



NEWLOCAL

New approaches for local media

WHITE PAPER



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

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1.INTRODUCTION

Project name: New approaches for local media

Project acronym: NEWLOCAL

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Local media have an advantage over big national media in direct access to local users and in serving content. The target market is limited, therefore working with small media organizations is sometimes not of interest to advertisers.

Our group of local media outlets will create an new approach on the audience through the NEWLOCAL cooperative project, which will also assist us in creating new products and possibilities to boost advertising revenues. We will concentrate on new technology, initially in the form of mobile apps for the media of all consortium partners, and afterwards to create tools to enhance user interaction. We'll concentrate on gamification, user-generated content, polls, quizzes, smart push notifications, and content customisation for each user.

Throughout the project, we will concentrate on exchanging internal know-how's through conferences, workshops, reports, and work-exchange programs. However, we will also share our knowledge with the public since the project website will make our findings available, allowing any interested local media to learn about our research, our activities, and what has and hasn't worked.

The project will have a significant impact on sustainability, competitiveness and long-term success.

Who's participating?

Ten local media companies from four countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro) make up the consortium for the NEWLOCAL project. Our backgrounds range from radio, print, and internet to established digital media with editorial teams producing content for the web and growing online revenue.

- **From Croatia (HR)**
 - Varaždinske vijesti d.d.
 - Sjeverni pol d.o.o.
 - RI PORTAL j.d.o.o.
 - Pro Media d.o.o.
- **From Serbia (RS)**
 - Tim za razvoj i integracije
 - Radio Magnum-18 d.o.o.
 - Privredno društvo Boom93 d.o.o.
- **From Slovenia (SI)**
 - NT&RC d.o.o.
 - RADIO TEDNIK PTUJ, družba za časopisno in radijsko dejavnost, d.o.o.
- **From Montenegro (ME)**
 - Digital media factory d.o.o.

2. WHITE PAPER - SUMMARY

This document outlines **everything that we as a consortium learned during the project and all the advantages of a new approach that we see.**

The **NEWLOCAL project** is an ambitious initiative aimed at enhancing the digital transformation of local media companies in **Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro**. The project, formed by a consortium of 10 local media outlets with *diverse backgrounds in radio, print and online media*, focused on creating sustainable business models for local media through **technological innovation, audience engagement and increased advertising revenue**. Over the course of the project, key innovations have been introduced, such as mobile apps for media outlets, new interactivity tools, gamification features and personalized content to improve user engagement and satisfaction.

The NEWLOCAL project, lasting for 2 years, is a collaboration between 10 local media companies from 4 countries. *The aim was to revitalize local journalism using innovative digital tools and collaborative business models.* With EU support, the consortium developed mobile apps, interactive content tools, and user-personalized platforms to engage readers and attract new advertising revenue streams. The project resulted in greater community interaction and improved editorial strategies.

Key outcomes include:

- Development of a shared mobile app framework used by all partners
- Introduction of personalized push notifications and content streams
 - Successful implementation of polls, quizzes and gamification
- Launch of user-generated content tools integrated into editorial workflows

The collaborative approach facilitated knowledge exchange and produced replicable models for other local media entities across Europe. This white paper outlines the detailed implementation, outcomes and strategic insights gained throughout the project.

Local media play a crucial role in democratic societies by addressing community-specific issues and holding local authorities accountable. However, **local media outlets face major challenges** including shrinking advertising revenues, limited

technological resources and increasing political pressures - especially in smaller markets. The rise of global platforms has disrupted traditional business models, leaving local media struggling to compete.

The NEWLOCAL project was created in response to these challenges. ***By forming a cross-border consortium, 10 local media companies pooled resources and expertise to innovate their approach to content delivery, audience engagement and revenue generation.*** The project focused on deploying scalable, replicable digital tools and formats that could empower small media companies to remain viable and independent.

This document outlines the key findings, technologies developed, methodologies adopted and outcomes achieved, serving also as a guide for other local media across Europe.

The **main objective** of the NEWLOCAL project ***was to develop a comprehensive approach to boosting digital revenues and improving audience loyalty through advanced interactive tools.*** These tools include personalized user profiles, gamified experiences, polls, quizzes and user-generated content - each designed to increase engagement and data-driven insights into audience preferences. By leveraging these innovations, the project aimed to help local media companies better compete with larger, national players while maintaining their unique, localized content offerings.

Throughout the project, substantial effort was dedicated ***to internal knowledge sharing across the consortium, with a focus on building skills among editorial and commercial staff.*** Key activities included online workshops, work exchange programs and the creation of a guidebook on best practices to ensure sustainability and long-term success.

The project also included ***dissemination efforts*** through two live conferences, a dedicated website and social media platforms to share its findings with a broader audience, ensuring that the lessons learned benefit the wider local media industry.

This final **White Paper** offers a comprehensive overview of the project's development, key findings, and results. It provides a roadmap for local media companies seeking to navigate the digital transformation journey, offering insights into successful strategies, challenges faced, and the critical role of innovation in the future of local media.

