative language and participatory over broadcast language.

## Key modes to consider in Language



## Vocabulary that is easy to understand

Younger consumers want news producers to use words that they understand to allow them to process the information that they are exposed to.

However, many news sources typically use complex vocabulary as a means of showcasing their expertise and credibility and by virtue of serving an older and more highly educated audience. Traditional news producers often have a readability score that requires a user to be in college to understand the majority of their articles.<sup>51</sup>

Research has shown that there is a gap between average adult reading ages and the 'readability' of mainstream news producers. More than half of Americans between the ages of 16 and 74 (54%) read below the equivalent of a sixth-grade level (11-12 years old).<sup>52</sup> This issue is more profound in developing countries such as Nigeria and India, where literacy rates are lower, especially amongst those in certain socioeconomic groups.

<sup>51</sup>. [Why is newspaper readability important?](#), Readable (April 2019)

<sup>52</sup>. [Reading the numbers](#), APM Research Lab (March 2022)

### 03. Desired Storytelling

This gap in readability can leave younger consumers apathetic towards mainstream news, even if they are highly educated:



Research Participant



Things are written in a really complicated way where I feel like I need to be more educated or literate... I have a degree [from Northwestern University], and I am still like, 'I don't know that I'm smart enough to be intaking this information.'

**Hope**, 23, Female, Chicago



Research Participant



It's so difficult to understand, and there is so much information that I get very irritated. Then I don't even feel like learning more about what is being talked about."

**Chahat**, 23, Female, Delhi

As such, the complex vocabulary often associated with traditional news producers can be a barrier for younger news consumers to engage with their content.

#### Informal and humorous tone

Adopting a tone that resonates with younger news consumers and their community is crucial for the next generation. Rather than formal, objective or institutional tones, our research participants indicated a preference for more casual, conversational and often humorous tones that are more commonly associated with independent and alternative news producers<sup>53</sup> and social media:



Research Participant



It's interesting because [IFLScience] write their articles in a way that is funny — so I learn about things that don't really concern me... but they write articles in a way that I enjoy."

**Olisa**, 25, Male, Abuja



Research Participant



News is easier to digest if it's in a funnier format. It's easier to process and keep up with."

**Hope**, 23, Female, Chicago



Research Participant



I don't like social media when it's serious. I just like when people make really funny stuff and post it."

**Gavin**, 21, Male, Birmingham

Independent creators and social media personalities — whom younger news consumer have a strong affinity for — also employ more relaxed and personal tones that appealed to our research participants:



Research Participant



[Popular influencer] does a lot of research before meeting people [and interviewing them]. He asks questions so calmly, and he doesn't shout. I like that."

**Harpreet**, 23, Male, Bangalore



Research Participant



[Popular podcaster] is funny. He'll keep you updated on what's going on in life and motivate you."

**Carlos**, 19, Male, Montgomery

This approach provides younger news consumers with a sense of intimacy and authenticity that mainstream organisations struggle to replicate and which we see play out alongside other gaps in language.


53. The Kaleidoscope: Young People's Relationships with News, Craft and Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (September 2022)

### Hopeful over negative

Younger news consumers want the impression that, irrespective of the topic, there is a reason for hope, and scope to find common ground on polarised topics. Our research across all three geographies showed that a consistently negative or adversarial tone can lead to younger consumers switching off, undermining their relationships with individual sources or entire categories of news:

“  
Research Participant


---

 I hate the way they show news on TV. Everyone just keeps screaming at each other, and no one makes any sense. They bring in random people to discuss trending topics. If they are bringing in people, they should bring in experts.”

**Sneha**, 24, Female, Bangalore

“  
Research Participant


---

 There's something I believe in called the law of repetition and the law of close proximity... That is again why I don't listen to [multinational news channel] because there is always something wrong somewhere in the world on these channels and somehow it tends to seep into your life.”

**Faith**, 24, Female, Lagos

“  
Research Participant

---

 I don't like following too many news pages on my [popular social media platform]. I find it very depressing. They just keep giving us bad news, but there is never any solution. Why should I only keep reading about terrible things happening around me?”


**Jinal**, 23, Female, Bangalore

### Participatory over broadcast

There is some indication that younger news consumers are drawn to content with a participatory tone and to news producers and platforms that invite them into a conversation. This can empower them to engage with complex issues and events:

“  
Research Participant

---

 I live in this world. I want to have a say in how things are done in it. In order to do that, I feel like I should be informed.”

**Lucas**, 21, Male, Palo Alto

“  
Research Participant

---


 I like investing, but because I have just started, I like to get as much information as I can — I have joined several Telegram channels to discuss financial news with peers.”

**Vibhav**, 24, Male, Delhi

We heard from several research participants that they used the comments on a post or the reactions to a story to ground their own thinking on a topic:

“  
Research Participant

---

 It really gives me a different perspective to see how other people look at things. Sometimes I'll watch a video and take it the wrong way and then I'll look at the comments and be like, 'Oh, that's what they meant. Sometimes the comments do help explain the video'.”

**Makenzie**, 19, Female, Birmingham

### 03. Desired Storytelling



Research Participant



I heard Corpers [graduates of the National Youth Service Corps] say, 'I don't think [the Special Anti-Robbery Squad] is bad, SARS is good'. And then, not from personal experience but from things that I read on Twitter and the things that I believed, I was actually very upset to hear them say this, so I thought it's better to just talk and convince other people that we need to be in support of the SARS protests."

**Olisa**, 25, Male, Abuja

This suggests there is scope for news producers to further advance the way they speak to their consumers and to adopt a tone that doesn't feel didactic or overly prescriptive. A member of our Advisory Board members reiterated this need:



Advisory Board



Content fundamentally is moving to new formats and this monologue-to-dialogue point is really becoming a very strong reality for all the media houses now. So, we are training our journalists to think that way for 2030, where dialogue comes first. We need to learn from our readers, we need to really talk to them, and it cannot be a one-way process."

**Pradeep Gairola**, VP & Digital Business Head, The Hindu Group

### What's the Language gap and what opportunities does that create between now and 2030?

In the most extreme cases, news producers...	But younger consumers want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Default to using complex vocabulary and writing styles</li> <li>• Adopt a hopeless tone that has consequences for the mental health of the audiences</li> <li>• Intentionally adopt a serious tone to assert a sense of authority and credibility</li> <li>• Tend to adopt a more didactic style, which gives the impression of speaking <i>at</i> younger consumers rather than <i>to</i> them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocabulary and delivery mechanisms that they can understand without information being 'dumbed down'</li> <li>• Stories that provide hope, solutions and opportunities to establish common ground</li> <li>• A multiplicity of tones, including informal tones that inject humour into reporting</li> <li>• To be able to interact with the news, through participation in forums and conversation about topics</li> </ul>

**Consider...**

How might we develop our use of language and tone in a way that is more relatable to the next generation of news consumers, whilst still satisfying existing audiences and maintaining journalistic standards?



