2025 TECH TRENDS REPORT • 18TH EDITION

NEWS & INFORMATION

FTSG

Future Today Strategy Group's 2025 Tech Trend Report

Our 2025 edition includes 1000 pages, with hundreds of trends published individually in 15 volumes and as one comprehensive report. Download all sections of Future Today Strategy Group's 2025 Tech Trends report at **www.ftsg.com/trends.**

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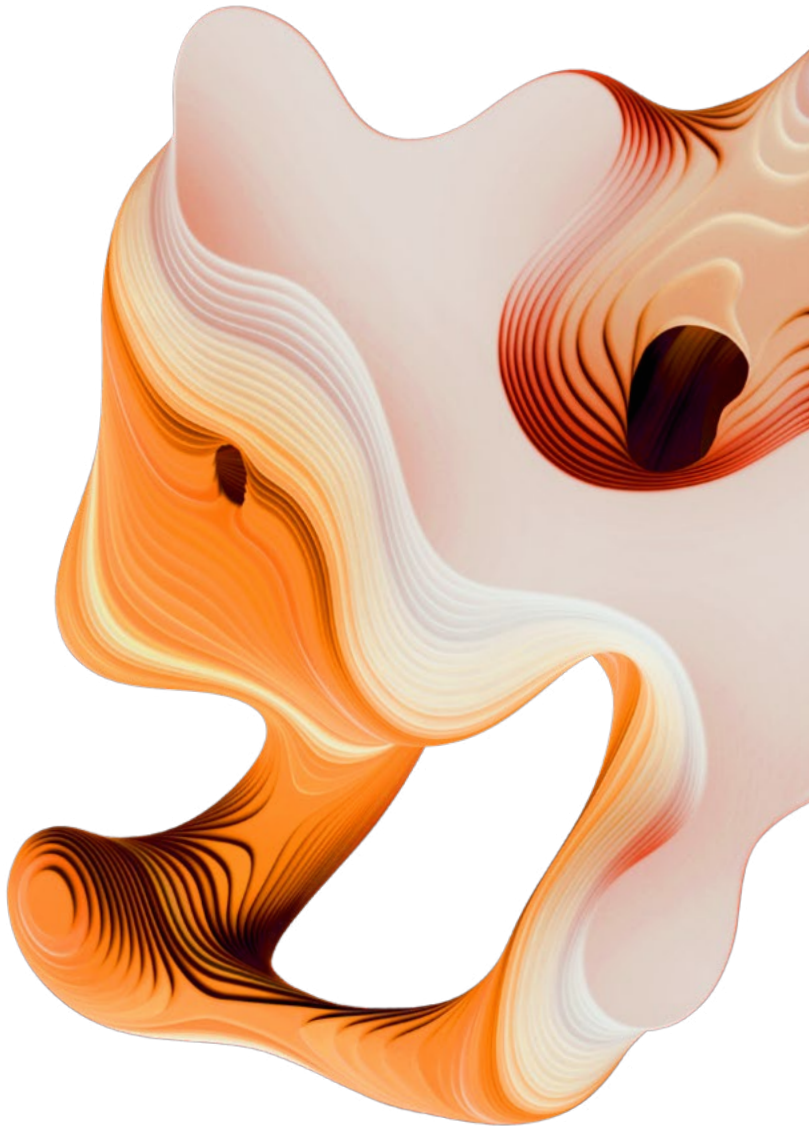

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Sam Guzik
News and Information Lead

A chaotic year ahead.

Imagine the news and information ecosystem as a duck swimming on a lake. There was an appearance of serenity last year, as news organizations doubled down on familiar strategies to keep the water placid. Yet just beneath that calm veneer was furious paddling as journalists raced to find applications of generative AI that could keep the industry stable. In 2025, a combination of technologies, regulations, and the political climate will shatter that calm like a hunter with a twelve-gauge shotgun—spooking the duck, sending ripples across the lake, and forcibly creating a new reality.

The technologies that started to transform the information economy last year will keep maturing. Consumers will encounter synthetic media in more places, and advances in generated images and videos will make it even harder to determine what is real: expect to see at least one major publisher fooled by an AI-generated hoax in the coming months. Publishers will keep fighting with tech companies about the value of their content, even as search engines and device manufacturers duke it out for a dominant position in the shifting landscape for content discovery—a fight that will almost certainly leave publishers with a weaker competitive position than before. But none of that is new; the real change in 2025 will be a brutal regulatory and political environment. If Congress repeals Section 230, it might make hosting companies think twice about providing services to aggressive investigative news outlets. We will see newsmakers file more lawsuits to punish or intimidate journalists who publish adversarial reporting. All of this will happen as our dominant social networks divest from content moderation, leaving users vulnerable to coordinated misinformation campaigns and toxic content.

The litany of threats facing the news ecosystem is dire—its collapse would have deep economic ramifications and would upend our civic life. But recognizing the stark reality ahead of us is a step toward choosing a different future. Let 2025 be the year we turn our backs on dated strategies and choose to invest in reinventing our information infrastructure.

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Patterns for distributing and discovering information are breaking.

1

AI is driving change and will keep shifting the information ecosystem

The most substantive economic impact of AI to date has been licensing payouts for a handful of big publishers. The competition will start shifting in the year ahead to separate AI “haves” that have positioned themselves to grow from the “have-nots.”

2

News organizations need to adapt to shifting norms

Trust in news is at historic lows. The Trump administration is taking steps to limit the access of independent news organizations. Publishers will need to navigate a hostile landscape as they try to stay relevant.

3

Content verification is getting harder

Journalists and others who depend on accurate information face growing challenges as AI-driven manipulation blurs the line between real and fake media. Tools that both generate and verify AI-manipulated content will drive a technological arms race.

4

Synthetic media is flooding the internet, confounding news discovery

Even though fears of rampant fake news generated by AI have not yet materialized, publishers and creators increasingly need to stand out against the tsunami of derivative summaries and rewrites hitting the internet.

5

Successful applications of AI in news will build on human reporting

AI avatars are creating new distribution channels for news organizations while human journalists handle the reporting and maintain creative control. This strategy is helping publishers engage younger audiences and protect reporters in dangerous areas.

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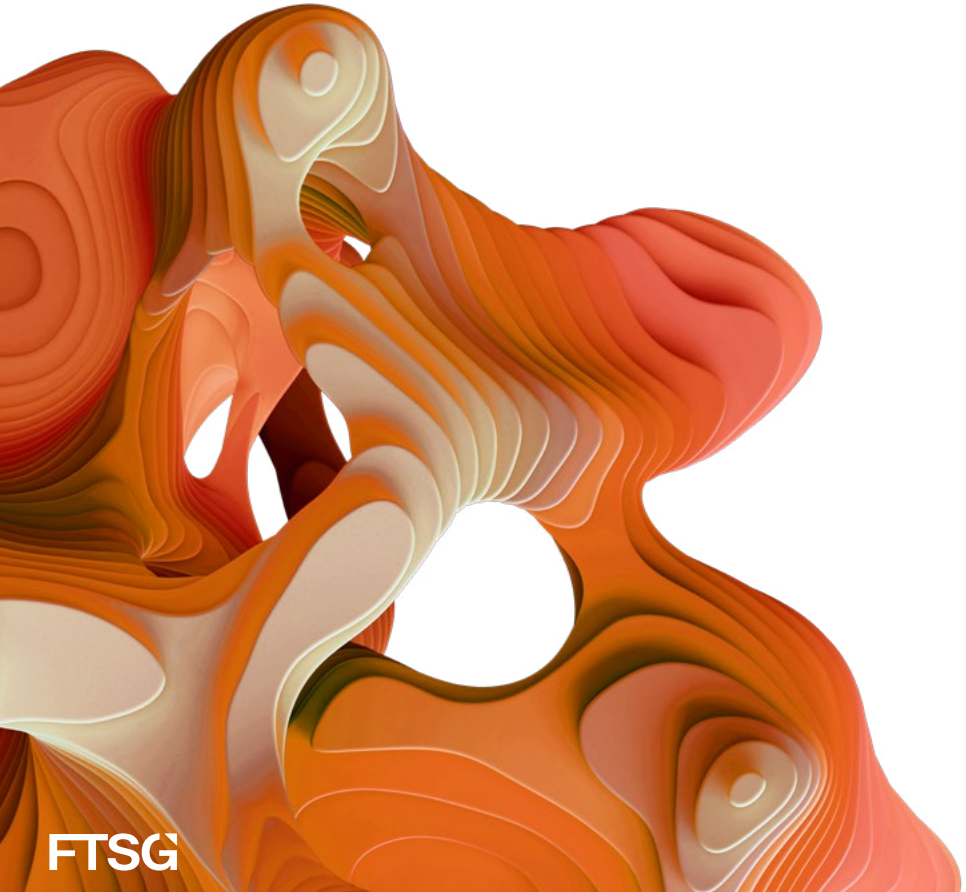
The information ecosystem is fragmenting.