3. INTRODUCTION

The **NEWLOCAL project** represents a significant step forward in the ongoing efforts to **revitalize local media in the digital age**. With the rapid shift toward online platforms and the dominance of large national and international media companies, local media outlets have faced increasing challenges in maintaining relevance and financial sustainability.

Despite having strong ties to their communities and the ability to provide content that resonates with local audiences, many local media companies have struggled to compete with the resources and reach of larger players in the media industry.

3.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

The NEWLOCAL project was conceived as a solution to these challenges. The goal was clear: **to equip local media outlets in Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro with the tools and strategies necessary to enhance their digital offerings, better engage their audiences and diversify their revenue streams**. These local media outlets, while diverse in terms of their editorial focus and delivery platforms (radio, print, online) all share a common goal of increasing their presence in the digital space and ensuring long-term financial viability.

Local media often have the advantage of direct access to their communities, but they face significant obstacles when it comes to attracting the attention of advertisers. The target audiences for local outlets are smaller and more geographically concentrated, which makes it more difficult for them to compete with national and global platforms, such as social media giants and international news outlets. At the same time, advertisers are increasingly looking for data-driven, targeted advertising opportunities that are more difficult for small, independent outlets to provide.

To address these challenges, **the NEWLOCAL project focused on using technology and innovation to bridge the gap between local media outlets and the ever-evolving digital advertising market. Through collaboration and**

knowledge sharing, the project aimed to foster a new era of sustainable and competitive local media businesses.

The NEWLOCAL project was designed to address systemic issues faced by local media in smaller European markets. These include:

- Small, geographically limited audiences
- Inconsistent or insufficient advertiser interest
- Inability to invest in new technologies due to limited budgets
- Editorial independence risks due to political pressures

To address these, the NEWLOCAL consortium **identified strategic objectives:**

1. Develop branded mobile apps for each partner
2. Integrate user interaction tools such as polls, quizzes and gamification
3. Promote user-generated content (UGC) via app interfaces
4. Personalize content based on user behavior and preferences
5. Create new monetization options for advertising and reader contributions

3.2 CONSORTIUM OVERVIEW

The NEWLOCAL project is a collaborative effort among **10 local media companies** from four countries in Southeast Europe – **Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro**. The consortium members represent a range of media types, including radio stations, print publications and online media platforms. Each partner brought unique expertise and a deep understanding of local media dynamics, allowing for a diverse and multifaced approach to the project.

Despite their differences in media format, the consortium members shared a common ambition: **to develop innovative strategies and tools that will enable them to thrive in an increasingly digital world**. All participating media companies have already established a digital presence and are seeking to expand their online revenues through new technologies, audience engagement strategies and personalized content offerings.

The project was led by a central coordination team, ensuring smooth collaboration across all partners and managing interactions with the European Commission (EC). In addition to the core consortium members, the project also involved the expertise of external subcontractor who played a crucial role in product development and technological innovation, i.e. the development of mobile applications and interactive features.

3.3 KEY OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

The main goal of the NEWLOCAL project was to enhance the digital capacity of local media companies, allowing them to compete more effectively with larger media companies. To achieve this, the project focused on several key objectives:

- **Development of mobile applications:** One of the first steps was to develop mobile apps for each consortium partner's media outlet. These apps were designed to offer users an interactive and personalized experience, with features such as smart push notifications, gamified elements and easy access to content. The apps are also intended to serve as a platform for new revenue-generation strategies, particularly through mobile-based advertising.
- **Interactive features for audience engagement:** A central component of the project was the development of interactive tools that would foster greater engagement with local audiences. These tools included polls, quizzes, user-generated content (UGC), and readers' comments, all aimed at increasing user participation and creating more meaningful connections with content. By building user profiles and tracking preferences, the project also aimed to personalize content and optimize the user experience.
- **Revenue generation models:** With audience engagement being a key driver, the project also aimed to develop new revenue streams - both from **advertising** and **audience contributions**. By offering more personalized, engaging content and interactive features, the project sought to attract advertisers and offer more lucrative advertising opportunities. Additionally, the project explored potential new sources of revenue, including subscription models and premium content.

- **Knowledge sharing and capacity building:** A significant part of the project was dedicated to internal capacity building and sharing best practices among the partners. Through workshops, work exchange programs and a final guidebook on best practices, the project aimed to foster a culture of collaboration and innovation among the consortium members. This internal sharing of knowledge and skills is expected to have a long-lasting impact on the participating media companies, enabling them to continue innovating and adapting in the future.
- **Public dissemination of knowledge:** Beyond the consortium, the project's results and findings are being shared with the wider media industry and all interested stakeholders. Through a project website, social media channels and conferences, the insights gained from the NEWLOCAL project are made available to other local media organizations looking to improve their digital strategies and revenue models.