Elijah, Research Participant, USA

**News producers have an opportunity to...**

- Use simple vocabulary and sentence structure to cater to reading ability and improve accessibility. This could include term definitions, explainers and Q&A formats. Our Advisory Board pointed to the video explainers shared by the [BBC's Ros Atkins](#) as a useful example
- Onboard the next generation into the news by spotlighting solutions to build hope amongst the next generation. Examples of this could look like [Future Crunch](#) (now named Fix The News), a “good news” independent newsletter with 50,000 subscribers, or [Positive News](#), a magazine that reports “socially relevant and uplifting stories of progress”. Alternatively, this can be incorporated by existing news producers either within their reporting (i.e. the body of an article or report) or via new mini-brands, such as The Washington Post's [The Optimist newsletter](#)
- Lean into the more casual, conversational, entertaining and opinionated approaches from branded accounts, in the way that video content publisher [Brut](#) has done. This opportunity needs to be realised in an authentic manner that aligns with the news producer and their brand
- Encourage more journalists to engage with readers via new distribution channels, including social media, podcasts and newsletters, to speak more authentically to audiences. This might include using tactics like ‘stitching’ on TikTok or ‘remixing’ on Instagram, which allow users to respond to one another by integrating someone else’s video into their own, as Gen Z news source [UnderTheDeskNews](#) does proficiently on TikTok
- Experiment with platforms that enable private, yet social, conversations via WhatsApp and Telegram. Spanish hyperlocal outlet [Pamplonews](#) has encountered success with its easy-going, engaging and approachable style on WhatsApp.<sup>55</sup> Our Advisory Board also showcased the example of solo journalist Martina Felix and how she has created Cafecito, a daily WhatsApp bilingual news hangout, where she can openly and directly interact with the Spanish community in Arizona<sup>56</sup>

55. [Hyper-local news, via WhatsApp... The success of Pamplonews in Spain](#), The Audiencers (August 2023)

56. [Cafecito](#), Listening Post Collective (July 2023)

# Format

"I want this in a form that works for me and my situation"

A key component of younger consumers' Ideal News Experience is the format or form factor. By this, we mean the medium, length and style of the content in question.

Historically, news producers have looked to singular and uniform formats to attract younger audiences, such as the industry-wide 'pivot to video' in the 2010s.<sup>57</sup> However, our research found that format preferences were dependent on several factors, not least the mode that consumers were in. For example, those in the Sift mode may be more likely to look for short form videos or TLDRs, while consumers in the Study mode are more likely to consume long-form podcasts.

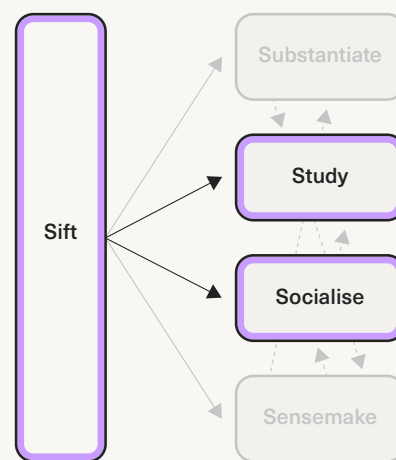
Form alone will not satisfy the next generation of news consumers because choosing the appropriate format — such as a 90-second explainer or a lengthy data visualisation piece — is dependent on broader contextual factors highlighted earlier in this report.

While we have been conscious not to over-generalise the format preferences of the next generation consumer, there were several trends we wanted to draw attention to.

## Video as part of a multimedia offering

Younger consumers are placing greater reliance on video as a storytelling format. Several of the research participants mentioned video-native creators as their primary sources of news and information. This corroborates findings from the 2023 Digital News Report, which makes clear that younger generations have a growing preference for video/audio/imagery and multimedia formats, despite text being the main means of consumption<sup>58</sup>:

### Key modes to consider in Format



Research Participant



News needs to become more interesting, otherwise why would we want to read or watch [on the TV] so much... I like when I watch videos [on YouTube] where they talk about news, though. That interests me."

Jinal, 23, Female, Bangalore



Research Participant



In the evening, I like to take on 'chill' content. I don't want to read about war or violence. Maybe just come home at the end of work and watch a YouTube video."

Olisa, 25, Male, Abuja

<sup>57</sup>. Facebook's pivot to video didn't just burn publishers. It didn't even work for Facebook, Nieman Lab (September 2021)

<sup>58</sup>. The Digital News Report 2023, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (June 2023)



### 03. Desired Storytelling

However, younger news consumers do not merely see 'video' as one, singular format; rather, they want it to be intertwined with text (like quotes, reactions, comments), imagery (pictures, data graphics) and/or audio (quotes, samples, music) to create a dynamic storytelling and media experience.

Our Advisory Board members saw that the blending of formats is a trend that will likely remain in 2030, especially when combined with individuals who have affinity and credibility, as we discussed in the Trusted Source section:



Advisory Board



2030 is not that far away, so mobile will continue to be the dominant [device]. Yet, people don't have time to read a 1,200 word-long investigative report. It won't just be text, but video, audio, bite-sized news, and all other formats. User-generated content will also be very important and be more embedded into all news."

**Bayo Olupohunda**, Editor-in-chief, Opera

However, it is worth noting that several participants from the United States did not feel good about watching hours of video at a time:



Research Participant



If I'm really bored, I'll go to [popular video platform] which is kind of like a worse version of.... [popular social media platform]... which is a worse version of [popular social media platform]. It's just like the most embarrassing version of today."

**Anna**, 18, Female, Palo Alto



Research Participant



Short-form video content is super popular nowadays because it's really addictive. Any of that content for the most part is garbage."

**Lucas**, 21, Male, Palo Alto

The physical and mental health risks of doomscrolling<sup>59</sup> and the concept of 'regretted time' are macro trends that need to be closely monitored by all media companies. Not all time spent on digital platforms is enjoyable, productive or worthwhile and news is no different. As one of our Advisory Board members noted, there is a risk that the next generation of consumers steps away from consuming news in order to take back control of their time and well-being:



Advisory Board



In the Elon Musk Interview on the BBC, one thing that wasn't picked up on is Musk saying that social media is often 'regretted hours'. You go on social media, you come off it, and you regret it. That is not a good emotion and is why people are turning away from a constant diet of stuff that sparks negative or non-useful emotions or reactions, and leaves you regretting the time you've spent on it — the time toilet."

**Kamal Ahmed**, Editor-in-chief & Co-founder, The News Movement

<sup>59</sup>. Doomscrolling linked to poor physical and mental health, study finds, The Guardian (September 2022)

### 03. Desired Storytelling

Another video-centred format — virtual reality and the metaverse — was discussed by our Advisory Board. The consensus was that it would not be commonplace by 2030 given significant technological hurdles and questions over mainstream adoption:



Advisory Board



From a news implication point of view, I don't think that by 2030 every news producer is going to have to grapple with providing a thick Metaverse-like news product... that definitely won't be the priority. But then on the services and software side, I think there are changes that everyone will have to grapple with, like the rise of interactivity and immersive experiences delivered with our existing devices and the rise of live, ephemeral social spaces that aren't always necessarily public."

**Joseph Teasdale**, Head of Tech, Enders Analysis

Our Advisory Board agreed that in a news context, there remains space for more immersive content experiences that are interactive and more akin to gaming formats; however, this was not mentioned by any of our research participants.

### Socially friendly formats

With the majority of news content being consumed through platforms, younger audiences have adopted preferences for socially friendly formats including the aforementioned short-form video but also threads, carousel posts, and other forms of user-generated content. Among them, 'memes' was a format that particularly resonated with the next generation of news consumers:



Research Participant



I follow around 10 news-meme accounts on Instagram. That way if only one account is posting something then I know there is a possibility of it being fake. But if they are all posting about it, then I know for sure it is true."

**Harpreet**, 23, Male, Bangalore



Research Participant



Someone sent it [a meme] to the group chat. I went on Twitter to do some quick research... and [found] there's even a thread on Instagram, so I went there."

**Hugh**, 24, Male, Abuja



Research Participant



I guess usually news that breaks out... gets posted and then, like, people make memes and stuff like that [about the] news."