The evolution of generative AI is ongoing, but the contours of the near-term media landscape are taking shape: A gap is growing between early adopters of AI and cautious observers. Large news organizations—and a handful of innovative upstarts—are actively experimenting with how to integrate AI into their operations, while many more outlets sit on the sidelines. But while there is great enthusiasm for AI, the technology's biggest economic impact has been an infusion of cash to large-scale publishers like Axel Springer, the Associated Press, and Hearst Newspapers. All three were among the news organizations that entered into content licensing agreements with tech giants like OpenAI; the long-term wisdom of those arrangements remains uncertain.

A more fundamental disruption looms in how AI might supplant the media's traditional role in building communities and social cohesion. As AI systems become more sophisticated at delivering personalized, contextual information and engaging in natural dialogue, they could satisfy some of the need for connection that news organizations have historically met. This shift is particularly significant given the already fragile state of local community bonds, declining trust in legacy media, and the migration of social discourse to online spaces. While the implications of that change unfold, news leaders may need to reconsider the function and value of their organizations in a world where people are increasingly unmoored from their communities and lack interpersonal bonds with each other.

The power dynamics between tech companies and creators will keep evolving. Publishers may gain more leverage as tech giants search for up-to-date, high-quality content to advance state-of-the-art frontier models. However, newsrooms will need to carefully consider their strategic direction to balance the potential benefits of short-term licensing revenue against the risks of dependency on technology platforms. Regardless of how they proceed, the ultimate challenge for media organizations will be maintaining their essential role in fostering informed communities while adapting to an increasingly AI-mediated information landscape.

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A chaotic year where AI established itself as a mainstream force.

JANUARY 2024

The Messenger Folds

A year of layoffs starts with the news site's demise, and staff reductions continue across the industry.

MARCH 2024

Pulitzer Finalists Used AI

Five of 45 finalists for the prestigious journalism prize disclosed using AI tools in their reporting.

JULY 2024

SCOTUS Sides with Social Media

The US Supreme Court blocks state regulation of social media in Moody v. NetChoice.

AUGUST 2024

CA Negotiates News Funding

California gets Google to pay $250 million for news in exchange for not passing a new law.

SEPTEMBER 2024

X Banned in Brazil

Elon Musk's social network is briefly banned for failing to comply with court orders.

« PAST

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Technical and regulatory forces will exert new pressure on publishers.

EARLY 2025

CA News Fund Launches

The News Transformation Fund formally launches; how it distributes funds will be closely watched.

JUNE 2025

First Amendment Cases

The US Supreme Court has a handful of First Amendment cases on its docket for 2025.

AUGUST 2025

EU Media Freedom Law

New EU rules protecting journalists and regulating transparency in media ownership take effect.

FUTURE »

SPRING 2025

Annual Media Impact Forum

The journalism industry's biggest major funders will gather to share ideas.

JUNE 2025

NextGen Broadcasting Conference

The standard-setting body for the next generation of broadcasting will hold its annual meeting.

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The evolving media ecosystem will shape our society.

We All Need Reliable News to Make Decisions

A growing body of research shows that losing local news outlets leads to more corruption, less competitive elections, and weaker government finances in impacted regions. Business leaders need to follow news and information trends so they can maintain the health of their operating environment. Without vibrant news organizations, leaders won't have the context they need to make informed decisions.

Publishers Will Influence the Future of AI

The development of generative AI models depends on vast amounts of data—and especially clean, well labeled data. A news organization's archive is full of billions of well-structured words. As tech companies look to train bigger models that stay aware of current events, publishers will be in a position to influence the future of AI. If news organizations falter, that could slow the development of new AI systems.

Search and Discovery Is Relevant to All

It's not only news organizations that need to consider how consumers encounter new information: The future of search and discovery is relevant for any business that wants to reach new customers. The shifting search and social media landscapes will make it harder for publishers to distribute news, but the same dynamics will impact retailers and other industries as well.

Verifying Information Is Essential

Journalists aren't the only professionals who need to be concerned with verifying the text, photos, and videos they encounter online: Deepfakes have already been used to perpetrate fraud and make phishing campaigns more believable. The tools that bolster the authenticity of our information ecosystem will help us all feel more comfortable taking action based on media that we encounter.

These Trends Predict Changes to Consumer Behavior

The ways that people consume and access information are changing. That has deep ramifications for publishers but is relevant to any business that depends on consumers getting information and making a decision with it—from finance to consumer goods and more. Understanding how media consumption is evolving will help leaders adapt to shifting customer preferences.

News Deeply Intertwines with the Advertising Ecosystem

News has historically been one of the core tools for building audiences large enough to sell to advertisers. These trends will drive the ongoing fragmentation of the media landscape, informing the strategies and technologies that advertisers need to reach consumers. Anticipating where people will get their information will help businesses that want to get a message out.

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These individuals are at the forefront of development and transformation in the News & Information industry.

- **Dr. Manny Ahmed, founder of OpenOrigins,** a technology company dedicated to preventing disinformation caused by generative AI, for advancing content provenance work in media.
- **Dr. Sun Joo "Grace" Ahn, founding director of the Center for Advanced Computer-Human Ecosystems at the University of Georgia,** for research on how people are affected by immersive media.
- **Dale R. Anglin, director of Press Forward,** for leading a half-billion dollar, multiyear effort to bolster investment in journalism and civic infrastructure in the United States.
- **Matthew Conlen & Harsha Panduranga, co-founders of Realtime,** for prototyping a platform that uses AI to scrape, summarize, and format data in a user-friendly news product.
- **Florent Daudens, press lead for Hugging Face,** for leading journalism outreach efforts—like publishing working examples to inspire journalists—at the AI company.
- **Dr. Nick Diakopoulos, director of the Computational Journalism Lab at Northwestern University,** for research on AI, automation, and algorithms in news production and distribution.
- **Ezra Eeman, director of strategy and innovation at Dutch Public Broadcasting,** for leading an AI initiative for WAN-IFRA, an organization that supports publishers around the world.
- **Araceli Gómez-Aldana, reporter at WBEZ,** for research conducted as a John S. Knight Journalism Fellow about using AI to facilitate the translation of local news into other languages.
- **Monsur Hussain, head of innovation at Nigeria's Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development,** for building an AI system to support fact-checking claims on WhatsApp.
- **Francesco Marconi, co-founder of computational journalism startup Applied XL,** for developing and deploying AI systems that can surface substantive real-time insights.
- **Mattia Peretti, a 2024 ICFJ Knight Fellow,** for founding News Alchemists, a project aiming to redefine journalism around audience needs and financial sustainability.
- **Nikita Roy, futurist and 2024 ICFJ Knight Fellow,** for systematic efforts to improve the quality of training and strategic conversations about AI in news organizations.

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AI can help publishers develop new ways to reach audiences...

OPPORTUNITIES

AI-generated avatars that present news in multiple languages or dialects enable organizations to reach underserved or underrepresented audiences, improving content accessibility and driving higher engagement in new demographics.

With AI-powered search and voice interfaces, news organizations can offer personalized, conversational experiences, increasing user engagement.

AI tools can help news organizations get more value from their archives. With AI search improving, organizations can offer subscription-based access to deep, well-indexed content, making historical news accessible and monetizable.

AI systems can identify emerging trends or uncover hidden stories in large datasets. News organizations that invest in AI will have a competitive advantage uncovering unique, data-rich investigative stories for their audience.

...but emerging devices and technologies are intermediating publishers from their users.

THREATS

AI-generated news summaries risk stripping articles of critical context, particularly in sensitive or complex stories, which could lead to misinterpretations. This threatens journalistic integrity and may cause audience trust to decline.

The increasing sophistication of AI-generated deepfakes makes verifying content harder for news organizations. This erodes public trust and complicates efforts to distinguish authentic journalism from fabricated media.

As devices increasingly incorporate AI-generated summaries, news organizations risk being displaced in the content value chain. When publishers have less control over distribution, it is harder to pursue ad and audience revenue.

AI tools that repurpose original content pose intellectual property challenges. Creators risk losing control over how their work is used, leading to legal battles and tensions between tech companies and media organizations.

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With planning, journalists can use AI to create new opportunities.

Reconsider how roles and responsibilities are distributed in your organization. Many news organizations keep technology and product teams siloed as a support function, rather than integrating them with the editorial team. Legacy organizational charts may be resistant to change; look for opportunities to reorganize staff in ways that improve collaboration and allow for faster experimentation.