3.4 PROJECT SCOPE AND INNOVATION

The NEWLOCAL project represents a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to local media innovation. Its combination of technological development (mobile apps), audience engagement (interactive tools and gamification) and financial strategies positions it as a groundbreaking effort in the region.

The project's focus on cross-border collaboration and the sharing of best practices among media organizations from four different countries is a unique and forward-thinking aspect of the initiative.

In addition to the tangible outputs, the project also aims to create a lasting impact on the local media landscape. By demonstrating the viability of new approaches to digital media and audience engagement, the project seeks to establish a model that can be replicated by other local media outlets across Europe and beyond.

3.5 STRUCTURE OF THE FINAL WHITE PAPER

This White Paper presents a comprehensive overview of the results and learnings from the NEWLOCAL project.

It provides detailed insights into the development process, the challenges encountered, and the solutions implemented to achieve the project's goals.

The following sections of this paper will examine the ***project's methodologies, individual work packages and the results achieved, offering a detailed description of how the project has successfully addressed the challenges faced by local media companies in the digital age.***

4. METHODOLOGY

The **NEWLOCAL project** was designed with the goal of equipping local media outlets with the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate the challenges of the digital era and ensure their long-term sustainability.

To achieve this, ***the project employed a structured methodology built around collaboration, technology development, audience engagement and continuous feedback.*** The approach combined strategic planning, iterative development, cross-country cooperation and constant evaluation to refine and optimize the project's outcomes.

In this section, we will outline the core methodologies that guided the **NEWLOCAL project**, focusing on the key steps taken in each phase and the collaborative processes that made this initiative successful. The methodology employed spans across the main Work Packages (WPs) of the project, each of which addressed specific goals and activities to ensure the overall success of the project. This section covers the following aspects of the methodology: project coordination, product development, audience engagement strategies, internal knowledge sharing and public dissemination.

4.1 PROJECT COORDINATION (WP1)

Given the international scope of the NEWLOCAL Project, with consortium members located across **Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro**, effective project coordination was critical to ensuring smooth communication and alignment of objectives. The project was managed by a central coordination team responsible for overseeing the implementation of each work package (WP) and ensuring that results were achieved on time.

Key activities:

- **Regular communication:** The project utilized a combination of virtual meetings, video calls and collaborative tools to keep all partners informed and connected. Monthly check-ins ensured that all partners were aligned in their efforts and that any issues could be addressed promptly.

- **Project management tools:** A project management software was used to track the status of tasks across different work packages. This helped maintain visibility into each partner's progress and created a transparent workflow for the entire consortium.
- **Cross-country collaboration:** Despite geographical distances, the project fostered a sense of collaboration through regular workshops, joint brainstorming sessions and work exchanges. The diverse backgrounds of the consortium members - from radio and print to online media - created a rich environment for sharing ideas, challenges, and solutions. Regular discussions allowed the partners to learn from each other's strengths and areas of expertise.

4.2 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT METHODOLOGY (WP2)

One of the central pillars of the NEWLOCAL project was **the development of mobile apps for each partner's media outlet**. These apps were intended to serve as a key tool for driving audience engagement and opening new revenue channels. The product development methodology focused on iterative development, close collaboration with external subcontractor and continuous testing to ensure that the apps met the consortium's requirements.

Key steps in product development:

- **Planning and requirement gathering:**

At the start of WP2, the consortium conducted extensive discussions to define the scope of the mobile apps. This included identifying the essential features that would meet the needs of both the media outlets and their users. Core functionalities, such as smart push notifications, interactive content (polls, quizzes) and user profiles, were identified as priority features. All these insights shaped the app's design and functionality.

- **Selecting the subcontractor:**

A selection process was used to choose a subcontracting company responsible for developing the mobile apps. The chosen subcontractor had experience in building digital products for media companies, ensuring that they understood the unique requirements of the local media sector.

- **Development phase:**

The subcontractor worked closely with the consortium's technology teams to create the mobile apps. The development was carried out in an agile, iterative manner, with regular sprints and frequent feedback loops to ensure the product was meeting the expectations of all stakeholders. Early prototypes were shared with consortium partners to gather feedback and make refinements.

- **Testing and refinement:**

During the testing phase, a group of media staff and users tested the apps for functionality, usability and performance. Multiple rounds of testing were conducted to identify and fix bugs, optimize user interfaces, and ensure smooth integration with existing media systems.

- **Launch and iterative improvement:**

Continuous monitoring and feedback collection were essential. Analytics tools were implemented to track user behavior and identify opportunities for further improvements. Based on user feedback, features were refined, new functionalities were added, and the apps were updated regularly.

4.3 INTERACTIVITY AND GAMIFICATION – AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT (WP3)

A core goal of the NEWLOCAL project was to improve audience engagement by **incorporating interactive elements** into the digital platforms of local media companies. This was achieved through the introduction of tools such as polls, quizzes, user-generated content and gamification features.