**Lucas**, 21, Male, Palo Alto

### 03. Desired Storytelling

While traditional news producers have started to introduce some of these new formats and some, like the LA Times, have created dedicated teams to do so, our Advisory Board members acknowledged that newsrooms remain sceptical and concerned that this could devalue their brand's credibility:



Advisory Board



Publishers should have a strategy around 'memeification' which is ready in anticipation of the audience. It would have a huge impact on the brand reach to be able to be at the centre of the conversation."

**Jocelyne Muhutu-Remy**, Managing Director, Sub-Saharan Africa Spotify



Advisory Board



Another thing about pivoting to 2030 is that we news producers need to learn the formats from other parts of the greater creator world. My reaction when we made our first 'rapid explainer' was, 'What is this? I can't keep up. It's ridiculous. That's not journalism.' And my kids said, 'But the point, dad, of TikTok is that it's on a loop. So if you want to watch it again, you watch it again.'"

**Kamal Ahmed**, Editor-in-chief & Co-founder, The News Movement

### What's the Format gap and what opportunities does that create between now and 2030?

In the most extreme cases, news producers...	But younger consumers want...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fail to acknowledge that there is value in a diverse portfolio of formats that match an individual's preferences or situation (time of day)</li> <li>Use a 'default' storytelling structure that doesn't match emerging formats that are popular with the next generation</li> <li>Fail to adopt an experiment-led approach to validate audience demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formats that reflect their preferences or situation, as opposed to whatever is chosen by the news producer</li> <li>Formats that are familiar and trending, such as short-form vertical video or memes</li> </ul>

60. Meet the editor building a "meme team" at the Los Angeles Times, Nieman Lab (October 2021)



#### Consider...

How might we mimic the formats and user experiences on apps and social media platforms used by younger consumers in order to appeal to them and increase their engagement with the news?


#### News producers have an opportunity to...

- Consider the investments they're making across formats and storytelling in the context of their consumers' situation during the day. For example, news producers can ask themselves: do we have formats that work for when our audience is in transit, waiting in line or unwinding at home? For example, the New York Times, when designing their extremely popular The Daily podcast identified that audiences were looking for content that they could consume on their way to work or while running errands — without having to look at a device
- Leverage generative AI technology to 'hand over' control of formats to the next generation, allowing them to cater to their respective format preferences and mode of consumption. The BBC, in collaboration with the Institute of Engineering and Technology, recently shared a demo of a tool that allows the consumer to toggle the length, features, and content within a video according to their preferences or needs<sup>61</sup>
- Mimic the formats and user experience patterns of popular social media platforms on their own websites and apps to better cater to the preferences of the next generation. Technology site [The Verge](#), which counts a third of its audience as between 25 and 34 years old, launched a new homepage featuring “a new Twitter-like feature that will offer readers a comprehensive, curated rundown of the most important tech stories of the day.”<sup>62</sup> News producers should experiment to validate the demand for new formats before channelling meaningful investment



61. Accelerator Project — [Responsive Narrative Factory](#) International Broadcasting Convention (2023)

62. [The Verge Launches an Ambitious New Site](#), The Verge (September 2022)

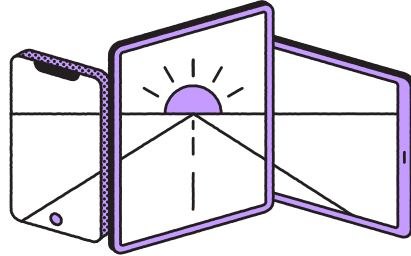


# CALLS- -TO-ACTION

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This section summarises six overarching opportunities for news producers moving into 2030.

# ADDRESSING THE GAPS



To start closing the gap between what consumers want from their news experience and what is available to them, news producers need to take action now. And, while the Ideal News Experience draws on the testimonies of younger news consumers, we expect these preferences to be representative of a much wider group of consumers in the future. Even if young news consumers' behaviours and preferences do change with time (to more closely reflect prior generations), news producers can't afford to wait to build relationships with them. They need to make the effort to meet them where they are now.

In this section, we detail six overarching opportunities for news producers moving into 2030. These opportunities are based on what we determine as the most important gaps within the Ideal News Experience section (based on what we heard throughout the course of our research). Within each opportunity, we provide practical considerations and examples of how the gaps could be closed. We encourage all news producers to use these as points of inspiration to stimulate discussion about how these gaps can be addressed within and beyond their organisations.

## 01.

**Building affinity with audiences**

## 02.

**Enhancing personalisation & customised experiences**

## 03.

**Developing socially native content to build direct relationships**

## 04.

**Modernising language**

## 05.

**Catering to different modes of consumption**

## 06.

**Giving hope & empowering action**

# 01. Building affinity with audiences



Research Participant



I don't trust traditional news sources, I have people for that."

Trevor, 21, Non-binary, Chicago

## Why is this important?

Given that the next generations of consumers seek out brands and creators that they feel a connection to, traditional news producers need to find ways to build greater affinity with those audiences. Among our Advisory Board members, there was consensus that independent creators and influencers had already gained a prominent role in today's information ecosystem.

In Nigeria, for example, bloggers and creators are filling the space typically occupied by mainstream news organisations, with publishers struggling to "stand out and maintain their positions as credible news providers in the country."<sup>63</sup> This trend is likely to be exacerbated by mainstream media's widespread adoption of paywalls as well as technological developments like generative AI that will make it easier for smaller outlets to scale production and reach, particularly when it comes to video and audio:



Advisory Board



The only thing that holds creators back [from growing their audience] is how often they can be in front of the camera or microphone. The idea that they can write scripts which are generated into video content or any other format that they want [by using AI] is pretty exciting [for them]."

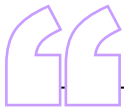
Trei Brundrett Non-Exec Board Member, The Guardian

63. Information disorder and the future of journalism in Nigeria, The Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (2021)

## How could news producers realise this opportunity?

### *Partner with independent content creators, journalists and brands*

One path is for news producers to partner with independent creators to develop affinity with audiences. A number of our Advisory Board members pointed to partnerships between legacy news and creators as a major opportunity for traditional news organisations:



Advisory Board



Here's a very compelling future for newsrooms, creators and independent writers — what if newsrooms could start partnering with creators? Maybe creators won't necessarily work within a newsroom's editorial guidelines... But what if publishing brands could take a music label approach to aggregating these independent writers and you could reasonably reconcile the risks? ... The opportunity here is that creators only have a certain scale and newsrooms only have a certain audience."

**Lucky Gunasekara** Co-Founder & CEO, Miso AI



Advisory Board



[OTT platforms in India] are enabling thousands of creators to upload content through self-serve platforms and API integration tie-ups with influencer platforms that allow their creators to start putting out content (with legal and ethical balances in place)."

**Chanpreet Arora**, Board Member, Internews Europe

While this approach can expose news producers to additional risks — as was the case with The Guardian<sup>64</sup> — there are a number of successful examples. The business brand Morning Brew has established a Creator Program that allows social media personalities to work for the company whilst remaining independent creators in their own right.<sup>65</sup> Another example is Puck, a new media brand that "treats reporters like social media influencers".<sup>66</sup>

By 2030, the relationship between news producers and their editorial talent may look very different to today and be more like a collective of experts than a traditional workforce. Kamal Ahmed, an Advisory Board member with significant experience working with creators, noted that these partnerships need to be approached very delicately and there needs to be industry-accepted journalistic standards for creators:



Advisory Board



We have a Head of Creator Relations here [at The News Movement] and we have to tread carefully about what that looks like, because as a journalist it is important we don't allow people to breed misinformation. Having creators doesn't negate the need for journalistic rigour. It means we need to be engaged with that whole realm of material and find relevant creators who can help spread great journalism."

