

**NEWSARCADE- SERIOUSLY PLAY
THE NEWS (101060250)**

NEW DIGITAL APPROACHES FOR YOUNG AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH JOURNALISTIC CONTENT

D3.5 WHITE PAPER

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Executive Summary

*In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, where misinformation proliferates and traditional news consumption declines, fostering public engagement with credible news is more crucial than ever. NewsArcade, an innovative digital platform, seeks to bridge this gap by merging the informative value of news with the engaging dynamics of serious gaming. Designed to **promote critical thinking, media literacy, and informed citizenship, NewsArcade transforms the way people, especially younger audiences, interact with current events.***

*This white paper explores the concept, development, and potential impact of NewsArcade, demonstrating how this unique format and authoring tool can play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges of news engagement in today's society. By **combining gamification with reliable news content**, NewsArcade offers an engaging, educational, and interactive experience that both informs and empowers young users. Our findings show that NewsArcade not only boosts interest in current affairs but also strengthens users' understanding of complex global issues.*

*This white paper outlines the project's objectives, key features, target audiences, and the anticipated outcomes, offering a glimpse into a future where **serious play becomes a cornerstone of news consumption and civic education.***



Introduction

NewsArcade is a project co-financed by Creative Europe and which combines the interdisciplinary expertise of eight different European partners.

The way people consume news has dramatically changed in recent years, driven by the rise of digital media, social networks, and mobile devices. However, alongside these advances, the spread of misinformation and the decline of traditional news engagement pose significant challenges. Young people, in particular, are turning away from conventional news sources, often perceiving them as irrelevant, overwhelming, or untrustworthy.

In this context, NewsArcade emerges as a timely solution. By integrating gamification with journalistic content, NewsArcade creates a new, engaging way for users to interact with the news. The partnership includes news media publishers which bring in their know-how about audiences, news media production and distribution, academics who having a focus on journalist training are able to inform about the underlying educational aspects, media literacy who can inform about the broader implications of the proposed design and technology, and finally games development and interactive digital solution providers, who are able to design and implement the innovative format.

The NewsArcade project is dedicated to advancing our understanding of digital news ecosystems. Established to explore the intersection of technology, journalism, and public engagement, NewsArcade leverages educational methodologies and gamification to encourage young people's critical thinking and news literacy skills. The NewsArcade format is designed to attract those who might otherwise disengage from traditional news media, encouraging them to stay informed, understand the value of journalism and actively participate in civic discourse.

This white paper presents the rationale behind NewsArcade, its development process, and its potential to transform news consumption. It also explores how the platform can address the challenges of the current media environment by fostering a more informed, engaged, and critical audience.

Seriously? Play the news!

The challenge and opportunity for NewsArcade lies in this paradox: never has a generation been so distrustful of traditional media while being such prolific users of digital media.

Since the media industry transitioned to digital formats, capturing the attention of younger audiences has been a persistent challenge for news organisations worldwide. This is paradoxical, given that these "digital natives" are typically early adopters and avid consumers of digital media.

NewsArcade aims to address this issue by integrating journalism with gamification as a mean to educate and engage younger news audiences. By developing tools and formats for gamified news that can present comprehensive, 360-degree stories, this project seeks to enhance news literacy and critical thinking among young adults. This, in turn, would bolster the position of media outlets by capitalizing on increased engagement.

Navigating the digital media landscape as a news consumer is increasingly complex. Feeds are saturated with content from a multitude of sources across diverse platforms, making it difficult to discern the nuances and variations in any given topic.

When analyzing young adults as news media consumers, crucial details are often overlooked. In 2019, Generation Z became the largest generation globally, making up 32% of the world's population. This cohort is known for being more skeptical and selective compared to their print-preferring predecessors. As Paula Felps, an award-winning freelance writer, editor, and author, notes, "Zoomers can sniff out a marketing ploy and are leery of fake news." [1]

Collaborate in the virtual newsroom

The working title of this project was “NewsCraft” to express the notion that you as a user could craft your own news. But as the research and user tests began, the most feasible concept seemed to end up with a more collaborative scope and so the title was changed.