Key Activities:

- **Developing interactive tools:**

The project placed significant emphasis on the development of tools that would enable audiences to engage more actively with the content. These included:

- **Polls and quizzes:** Simple yet effective ways to engage users, encourage them to interact with content and gather valuable data about audience preferences.

- **User-generated content:** Media outlets encouraged their users to contribute their own content, such as opinions, photos, or videos. This not only increases engagement but also created a sense of community.
- **Gamification:** The introduction of points, rewards, and badges for regular interaction helps create a more engaging and fun experience for users. These features also tie back to the user profile system, where users can accumulate points based on their activity.

- **Personalized content and user profiles:**

A key aspect of increasing engagement was personalizing content based on user preferences. As users interact with content, the system gathers data and adjusts the content recommendations accordingly. This allows media companies to deliver more relevant content to their audiences, increasing user satisfaction and retention.

- **Revenue generation through engagement:**

The interactive tools were designed not only to engage users but also to drive revenue. For instance, quizzes can be used as a vehicle for native advertising, while gamified content offers new opportunities for premium content models. Additionally, by collecting more data on users through their interactions, the media outlets can better target their advertising and create more attractive ad packages for advertisers.

4.4 INTERNAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND SHARING OF KNOW-HOW (WP4)

Given the collaborative nature of the project, **internal knowledge sharing was a fundamental aspect of the methodology**. Ensuring that all consortium members could learn from each other's experiences and successes was key to achieving long-term success.

Key activities:

- **Workshops:**

Two online workshops were organized to teach editorial and commercial staff how to use the new interactive tools, mobile apps, and data analytics

capabilities. These workshops also focused on best practices for engaging users and monetizing digital content.

- **Work exchange programs:**

The project included a work exchange program where staff from different media companies could visit each other's offices and learn about how different organizations were implementing digital strategies. This hands-on learning approach facilitated the transfer of practical knowledge and fostered closer relationships between partners.

- **Creation of best practices Guidebook:**

One of the major outputs of WP4 was the development of a guidebook documenting best practices, strategies, and insights gained from the project. This guidebook serves as a valuable resource for both the consortium members and the wider local media community.

4.5 PUBLIC DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION (WP5)

A critical aspect of the project's methodology was **the dissemination of findings and lessons learned to the broader local media community and all interested stakeholders**. The project aimed to ensure that the tools, strategies, and insights developed through NEWLOCAL project were made accessible to as many local media outlets as possible.

Key activities:

- **Conferences and Workshops:**

Two live conferences and two online workshops were held during the project, where consortium members presented their findings and shared their experiences with other local media organizations. These events were designed to foster dialogue and knowledge sharing across the industry. Recordings from both conferences and workshops are available on project's YouTube channel.

- **Project website and social media:**

- The project also maintained a website and active social media presence to share progress, updates, and final results. All of the findings were published to provide a comprehensive overview of the project's activities.

The methodology employed by the NEWLOCAL project was designed to ensure collaboration, innovation and continuous learning. Through a mix of strategic planning, cross-country teamwork and iterative development, the project successfully developed and implemented digital tools and strategies.

By continuously gathering feedback and adjusting strategies, the project has created a sustainable and scalable model for local media organizations in the digital era.

5. PROJECT COORDINATION (WP1)

Effective project coordination and management are vital to the success of any complex, multi-partner initiative, especially one like the **NEWLOCAL project**, which spans over four countries, lasts for 2 years, and involves multiple stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.

The **WP1** (Work Package 1), **Project coordination**, was designed to ensure the smooth and efficient execution of the entire project. This work package was responsible for overall project governance, inter-partner communication, reporting and financial management. The role of **WP1** was not only to guarantee adherence to timelines and budgets but also to facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing among the ten participating media organizations, ensuring the project's objectives were met.

5.1 STRUCTURE OF PROJECT COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT

At the core of WP1 was a centralized **Project Management Team (PMT)**, which had overarching responsibility for the coordination, communication and monitoring of all work packages. The PMT consisted of representatives from each partner organization, the lead partner acting as the main project coordinator (from Varaždinske vijesti).

The structure of **WP1** was divided into several key tasks, each of which contributed to ensuring the smooth operation of the project. These tasks included coordination of activities, internal and external communication, financial management, and compliance with European Commission requirements.

5.2 KEY TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1.1 Coordination of the project

The primary goal of this task was to provide day-to-day management and supervision of the entire project. This included establishing clear objectives, deadlines, and

deliverables for each work package and monitoring their progress. Key activities included:

- **Kickoff meeting:** At the beginning of the project, online **kickoff meeting** was held in which all consortium partners gathered to align on the project's objectives, timeline, and structure. During this online meeting, the roles and responsibilities of each partner were clearly outlined, and a roadmap was established to guide the execution of the project.
- **Ongoing monitoring and tracking:** The project management team established a set of indicators to measure the progress of the project at regular intervals. They were used to track the progress for each work package and ensure that the project was on track.
- **Problem solving and conflict resolution:** The PMT facilitated open discussions and problem-solving when issues arose. Whether it was related to timeline delays, differing expectations among partners or challenges in technical development, the PMT worked with all partners to ensure solutions were found quickly and efficiently. The goal was to keep the project moving forward without disruption and resolve conflicts through constructive dialogue.
- **Risk management:** A comprehensive risk management framework was established from the outset of the project. This included identifying potential risks - both internal and external - and creating mitigation strategies for each. Regular **risk assessment reviews** ensured that emerging risks were addressed early in the process.