Build direct partnerships with researchers and universities exploring applications of generative AI relevant to your business. Those relationships could help news organizations get earlier access to emerging technologies—and will let them shape how the field develops without relying on commercial products from big tech companies.

Explore products and experiences built around structured data. While LLMs are well positioned to disrupt the creation of traditional text, video, and audio formats, that's not the only way to meet people's information needs. With the right information architecture and user experience, local news organizations may be able to redefine themselves as purveyors of geographically relevant information.

Journalism schools and industry groups should double down on training that helps reporters verify information and identify manipulated media. The risk of widespread distribution of AI-generated misinformation is real; the time to prepare for a systematic attack on the information ecosystem is now, before false narratives reach audiences.

To trust AI-generated content, publishers should develop a sophisticated understanding of the AI supply chain. News organizations live and die by the accuracy of their products, so they need to be especially careful about "hallucinations" from AI. Now is when publishers should test different solutions, including whether open-weights models like Llama provide better results than commercially available models like Gemini or GPT-4.

The business of news relies on trust, and media companies should explore the particular drivers of trust for their audience. Those insights should inform investment decisions. But regardless of how much publishers decide to use AI or other new technology in their products, now is the time to start thinking about how to communicate those decisions to readers, viewers, and users.

Technology Deployment | Capital Expenditure | Talent Development | Regulatory Influence

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NEWS & INFORMATION TRENDS

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REPORTING & VERIFYING INFORMATION

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4TH YEAR ON THE LIST

COMPUTER-DIRECTED REPORTING

WHAT IT IS

Artificial intelligence is transforming journalism by helping newsrooms analyze vast datasets, generate story leads, and automate some content creation. These tools offer the still-unproven promise of deeper investigative reporting and new modes of audience engagement.

HOW IT WORKS

Newsrooms globally are adopting AI-powered tools to take on meaningful tasks in the story production pipeline. For example, The Washington Post uses an AI tool called Haystacker to sift through large volumes of data. One story analyzed a database of political campaign ads to demonstrate that campaigns use outdated or misleading visuals in nearly 20% of advertisements about immigration.

While much of the experimentation with AI is happening at well-funded commercial newsrooms in the US and Europe, some smaller publishers are seeking out innovative applications of the technology: Pennsylvania's Spotlight PA developed an AI chat interface that provides voters with critical election-related information. This tool helps citizens navigate the complexities of electoral processes by delivering accurate, timely information via natural language responses. In Colombia, Cuestión Pública uses Odin, an AI-based system that generates social media threads based on the data that journalists uncover in their reports. By employing retrieval-augmented generation, Odin ensures that content is fact-based.

A broader trend is the integration of AI into routine news operations. For example, the Associated Press and AppliedXL launched an AI-driven platform that delivers updates on regulatory changes from over 430 federal agencies, helping newsrooms stay current with policy shifts and contextualize stories quickly.

WHY IT MATTERS

AI is shaping the future of journalism by making the news-gathering process more efficient and precise. Economists from the University of Chicago have found that journalists are among the most frequent professional users of AI. These tools help journalists work faster, allowing them to uncover hidden patterns in complex datasets that would be too time-consuming to analyze manually. As AI continues to improve, news organizations can focus more on investigative depth while AI manages routine reporting tasks.

AI tools can also enable enhanced voter engagement by delivering accessible, accurate information. In an era where misinformation can spread rapidly, AI can help verify facts and ensure that news is accurate and contextualized. Tools like Odin prevent hallucinations in AI-generated content, fostering trust between readers and news outlets.

By automating routine tasks, AI offers the promise that journalists could focus more on high-impact stories. Whether that is true, though, will depend on how newsroom leaders choose to use this technology. As more newsrooms adopt these tools, the landscape of journalism will shift toward a blend of human editorial oversight and machine-driven analysis, allowing for a richer, more detailed exploration of societal issues.

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2ND YEAR ON THE LIST

SUMMARIZATION AT SCALE

WHAT IT IS

AI-driven summarization is transforming news consumption with the promise of quick, digestible insights available everywhere. As AI features are incorporated into consumer devices, the landscape for news distribution and discovery will change dramatically.

HOW IT WORKS

AI summarization technology is becoming a critical tool for managing the overwhelming volume of digital content. Media companies like USA Today and the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) have integrated AI-generated summaries into their articles, giving readers a quick overview before they dive into full stories. At USA Today, journalists review the three "key points" before publication, and a disclaimer at the bottom of the article discloses that the bullets were generated with AI. NRK's data shows that users who interact with its summaries engage with the article for longer and are more likely to be younger.

The emergence of models optimized for consumer hardware means that the curation function is increasingly integrated into devices, improving security and reducing the cost of generating summaries at scale. This localized processing opens the door for more personalized uses of AI summarization, such as blending news with personal information, emails, or messages.

However, this shift to AI-generated content isn't without challenges. Summarization models are prone to losing critical context, especially in nuanced reporting, which can lead to misinterpretations. In particular, AI models struggle with accurately handling direct quotes—sometimes altering or incorrectly attributing them as factual statements. This presents significant risks for news organizations, where misquoted or decontextualized information can damage credibility.

WHY IT MATTERS

AI summarization is fundamentally altering how we consume information by creating a faster, more efficient way to engage with content. For news organizations, this offers a double-edged sword. On one hand, AI-generated summaries cater to modern consumer habits—quick, skimmable content that fits within the busy lives of readers. On the other hand, this rapid shift comes with substantial challenges. The risk of removing context, misinterpreting content, or misquoting sources is real without careful training. Generative models don't intrinsically understand the meaning of quotation marks in news stories: Incorrectly paraphrasing or altering statements not only threatens journalistic integrity but also exposes organizations to reputational harm. As more platforms and devices embrace AI summaries, the potential for context erosion will only grow, raising concerns about the long-term implications for informed discourse.

As summarization models are increasingly built into devices, control over information distribution shifts away from publishers and into the hands of technology companies. Device manufacturers could potentially dictate what content gets summarized and how it is delivered, impacting the flow of traffic back to original news sources. This consolidation of power could marginalize smaller media outlets and reshape the economics of online journalism, forcing organizations to reconsider their digital strategies to stay competitive.

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2ND YEAR ON THE LIST

CONTENT VERIFICATION IN A DEEPFAKE ERA

WHAT IT IS

Content verification tools face growing challenges as AI-driven manipulation blurs the line between real and fake media. Even with advanced verification systems, AI-generated content can still deceive audiences, posing risks to public trust in news and information.

HOW IT WORKS

These tools are designed to authenticate media by using algorithms that analyze digital content for signs of tampering, such as manipulation of video, audio, or images. They can compare an image or video with metadata, track visual inconsistencies, or use AI-based classifiers to determine whether content was digitally altered. Even when they work as expected, the tools can be abused: Shortly after President Biden was diagnosed with Covid in July 2024, conspiracy theories began circulating alleging he was dead. The supposed proof was a video on X showing ElevenLabs' AI Speech Classifier describing an audio recording of Biden as "very likely" AI-generated—but that "proof" had been faked by someone trying to fool viewers.

Leading initiatives like Adobe's Content Authenticity Initiative (CAI) are working to create more robust standards. CAI promotes a three-pronged approach through metadata tagging, watermarking, and visual fingerprinting, built on the C2PA (Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity) standard, to identify if content has been altered after creation. Other verification efforts, such as real-time detection systems, aim to incorporate signals of authenticity into the production of media to make it more resistant to tampering. One team at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore developed a system for detecting face manipulation and other types of deepfakes in real time based on how the image responds to vibrations triggered on the capture device.

WHY IT MATTERS

The rise of deepfakes and AI-generated content threatens to undermine the public's trust in media, politics, and even personal communications. The ease of generating fake images, videos, and audio means that even when media is authentic, the specter of manipulation looms large. When running for president in 2024, Donald Trump repeatedly alleged that images of Harris-Walz campaign rallies were faked using generative AI. Even when that notion was rejected by content verification experts and reporters on the ground, the rumor persisted online. The fact that existing tools for detecting whether content is created by AI can be easily defeated places special weight on publishers to build trust with their audience.

The proliferation of tools that both generate and verify AI-manipulated content will drive the next technological arms races in the media industry. The news sector, in particular, faces existential challenges if it cannot reliably prove the authenticity of its reporting. The stakes are high for content creators, journalists, and governments alike as they struggle to stay ahead of AI-based deception. As content verification becomes more necessary, adopting solutions that combine several techniques—like watermarking, metadata, and real-time detection—will be vital to maintaining trust in a world increasingly dominated by AI.

