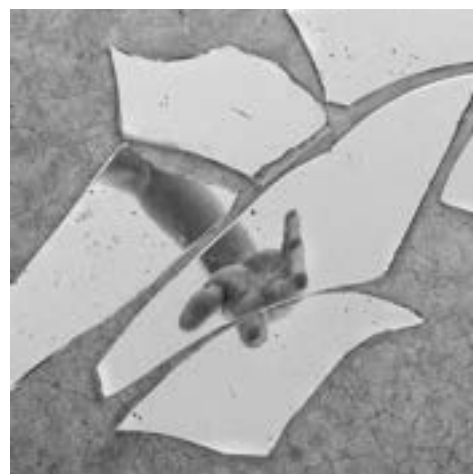


# A NEW AGE OF INFLUENCE: NAVIGATING THE NEWS YOU DON'T CHOOSE



# INTRODUCTION

The news environment has never been more complex — or more personal.

Where once a few trusted broadcasters shaped the day's headlines, today's audiences curate their own newsfeeds, swiping through a swirl of breaking alerts, influencer posts, algorithmic recommendations and AI-generated summaries. News no longer simply finds us; it fights for our attention.

But choice does not always equal clarity. As algorithms prioritize speed and engagement over depth and credibility, the lines between journalism, commentary and misinformation are blurring. Newsrooms are shrinking. Trust is eroding. And the traditional rules of influence — who shapes narratives, who holds power, who gets heard — are shifting faster than ever.

We first examined the shifting media landscape in our 2022 white paper, **The Art of Placing a Story in the News-you-can-choose Media Environment**, from the avalanche of content that people must filter through to consumers' deepening distrust and apathy toward the news media. But as the forces behind news distribution grow even more fragmented — and the fight for attention more fierce — new strategies are needed to break through.

In this white paper, we explore the forces redefining modern journalism and media relations, from the rise of algorithmic editors and citizen reporters to the death of the specialist beat and the urgent need for trust in an era of overwhelming noise.

The news-you-can-choose world is evolving again. Staying visible, credible and connected means understanding not just where the news is going — but who is steering it.





# Or

**TRUST ISSUES:**  
REBUILDING CREDIBILITY IN  
AN ERA OF MISINFORMATION

As newsrooms battle dwindling trust, misinformation and political polarization, the future of journalism hangs in the balance. Restoring faith in factual reporting demands a new level of responsibility from journalists, PR professionals and platforms alike.

Trust in the media has been eroding for decades — and today, the cracks are unmistakable.

A 2024 **Pew Trusts** report found that skepticism toward traditional news outlets is now deeply entrenched across much of the public, fueled by years of political polarization, corporate consolidation and increasingly fragmented information ecosystems. In an environment where misinformation can travel faster than truth — as an **MIT study** showed as early as 2018 — audiences often start every new story with a seed of doubt.

Social media platforms have further complicated the landscape. **TikTok**, with 2.65 billion monthly visits in January 2025, has overtaken traditional news bulletins for younger audiences — creating a shift from carefully curated broadcasts to decentralized, often unreliable newsfeeds. A **Pew Research** study found that most Americans who get their news from social media are less confident in its accuracy than those who rely on traditional outlets, further widening the trust gap.

At the same time, the economic pressures reshaping the media industry — mass layoffs, shrinking editorial budgets and the rise of “infotainment” to name a few — have eroded the depth and quality of coverage. As former New York Times Editor Bill Keller argued in a **Bloomberg** essay, restoring media trust will require a renewed commitment to editorial rigor and transparency — and a willingness to resist the temptation of clicks over credibility.



Against this backdrop, journalists, in-house and agency PR professionals and platforms each have a critical role to play in rebuilding trust:

- **Journalists** must double down on verification, transparency and a clear separation of fact from opinion. Newsrooms that invest in independent reporting — and resist the gravitational pull of polarized narratives — will be best positioned to regain public confidence.
- **PR professionals** must act not just as advocates, but as stewards of credible communication. In an era of information overload, careful vetting, context and responsible storytelling are no longer optional — they are essential to maintaining trust with both media and the public.
- **Platforms** must take greater responsibility for the ecosystems they create. Initiatives like community moderation, content labeling and partnership with independent fact-checkers can help slow the spread of misinformation, but lasting progress will require systemic changes to how information is prioritized and surfaced.

Protecting independent media will also be key. Outlets outside the reach of corporate or political influence offer vital counterbalances to concentrated narratives — and ensuring their survival is essential to maintaining a diverse, credible news environment.

Ultimately, the path to restoring trust in journalism will not be paved by algorithms or automation. It will come down to the same human values that built journalism’s authority in the first place: Accuracy, transparency, fairness and an unwavering commitment to serving the public good.