**Kamal Ahmed** Editor-in-chief & Co-founder, The News Movement

64. Gary Lineker: it was factually accurate to call refugee policy cruel, The Guardian (April 2023)

65. Morning Brew building creator program, Axios (August 2022)

66. A New Media Startup Treats Reporters Like Social Media Influencers, Bloomberg (September 2021)



## 01. Building affinity with audiences

### *Empower younger and more diverse talent to be their authentic selves*

News producers have the opportunity to hire younger and more diverse journalists who are permitted to express themselves in an authentic way, particularly on social media.

Naturally, this must be balanced with the need to maintain journalistic standards. However, the benefits are sizeable, as Dory Carr-Harris, the former Executive Editor of Vice.com explains: *“We always made a point to hire young, diverse staff from a non-traditional pipeline to tap into those authentic voices. That is key in terms of targeting that audience. Have your young people pitch the stories surrounding a specific lens you want to produce through. But doing so is a really intentional decision which requires an infrastructure (training, policies and guidelines) because it provides institutional challenges. You get energy, enthusiasm, drive, and a knowledge base that is truly authentic and organic.”*<sup>67</sup>

### *Elevate existing individual journalists within the organisation*

News producers can also elevate individual journalists within the organisation to create personal brands and spaces for them to speak directly to audiences. In practice, this could include:

- New content verticals or series fronted by popular staff
- Products, such as a podcasts or newsletters, built around specialist journalists
- Encouraging employees to build social media audiences that speak to their expertise



Our Advisory Board have noted examples of this being done successfully, citing Sophia Smith Galer (ex-BBC and Vice News) and Taylor Lorenz (The Washington Post). These journalists have attracted large followings through their use of TikTok and Twitter respectively, allowing their authentic personalities to shine through their work.

There are some risks to this: journalists — particularly women and those from underrepresented communities — can face harassment and hate when putting themselves forward online. This can affect their day-to-day work and even spill into violence in the real world.<sup>68</sup> As such, news producers need to train and support individuals accordingly to protect their wellbeing and safety.

<sup>67</sup>. [Attracting Young\(er\) Audiences: A guide for small\(ish\) Legacy Organisations](#), Ethar El-Katatney (August 2022)

<sup>68</sup>. [The Chilling: A global study of online violence against women journalists](#), ICFJ (November 2022)

# 02. Enhancing personalisation & customised experiences



Research Participant



My ideal delivery form is something I can easily customise — that gives me exactly what I want and tells me the things that are most important.”

**Longji**, 25, Male, Lagos



Advisory Board



I think there is, uniquely for young audiences, a desire for very personalised spaces. One finding [from the 2023 Reuters Institute Digital News Report] that continues to arise is, unsurprisingly, that what really draws people to TikTok for news is its algorithm. Even if the users don't understand it, there is very clearly a desire to be a part of an environment that knows them so well and that will automatically predict what they like.”

**Kirsten Eddy**, Senior Researcher, Pew Research Center

## Why is this important?

The next generation of news consumers will seek out news experiences that cater to their content and storytelling preferences, made possible through personalisation. As one of our Advisory Board illustrated:



Advisory Board



If you go to Netflix, you can filter down to 'celebrating strong black leads'. If you go to a shopping site you can filter down to the colour, size, etc. Why can't we filter this way for news? We should be able to filter based on affinity, worldview, and perspective.”

**Ruona Meyer** Freelance Media Trainer & Researcher

However, whilst personalisation can create value for the next generation of news consumers, there are concerns around hyper-personalisation and data privacy. Therefore, news producers need to leverage this new technology and balance the benefits with the risks.

This will be even more important as the number of news sources increases and generative AI enables multi-modal content to be produced, at scale, for relatively little cost. This could drastically change consumers' product expectations and perception of quality.

## How could news producers realise this opportunity?

### Leverage generative AI technology to 'hand over' control of formats to the next generation of audiences

Agnes Stenbom, Head of IN/LAB at Schibsted, has said that generative AI can “*be used to give users more control over how they prefer to interact with news content... For example, long-form text could be automatically converted into summarised bullet points or audio, giving users the choice of how they want to consume journalism.*”<sup>69</sup> Whilst concrete use cases of such technology are currently limited, some news producers are actively experimenting. The BBC has been working on a flexible media tool that adapts content and formats to an individual’s personal preferences.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Danish publisher [Zetland](#) is currently using generative AI for transcription services but plans to use a wider range of tools that will support the creation of such customised experiences.<sup>71</sup>

We also expect an increase in chatbot-like interfaces in which the audience can ask questions and receive personalised answers. For many, this could represent a significant change in the way consumers interact with news producers' content. This opportunity was more deeply examined by a number of our Advisory Board members:



Advisory Board



Anyone with a proprietary data set [like news organisations] can fine-tune a model, which would likely be open source, that could be more differentiated than ChatGPT. That could, I think, motivate lots of separate vertical news products, even if they may in the future be accessed through some form of common interface.”

Joseph Teasdale, Head of Tech, Enders Analysis

There are several examples already in production including Bloomberg GPT,<sup>72</sup> [Ask Skift](#),<sup>73</sup> and [Smart Answers](#).<sup>74</sup> There have also been a number of examples of local news organisations experimenting with such products, such as [ARLnow](#)<sup>75</sup> and [Queen City Nerve](#).<sup>76</sup>

The key to seizing these opportunities, according to David Caswell, Founder, StoryFlow Ltd, will be to build technical foundations that can support such personalisation. In practice, that means investing in “*infrastructure that can store, select and serve different variants of a story to different users or different user segments in different situations*”.<sup>77</sup> This is no small challenge, even for large media businesses that have been thinking about offering users direct control over format and experience for some time.

69. [Generative AI set to make humanity in journalism 'a premium feature'](#), Wan-Ifra (August 2023)

70. [Flexible Media](#), BBC (March 2023)

71. [How AI and audio tools, and a risk-taking culture, are helping to grow young members at Zetland](#), Wan-Ifra (May 2023)

72. [Introducing BloombergGPT, Bloomberg's 50-billion parameter large language model, purpose-built from scratch for finance](#), Bloomberg (March 2023)

73. [Introducing Ask Skift, the AI Chatbot to Answer All Your Travel Industry Queries\\*](#), Skift (May 2023)

74. [Smart Answers: GenAI tool makes it quicker and easier to find the info you need on Macworld](#), Macworld (August 2023)

75. [Can AI help local newsrooms streamline their newsletters? ARLnow tests the waters](#), Nieman Lab (May 2023)

76. [Building a chatbot trained on your newsroom's content](#), Reynolds Journalism Institute (September 2023)

77. [AI and News: What's next?](#), David Caswell (September 2023)

*Create more sophisticated personalisation algorithms that are better suited to the next generation's needs and expectations*

While much of the news industry's focus has, naturally, been on the algorithms used by technology companies to rank and distribute stories, we see opportunities for producers to refine and improve their own methods of recommending content. Our Advisory Board echoed this view and laid out three different ways this could be realised:

**01 Collecting and leveraging additional user data to fine-tune existing algorithms**

In practice, this could mean asking for more data — such as job title, interests, and needs — when readers sign up, and using that information to power content personalisation preferences, such as article recommendations and notification preferences. For example, the Axios app encourages users to declare 'what matters' to them — this data is then used to curate their news feed.