1.2 Communication within consortium and with the European Commission (EC)

Effective communication was essential for ensuring the cohesion of the project and to maintain transparency, foster collaboration, and ensure timely updates to all stakeholders, both within the consortium and externally with the European Commission. Key activities included:

- **Internal communication:** To ensure efficient information flow, regular communication channels were established within the consortium. Monthly online progress meetings were held to review ongoing work, share updates and

resolve any issues. In addition, partners used e-mail for communication, ensuring fast response times and streamlined information sharing.

- **External communication with the European Commission:** The project coordinator was responsible for maintaining regular contact with the **European Commission (EC)** throughout the project. This communication involved providing deliverables and needed reports, ensuring compliance with the guidelines set forth by the EC, and clarification whenever needed.
- **Reporting and documentation:** In compliance with EC requirements, the PMT ensured that all deliverables were submitted on time as well as progress report. These reports were submitted in accordance with the **schedule**.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** The PMT also served as the liaison for engaging with other relevant stakeholders in the media sector, local businesses, and regional authorities. These stakeholders were involved through updates, and invitations to attend project conferences. This external communication helped the project raise awareness and attract additional partners for future initiatives.

1.3 Reporting to the European Commission

Reporting to the European Commission was a crucial aspect of **WP1**, ensuring compliance with the EU's rules and maintaining transparency in the allocation and usage of project funds. Key activities included:

- **Progress report:** The PMT ensured the submission of detailed progress report to the EC, following all the requirements. This report outlined key project activities completed in year one, deliverables achieved, any changes in the project plan, and any deviations from the initial project goals.
- **Submission of deliverables:** The PMT and the partner in charge of each deliverable worked closely to make sure that all deliverables were submitted in the right format and in the timeframe set out in the Grant Agreement.

1.4 Financial Management

Effective financial management was a cornerstone of WP1, ensuring that the project remained within budget and that resources were allocated appropriately across the different work packages. Key financial management activities included:

- **Budget monitoring:** The project was allocated a fixed budget (and the prefinancing at the beginning of the project) and it was crucial to ensure that the funds were distributed efficiently across the work packages. The PMT regularly tracked spending and adjusted allocations as needed to ensure that each work package was adequately funded.
- **Keeping records:** Each project partner got the assignment at the beginning of the project to keep all the records and documents related to spending funds and performing the activities and their tasks in the project, in accordance with the Grant Agreement.

5.3 TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES FOR PROJECT COORDINATION

To ensure smooth coordination and execution of WP1, several tools and methodologies were used throughout the project. These tools facilitated communication, progress tracking, financial oversight, and reporting:

- **Cloud-based collaboration:** Partners used **Google Drive** for document sharing, ensuring that all team members had access to the latest project files and reports. This platform helped to keep all communications centralized and organized.
- **Regular monitoring and reviews:** The project's progress was reviewed monthly in project meetings. These meetings were conducted virtually and two in person meetings were held during the project first and closing conference.

WP1 was crucial to the success of the **NEWLOCAL project**, providing essential structure, oversight and communication throughout the initiative. By managing project coordination, communication, reporting and financial processes effectively, WP1 ensured that the consortium was able to focus on the creative and technical aspects of the project while maintaining a strong foundation of organization, transparency, and compliance. The success of WP1 not only facilitated the achievement of the project's goals but also established a model for future cross-border collaborations in the media sector.

6. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT (WP2)

The **Product development** work package (WP2) was one of the central pillars of the **NEWLOCAL project**, aimed at enhancing local media companies' digital offerings by **developing cutting-edge mobile apps designed to improve audience engagement, increase interactivity, and create new revenue channels**. This work package focused primarily on the development of mobile applications, incorporating features such as personalized content, gamification, smart push notifications, and user-generated content. In collaboration with external subcontractor, WP2 also included rigorous testing phases, continuous refinement of the product based on feedback and the eventual deployment of these applications across the partner media companies.

The primary objectives of WP2 were to ensure that local media organizations could increase their digital presence, engage with audiences more effectively, and generate sustainable revenue streams through innovative mobile solutions. In this section, we will describe in detail the **planning, development, testing** and **launch** processes involved in WP2, as well as the lessons learned throughout this phase of the project.