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5TH YEAR ON THE LIST

SENSORY JOURNALISM

WHAT IT IS

As immersive headsets and other wearables gain market penetration, there will be new opportunities for journalists to tell stories that tap into their audiences' senses and emotions with emerging technologies like virtual and augmented reality.

HOW IT WORKS

Sensory journalism technologies include augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and AI to create immersive storytelling experiences that engage more than just sight and sound. The combination of text, visuals, sound, and often interactive elements draw audiences deeper into a narrative, making them active participants rather than passive observers.

While the hype around the metaverse may have faded, these tools continue to advance. The University of Georgia launched the Center for Advanced Computer-Human Ecosystems to explore how to use VR environments for communal storytelling, where audiences "live" the stories together. These immersive technologies enable journalists to create emotionally charged, sense-driven content, increasing empathy and engagement. AI plays a significant role in this trend by automating some storytelling processes and enabling more personalized, emotionally resonant content. El Surtidor, a Paraguayan publication, developed an AI-powered chatbot to tell the story of women's imprisonment in a deeply human way. The entirely text-based experience has users interacting directly with a composite woman's story, fostering a personal and emotional connection with women incarcerated for drug trafficking.

Journalists are also leveraging immersive experiences for training purposes: The 2402 Foundation used VR to simulate dangerous reporting environments to train journalists covering conflict zones in Ukraine.

WHY IT MATTERS

Sensory journalism reshapes how stories are told, making audiences more emotionally connected to the content. They feel like they are a part of the story, which research shows can foster empathy and a more nuanced understanding of complex issues. But there is a risk that immersive experiences could be used, intentionally or unintentionally, to steer public opinion with emotional responses. As journalists experiment with VR and AR storytelling, they will need to update their ethical frameworks.

Future journalists will need to craft narratives that aren't just accurate but also deliver a rich sensory experience. This may open new opportunities for audiences and journalists to co-create stories, but it also demands that resource-constrained newsrooms incorporate new skills into their workforce.

Because the hardware that enables sensory journalism is so new, it's likely that immersive stories produced in the near future will be co-creations with technologists. And because a dominant standard doesn't yet exist for delivering VR content, the audience for the first immersive stories will be limited to who owns the hardware it is compatible with. News organizations should be conscious that their collaborations may be used to shape consumer demand for headsets.

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2ND YEAR ON THE LIST

ALGORITHMIC FACT-CHECKING

WHAT IT IS

AI-powered fact-checking tools are transforming journalism by automating misinformation detection at scale. While these tools offer speed and efficiency, concerns over biases in AI models and government-funded research highlight the need for transparency and human oversight.

HOW IT WORKS

Algorithmic fact-checking involves using artificial intelligence and machine learning models to verify the accuracy of information. The process typically starts with an AI model identifying claims in an article, followed by a comparison with reliable data sources. Large language models (LLMs), such as GPT, are used in these systems for their ability to process language and generate fact-based outputs. Some systems also incorporate retrieval-augmented generation, which helps overcome the limitations of static knowledge bases by constantly pulling in updated information from the web.

Fact-checking traditionally relies on manual processes that are labor-intensive and slow. With algorithmic models, AI can prescreen articles, prioritizing certain claims for human review. Der Spiegel, a German news site, built an experimental tool to support its fact-checking process. The system starts by using an LLM to identify all the factual statements in the article. A series of agents then compare those statements to information in a knowledge base and online. The statements of fact are then prioritized for human fact-checkers to review, so they can focus on the information that's hardest to verify.

WHY IT MATTERS

The volume of misinformation in today's media environment presents a growing challenge for news outlets, platforms, and consumers. Manual fact-checking is too slow to keep up with the sheer volume of content produced daily. Algorithmic solutions offer scalability, enabling the rapid evaluation of information and reducing the spread of false claims. However, automated fact-checking systems are not without risks. Models trained on biased data, or influenced by political agendas, can lead to skewed results, potentially reinforcing misinformation rather than correcting it.

The integration of algorithmic fact-checking tools in newsrooms promises to enhance the credibility of reporting by flagging misinformation before it reaches the public. But as these tools are increasingly adopted globally, including in tightly controlled environments like China, the international community must closely scrutinize the influence of these systems. Journalists and media organizations need to remain vigilant about how pretrained models are built and the potential for embedded biases.

As trust in media remains fragile, striking a balance between technology-driven fact-checking and human oversight will be critical in preserving the integrity of news.

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1ST YEAR ON THE LIST

AVATARS PRESENT THE NEWS WITH HUMANS IN CHARGE

WHAT IT IS

AI-generated avatars are creating new distribution channels for news organizations even as human journalists maintain creative control. This strategy is helping publishers engage younger audiences and protect reporters in dangerous areas.

HOW IT WORKS

A growing number of news organizations around the world are using AI-generated avatars to deliver news. The synthetic journalists aren't autonomous actors, however: They are backed by substantial teams of human journalists who report, edit, and craft their message. Grupo Fórmula, one of Mexico's leading broadcasters, created three avatars: NAT for entertainment stories, SOFI for political topics, and MAX for general news. These avatars are carefully monitored and guided by teams of journalists who write scripts, verify facts, and oversee production. Grupo Fórmula thinks these approaches will help reach younger audiences, who may not respond to traditional news formats, with avatars whose appearance and speech patterns can be tailored to meet audience needs.

In regions with political unrest, like Venezuela, journalists are using AI avatars to hide their identities while reporting the news in the face of threats. Following Venezuela's controversial election in July, a group of Venezuelan journalists partnered with Connectas, a Colombia-based journalism platform, to launch avatars that obscure their identities.

In Peru, AI avatars are also being used to reach underrepresented groups. The National University of San Marcos developed Illariy, an AI-generated presenter who delivers news in Quechua, Peru's most spoken indigenous language.

WHY IT MATTERS

AI avatars allow news organizations to hyper-tailor content to niche communities, creating new opportunities to reach underserved audiences. This could be especially useful for publishers looking to present news across languages or cultural contexts. While this level of customization could make news more accessible and relevant for some audiences, there are risks: As news becomes more fragmented and customized, the shared experiences that mass media once provided may be lost, weakening the role of journalism in fostering a common public dialogue.

Despite the opportunities for innovation, there are challenges ahead. Audiences may initially question the authenticity or trustworthiness of news delivered by an AI anchor, making it imperative for news organizations to be transparent about the human oversight involved. Additionally, the overreliance on avatars could unintentionally distance viewers from the very human stories being told. The challenge for newsrooms will be maintaining journalistic integrity and fostering public trust while navigating the appeal of tailored, AI-driven distribution.

Above all, this trend complicates the narrative about how AI will impact the media landscape. The emergence of AI-generated presenters doesn't mean journalism jobs will immediately evaporate. Instead, new distribution channels will create demand for new types of reporting and editing roles.

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SCENARIO YEAR 2029

ALGORITHMIC FACT-CHECKING GETS HIJACKED

Wherever people gather to share news and information, algorithmic fact-checking is ubiquitous. News feeds automatically reduce the distribution of stories that fail real-time verification tests. Messaging apps run fact-checking algorithms locally to detect and flag misinformation in group chats and direct messages without compromising encrypted communications. On-device AI agents validate information before summarizing it for consumers.

As a result, people generally trust the news they see; they are accustomed to seeing reliability scores and green check marks across platforms. The quality of civic discourse is improved because people can get immediate fact-checks during conversations and casual encounters through wearables. This trust came from years of work: News organizations, researchers, and tech companies worked together to build sophisticated algorithms that grasp reporting nuances.

But even though misinformation is rare, this future is dark. Investigative reporting languishes because the algorithms routinely block controversial stories. Because journalists were focused on building systems to detect the kinds of misinformation that was rampant when fact-checking systems were developing in the mid-2020s, they failed to consider other inputs to the algorithms. And because the open-source tools that became the backbone of the information ecosystem were built by government-funded researchers, the algorithms subtly reject information that challenges official narratives. The tools built to help people trust what they see threaten the truth. As the world grapples with this crisis, one question looms: Who will fact-check the fact-checkers?

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SEARCH & DISCOVERY

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8TH YEAR ON THE LIST

SEARCH INTERFACES EVOLVE WITH AI AND VOICE

WHAT IT IS

The evolution of search interfaces, driven by AI and multimodal models, is reshaping how users discover information. Search engines are shifting away from offering "10 blue links" and focusing on delivering personalized, AI-powered experiences with higher-quality content.

HOW IT WORKS

Search interfaces are evolving as AI and voice search transform how users find information. Google, for instance, has made significant changes to its search algorithms in the last year, penalizing sites with unoriginal content. Microsoft and Google are both racing to stay ahead of startups that offer native, AI-powered experiences by embedding new AI features on their results pages.