**02 Adapting existing algorithms to optimise for novelty and serendipity**

This might involve news producers using article vectorisation — the process of using an algorithm to turn a text input into a series of numbers to identify clusters of articles that increase readers' engagement. For example, The Financial Times uses 'breadth of reading' as an input into a recommendation model, which then suggests relevant content from a nearby cluster based on what users typically read.<sup>78</sup>

**03 Allowing audiences to customise their own personalisation algorithms**

In the context of news, this could mean that news producers allow the next generation of news consumers to create their own custom feeds. These feeds might serve different purposes; for example, a 'stay informed' short-reads feed about topics that someone is interested in might be useful when in the Sift mode, whereas a long-form video feed may be best when consumers want deep dives as part of the Study mode.

Bluesky, the decentralised social media protocol, has rolled out a custom feature that lets consumers pick from one of dozens of different feeds that are maintained by other users.<sup>79</sup> One of our Advisory Board spoke about the potential for this:



Advisory Board



What I think is really interesting is that next-generation platforms already are tinkering with things like customised algorithms. Bluesky, for instance, is the sort of new hotness in terms of post-Twitter, social sharing and social news. They say they're going to be pivoting to a model where you can essentially select an algorithm that works for you and the algorithm will have a certain degree of transparency."

Jeff Yang, Research Director, Institute for the Future

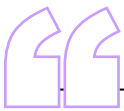


Chastity, Research Participant, Nigeria

78. Article Vectorisation Reloaded, Medium (June 2023)

79. Bluesky rolls out feeds with custom algorithms, The Verge (May 2023)

# 03. Developing socially friendly content to build direct relationships



Research Participant



Whatever news makes it to Instagram is what I'm going to get..."

Olivia, 23, Female, Birmingham

However, despite clear evidence that socially friendly content could be critical to future news consumption, there are signs that social media platforms could begin to deprioritise some categories of news on their platforms because of:

- The reputational danger and cost of moderating misinformation and disinformation has led to some claiming that news content is substitutable for other content. Meta said: *"news publisher content plays an economically small and diminishing role on the Facebook platform, with news links accounting for less than three per cent of what users see in their Facebook newsfeeds."*<sup>82</sup>
- Government regulation that has aimed to balance the commercial interests of news producers and online platforms, including Australia's News Media Bargaining Code, Canada's C-18 Online News Act and the European Union's Digital Markets Act, is leading platforms to reconsider the visibility of news and, in some cases, block it completely.<sup>83</sup>

## Why is this important?

With direct news access on the decline, news producers have the opportunity to develop a meaningful presence on social media platforms used by the next generation of news consumers. As noted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's 2023 Digital News Report: *"In the UK 41% of 18-24s say social media is now their main source of news (43% across markets), up from 18% in 2015. These changes are not confined to these so-called 'social natives,' with some young millennials showing increased dependence on platforms and social media... At the same time, this group has become significantly less likely to use a news website or app."*<sup>80</sup>

Academic research has also found that, in three European countries studied, just 3.4% of total online browsing was direct to news websites across all ages.<sup>81</sup> This lack of reliance on owned and operated news sites and apps is expected to be even more profound among the next generation.

Whilst there is a significant opportunity for news producers to engage the next generation of consumers with socially friendly content, it should avoid over-reliance on any one platform and eventually lead to a direct relationship with consumers to mitigate any risks.

<sup>80</sup>. [The Digital News Report 2023](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (June 2023)

<sup>81</sup>. [Non-News Websites Expose People to More Political Content Than News Websites](#), Wojcieszak et al (August 2023)

<sup>82</sup>. [Facebook report disparages news: 'Small and diminishing role' for publisher content](#), Press Gazette (April 2023)

<sup>83</sup>. [Australia's News Media Bargaining Code: A New Institutional Perspective](#), American Affairs

## How could news producers realise this opportunity?

### *Mimic the formats and user experience present on popular social media platforms*

Social media has undoubtedly changed users' preferences for certain formats and storytelling experiences. As American academic and video game designer Ian Bogost notes: *"Media formats — the actual things people create, use, and share — have been adapting to the smartphone as a platform for both authoring and display... But they've been remarkably slow."*<sup>84</sup> News producers have an opportunity to copy or replicate these formats in a news context to build deeper connections with their audience.

A clear example of this is the Stories format, which was introduced by Snap (formerly Snapchat) in 2014 before being introduced by Instagram in 2016 and a number of other platforms. Social media companies have *"a long track record of adopting popular features and integrating them into their own apps to stay competitive."*<sup>85</sup>

As it became clear that Stories was a popular format, it was co-opted by news producers to drive engagement; for example, BBC News launched a vertical video feature in its mobile app to take advantage of the rise in popularity of vertical video.<sup>86</sup> The Financial Times also used the familiar Stories UX pattern in its myFT feature to allow users to keep up-to-date with topics and journalists.

Such mimicry happens elsewhere on occasion, but it is rare. As mentioned earlier in this report, technology site [The Verge](#), which counts a third of its audience as between 25 and 34 years old, launched a new homepage featuring "a new Twitter-like feature that will offer readers a comprehensive, curated rundown of the most important tech stories of the day".<sup>87</sup> Whilst this specific tactic may not work for all news producers, there is merit in considering formats that have worked elsewhere.

### *Create compelling content that is intertwined with the social media experience*

News organisations have the scope to reallocate resources towards social-first content that is commissioned and created for social media, as opposed to being developed off the back of other formats.

This represents a shift from thinking about social media as a distribution mechanism and instead as a place to develop brand affinity, direct relationships and loyalty. As Sarah Marshall, Global Executive Director of Distribution and Channel Strategy at Condé Nast noted at the end of 2022: *"We must have a holistic audience strategy and understand how to promote our brands and stories across those touchpoints."*<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup>. [Why 'Stories' Took Over Your Smartphone](#), The Atlantic (May 2018)

<sup>85</sup>. [Social media's copycat conundrum](#), Axios (July 2023)

<sup>86</sup>. [Vertical video on the BBC News app](#), BBC News (July 2017)

<sup>87</sup>. [The Verge Launches an Ambitious New Site](#), The Verge (September 2022)

<sup>88</sup>. [A web channel strategy won't be enough](#), Nieman Lab (December 2022)

### 03. Developing socially native content to build direct relationships

Our Advisory Board also called for news producers to invest time and effort into understanding and utilising specific aspects of each platform. For example, the importance of thumbnails on YouTube:



Advisory Board



We place a great deal of emphasis on selecting topics that are interesting and also investing time in ensuring a strong thumbnail/branding for the video to make it approachable despite being a deep-dive.”

Jack Kelly, Founder & Content Creator, TLDR News

To realise this opportunity, news producers must adhere to the norms of the respective platform — the format, tone and vocabulary used in telling the news. Immersive storytelling publisher Seen does this by utilising augmented reality tools, such as filters and lenses on Snap and Instagram, to tell stories about young people’s lived experiences of entrepreneurship, mental health, and even domestic violence.

News producers must focus their resources on the platforms and devices that work for them. Newsroom strategist Ethar El-Katatney argues: *“unless you have a sizeable budget and can hire the right team, if you try to produce videos, podcasts, newsletters, and TikTok content all at once, you will fail.”*<sup>89</sup> Experimentation can be a means for news producers to answer this question without overinvestment.

#### Create pathways that transition young audiences from social media to direct channels

News producers can also focus their attention on transitioning their unknown, social audiences to becoming known, direct consumers. Ben Werdmuller, Chief Technology Officer at The 19th, has gone as far as to say that *“owning [consumer] relationships will no longer be a choice: it will be a matter of survival”*.<sup>90</sup>

In practice, there are several ways that news producers can funnel users from social media to collect data on next-generation audiences:



#### Events

Encourage audiences to share data in exchange for virtual or in-person events. The Nudge, a London-based entertainment publisher, shares details of exclusive events or discounts for restaurants via its social channels and free newsletter.