**"TikTok surpassed 2.65 billion monthly visits in January 2025 — reshaping how younger generations engage with news."**

**(SOURCE: SPROUTSOCIAL)**

A large, bold red '02' is the central focus. The background is a light gray with a faint, vertical stream of binary code (0s and 1s) and a very faint silhouette of a person's head and shoulders, suggesting a digital or technological theme.

02

**ALGORITHMIC EDITORS:**  
**WHO'S REALLY DECIDING WHAT**

As AI and social media algorithms increasingly dictate what news audiences see (and what they miss), the role of editors is evolving. Once the ultimate gatekeepers of news judgment, today's editors must navigate the twin forces of automation and audience-driven content — working to protect quality, integrity and trust in a landscape that is shifting faster than ever.

Two years after generative AI exploded into the mainstream, the media industry is still scrambling to keep pace. The transformation has been so rapid that the traditional **role of the editor** — once focused on curation and editorial judgment — has shifted dramatically. In 2025, editors are not just gatekeepers; they are guides, steering audiences through an information ecosystem increasingly shaped by invisible algorithmic hands.

The challenges are multiplying. **BusinessWire** explored how algorithms now determine much of what news audiences encounter online, driving a sharp decline in organic visibility for traditional outlets. As **Press Gazette** notes, the so-called “death of the search engine” — and the subsequent loss of referral traffic — is also hitting publishers hard, affecting both reach and revenue. Meanwhile, the decline of social media traffic, concerns around bias and manipulation, and the rise of clickbait and low-quality content are further eroding trust.

Adding to the pressure is the human toll: Newsroom job cuts, declining investment in quality journalism and an overwhelming pace of technological change. Editors are now expected to pivot strategies almost daily to keep up with evolving platforms and audience behaviors. Yet even as their influence feels threatened by automation, their role has arguably never been more vital.

Trust remains a critical concern. According to the Reuters Institute's **Journalism and Technology Trends and Predictions 2025** report, confidence in the future of journalism among editors and media executives has fallen significantly — from 60% in 2022 to just 41% in 2025. AI is seen both as a threat to editorial integrity and as a necessary tool for survival. Major outlets like The New York Times and the Financial Times are also investing heavily in cross-functional AI teams, using platforms like OpenAI and Perplexity to enhance their newsrooms.

**“Just four in 10 (41%) editors, CEOs and digital executives say they are confident about the prospects for journalism in the year ahead, with one in six (17%) expressing low confidence.”**

**(Source: Reuters Institute)**



These experiments offer potential revenue streams, such as licensing opportunities and new AI-driven products, but they also demand careful oversight to preserve journalistic standards.

Ultimately, the media industry finds itself at a crossroads: Balancing the promise of AI and audience-first models with the enduring need for human judgment, ethical stewardship and public trust. In a world where anyone can publish and algorithms increasingly decide what gets seen, editors are still essential — not as gatekeepers of what we read, but as guides helping us make sense of an ever-more fragmented and fast-moving information landscape.



**CITIZEN CHRONICLES:**  
**POWER AND PERIL**

The boundary between professional reporters and everyday storytellers has never been more porous. Empowered by mobile technology and social platforms, citizen journalism is rewriting the rules and prompting traditional newsrooms to adapt.

Citizen journalism has redefined how the world witnesses political movements, humanitarian crises and cultural shifts — offering raw, unfiltered perspectives that can challenge official narratives and mainstream bias. From the Indian Ocean tsunami to the Arab Spring uprisings to the Black Lives Matter protests, citizen reporting has brought marginalized voices to the global stage.

But today, a more complicated reality is taking shape. While citizen journalism continues to democratize information-sharing, the honeymoon period may be over. With the same speed that it can amplify vital stories, it can also spread misinformation, foster polarization and erode trust in factual reporting.

In recent years, global newsrooms and social media platforms have scrambled to adapt to this new era. Some, like **BBC Verify**, are building specialized units to authenticate user-generated content. Others are investing in applications like **Google Fact Check Tools**, **Truepic** and **InVID** to flag manipulated images, deepfakes and disinformation. Meanwhile, independent collectives like **Bellingcat** have pioneered open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods that are now frequently referenced by major outlets, highlighting a growing reliance on citizen data paired with professional verification.



Still, the politicization of citizen journalism — often weaponized to distort reality — has cast new shadows over its role. As **Le Monde** recently argued, what some tout as a triumph of citizen voices can sometimes be a tool for the mass destruction of factual reality.