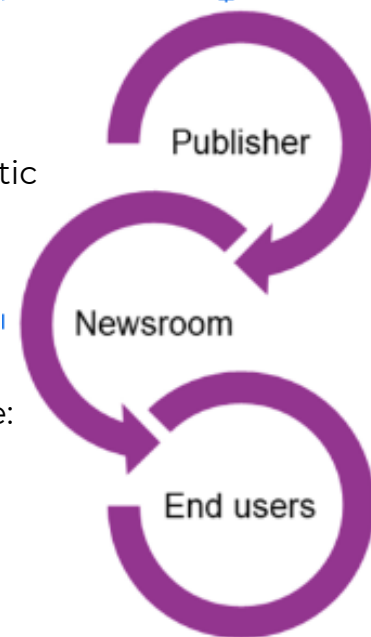
As a user, you enter the gamified online universe through the news arcade, hence giving you the impression of taking part in the kind of editorial decisions which are made every day in newsrooms all over the free world.

The initial user research was conducted with a focus on defining core requirements in the three main segments:

- End users - GenZ defined as the age group 18-35
- Publishers - of news media with distinct journalistic profiles
- Journalists - working in traditional newsrooms

The overall themes covered within the research were:

- Young adults as media users
- News literacy
- Gamification in news



Based upon our findings, user needs to navigate towards throughout the project were defined in all three segments. The primary goal being to synthesise areas of interest across the segments to refine a list of distinct user requirements, which would guide development of the initial solution.

The rationale behind this method is illustrated in the accompanying figure, which demonstrates how the interests of various segments are inextricably linked and must therefore be calibrated to achieve the desired outcome.

Reconstructing the user contract of trust

A key example of this interconnectivity is the trust contract between journalistic newsrooms and their audiences, which is currently under strain. In our pre investigations, publishers voiced concerns that younger generations are increasingly questioning the credibility of news content. They suggested that more transparency within the newsroom could be part of the solution. However, current journalistic practices and publishing tools do not adequately support this level of transparency.

Therefore, the solution must encompass both a revised journalistic approach and a publishing tool designed to engage GenZ — the end-users. This defining segment of the project demands content and news design that they can actively shape, thereby personalising it and making it more shareable with friends and on social media platforms. The outcome is a system where users are invited behind the scenes in the newsroom as co-narrators of current news stories, based upon content that remains grounded in journalistic values and methods.

By aligning these diverse interests and integrating the latest user requirements, we aim to restore and strengthen the trust between newsrooms and their audiences, particularly among the younger generation. This approach not only indicates enhanced transparency but also fosters a more engaged and loyal audience, ensuring the longevity and relevance of journalistic endeavours in the digital age.

What can NewsArcade do for me?

The final user requirements can be seen as a concentrated essence of distilled interests—a bouillon cube of sorts. Just like when dissolved, this essence is crafted to appeal precisely to the tastes of your audience. These requirements directly address the central question that every news outlet must ask itself to remain relevant to its users: ***What can NewsArcade do for me?***

The answer to this question is encapsulated in a list of five key points, which have served as the guiding principles for the development of our solution over the eighteen months following the conclusion of our initial user research:

- **Empower me** to become an informed and responsible citizen by keeping me updated on the news
- **Engage me** in a game experience while I consume real world news I would like to follow
- **Educate me** in identifying quality information by taking me behind the scenes in the newsroom
- **Create shortcuts for me** to understand the current affairs that affects my life
- **Connect me** to a news environment of inspiring people and peers

These five points have been the cornerstone of our approach, ensuring that the final product is not only innovative but also deeply resonant with the needs and preferences of today's news consumers.

Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater

The user requirements outlined for NewsArcade address the ideal role that news media should play for Generation Z. An astute reader may notice that the resulting relationship between user and media bears a strong resemblance to the traditional contract that has always existed between legacy news media and their audiences, such as the bond between a newspaper and its readers.