Multimodal AI models, capable of handling text, voice, and images, are poised to further disrupt search by allowing users to interact with AI in a more natural way. Startups like Perplexity AI are using retrieval-augmented generation to offer conversational search experiences without introducing hallucinations. While initially the company faced strong pushback from critics alleging the tool violates copyright by plagiarizing content, Perplexity AI responded by offering an ad-revenue share to publishers that agree to let them summarize their content. Time, Der Spiegel, and Fortune were among the first to participate in the licensing scheme.

AI is also transforming voice search. OpenAI's GPT-4o has demonstrated the potential for deeper, more meaningful conversations, surpassing the capabilities of established voice assistants like Amazon's Alexa. Multimodal AI models are particularly well-positioned to lead this revolution, as they can understand and generate content across different media types, creating richer search experiences for users.

WHY IT MATTERS

The evolution of search interfaces is significant because it fundamentally alters how users engage with digital content—and requires businesses and marketers to rethink their strategies for reaching new users. Relying on traditional SEO tactics no longer guarantees top rankings. Instead, publishers need to double down on their website's user experience while considering how to communicate their brand value in AI-generated summaries. And they'll need to find new ways to attract users even as search engines increasingly look like virtual assistants, with features designed to keep users from leaving. The integration of AI in search may accelerate as model capacity increases and as technologists propose new ways of incorporating information created after an LLM was trained. An international group of researchers proposed a framework in September called MMSearch that lets any LLM act as a multimodal search engine and creates a standard benchmark to compare the results. To date, OpenAI's GPT-4o had the strongest performance. But none of the LLMs performed as well as a human researcher.

These advancements offer the promise of quicker, more accurate answers with less effort for users. Voice search, in particular, has the potential to further streamline how people find information, making search a more conversational and natural process. This shift will likely encourage broader adoption of voice-enabled devices and AI-driven search assistants, leading to more integrated and seamless interactions with technology in daily life.

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4TH YEAR ON THE LIST

TEACHING NEWS LITERACY

WHAT IT IS

It is essential to equip the public, especially young people, with tools to critically evaluate information. Initiatives to teach consumers how to identify fake news, media bias, and the role of social media platforms can prepare them to navigate a shifting media landscape.

HOW IT WORKS

News literacy programs are designed to help individuals navigate the increasingly complex information ecosystem. Schools, governments, and news organizations all have a role to play in fostering critical thinking skills to differentiate between trustworthy news sources and disinformation.

Amid rising concerns about global disinformation, the focus has shifted from merely identifying misinformation to understanding the systemic factors that amplify it. The spread of false information is often exacerbated on digital platforms, whose algorithms selectively promote content that maximizes engagement rather than accuracy. Recent research from Northeastern University found that when individuals are educated about how social media algorithms work, they are more likely to recognize and act against misinformation. However, this knowledge is unevenly distributed, and many lack access to critical tools.

AI is increasingly being explored as part of the solution: Researchers from MIT and Cornell have developed AI chatbots capable of persuading individuals to question conspiracy theories, successfully reducing belief in such ideas by 20%. These emerging technologies signal potential for more interactive and scalable news literacy solutions.

WHY IT MATTERS

Disinformation and misinformation pose critical risks to public understanding and democratic processes. In particular, disinformation campaigns by foreign governments—such as those launched by Iran and Russia in recent years—undermine trust in institutions and create social divisions. To counter these effects, news literacy education must evolve beyond traditional media sources and engage with digital ecosystems, with a focus on the algorithms that dictate much of what people see online. Teaching news literacy is not only about recognizing false information but also understanding how information is filtered and spread by platforms like Facebook, X, and YouTube.

As AI-powered tools become more accessible, they may play a significant role in tackling disinformation at scale. News literacy programs equipped with AI assistants could provide real-time fact-checking, debunk conspiracy theories, and offer insight into how personal data influences the news individuals see. The more citizens understand about these systems, the less susceptible they will be to manipulation by bad actors.

By preparing the public—especially younger generations—through educational initiatives, societies can build resilience against disinformation. Teaching news literacy will be vital to ensure that democracies remain robust in an era where information ecosystems are increasingly polluted by falsehoods.

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3RD YEAR ON THE LIST

USER DIRECTED MEDIA FORMATS

WHAT IT IS

AI-driven tools are shifting content control from creators to audiences. As the cost of transforming text into audio or images into video decreases, users are poised to have more control to direct how they want to consume media.

HOW IT WORKS

Multimodal generative AI models excel at transforming content from one format to another, and some of 2024's most talked about AI products built on this feature set. Google, for example, added an experimental feature to its note-taking app, NotebookLM, to generate conversational podcast-style audio from documents. Shortly after Google announced the feature, it became common to see the generated summaries flooding social media.

At its Connect event in September, Meta launched a tool that lets users automatically dub videos into another language. The initial tests will run on videos from creators in Latin America and the United States, with translations between English and Spanish.

AI startup OpusClip deployed a tool called ClipAnything that's capable of sophisticated video editing based on natural language prompts. Given a prompt, it can cut a sports highlight reel or excerpt a specific part of the video. The tool's applications include speeding up the production of clips for social media, but the underlying technology could also give users more control over what they watch in the future.

WHY IT MATTERS

The implications of this shift are profound for the future of content creation and media consumption. As the cost of media transformation decreases, audiences are gaining more power in the content creation process, reshaping the relationship between creators and consumers. This audience-directed approach challenges traditional models of media production, where creators held most of the control. With tools that offer more personalized media experiences, user-generated content will dominate, driving platforms to prioritize features that allow seamless media customization.

Furthermore, AI-driven platforms like YouTube that already dominate podcast discovery are poised to capitalize on this trend by integrating advanced AI tools that can help users find or even create new content tailored to their preferences. This democratization of media production will lead to more niche content, blur the lines between professional and amateur media, and potentially disrupt traditional content industries such as filmmaking, podcasting, and journalism. Companies in this space must adapt to these shifts or risk being left behind in a more user-controlled media landscape.

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10TH YEAR ON THE LIST

DIGITAL FRAILTY

WHAT IT IS

Digital storage is more vulnerable than we realize, with cultural memory at risk due to data loss, AI misinformation, and sabotage. Studies show significant portions of the web and social media vanish within a decade, compounding the fragility of our information ecosystem.

HOW IT WORKS

Digital frailty refers to the susceptibility of our vast online information systems to corruption, loss, and distortion. A Pew Research Center study found that 38% of websites that existed in 2013 were no longer available a decade later. This trend affects everything from government records to news articles, with 21% of government websites and nearly a quarter of news sources including at least one “dead” link. More than half of the articles on Wikipedia include at least one broken reference.

The problem doesn’t stop with missing websites. Pew reports that nearly one in five tweets disappears within months of posting, with accounts either becoming private, suspended, or deleted. The ramifications are severe for both the preservation of public discourse and historical records, as posts that changed the trajectory of the digital conversation can quickly vanish.

A new dimension of this trend emerges as AI-driven tools, such as generative models, are incorporated into the ways we access and interpret information. Generated answers are vulnerable to hallucination, but people don’t always know how to recognize when they’re not seeing something accurate. Research from MIT Media Lab has found that vulnerability can be compounded because interaction with generative AI systems can distort human memory, making participants three times more likely to form false memories compared to traditional methods.

WHY IT MATTERS

As society relies more heavily on digital platforms to store cultural, historical, and governmental records, the risks of data loss, misinformation, and sabotage are rising. This fragility poses a significant threat to our ability to preserve cultural memory, maintain accountability, and provide accurate information to future generations. And as search engines and AI tools pivot toward generative models, they introduce new risks, further complicating the reliability of information retrieval.

Generative AI, in particular, presents a unique challenge. Although AI models can process and synthesize vast amounts of data, their reliance on probabilistic patterns means they may generate false or misleading information—without any built-in mechanism to distinguish fact from fiction. This has profound implications for sectors like education, journalism, and governance, where accurate, reliable information is critical.

Leaders in digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and information governance must act now to address the vulnerabilities of digital frailty. This includes creating more resilient, long-lasting digital archives, improving transparency in AI-driven data systems, and ensuring that the tools we rely on for knowledge preservation are equipped with robust protections against manipulation, corruption, and deletion.

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2ND YEAR ON THE LIST

THE BATTLE FOR CONTENT VALUE

WHAT IT IS

News organizations face critical decisions regarding AI model training and content licensing. As generative AI reshapes the media landscape, publishers must balance between licensing deals and protecting their intellectual property.