#### Lite apps

Create ‘lite’ versions of your app that are available in exchange for basic personal information and designed to specifically target non-core audience segments. An example is Espresso from magazine publisher The Economist.



#### Rewards

Encourage audiences to exchange data for rewards such as discounted subscriptions, a period of free access or other incentives, such as food or retailer vouchers. Research has highlighted that financial rewards (approximately £12 or \$15) are most effective for facilitating data exchange.<sup>91</sup>



#### Advanced features

Incentivise audiences to provide data in exchange for access to personalisation tools and features, such as the ability to follow topics and authors. A 2019 survey found that 54% of participants expressed a willingness to share personal information if it would be used to create personalised experiences; that proportion jumped to 70% and 72% when focused on millennials and Gen Zers, respectively.<sup>92</sup>

89. Attracting Young(er) Audiences: A guide for small(ish) Legacy Organisations, Ethar El-Katatney (August 2022)

90. The internet is up for grabs again, Nieman Lab (December 2022)

91. New Research Highlights Gen-Z Consumer Attitudes on Data Privacy, BRC (2022)

92. Addressing the Gaps in Customer Experience, Redpoint (2019)

# 04. Modernising language



Research Participant



I subscribe to the New York Times... and I am still like, 'I don't know that I'm smart enough' to be intaking this information [despite having a college degree]."

Hope, 23, Female, Chicago

respect to communication.<sup>94</sup> Dr Laura Bailey, a senior lecturer in English language and linguistics at the University of Kent, notes that *"For the older generation, letter-writing etiquette might be drilled in enough that it is instinctive in any written communication... Whereas for Gen Z, social media has driven linguistic change and sped up the spread of language trends."* While ensuring high standards remains foundational to journalism, there is scope to evolve industry norms to cater to these new tastes.

## Why is this important?

With the next generation of consumers gravitating towards news that is packaged in an easily digestible way, news producers have an opportunity to make their content more accessible and desirable to avoid disillusionment and avoidance.

Research has shown that complicated language and extensive references are a leading contributor to the belief that news is not for younger audiences. For example, in countries such as Australia, the United States, and Brazil, *"around 15% of younger avoiders say they find news hard to follow — a much higher proportion than older news consumers [because of the] complexity of the language or assumed knowledge."* The research noted that explainer and Q&A formats have been used during the Covid-19 pandemic and Ukraine war to engage younger and less educated audiences but that *"this process needs to go much further."*<sup>93</sup>

This is a shift that is happening beyond the news industry. In the workplace, for example, the next generation is embracing a shift to *"more personable language"* as part of wider changing norms with

## How could news producers realise this opportunity?

*Use simple language, without being simplistic*

News producers should create information that is easy to understand, without patronising their audiences. Ethar El-Katatney, who has worked at the Wall Street Journal and Al Jazeera, suggests some simple questions that news producers can ask themselves: *"Is this easy to understand? Is my message conveyed in an understandable way, without a lot of explanation needed? Are there multiple entry points (e.g. summaries/timelines)? Is there lots of jargon?"*<sup>95</sup>

93. The Digital News Report 2022, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (June 2022)

94. How Gen Z are changing the way people speak at work, The Independent (September 2023)

95. Attracting Young(er) Audiences: A guide for small(ish) Legacy Organisations, Ethar El-Katatney (August 2022)



## 04. Modernising language

There are many ways that news producers can improve the news experience in practice:

### 01 Assume that the reader doesn't know the background to a story

Advisory Board member Kamal Ahmed explained how they employ this mentality at The News Movement: *"We try and have every piece of content as Series 1, Episode 1, whereas traditional news is often Series 5, Episode 5, and most of your audience has forgotten the first four series, or never saw them in the first place."* This could take the form of information-dense formats where news producers start from the beginning and aim to cover the whole story in one piece. One example is the [BBC's "Ros Atkins on..." series](#), which is particularly popular on social media. Producers can also serve this need by linking to stories or resources where audiences can find contextual information.

### 02 Use easy-to-understand vocabulary and sentence structure to cater to every reading ability

Improving the readability of content by avoiding jargon, explaining specialised terms and acronyms and using a mix of sentences can make stories more accessible. There is also an opportunity to leverage generative AI to modify source text, something that BBC Lab's David Caswell calls "an ambitious but still relatively low-risk" application. This could be using tools built into content management systems or via custom-built API-driven front-end functionality.<sup>96</sup>

### 03 Create explainer journalism or evergreen content which answers your audience's critical questions

News producers can actively listen to and collect questions from their audiences before answering them within the content that they produce. [The News Movement's](#) (TNM) first successful TikTok video — which surpassed a million views — simply explained where Ukraine was as part of an introduction to a series of video content on the war in Ukraine. TNM believes the success of the video was due to young people acknowledging the importance of the topic but finding it difficult to engage with the content on offer from traditional media producers.

Advancements in technology mean there is an opportunity to make the news more accessible to those with a variety of reading levels and prior knowledge:



Advisory Board



I think in the next 10 years, we're gonna start to see more and more personalised AI agents... Imagine, you don't really know what's going on, but a news story is blowing up on your phone. We're rapidly converging to a future where you could actually ask your AI agent what is going on directly. And since you've never interacted with this info before, the answers to your questions can be written from a beginner's point of view in context in a format and tone that's perfect for you."

Lucky Gunasekara, Co-Founder & CEO, Miso AI

### Experiment with different tones

News producers have an opportunity to experiment with informal and entertaining tones. As Ziad Ahmed, CEO of Gen Z consulting company JUV, explains: *"Can you entertain us while we learn? We want to learn through entertainment. We are curious and voracious consumers. We can watch for 15 seconds or 15 hours. Can you tap into that? Blend news and information and entertainment?"*<sup>97</sup> John Oliver's Last Week Tonight has been a pioneer of this approach, demonstrating how humour can be a way to engage with 'hard news' topics.

<sup>96</sup>. [AI and News: What's next?](#), Medium (September 2023)

<sup>97</sup>. [Attracting Young\(er\) Audiences: A guide for small\(ish\) Legacy Organisations](#), Ethar El-Katatney (August 2022)

## 04. Modernising language

There are a few different ways that news producers can experiment with tone without ostracising existing audiences and impacting their credibility:

### 01 Evolve the linguistic standards used to create and edit copy

By reviewing and updating existing style guides, news producers can tailor their use of language and grammar to specific segments of their audience. Using resources such as the [Conscious Style Guide](#), a continually updated database of guidance and recommendations for inclusive language, can ensure that users are communicated to in a way that does not jar with them.



Advisory Board



You have to be careful [when changing tone or language], because you can very easily fall into the trope of 'hey young people, listen to this' and feel very disingenuous. I think you need to really be careful and thoughtful about where you do these tonal changes. The FT is actually a good example where their YouTube content is much easier to understand, but their articles stay true to an 'FT' traditional tone."

**Jack Kelly**, Founder & Content Creator, TLDR News

### 02 Creating separate mini-brands or sub-brands to perfect an alternative style and voice

News producers are creating sub-brands to reach consumers with different preferences from their core audience. One example is Reach's [Curiously](#), a socially native mini-brand that is targeted at 16-24-year-olds and which has a presence on TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat — but not its own website.



Advisory Board



Often it's a lose-lose for legacy news organisations... because young people already have a very clear idea in their mind of what news should look like from those organisations, and any changes can feel like they're trying too hard and being disingenuous. That's why we have started to see some news organisations take on sub-brands to better reach the next generation of consumers with different preferences from the core audiences of today."

**Kirsten Eddy**, Senior Researcher, Pew Research Center

# 05. Catering to different modes of consumption



Research Participant



"I prefer reading shorter articles online that give the gist of what is happening..."

