Innovators in Digital News

Aron Pilhofer, The Guardian
James Lamont, Financial Times
Kevin Sutcliffe, VICE
Lucy Küng, Author and Research Fellow, Reuters Institute

#diginews @risj_oxford
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Underlying research questions

- **Plan A:**
  - Why are some legacy news organisations more successful with digital than others? How are they innovating?

- **Pivot:**
  - “I’m not really interested in legacy players – what interests me are the new ones”

- **Plan B:**
  - Why are some digital news organisations more successful than others?

Are there common elements behind their success?
# Case studies

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<th>GMU’s</th>
<th>Bus Mod</th>
<th>Finances/Funding</th>
<th>c. Journ/Tech</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
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1. BuzzFeed and Vice
   1. Why so highly valued?
   2. Why included in news sector?
   3. Why are ‘pedigreed’ journalists joining them?

2. Why haven’t leading legacy players like The Guardian and The New York Times been even more successful?
Findings
Innovators in Digital News. © Lucy Kueng, @kuenglucy

“will it share?”

BuzzFeed

Private, Growth not profits
Native only

1. Editorial
   - News – big ambitions
2. Native
   - "fill the hole left by newspapers"
3. Video
4. Distributed

Data science underlies everything – perpetual loop of analysis, interpretation, experimentation

Tech/media hybrid

Lifestyle - food, style

Buzz’ – listicles, quizzes, cats

“don’t juice traffic”

Seek

News – big ambitions

What characteristics influence virality?
- Maximise
- Accelerate spread rate

“will it share?”

Build for the long-term

Innovators in Digital News. © Lucy Kueng, @kuenglucy
BuzzFeed, in summary

- started off as lab to test viral content and is still testing
- data science underlies content creation, tech industry influences how organisation is run
- classic disrupter - started downmarket and progressed resolutely up
Conclusions
So are there common elements behind their success?

- Deep integration tech and journalism
- Pro-digital culture
- Singularity of purpose
- Smart, compelling leadership
- Unequivocal strategic focus

- Many mistakes, much learning
- Attuned to pace of industry
- Early start
- Allows prioritisation, avoids distractions
- Differentiated market position and value prop.
- No nostalgia
- Views digital as opp
- Credibility with culture
- Sees a way forward - intuitive strategists

Lucy Kueng (www.lucykueng.com)
So are there common elements behind their success?

- **Fluid approach to story format**
- **Response/data driven**
- **Digital editorial thinkers**
- **Mobile, social, design, workflow CMS linked**
- **Deep integration tech and journalism**
- **Differentiated market position and value prop.**
- **Unequivocal strategic focus**
- **Singularity of purpose**
- **Smart, compelling leadership**
- **Pro-digital culture**
- **Credibility with culture**
- **Sees a way forward - intuitive strategists**
- **No nostalgia**
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- **Early start**
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- **Many mistakes, much learning**

Lucy Kueng (www.lucykueng.com)
Similar strategic priorities - new business model?

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