Even the game experience isn't entirely new. Quizzes, crosswords, and competitions have long thrived on the printed pages of newspapers. However, where these elements were typically considered supplementary content, in NewsArcade, the game mechanics are elevated to the driving force that propels the narrative in current news stories.

Given this profound transformation in how journalists must convey their stories within NewsArcade, it has been crucial to work with and clarify the underlying values of journalism to ensure that the baby is not thrown away with the bath water. To extend the soup metaphor, we have aimed to ensure that the broth continues to be simmered from quality ingredients, carefully harvested, selected, and refined with the journalistic expertise that a newsroom possesses.

At the end of the day, this project upholds the tradition of a free press, grounded in freedom of expression, fact-based reporting, and trustworthy sources. To this end, we developed and integrated into the game's algorithm a set of journalistic news values, closely aligned with the traditional 7-8 principles widely recognized and easily identifiable across news media in different countries.

In the publishing tool, each news outlet has the opportunity to define its own set of news values, allowing for the customization of the game engine to align as precisely as possible with the outlet's editorial profile. Is it a local news outlet? Does it prioritise specific areas of coverage? Does the newsroom focus on constructive journalism? The level of customization ensures that NewsArcade not only engages younger audiences but also maintains the integrity and distinct identity of each participating news organisation.

NEWSARCADE NEWS VALUES

News Value	Description	Characteristics
Analytical	Stories based on facts and sound analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on documentation and validation• Having investigation and research are key values• Quality newspapers tradition - background stories
Confrontational	Stories highlighting strong points of view	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on opposite interests and disagreement• Having action and consequences are key values• Tabloid tradition – strong headlines
Empathetic	Stories illustrating situations we can identify with	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on proximity and familiarity• Having human interest and personalization are key values• TV tradition – case stories
Entertaining	Stories to take the audience away from daily life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on prominence and oddity• Having fascination and superlativeness are key values• Magazine tradition – quality photography
Impactful	Stories dealing with essential topics that affect many people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on amount of people affected and amplitude• Having publicity and politics are key values• Public service media tradition – usually dealt as cover story
Constructive	Stories proposing solutions or meaningful initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on consonance and solutions• Having optimism and collaboration are key values• Vertical media tradition – specialised stories/ strong angle
Surprising	Stories built around unexpected incidents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on unexpectedness and impression• Having curiosity and originality are key values• Social Media tradition - fun facts used to build narrative
Trending	Stories that seize the mood of the moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A focus on frontrunning agendas and vogue phenomena• Having topicality and timeliness are key values• Op-ed tradition - lifestyle, social media

The problem: a deep dive

Media companies face significant challenges that threaten their stability and, some might even say, their survival [2]. Trust in news is at a low point, with only 40% of people expressing trust in the news. This percentage is even lower (37%) amongst those under the age of 35. This trust deficit presents a substantial opportunity for media organizations to rebuild credibility and engagement. According to the Digital News Report by Reuters [3], the number of media avoiders is increasing with 39% of respondents indicating that they sometimes or often avoid the news. Furthermore only 17% of consumers is willing to pay for online news. The market is characterised by a 'winner-takes-most' dynamic, where a few major news brands capture the majority of paid subscriptions. Developments in the digital media ecosystem are not helping either: social media platforms have deprioritised news and popular platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are not designed for click throughs and monetisation of news [4]. As a result, referral traffic from social media is plummeting. Another challenge for news publishers is the rise of AI-driven search engines. These services favour zero-click results, providing summaries instead of directing users to the original news sources. This shift negatively influences visibility of news organisations, impacting their traffic and revenue potential [5]. Since 2019, media organisations saw their overall revenues decrease by an average of 23% [6].