HOW IT WORKS

Generative AI is disrupting the media ecosystem by upending the traditional value chain for news and information. With the rise of large language models (LLMs), news outlets now find themselves in a dilemma: Should they license their content to tech companies to train these models or hold out in an attempt to protect their proprietary value?

AI models require vast datasets to improve, and publishers have vast archives of original, deeply reported content. Some research suggests that AI models start to degrade when trained on AI-generated content; if that finding holds, publishers may get more leverage in negotiations with AI developers. But if companies like Google and OpenAI can find a way to advance their technology with synthetic data, publishers like Hearst and Axel Springer that have entered large licensing deals may not be able to renew those agreements profitably.

Legislators in Australia and Canada passed laws designed to force platforms to pay for displaying news content; a similar law was proposed in California last year. Those laws have had mixed results. For instance, when Meta stopped showing Canadian news on its platforms, news organizations saw dramatic drops in engagement, with no corresponding rise on alternative platforms. Meanwhile, tech companies are exploring ways to bypass reliance on licensed data by using synthetic datasets or fine-tuning models to minimize the need for high-quality real-world data.

WHY IT MATTERS

Licensing deals with AI companies provide immediate financial relief but come with the long-term risk of losing control over proprietary content. News organizations that hold out on licensing deals might protect their value while falling behind competitors that embrace new revenue streams from AI. Moreover, governments stepping in to regulate tech platforms' relationships with news organizations may have unintended consequences. The solution negotiated to avoid regulation in California saw Google dedicating $250 million over five years to the state's publishers. While it's a near-term win, there is no guarantee that Google will offer funding beyond the initial period, and that sum is far less than the bill would have required it to pay.

Right now, tech companies need the publishers' original content because AI models trained on synthetic data tend to underperform, a situation referred to as "model collapse." But as companies work to improve synthetic data generation, tech will reduce its dependence on licensed content and publishers may lose their leverage. If synthetic data remains problematic, news outlets may be in a stronger position to negotiate.

This battle over content value is not just about compensation for today's news stories; it's a contest over the long-term economics of information. AI's role in automating content creation could lead to new ways of monetizing media, but it also raises ethical and practical questions about originality, bias, and the future of journalism.

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4TH YEAR ON THE LIST

POLICING THE CREATOR ECONOMY

WHAT IT IS

Content moderation is a battleground where platforms balance user safety, free speech, and regulatory pressure. Major social media platforms are making divergent choices as court rulings, policy updates, and public backlash shape the evolving social landscape.

HOW IT WORKS

Platforms use algorithms, human moderators, and user reporting systems to identify and remove illegal or harmful posts, but this balance between moderation and free expression is always contentious. Last year the Supreme Court struck down laws in Florida and Texas that aimed to regulate how platforms moderate content. In Brazil, a court temporarily blocked X over moderation failures, forcing the platform to soften its stance and comply with local regulations. This incident reflects the increasing pressure on platforms to adhere to national laws while maintaining global standards.

Some platforms, like Twitch, are taking a more educational approach. The video streaming platform introduced a system where users get more information from moderators when they are penalized for breaking the platform's rules, with opportunities to reduce penalties through corrective actions, like educational courses. This system, akin to points on a driver's license, aims to strike a balance between enforcement and rehabilitation.

Content moderation is not just a technical issue; it takes a toll on workers. Facebook's moderators in Kenya have sued the company over poor working conditions, insufficient mental health support, and low wages. This highlights the emotional and mental burden on those tasked with reviewing harmful content.

WHY IT MATTERS

Content moderation shapes the flow of information in today's digital ecosystems, influencing political discourse, public opinion, and social movements. It is not merely a technical issue but a reflection of deep societal debates over free speech, privacy, and responsibility. As governments worldwide push for tighter controls, platforms must navigate a complex landscape of laws, user expectations, and reputational risks.

While social media platforms evolve their strategy for incentivizing and removing content—and as new platforms emerge—creators need to find ways to keep up. When a platform like Facebook makes the decision to deemphasize news in its feed, publishers need to work harder to reach audiences. That can be especially challenging when organizations make business decisions based on their perception of the social media landscape, only to find the ground shifting under them; we saw this play out in the mid-2010s in the industry's disastrous "pivot to video."

The political climate in the United States and abroad will inform how much conflicts about moderation shape the year ahead. Watch to see whether Republicans renew their assault on Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act and whether new regulations are issued under the EU Digital Services Act.

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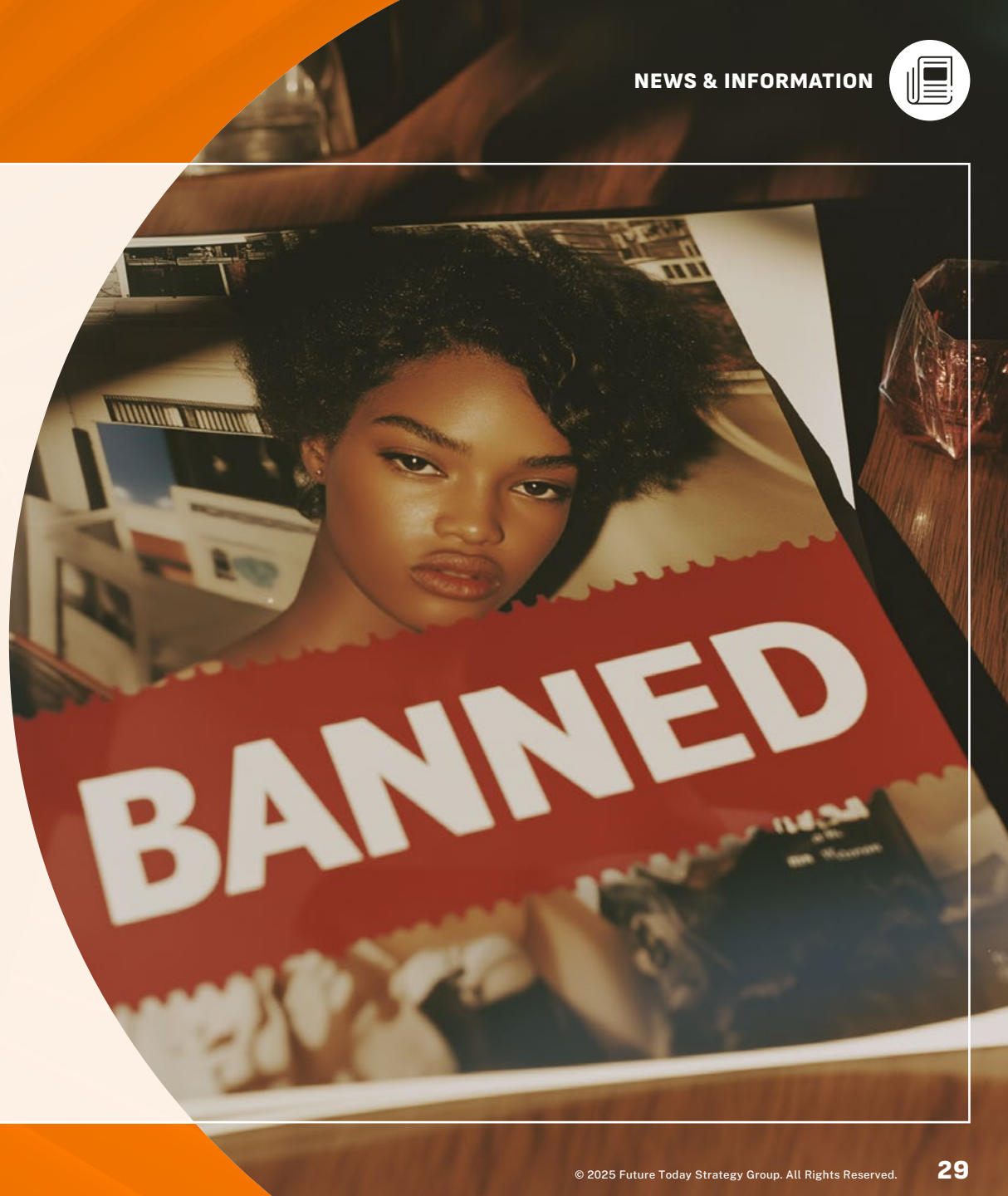
SCENARIO YEAR 2026

WEAPONIZING THE DIGITAL REVENUE STACK

For years, Teen Chic's revitalization as a digital-only publication was a rare bright spot in the US magazine publishing industry. The magazine became a destination for political journalism during the first Trump administration because its leadership team realized that readers in Generations Z and Alpha saw themselves as activists—and expected the same from the brands they followed. Teen Chic engaged honestly and authentically with social justice movements, activists, and progressive politics; that coverage helped it grow a digital audience and a sustainable advertising-supported business model.