Faced with these challenges, new efforts are emerging to hold citizen journalism accountable while preserving its grassroots power. Codes of conduct, ethical guidelines for contributors, community moderation practices, and neutral POV policies — such as those used by platforms like **Reddit** and **Wikinews** — are becoming more important. Trust indicators like verification badges and watermarking are gaining traction. News organizations and nonprofits are also calling for broader initiatives in training, awareness and media literacy. In fact, both **the UK Parliament** and international media outlets like **The Guardian** have launched inquiries into teaching media literacy in schools, recognizing that understanding how to evaluate information is becoming as fundamental as reading or math.

Ultimately, the question is no longer whether citizen journalism will shape the future of news — it already has. The challenge is how to balance freedom of speech with the responsibility of accuracy and accountability in an environment where anyone, anywhere can break the news.





## TIMELINE

### THE RISE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM

#### 1960s - 1980s

Affordable technologies like home camcorders, Dictaphones and early personal computers enable more individuals to capture and share newsworthy moments.

#### 2004

Eyewitness videos and blogs document the Indian Ocean tsunami, highlighting the value of first-hand accounts.

#### 2010 - 2012

The Arab Spring demonstrates the political power of citizen media via Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

#### 2013 - 2020

Mobile phones and livestreaming apps like Periscope and Facebook Live amplify citizen coverage of social justice movements, from Ferguson to global Black Lives Matter protests.

#### 2020s

Eyewitness videos and blogs document the Indian Ocean tsunami, highlighting the value of first-hand accounts

## TIMELINE

### HOW NEWSROOMS EVOLVED WITH CITIZEN JOURNALISM

#### 2005

BBC launches the **UGC Hub** to manage citizen-submitted content.

#### 2006

CNN creates **iReport** to allow public story submissions (discontinued in 2015).

#### 2008

Al Jazeera launches the **Sharek** portal to gather and publish user-generated content.

#### 2013

The Guardian introduces **Guardian Witness** (closed in 2020) to crowdsource photos, videos and stories.

#### 2023

BBC launches **BBC Verify** to authenticate user-generated content in real time using advanced verification tools.

#### ONGOING

Reuters and other major outlets integrate social media verification tools and OSINT practices into their editorial workflows.

# D4

**THE DEATH OF THE BEAT?**  
**WHY SPECIALIZATION STILL**  
**MATTERS IN A CLICKBAIT ERA**

As newsrooms shrink and journalists are expected to cover everything, the deep expertise that once defined great reporting is at risk. In an information-overload world, bringing back specialized beats could be critical for rebuilding trust, quality and audience loyalty.

In journalism, a “beat” traditionally refers to a specific area a reporter consistently covers — whether education, business, technology or crime. Beats are more than just assignments; they are built over time through expertise, relationships and deep understanding, allowing reporters to surface richer stories and provide vital context.

But in today’s media landscape, the beat is under threat. Faced with budget cuts and stretched thinner than ever by an insatiable digital-first news cycle, many journalists are now expected to cover a wide range of topics — often without the specialized knowledge that once set their reporting apart.

The layoffs of 2024 have only accelerated this shift. **The Los Angeles Times** cut 115 newsroom employees (20% of its staff), **TIME** eliminated 22 roles across editorial and other departments, and **Business Insider** reduced its workforce by 8%. Meanwhile, staffers at Condé Nast, Forbes and The New York Daily News staged historic walkouts protesting ongoing cuts. Since 2016, nearly 8,000 media workers across 146 companies have **unionized** — a powerful sign of growing unrest in journalism. And in early 2025, the trend has continued: **Disney** laid off 6% of its staff across ABC News and its entertainment division, **The Wall Street Journal** made further cuts, and federal budget reductions triggered layoffs at **public broadcasters** — sparking online backlash after Sesame Street’s **Elmo** jokingly announced his own termination on LinkedIn.

At the same time, the pressures of the digital age — where speed often trumps substance — have led many outlets to prioritize viral headlines and SEO-driven content over original, beat-driven reporting. Algorithms reward clicks, not necessarily credibility, and audiences are left overwhelmed but often under-informed. As misinformation continues to spread, the need for trusted, specialized voices has never been more urgent.



**“Since 2016, nearly 8,000 media workers across 146 companies have unionized — a powerful sign of growing unrest in journalism.”**

**(SOURCE: NIEMANLAB)**

How can this be fixed?

From a public relations perspective, it’s critical to recognize the human side of journalism. Publicists must take the time to read what reporters are writing, understand their areas of focus — even if formal beats are less defined — and tailor pitches accordingly. In a time when politics and AI dominate media coverage not just in the U.S. but globally, creative, thoughtful storytelling that fits naturally into a reporter’s evolving interests is essential.

From the newsroom perspective, leadership must find ways to invest in specialization even amid resource pressures. Hiring for expertise, not just generalist skill, can help publications stand out, offering depth and distinctiveness that audiences crave. Paywall and subscription models, while controversial, may also support this shift: by providing a financial foundation for deeper, beat-driven reporting that audiences are willing to pay for — and that rewards loyal, informed readerships over fleeting clicks.