Considering these developments, it's crucial for news organisations to develop new methods that directly engage their audiences. As the Digital News Report states: "Success is also likely to be rooted in standing out from the crowd, to be a destination for something that the algorithm and the AI can't provide." Addressing the lack of trust in media organisations is essential, as it impacts audience engagement. According to the Reuters survey, key factors influencing trust include transparency, high journalistic standards, and freedom from bias. Research [7] indicates that increasing transparency, for instance by providing information about why and how a story was written, leads to an increase in credibility evaluations and intentions to engage with news content. Improving transparency and enhancing news literacy can work synergistically to foster greater trust from audiences. News literacy, a subset of media literacy efforts, covers topics such as news content, news production, news consumption and the role of news in society. It can empower citizens to make informed news decisions that contribute to informed life decisions, and a sense of control over the news and information they encounter. In today's overwhelming and complex media ecosystem, news literacy can positively influence the relationship between news and its consumers, making people more adept at recognising disinformation [8]. Providing insights into the journalistic decision-making process has the potential to both enhance transparency and foster news literacy.

Gaming meets news: a modern approach

Engaging the audience is crucial for news organisations in the current media landscape. An effective method to achieve this can be gamification of journalism. Research has shown interactive content can lead to more positive attitudes toward the content and its source [9]. For news organisations, incorporating interactive games could potentially enhance users' perspectives of their news site [10]. Moreover, interactive games in educational contexts have been shown to influence users' intrinsic motivation for achievement [11]. When applied to news, interactive games can provide an engaging way for its users to effectively learn details about specific topics whilst pursuing their gaming goals [12]. These interactive games also allow users to gain a deeper understanding through simulated experiences rather than just processing information through more traditional learning methods and top-down approaches [13].

Several news media organisations have begun to adopt gamification within their online platforms to create new storytelling formats. It is important here to distinguish between “stand-alone” games provided by the news media organisation in order to increase subscription and keep their readers longer on their website (like the very successful approach of New York Times with Wordle) [14], and news games, which by blending gaming elements with journalism, aim to enhance audience engagement and foster a habit of regularly consuming news by creating a more personalised experience [15]. Al Jazeera's gamified news story “Pirate Fishing: An Interactive Investigation” is an effective example of gamification in journalism [16]. This interactive news story transforms its users into investigative journalists, requiring them to engage with various types of multimedia content – such as text, video and photos, documents and audio clips – to progress through the story. By collecting evidence, users gain investigative points, advancing from junior reporter to senior editor, unlocking new content and earning badges. This immersive approach to journalism shows how a complex, hard news story can be presented in a playful yet informative way, maintaining the quality of reporting whilst enhancing engagement.

The gamification of journalism has the potential to attract and retain the interest of audiences, enhancing the overall engagement with news content. By providing an interactive and immersive experience, news organisations can stand out in a crowded digital landscape. This approach contributes to increased trust and credibility with audiences by offering them an accessible and engaging way to consume news or gain insights into journalistic processes.

The NewsArcade Solution

Newsarcade is a web-based interactive news story, where the reader plays the journalist, trying to create an article that reflects a certain goal news value. The topic of the article is chosen by the actual journalist who created the NewsArcade story. The reader, now a player, starts the news crafting journey by first reading about the context of the story, exploring some background information on the topic, and then is presented with a series of choices of how to shape the article. The player then rates and selects the paragraphs of choice in order to create their own article. In doing so they are provided with constant contextualised journalistic feedback to understand the process and which news values are transmitted with the choices made. The experience is augmented by comparison with other readers/players and gamification elements like points. In the end, the headline and photo of the article is selected. Now the final article is ready for review and the player learns if the goal news value was achieved.

To create this interactive experience the journalist has plenty of help and there is no technical expertise necessary. A friendly authoring tool which resembles a web content management system is powering the back-end of the experience. Journalists can reformat existing stories into interactive stories that can be embedded on publisher websites for the readers to see and play. The process of creating a NewsArcade story is carefully guided, providing the journalist with a clear template for the editorial content that needs to be provided. The goal of the authoring tool is to make the process straightforward, automating the process whenever possible, but without compromising on flexibility and the creativity potential. Thus the journalist can choose to adapt the template if the type of story envisioned requires it. Another important aspect that has to be mentioned is that the entire authoring tool is multilingual, allowing for journalists from many different countries to create interactive story experiences for their readers.