Harpreet, 23, Male, Bangalore



Advisory Board



"So what we do with our partners is help them understand information needs and habits of people in their community, and help them make sure that it doesn't just happen once, that it's a consistent conversation between these news producers and their community. So that they know what their audience actually cares about, what challenges they have, what their experiences are, in order to tailor their content to make sure that it's fitting those gaps."

Carolyn Powers, Director for US Programs, Internews

## Why is this important?

News producers have an opportunity to offer content based on audiences' modes of consumption and underlying information needs rather than assuming their preferences based on their broad demographics, such as age and location.

The concept of 'user needs' in news has been evangelised by former BBC World Service editor, Dmitry Shishkin<sup>98</sup>, and utilised by many news producers as a way to find 'product-market fit' between content and consumers. The model clearly points out that readers consume the news for reasons beyond simply staying informed.

Despite the growing popularity of user needs, Carolyn Powers, a member of our Advisory Board, notes that it remains a major opportunity in the quest to fill the gap between the current news experience and younger consumers specifically:

Our research aims to build on this body of work by conceiving different 'modes' of media consumption among the next generation of news consumers. These are:



**Sift** — *How do I filter through the noise?*



**Substantiate** — *How do I know what's true?*



**Study** — *How do I build knowledge and expertise?*



**Socialise** — *How do I connect with others?*



**Sensemake** — *How do I figure out what it all means?*

<sup>98</sup>. The user needs model for news, Smartocto (2023)

## How could news producers realise this opportunity?

*Develop content and products that are designed around specific user modes*

The best digital products successfully cater to the way that consumers are thinking, feeling and behaving — and news is no different. While some news producers have had success with integrating product thinking and user experience design into the newsroom, there remain opportunities for many to build products that meet audiences in specific modes:



### Sift

News producers can help young consumers quickly evaluate information that is important and relevant to them. Among our research participants, this mode of consumption is catered for by news aggregators such as InShorts India app, the Apex News App or Opera Mini but news producers could consider short, information-dense summaries that allow consumers to assess the quality and suitability of content. [Volv Media](#), an app described as “TikTok but for news”, reworks stories into nine second summaries that users can swipe through.



### Substantiate

News organisations can leverage their brand to quickly verify or frame information on behalf of audiences. Advisory Board member Pradeep Gairola shared the example of [Times Verified](#), a project run by the Times of India for consumers to ask questions via WhatsApp or text message about stories they are unclear about. [Outlier Media](#) also operates an SMS service to allow its audience to receive housing, utilities and other essential information directly from a reporter.



### Study

News organisations can promote learning about topics that the next generation of news consumers care about. YouTube channel [TLDR News](#) was created to help meet the needs of audiences in this mode, providing 10-minute explainer videos that deep-dive into a single story. By applying a standard format type, the channel has “cultivated an audience of inquisitive people that are willing to learn alongside us as we learn”, according to its founder Jack Kelly.



### Socialise

News producers can develop content that is easily shareable within consumers’ trusted circles and online communities. As referenced within the Affinity and Language sections of the report, memes bring a story to life and inspire connection with others, but this must be done with the brand in mind. [Literally Media](#), which has over 500 million video views a month across its brands, is an example of a brand that creates culture and comedy content that they “know audiences are really clamouring to see” and is optimised for shareability.<sup>99</sup>



### Sensemake

News producers can support audience sensemaking by laying out the multiplicity of perspectives on a topic. This could involve integrating the opinions of experts and people with lived experience in a single article, much like [We Are Not Divided](#) does. Live Q&As with journalists via video or within the comments section of a social media post can also help consumers parse what has happened and what they think about it.

99. [Publisher-creator partnerships](#), The Rebooting (August 2023)

# 06. Giving hope & empowering action



Research Participant



[News producers] just keep giving us bad news. There is never any solution. Why should I only keep reading about terrible things happening around me?"

Jinal, 23, Female, Bangalore

A number of our Advisory Board members identified this as an opportunity to better meet the needs of the next generation and drive engagement:



Advisory Board



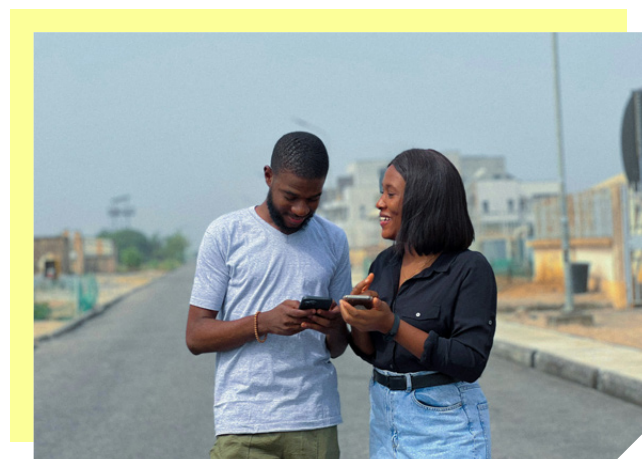
Ten years ago, solutions journalism wasn't even a thing... Whereas now you've got great evidence that you can build a business model, and an engaged audience, via slow journalism. Not only can you monetise your readers, but even advertising can perform better — there's research which suggests that advertising placed within solutions-focused stories leads to better brand engagement. So the evidence is now there."

Jodie Jackson, Director, News Literacy Lab

## Why is this important?

News producers have the opportunity to employ positive and solutions-based reporting to reduce the risk of emotionally draining their audiences with negative and sensationalist coverage. This is especially important given the recently published research from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism which noted that selective news avoidance is increasing, with 36% either sometimes or often actively avoiding it, up from 29% six years ago.<sup>100</sup>

The same research suggests that 'solutions journalism' could be one of a number of remedies. This has been corroborated by other secondary research going as far back as 2015, which showed that consumers under 35 wanted the news to share practical guidance about how to deal with real-world problems.<sup>101</sup>



<sup>100</sup>. [The Digital News Report 2023](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (June 2023)

<sup>101</sup>. [5 key research findings about young online audiences from BBC World Service](#), Journalism.co.uk (2015)

## How could news producers realise this opportunity?

### Onboard the next generation in a healthier way

News producers have a responsibility to onboard the next generation of consumers into the news rather than assume that they will 'grow up' and become engaged. Our research indicated that consumers need external encouragement to explore news content and our Advisory Board came up with some practical ways that this could be achieved:

#### 01 Slow the pace of news and make it more manageable to process

Our Advisory Board members referenced [Tortoise Media](#) as a good example of a news producer that has intentionally and effectively slowed down the news. James Harding, the Editor and Co-founder of Tortoise, wrote an essay in 2019 to explain their founding: *"We hope that if we take a little longer and open up the process of journalism, we can better understand these problems and foster new ideas. We're trying to come to a better-informed point of view on our future. In that sense, we're journalism as jury, with a hell of a caseload."*

#### 02 Create new signals of quality to help the next generation identify reliable sources

The existing signals that audiences rely on — clicks, likes, reactions — are indexed to virality, as opposed to quality. Advisory Board member Jodie Jackson argued that *"in our online environments, especially on social media, we are missing an IMDB-style quality signal for the news. This means that young people end up relying on social proof, which is a lousy system of verification."* Canadian outlet [Ground News](#) has combatted this by showing bias and factuality ratings from three independent monitoring organisations on every story. News producers could also work with the broader media ecosystem to create new signals of quality directly.