In the run-up to the 2026 midterm elections, however, the magazine's voice has become a liability. After publishing a major investigative report about how abortion access has been curtailed since the Dobbs decision, Teen Chic's revenue cratered. The magazine finds itself struggling to monetize its content because its website isn't listed as brand safe on programmatic ad exchanges and YouTube suspended it from video monetization programs. The changes were the result of a coordinated campaign by the Trump administration to pressure the tech companies that enable digital monetization to silence their critics. The campaign culminated with a disastrous fourth quarter, usually a high-point for ad supported publishers. As the losses mount, it's publisher decides to shutter Teen Chic to protect its relationships with advertisers at other titles.



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THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

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11TH YEAR ON THE LIST

ERODING TRUST IN NEWS

WHAT IT IS

Trust in news has fallen sharply, with only 32% of Americans expressing confidence in mass media's accuracy in an annual Gallup survey. AI's rise further complicates the landscape, yet local outlets and legacy brands show potential for rebuilding trust.

HOW IT WORKS

Trust in the media has steadily eroded, with a record-high 39% of Americans expressing no trust "at all" in mainstream news outlets, according to Gallup's annual survey on the subject. This skepticism extends to established media brands, exacerbated by increased exposure to misinformation and the perception that news is influenced by partisan agendas. Even during critical events like elections, where accurate reporting is essential, the public's confidence in news has dipped to historic lows. Still, legacy media is important: A study of online news consumption during the contentious 2022 Brazilian presidential campaign found that the more exposure that people had to news from "legacy news brands," the less likely they were to believe in electoral misinformation.

Artificial intelligence has introduced new challenges for trust. AI-generated content, even when used for simple tasks such as transcription or grammar correction, is met with suspicion by news consumers. A study by the University of Minnesota found that nearly 94% of news consumers want to be informed when AI is used in the content creation process. Public sentiment remains wary of AI's role in journalism, with more than half of consumers expressing discomfort with AI-generated news articles, even when supervised by human journalists. Despite these concerns, there are pockets of resilience: The Lenfest Institute reported that up to 90% of audiences trust information from the Statewide News Collective, a local news initiative it funds.

WHY IT MATTERS

When people don't trust news organizations, it's not just publishers who suffer—entire social systems are destabilized. Distrust in news can lead to increased polarization, where people retreat into echo chambers of like-minded individuals, consuming only the information that confirms their biases. This amplifies misinformation, making it harder to distinguish fact from fiction. The breakdown of a shared set of facts hampers not just political debate but also public health initiatives, responses to climate change, and societal cohesion at large. For governments and institutions, mistrust in the media complicates the task of communicating effectively with the public, especially during crises, when clear and accurate information is most needed.

This erosion of credibility can quickly lead to journalism's business models becoming unsustainable: Advertisers are less likely to invest in platforms that have lost credibility, and consumers are less willing to pay for news they don't trust.

In an information ecosystem already weakened by decades of media consolidation and retrenchment, the erosion of trust in news is not just a media crisis—it's a societal one. Without trusted news sources, the public loses a critical infrastructure for understanding the world, undermining the ability to address complex, collective challenges.

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2ND YEAR ON THE LIST

PIVOT TO PHILANTHROPY

WHAT IT IS

Philanthropic funding has become a critical source of funding for the news ecosystem. The growth of nonprofit news outlets has bolstered reporting in communities that would otherwise be news deserts, but there is increasingly intense competition for limited funding.

HOW IT WORKS

The media landscape is undergoing a fundamental shift as news organizations see advertising provide a smaller share of revenue. Philanthropic funding—whether from individual donors or large foundations—has unlocked a surge of investment in journalism over the past decade. The importance of donations has grown in the last two years as tech giants like Google and Meta reduced their support for journalism. Still, the newsrooms receiving that funding aren't immune to competitive pressures: Nonprofit status is a tax status, not a business model.

That competition is fueling a wave of mergers among nonprofit newsrooms, mirroring the consolidation in the for-profit market. The Markup, a website focused on reporting that investigates technology, joined CalMatters, a website focused on public service journalism in California. Another example is the tie-up between Wisconsin Watch and Milwaukee Neighborhood News Source, which joined forces to pool resources in the hope of better—and more sustainably—meeting their audiences' needs.

Even as they operate in the public interest, the business practices of successful nonprofits are increasingly hard to differentiate from their for-profit peers. Both organization types need sophisticated audience development programs to maintain a pipeline of users moving from discovery to support roles (whether they are subscribers or donors).

WHY IT MATTERS

Philanthropic funding often comes with its own challenges. A recent study on the impact of Google News Initiative's support in regions like Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East revealed that while such grants are essential for innovation, they sometimes come with strings attached. Meeting funders' expectations can place significant operational pressure on news organizations, making them reliant on the same tech ecosystems that disrupted traditional journalism business models. While that research focused on Google's funding, the general principle can apply to all nonprofit news organizations.

Even though it's hard to find fault with more funding for journalism, news leaders shouldn't get complacent about philanthropic support. That's especially true as the information ecosystem is reshaped by the other trends described in this report: Individual and institutional donors alike expect that their money supports reporting that reaches audiences. If it's harder to reach people—or harder to prove exactly how many people were reached—that will impact the viability of future funding. Smart leaders will pursue balanced revenue strategies that mitigate the risk of any single funding stream having an outside impact on the future of the organization.

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2ND YEAR ON THE LIST

DISORDERED CONSUMPTION AND NEWS AVOIDANCE

WHAT IT IS

Extreme reactions to a fast-paced and polarized news ecosystem have led to two distinct behaviors: news avoidance and doomscrolling. Some avoid news for mental health reasons, while others get trapped in harmful consumption patterns, highlighting shifts in news habits.

HOW IT WORKS

The relentless 24-hour news cycle, compounded by the rise of social media and algorithm-driven platforms, has created an environment where information is both ubiquitous and emotionally taxing. News avoidance is increasingly prevalent, driven by a perception that people are constantly surrounded by information. Research shows that many people feel they no longer need to seek out news actively; instead, they expect to get key updates through social media or chats with friends and family. As a result, people often choose not to build a regular news consumption habit, particularly when faced with the emotional burden of political or divisive content.

Even when users want to follow the news closely, their consumption may be steered by the design of a platform's algorithms. A group of researchers studied content recommendations on YouTube and found that the site's algorithms have a higher probability of recommending entertainment videos than news content. That research suggests that sometimes news avoidance isn't a user preference but an inherent bias in the algorithms that drive digital distribution.

Researchers have noted that not all news avoiders are disengaging from information entirely. Platforms like Twitch have become alternative spaces for news consumption, where authenticity and direct interaction with content creators are valued over traditional journalistic norms. This shift indicates that while some may avoid mainstream news, there is still demand for more relatable and interactive formats.

WHY IT MATTERS

The trend toward disordered consumption and news avoidance is critical as it shapes the future of how people interact with information, affecting democratic engagement, public discourse, and individual mental health.

News avoidance could exacerbate the current information crisis, leaving consumers vulnerable to misinformation and less informed on critical issues. For democracies, a disengaged or misinformed public is particularly problematic, as it may lead to reduced civic participation and a breakdown in the essential functions of news media.

For news organizations, the challenge is twofold. First, they must navigate an ecosystem where platform algorithms act as gatekeepers, often promoting content that is antithetical to the values of quality journalism. Second, they must address shifting audience expectations, particularly among younger consumers who favor more interactive and less formal modes of engagement.

The rise of news channels on platforms like Twitch presents an opportunity to reimagine news delivery, with a focus on authenticity, real-time interaction, and a more conversational tone.

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2ND YEAR ON THE LIST

DATA-ENRICHED BROADCASTING

WHAT IT IS

A new standard for broadcast TV called ATSC 3.0 unlocks new opportunities for real-time media consumption, interactive features, and enhanced emergency alert systems. The new standard paves the way for broadcasting to evolve beyond television and radio.

HOW IT WORKS

ATSC 3.0, also known as NextGen TV, represents a significant shift in the broadcasting landscape by combining traditional over-the-air signals with internet protocol-based data delivery. By leveraging more efficient data transfer methods, ATSC 3.0 enables broadcasters to offer services typically associated with internet streaming, such as the ability to pause, rewind, or restart live broadcasts. It also opens the door for broadcasters to gather deeper analytics on viewer behavior, providing granular insights akin to those utilized by digital platforms.

However, its real breakthrough lies beyond video delivery: ATSC 3.0 supports the transmission of any data type, which can be broadcast over wide geographic areas. This opens up new use cases, such as “datacasting”—the broadcasting of non-video data over vast distances. This data can include anything from weather updates and real-time traffic information to emergency alerts with embedded rich media and geotargeted notifications.