All in all, the value proposition of this solution is to give a younger audience a more engaging way to digest news-stories and give journalists an easy-to-use tool to create those. Creating the positive outcome of increased consumption and media literacy for the young readers and an improved reader reached an engagement for the publishers.

Our Research Findings, Results and Impact

During the last year journalists and media literacy professionals have evaluated the NewsArcade format and the underlying technological system providing valuable feedback to the team and guiding gradual improvements. The latest interviews with professionals revealed that the NewsArcade tool enhances news literacy by immersing users in the journalistic decision-making process, helping them understand why journalists make certain choices and how these decisions shape the final outcome of an article. By focusing on the concept of news values, the tool simplifies the complex and time-consuming aspects of journalism, making it accessible in a game format.

This approach provides users with insights into the reasons behind journalistic decisions (the "why") and their impact on content (the "what"), without requiring a deep dive into the mechanics of news production. These insights are crucial in building trust in journalism, as they demystify the process and show how deliberate and thoughtful journalistic decisions are made. Additionally, the game has the potential to foster critical thinking about media trustworthiness and help users distinguish between sources from journalists and influencers, ultimately contributing to the development of critical and engaged news consumers.

The tool also shows great promise for educational use in both secondary and higher education. Scale-up investigations indicate that it functions effectively as a conversation starter about the journalistic decision-making process. Ideally, the game would be integrated into a lesson on news values and perspectives, where a teacher provides context, students play the game, and a plenary discussion follows. This approach could be even more impactful in "journalists in the classroom" settings, where direct interaction with journalists can further enhance students' understanding and trust in the journalistic process.

For news publishers, NewsArcade offers the unique opportunity to take the user behind the curtain of the newsroom. People are invited to experience the choices, the reasoning behind the crafting of a news piece. It is a unique experience. Why would users like to do so?

The game component plays an important part here. If a news company offers an intellectual activity under its brand, they are engaging their audience, usually by targeting dopamine [17]. It also creates a loyalty bond if the quality of the game matches the expectations of the player. But, as stated by The Guardian's visual projects editor, David Blood in journalism.co.uk [18]: *"at a time when almost every news publisher is feeling the squeeze, the time taken to create a game is hard to justify when more typical forms of reporting are quicker, cheaper and less risky. Not every story will lend itself to being told through a game and the accelerating conveyor of breaking news is unlikely to slow sufficiently to allow games to catch up, but the sparing use of interactive elements in journalism can create stories that connect with audiences on a deeper level."*

NewsArcade offers a solution to this question by enabling a quick turnaround of a current topic into an interactive experience. Just days after the publisher's experiment was held in France, the Olympic Games started in Paris, putting Tony Estanguet, three time gold medalist and president of the organising committee in the spotlight. At the end of the games, regional newspaper Sud Ouest ran a long feature on Tony Estanguet who was born, raised and competed in the South West of France. In less than two hours, SAPESO was able to turn the long feature into a NewsArcade experience [19], drawing from the local angle that would engage readers and showcasing the emotional side of feature-writing to illustrate the quality of the work of the newsroom.

This showed that stories must be selected with care and the journalists who worked on said-story should participate in turning it into a Newsaracde experience.

Challenges and Considerations

One of the core challenges faced during the NewsArcade project was the complex task of identifying and prioritising its multifaceted objectives. Balancing goals such as promoting media literacy, attracting a younger audience, providing publishers with a viable financial model, and minimising the complexity and time required for content creation proved to be an intricate endeavour. At times, these goals appeared to be in conflict with one another. For instance, the need for educational depth occasionally clashed with the demand for engaging content that appeals to younger users. Similarly, ensuring a cost-effective value proposition for publishers sometimes conflicted with the aim of maintaining a simple content creation process.