6.1 PROJECT PLANNING AND INITIAL SETUP

The planning phase of WP2 set the groundwork for all subsequent product development activities. A detailed product development plan was created to align all partners around a common vision and ensure the application would meet the unique needs of each media company involved in the project. Key steps in the planning phase included:

- **Stakeholder alignment and requirement gathering:** The planning process began with a series of meetings involving all consortium partners to gather input and establish the requirements for the mobile apps. Given the diverse nature of the partner organizations - ranging from radio stations to print and online media outlets - the requirement's gathering process was crucial to ensure that the final product would meet the varied needs of the consortium members.

The key requirements identified for the mobile apps included:

- **Multimedia integration:** The ability to seamlessly integrate text, audio, video and interactive elements within the apps.
 - **User profiles:** A robust system for collecting and personalizing user data, allowing for customized content delivery.
 - **Gamification features:** Tools for audience engagement, such as quizzes and polls that encouraged user participation.
 - **Push notifications:** Smart notifications that could alert users to breaking news, personalized content, or special offers.
-
- **Selection of subcontractor:** Given the scope and complexity of developing the mobile apps, the consortium decided to engage an external subcontractor specializing in mobile application development. A **competitive selection process** was used to choose a subcontractor with proven experience in the media sector and the technical expertise required for the project.
 - **Defining timeline:** Based on the requirements, the PMT (Project Management Team) worked with the development team and the subcontractor to create a clear timeline for the development process. A detailed **timeline** was created, which outlined key deadlines and deliverables across the development phases.

The chosen subcontractor, a company with a strong portfolio in developing mobile apps for media and publishing companies, was tasked with translating the consortium's vision into a functional and scalable mobile product.

6.2 MOBILE APP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The core of WP2 revolved around the development of a suite of mobile applications tailored to the specific needs of each partner. This phase involved close collaboration between the consortium members and the selected subcontractor to ensure the apps aligned with the project's goals and the needs of the user base.

2.1 Development planning and system architecture

- **Designing the system architecture:** Before coding began, the technical team worked closely with the consortium to develop a system architecture that would allow the mobile apps to scale effectively across different media outlets. The apps were designed to be flexible, allowing customization per media partner while using a core backend infrastructure that streamlined content management and user engagement features.
- **Feature prioritization:** Based on the initial requirements gathering phase, the team prioritized key features to be developed in the first phase. Core functionalities such as user registration, personalized content delivery, and push notifications were identified as high priority.
- **Agile methodology:** The development process was structured around **agile principles**, ensuring flexibility and the ability to adapt to changes during the development lifecycle. Work was broken down into **sprints** with regular check-ins, allowing the project team to gather feedback from the consortium partners and make iterative improvements.

2.2 App design and user experience (UX)

- **Wireframing and Prototyping:** After the system architecture was finalized, the design phase began. Wireframes and prototypes of the mobile apps were developed and presented to the partners for feedback. The initial designs focused on ensuring an intuitive, easy-to-use interface while maintaining a consistent visual identity that aligned with the media brands of each consortium member.

The key design principles included:

- **Mobile-first design:** Ensuring that the apps were optimized for smaller screen sizes and mobile devices, given the significant percentage of users accessing content through smartphones.
- **Responsive design:** Ensuring the apps would work across various device types (Android and iOS) and screen sizes.
- **Simplicity and speed:** The apps were designed to be lightweight and fast-loading, with a focus on seamless user experience.

- **User testing:** User testing was incorporated into the design phase to validate the app's usability. Mockups and prototypes were presented to small groups of users within each partner organization, with feedback used to refine the interface and functionality.

2.3 App development and coding

- **Backend and frontend development:** Development started with the coding of the backend systems - servers, APIs, and databases that would support the mobile apps. The backend was designed to handle large amounts of user data and content from various media outlets, enabling easy integration with existing content management systems (CMS).

On the frontend side, developers used modern technologies to ensure the apps were cross-platform (iOS and Android) while maintaining high performance and user experience.

- **Integration with CMS:** The mobile apps were integrated with each partner's CMS to ensure that content could be easily updated and displayed on the apps. This integration was essential to streamline the process of publishing articles, videos, podcasts, and other multimedia content.

2.4 Testing and quality assurance

- **Unit and integration testing:** Testing was an ongoing process; with unit tests conducted on individual components to ensure they functioned as expected. Integration testing was carried out to ensure that the various components of the apps worked together seamlessly.
- **User acceptance testing (UAT):** User acceptance testing (UAT) was conducted by a select group of users from each partner organization. These users tested the functionality of the app, including features like personalized content, gamification elements, and push notifications. Feedback from UAT helped identify any bugs or issues that needed to be addressed before launch.
- **Performance and security testing:** In addition to functional testing, performance testing was conducted to ensure that the app could handle a large number of users at the same time, particularly during peak times. Security

testing was also a top priority, with efforts focused on safeguarding user data and complying with relevant data protection regulations.

6.3 LAUNCH AND DEPLOYMENT

After months of development and testing, the mobile apps were ready for launch. The deployment process was carried out in stages to ensure a smooth rollout and to minimize any potential issues.