As newsrooms continue to evolve, the future of journalism may hinge not on covering everything — but on covering something deeply, credibly and consistently.

The background features a faded, grayscale image of a woman's face, likely a news anchor, looking directly at the camera. Below her face, there is a faint, illegible newspaper clipping with some visible words like "Após o anúncio de" and "críticas em".

# 05

**THE BUSINESS OF NEWS:**  
**SURVIVING THE SUBSCRIPTION ERA**

With ad revenues dwindling and paywalls rising, newsrooms are rethinking monetization. The challenge? Delivering premium content that audiences are willing to pay for while keeping journalism accessible and impactful.

In our 2022 white paper, **The Art of Placing a Story in the News-you-can-choose Media Environment**, we already predicted that the economics of news will increasingly shift toward personalization — with successful brands tailoring every pitch to meet the needs of individual journalists, their specific audiences and the cultural context of the moment. That prediction continues to take shape — and today, it extends beyond media relations to news consumption itself.

As audiences increasingly curate their own news experiences, media outlets are responding with new models centered around the individual, with personalized content recommendations and premium subscriptions becoming a defining feature of the media landscape. Today, our prediction is playing out at scale — but not without growing pains.

The business model that once supported modern journalism is on life support. Traditional ad revenue has continued to fall as brands funnel budgets into digital platforms, influencer content and programmatic buys. According to recent data from **AdExchanger**, advertising is no longer a major growth driver for top news publishers. And with social media platforms deprioritizing news in their algorithms — or eliminating it altogether in some regions — publishers are fighting harder than ever for visibility and viability.



Enter the paywall.

What started as a niche strategy has become the default model for sustaining journalism in a fractured media economy. Powerhouses like **The New York Times** and **The Washington Post** have reported steady subscription growth, while global players like **CNN** and **Reuters** have recently joined the club. For some outlets, subscriptions have surpassed ad revenue entirely — a monumental shift in how journalism is funded and consumed. For example, The New York Times reported \$334.9 million in digital subscription revenue in Q4 2024 — nearly three times its digital ad revenue. Subscription revenue also grew almost twice as fast as ad revenue year-over-year, highlighting the accelerating shift toward a consumer-funded model.

But monetizing content isn't as simple as flipping a switch. Publishers face a delicate balancing act: How do you deliver high-quality, high-value content behind a paywall while keeping your brand accessible, discoverable and relevant to the broader public?

There is also a perception problem. While some readers are willing to pay for trusted sources, a **PR Daily** analysis showed that many still balk at hitting a paywall — especially for breaking news, which they feel should remain free and in the public interest. Others turn to alternative sources, including social media and AI-generated summaries, to bypass the cost altogether.



To stay competitive, some media companies are evolving the subscription model into something more dynamic. Think: premium memberships with exclusive newsletters, events, behind-the-scenes reporting and video content that invites deeper engagement. According to the **Associated Press**, video in particular is proving to be a high-value differentiator, offering strong monetization potential while meeting audience demand for visual storytelling.

Others are exploring new frontiers altogether. **Perplexity AI**, for instance, made headlines by proposing a revenue-sharing model with publishers whose content is cited in its chatbot answers — hinting at a future where AI platforms might become part of the monetization strategy, not just the threat.

Still, challenges remain. Paywalls risk limiting access to credible information, widening the gap between those who can afford quality journalism and those who cannot. And as more outlets adopt them, consumer subscription fatigue may set in, leading audiences to become more selective — or simply disengaged.

What's clear is this: The news business is undergoing a radical transformation. Publishers that survive (and thrive) in this subscription era will be those that prioritize audience relationships, experiment with new revenue streams and keep refining the value proposition of journalism in the digital age.

As we look ahead, the most successful media brands may not be those with the biggest audience — but those with the most loyal ones.

**“In the subscription era, it’s not the size of your audience that matters — it’s the strength of your relationship with them.”**

(SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE)



# FINAL THOUGHTS

The future of journalism will not be decided by technology alone — or by the loudest voices in the feed. It will be shaped by those who can deliver what audiences are hungriest for but struggling to find: Trust, depth and meaning.

In a landscape driven by algorithms, speed and scale, credibility has become the ultimate competitive advantage.

For journalists, PR professionals and platforms alike, the challenge — and the opportunity — lies in doing the harder work: Investing in expertise, upholding integrity and forging genuine connections in an age of manufactured influence.

The information wars will continue. But so will the demand for real journalism, real stories and real impact. Those who stay committed to trust — not just traffic — will be the ones who shape what comes next.





UNBLINKERED thinking.  
UNEXPECTED ideas.



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