From a news literacy perspective, the most significant challenge lay in accurately reflecting the realities of the journalistic process while avoiding a simplistic or caricatured approach to media literacy. It was essential to move beyond a narrow focus on disinformation and instead highlight the broader value of quality journalism. NewsArcade addresses this challenge by emphasising the critical choices journalists make and the responsibilities they bear in producing accurate, reliable information. Moreover, the platform is designed to be adaptable, allowing each publisher to conform to their national regulations, cultural norms, and journalistic practices.

One regulatory consideration involves the use of images sourced from news-wire agencies. Each publisher must ensure that their contracts with these agencies permit the use of images in the NewsArcade platform. This consideration highlights the importance of aligning content usage rights with the innovative format offered by NewsArcade.

Accuracy remains a fundamental priority, as the content in NewsArcade is based on existing materials from reputable publishers. However, there is an inherent risk of oversimplification when adapting news articles into interactive experiences, particularly when creating incorrect answer options. This risk can be mitigated by providing detailed explanations in the feedback section, helping users understand the reasoning behind the correct and incorrect choices.

Future Directions

Looking forward there are several potential developments and enhancements for NewsArcade that could further increase its value to both publishers and users. One promising avenue is the exploration of various business models that could offer strategic advantages to publishers. For instance, publishers might choose to offer NewsArcade experiences for free as a way to attract new readers and increase engagement, similar to how the New York Times uses Wordle [20]. Alternatively, they could place these experiences behind a paywall as a premium offering for subscribers, akin to the New York Times' approach with its Crosswords section. These strategic decisions would depend on the marketing and audience acquisition goals of each publisher.

Ideally NewsArcade would benefit from having a design that can be customised by each publisher. For better integration of NewsArcade on the publisher's website and better incarnation of the stories proposed by journalists, it is essential that the games module be co-branded. Indeed, stories must be identified as content produced by the newspaper's editorial staff for its readers and the new audiences they wish to reach and convince to obtain information via the press.

An unexpected yet valuable outcome of the NewsArcade project has been its potential as a training tool for journalists. By breaking down the journalistic process into discrete steps, NewsArcade reveals the automatic choices and habitual practices that journalists might otherwise overlook. This introspective aspect of the platform can help journalists critically assess their routines and potentially improve their professional practices.

Conclusions

Today it can be noticed that as the landscape of news consumption shifts from traditional media to digital platforms, the industry faces an urgent need to adapt and innovate. In particular, the rise of misinformation and the overwhelming saturation of content have made it increasingly difficult for Generation Z, the news consumers of tomorrow, to discern credible information, highlighting the need for new approaches to engage and educate this critical demographic.

NewsArcade emerges as a timely and innovative solution to these challenges, offering a unique blend of gamification and journalism designed to enhance news literacy and foster deeper engagement among younger audiences. By allowing users to actively participate in the news creation process, albeit carefully guided experienced journalists, NewsArcade not only makes news consumption more interactive and engaging but also rebuilds the crucial trust between newsrooms and their audiences. The platform's focus on critical thinking equips users with the tools they need to navigate the complex media landscape, making it a valuable resource for both news consumers and publishers. Our vision is that as it continues to evolve, NewsArcade will transform not only how news is consumed but also how it is created, contributing to a more informed, engaged, and critically thinking society.

NewsArcade is now welcoming Early Adopters, news media organisations, journalists and educators, who are ready to take the leap and experience first-hand how this new interactive format can foster audience engagement that is both captivating and educational.

Are you Interested to dive deeper?

Check out our **course for professionals** here:
<https://newsarcade.eu/ccourse-for-professionals/>

Or **sign up directly to become an Early Adopter** by writing a short message to: newsarcade@in-two.com

We are looking forward to hearing about your experiences with NewsArcade.

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Website

www.newsarcade.eu



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[NEWSARCADE-SERIOUSLY PLAY THE NEWS!](https://www.linkedin.com/company/newsarcade-seriously-play-the-news/)



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