US broadcaster Sinclair is collaborating with global partners to integrate ATSC 3.0 receivers into smartphones. This would let consumers receive live TV and data anywhere within the broadcasting range, making content delivery more accessible and cost-effective.

WHY IT MATTERS

ATSC 3.0 isn’t just a step toward better TV—it’s a way to completely reimagine how broadcast exists in the digital world. The ability to broadcast any kind of data transforms TV frequencies into an alternative to the internet, particularly for rural and underserved regions where broadband access is limited. Datacasting could allow for widespread dissemination of educational resources, public safety alerts, and real-time public service communications without requiring robust internet infrastructure. Additionally, the technology could reduce the strain on cellular networks during major events by offloading traffic onto broadcast networks.

ATSC 3.0’s implications extend globally. Devices with built-in ATSC 3.0 receivers, such as the smartphone planned for the Indian market, could introduce mobile-first populations to broadcast television without reliance on Wi-Fi or 5G. Emergency alert systems, enhanced by precise geotargeting and rich media, could improve public safety and disaster response.

As the rollout of NextGen TV scales, it has the potential to enable hyper-local ad targeting that rivals internet advertising and could create a meaningful alternative to digital display ads. Long-term, ATSC 3.0 could bridge the digital divide by ensuring that large swaths of the population can access critical information and media without needing high-speed internet.

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1ST YEAR ON THE LIST

THE SYNTHETIC TSUNAMI

WHAT IT IS

Generative AI is poised to flood the information ecosystem with synthetic content. While fears of rampant fake news have not materialized, publishers and creators increasingly need to differentiate themselves from derivative summaries and rewrites of original content.

HOW IT WORKS

Generative AI has made it easier and cheaper to create all types of media. Commercial and open-source tools can generate everything from news articles and advertising copy to photo-realistic videos that seem authentic at first glance.

Our news feeds and search results are increasingly inundated by benign but low-quality content, sometimes referred to as “AI slop.” This content often has the veneer of polish but is ridden with hallucinations and derivative recitation of human-created material. The result is websites and creator feeds that are like empty calories: capable of consuming our time yet lacking any substantive information content.

This trend will accelerate as social platforms like Facebook and Instagram test AI-generated content integrations in their news feeds. For politicians, AI offers new tools for generating hyper-targeted messages, potentially to manipulate narratives. Some AI-generated misinformation has already appeared in political campaigns, including deepfake audio and misleading robocalls impersonating public figures. As the cost of producing convincing AI-generated media continues to fall, we will see a rise in the volume of synthetic content, and the line between authentic and fake media will blur further.

WHY IT MATTERS

News publishers are trying to distinguish themselves from this kind of rote production, but they still need to contend with how it impacts the media ecosystem: As the internet is overrun by AI-generated content, the cognitive and emotional load on consumers rises because of the sheer volume of content they must navigate.This “synthetic tsunami” forces consumers to spend more time and mental energy discerning credible information from AI-generated noise. The constant exposure to shallow, error-prone content can lead to news avoidance or decision fatigue, making it harder for people to evaluate what is trustworthy and what isn’t. Publishers should stay vigilant about how content overload might diminish consumers’ ability to engage meaningfully with news and information.

While the world has been fortunate to avoid a high-impact misinformation campaign enabled by generative AI, we increasingly see synthetic media deployed as a tactic at all levels of politics. A robocall impersonating then presidential candidate Joe Biden in January 2024 told people not to vote in the New Hampshire primary. A fake 10-second audio clip of a Manhattan Democratic Party leader insulting a sitting state assemblymember briefly upended the tight-knit world of Harlem politics last year. The impact of these kinds of malicious actions will be magnified if consumers develop a sense of apathy or mistrust toward all content.

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SCENARIO YEAR 2031

BROADCAST IS THE FUTURE

The internet is mostly over-run with low-quality AI-generated media. Even as search engines and digital assistants try to sift through the vast volumes of content generated every day, consumers spend less time browsing because it is unpleasant—if not impossible—to find what they're looking for.

As the internet became less reliable, innovators spent more time thinking about broadcast. Widespread adoption of the ATSC 3.0 standard revitalized the legacy broadcast network, enabling the delivery of all types of media directly to consumers. Nearly every electronic device comes with a built-in ATSC 3.0 receiver, constantly picking up datacast signals.

The volume of text, video, and audio transmitted across the airwaves is impossible for any individual to sort through. But datacasted information is perceived as more reliable than media published to the internet for two reasons: First, the cost of broadcasting establishes a significant barrier to entry, making it economically infeasible for low-value publishers to distribute content that way. Second, on-device AI models constantly curate broadcast data, creating a personalized stream of news and information that is easier for consumers to manage.

The resurgence of broadcast distribution fuels investment in television stations that have the bandwidth to broadcast across a region. It also opens the door for new regulation of media because the government owns the airwaves.

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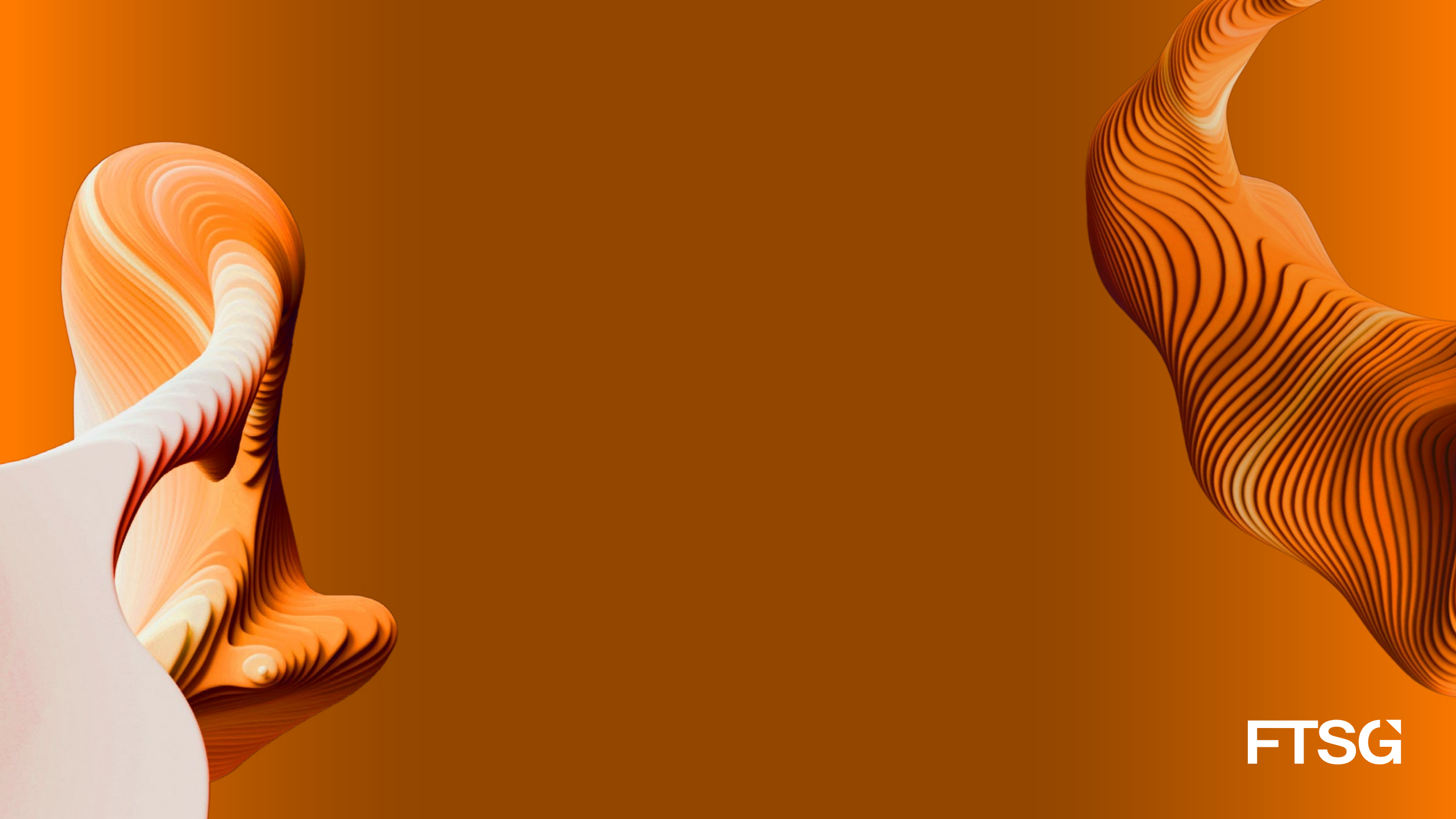
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