#### 03 Create content that is valuable during large life transitions

News producers can continue to provide information that helps the next generation through life transitions, particularly from education into the world of work. Practical information about finding a career that is

right for them, preparing for interviews and gaining an advantage at work could boost the perceived relevance of the news brand. For example, [FT Schools](#) provides a weekly newsletter that highlights resources and key readings for younger readers and tips from career experts.



Advisory Board



I think there's an opportunity to build more contextual coverage for readers. For example — I'm a recent college graduate who hears that interest rates are climbing and the economy is doing badly. What should I do? Should I join a start-up? There again, it's all about your personal context and current situation. For this to happen, we need LLMs to combine with personalisation, but the ethical guardrails and privacy incentives aren't fully aligned yet. But with private AI models, this might actually be possible, and much sooner than we think."

Lucky Gunasekara, Co-Founder & CEO, Miso AI

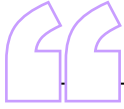
### Provide solutions, spark action and inspire hope

Adopting a constructive approach can help to re-engage younger consumers who have become overwhelmed by the negativity bias, although it will take time to counteract the damage that has already been done. Typically, this means solutions stories that *"don't celebrate responses to problems, or advocate for specific ones; they cover them, investigating what was done and what the evidence says worked and didn't work about it, and why."*<sup>102</sup>

<sup>102</sup> What is solutions journalism and why should you care?, Solutions Journalism Network (July 2022)

## 06. Giving hope & empowering action

Our Advisory Board members explicitly noted that solutions journalism must go beyond the occasional positive story and offer audience members the chance to develop meaningful hope:



Advisory Board



When you're looking towards 2030, how do you change the model [that perpetuates negativity]? You change that through explanation, relevant opinion, non-partisan, quieter, less shouting news products that allow people to see news as a useful part of their journey in the world. Because the evidence is that there is a large, addressable audience, not all audiences, but an addressable audience... Can you just stop shouting? Explain to me, what is going on? And allow me to have some sense of the onward conversation."

**Kamal Ahmed**, Editor-in-chief & Co-founder,  
The News Movement

## Encourage participation and discussion

Our Advisory Board repeatedly called for news producers to transition from broadcast to participatory forms of reporting which engage the audience in the process directly. According to one Advisory Board member, it could prove to be a fundamental shift for the industry:



Advisory Board

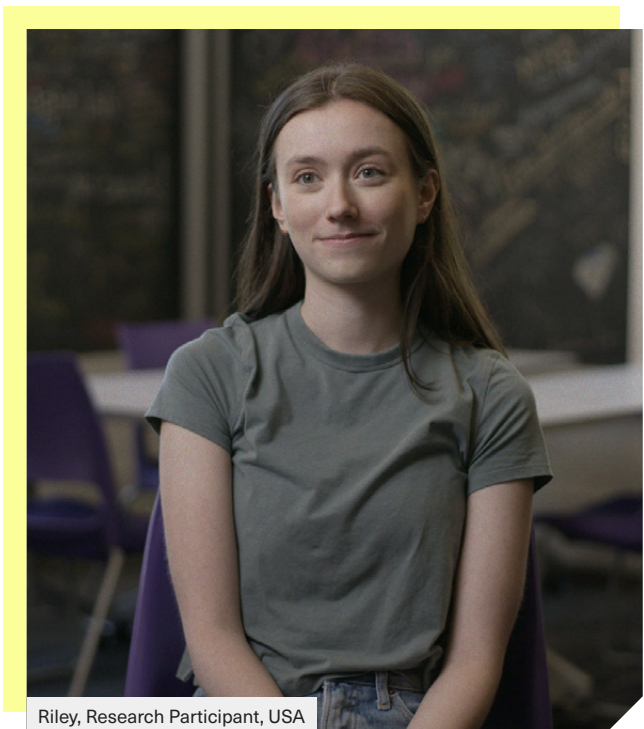


The definition of journalism is likely going to change to something more co-authored. Journalism will be created through dialogue and co-creation (either via computers or communities). There's evidence to suggest that there will be greater collaboration between audiences and content creators in the future — in fact, it will be a necessity."

**Justin Arenstein**, Founder & CEO, Code for Africa

One example that was referenced multiple times by the Advisory Board was [Future Crunch](#) (now named Fix The News), an Australian outlet with a mission "to foster intelligent, optimistic thinking about the future, and to empower people to contribute to it." The Smithsonian Magazine's [Planet Positive](#) is another outlet that follows up on stories related to social issues to give a sense of progress.

As well as examining what solutions are out there, news producers can also "provide audiences with the knowledge to try and address problems themselves, moving beyond what has happened and looking to where to go next — giving guidance to viewers, rather than solutions."<sup>103</sup> This approach may be more appropriate when a crisis is ongoing — for example, by providing information about where to donate food or clothes during a natural disaster.



Riley, Research Participant, USA

103. 5 key research findings, Journalism.co.uk (2019)

## 06. Giving hope & empowering action

Our research suggests a few practical ways that this could be achieved by news producers:

### 01 Experiment with platforms that enable private, yet social, conversations

News producers can use closed messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram or Discord to establish conversations with hard-to-reach or news avoiders. Carolyn Powers, an Advisory Board member, pointed to Martina Felix, who created Cafecito, a daily WhatsApp bilingual news hangout, where audiences can openly and directly interact with the Spanish-speaking community in Arizona.<sup>104</sup>



Advisory Board



When we're deciding what's newsworthy and what's worth talking about as a news creator, we're listening to the discussions in the office... and the discussions other people are having on Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, and news articles. With that, we assess what's important to our audience and what will make the news relevant and interesting to them."

**Jack Kelly**, Founder & Content Creator, TLDR News

### 02 Adopt experiences and formats that encourage participation

Formats that facilitate live interaction, such as live streamed video or audio, are *'very important to the next generation'*, according to Jack Kelly, one of our Advisory Board members. Alternative formats include Q&A, 'advice' content and participatory events, such as the 'cycles of conversation' run by [Mutante](#), a Colombian investigative news outlet, to inform their news agenda.

Introduction

Audience trends

The Ideal News Experience

**Calls-to-action**

Conclusion

Acknowledgements

<sup>104</sup>. [Cafecito](#), Listening Post Collective (July 2023)





# CONCLUSION

The news is not going away. It remains, and will remain, an essential part of young people's lives in 2030. Dev was one of many interviewed who was quick to reference the desire and need to be informed:



Research Participant



**If I want to form an opinion about something, which I think is really important if you want to live in today's world, you can't ignore the news."**

**Dev, 23, Male, Bangalore**

However, what is also apparent is that the news information needs and preferences of the next generation have evolved — and they continue to evolve. We encourage incumbent and emerging news producers to pay attention to these generational differences so they can play a role in delivering on the news needs of this next generation of audiences.

We hope that this research — and the 'Ideal News Experience' framework — stimulates new ideas, conversations and action within the news industry. Ultimately, changing preferences present new opportunities and it is up to news producers to seize them.



Dev, Research Participant, India



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This research would not have been made possible without the dedication and commitment of several of our partners. With special thanks to:

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Our **research participants**, from across the world, who gave up their time to give us an insight into their lives, news diet and preferences.

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Our **Advisory Board** members who helped to shape our thinking and this research from start to finish.

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**The Google News Initiative** for supporting the project and giving the joint team from **FT Strategies** and the **Knight Lab** the freedom to create an independent report.

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**Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications** for supporting the **Knight Lab** on this project.

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**Tiny Collaborative** for helping to design, identify participants, conduct and synthesise the human-centred design research, and **Quantum Consumer Solutions** and **Reach Africa** for helping to identify participants and conduct the conversations.

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**FT Studios** for designing and creating the Next Gen News website, PDF report and accompanying video.



A few members of our joint research team