2.5 App launch strategy

- **Pilot launch:** To minimize risk, the consortium decided to first release the mobile apps to a small group of users in a **pilot launch** phase. This allowed for final testing in real-world conditions and provided valuable feedback before the broader public launch.
- **App Store and Google Play launch:** After the pilot phase, the mobile apps were launched on major app stores (Google Play and Apple App Store). The launch strategy also included gathering user reviews and ratings to further optimize the app post-launch.

2.6 Post-launch monitoring and refinement

- **Continuous improvement:** Based on user feedback and data analysis, the apps underwent several updates and refinements. New features were added, and existing ones were improved, ensuring the apps remained relevant and useful for the target audience.

6.4 LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

While the product development process was generally successful, several challenges arose throughout the course of WP2. These included:

- **Cross-partner coordination:** Given the varying needs and technical systems of the different partners, aligning on features and integration requirements proved to be a challenge. Regular communication and flexibility in the development process were key to overcoming these issues.

- **User adoption:** Early user adoption was slower than expected in some markets, primarily due to competition from larger, more established apps. To counter this, the partners focused on improving app features based on feedback and optimizing the user experience to increase retention.

WP2, the **Product development** work package, was central to the success of the **NEWLOCAL project**, resulting in the creation of high-quality, feature-rich mobile apps tailored to the specific needs of local media organizations. The successful collaboration between project partners and the external subcontractor ensured the development of a robust platform that addressed both user engagement and revenue generation.

The mobile apps will not only help the participating media companies improve their digital presence but will also set the foundation for future digital initiatives within the local media landscape.

7. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND GAMIFICATION (WP3)

Audience engagement is a fundamental pillar for the success of any digital media platform, and the **NEWLOCAL project** recognized the importance of fostering meaningful interactions between local media companies and their audiences.

Work Package 3 (WP3) focused on developing innovative strategies to engage users through various interactive tools, including **gamification, user-generated content, personalized experiences, and advanced interactivity features**.

The aim was not just to attract users but also to keep them coming back by providing an enjoyable and rewarding experience. By leveraging interactive features, WP3 sought to strengthen user loyalty, increase time spent on the platforms, and ultimately contribute to the generation of additional revenue streams through content and advertising.

In this section, we will discuss the objectives of WP3, the methodologies employed, the tools developed, and the lessons learned from integrating gamification and interactivity into the participating media platforms. The focus will be on the role of user profiles, quizzes, polls, gamification features, and user-generated content in enhancing audience engagement, as well as the impact on revenue generation and long-term user retention.

7.1 OBJECTIVES OF WP3: AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND GAMIFICATION

WP3 was driven by the need to increase engagement through interactive features and personalized content. The key objectives included:

- **Enhancing interactivity:** The project aimed to make digital interactions between the media outlets and users more engaging and dynamic. This was achieved by integrating polls, quizzes, comments sections, and user-generated content features, making it easier for users to participate actively.

- **Personalization of content:** By gathering and analyzing data about user preferences and behaviors, WP3 aimed to deliver tailored content experiences that would increase user engagement and satisfaction.
- **Building user profiles:** User profiles were central to the personalization strategy. These profiles not only allowed for content recommendations but also introduced an element of fun through gamified experiences and point systems, encouraging users to participate more actively.
- **Building long-term relationships:** By creating a deeper connection with users, WP3 aimed to increase long-term retention rates. Partners could then use these relationships to offer targeted advertising, paid subscriptions, and special offers that aligned with users' interests.

7.2 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The WP3 strategy was based on a combination of **experimentation**, **data-driven insights** and **iterative design**, allowing for flexibility in adapting to audience feedback. The following key approaches were used:

- **Audience research:** The first step in the methodology was to gather and analyze data on the media outlets' existing audiences. This data informed decisions about which interactive features and content types would be most appealing. Surveys, focus groups, and data analytics were used to identify audience preferences and tailor engagement strategies.
- **User-centric design:** The development of interactive tools followed a **user-centered design (UCD)** approach, where user needs and preferences were prioritized throughout the design and testing process.
- **Agile development and continuous testing:** WP3 employed an agile development approach, with frequent iterations and testing to refine features based on real-time feedback. A/B testing, beta releases, and user feedback loops were used to continually improve the engagement tools.
- **Cross-collaboration:** WP3 encouraged collaboration between editorial teams and marketing departments to ensure that engagement strategies were fully integrated with the editorial voice and marketing campaigns.

7.3 KEY TOOLS AND FEATURES DEVELOPED

WP3 developed several key features designed to increase interactivity and gamification within the mobile apps of participating local media organizations. These tools not only served to engage users but also provided valuable data for personalizing user experiences. The tools included:

7.3.1 Polls

- **Objective:** Polls and surveys are designed to engage users and allow them to participate in discussions or share their opinions on various topics. This feature can also be used to gather data for personalizing content and improving the media outlet's understanding of its audience.
- **Implementation:** Polls are integrated into articles, homepage widgets, and social media channels. Users can vote on various topics, ranging from current affairs to local events. Results are shared with users, encouraging them to return and check the outcomes.
- **Impact:** Polls are particularly effective in driving daily engagement, with users participating to see how their views compared to others. This also provides a direct link between user opinions and editorial content, fostering a sense of community.

7.3.2 Quizzes

- **Objective:** Quizzes are used to enhance engagement by offering fun, personalized content experiences. Quizzes can be themed around current events, user interests, or entertainment.
- **Implementation:** Each quiz is designed to be interactive, fun, and shareable. The quizzes provide instant feedback and results, increasing the visibility of the media outlet's content and attracting new users.
- **Impact:** Quizzes are one of the most popular features in terms of engagement, with high participation rates. They encourage users to stay longer on the platform and share their results, thus contributing to organic growth through social media sharing.

7.3.3 User-generated content (UGC)

- **Objective:** User-generated content (UGC) allows users to contribute directly to the content creation process, which not only increases engagement but also fosters a sense of ownership and connection with the platform.
- **Implementation:** Features such as comment sections, story submissions, photo galleries, and video contributions are into the apps. Users can submit content related to local events, personal stories, or even comment on articles, creating a two-way conversation between the media outlet and the audience.
- **Impact:** UGC increases both engagement and content volume on the platform, making the app more dynamic and community-driven. It also leads to greater user loyalty, as people enjoy seeing their contributions featured in public spaces.

7.3.4 Smart push notifications

- **Objective:** Push notifications are used to provide users with timely, personalized content alerts, which increases engagement and encourages users to return to the app.
- **Implementation:** Using data collected from user behavior, smart push notifications are designed to deliver tailored messages, offering content related to user preferences, breaking news, or upcoming events.
- **Impact:** By delivering relevant content, push notifications significantly improve user retention rates and daily active users. Users are more likely to engage with notifications that were personalized, leading to a stronger connection with the platform.

7.3.5 Gamification

- **Objective:** Gamification is integrated to increase user engagement through rewards, achievements, and competitive elements, such as leaderboards.
- **Implementation:** Users earn points for completing certain actions, such as answering quiz questions, participating in polls, or contributing user-generated content. Points can be used to unlock badges or rewards, and users can compete on leaderboards.

- **Impact:** Gamification successfully increases user participation. By providing an element of fun and competition, this feature drives users to interact more frequently with the app, leading to increased time spent on the platform.

7.3.6 Personalized user profiles

- **Objective:** Creating personalized user profiles is a key strategy to make users feel that the platform was tailored to their preferences and interests.
- **Implementation:** The apps collect data on users' reading habits, quiz results, preferences for content types, and participation in interactive features. This data is used to deliver personalized recommendations and provide a custom-tailored experience.
- **Impact:** Personalized content leads to higher user satisfaction, as users find it easier to discover articles, videos and features aligned with their interests. This also fosters a sense of belonging and loyalty to the platform.

7.4 REVENUE GENERATION FROM ENGAGEMENT

WP3 was not only focused on engagement but also on converting this engagement into new revenue streams. The tools developed within this work package were designed to create opportunities for both **content monetization** and **advertising revenue in the future**.

- **Content monetization:** By increasing user engagement, the apps create a larger and more loyal audience that could be targeted for premium content offerings, such as exclusive articles, videos, or subscription-based services.
- **Advertising opportunities:** As engagement will grow, the platforms will also become more attractive to advertisers. Higher engagement rates mean more opportunities for native advertising, sponsored content, and targeted ads based on user interests and behavior.
- **Data-driven revenue strategies:** The data collected through interactive features will allow media organizations to offer more precise targeting for advertising campaigns, thus increasing their value to advertisers. Additionally, audience segments with high engagement were identified as premium groups for advertisers in the future.

7.5 LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

While WP3 was largely successful in improving user engagement, several challenges arose during implementation:

- **Balancing gamification with content integrity:** Some consortium members felt that excessive gamification could detract from the quality of journalistic content. Balancing fun and interactivity with the core mission of providing accurate, valuable news was a delicate process.
- **Data privacy concerns:** With the increased use of personalized content, some consortium members expressed concerns about data privacy of the users and how their personal information will be used. We had to ensure transparency about data collection and implement strong privacy measures to maintain trust.

NEWLOCAL project has demonstrated that **mobile gamification, interactivity, and premium content can significantly enhance the relevance and sustainability of local media.**

Gamification features foster habitual interaction, turning news reading into a rewarding activity. Users can collect points and badges in themed categories, which not only encourages repeat visits but also deepens their sense of connection with the platform and local community.

Interactive elements improve the quality and frequency of audience engagement. Through regular participation in polls and quizzes, users become more invested in local stories, while also contributing to the media narrative through comments and opinions. This increased interactivity will help position local outlets not only as sources of news but as platforms for civic dialogue.

The introduction of user-generated content channels, including photo and video uploads, adds a new layer of authenticity and relevance to the coverage. Local stories gain depth and immediacy, and audiences feel a stronger ownership of the media space, reinforcing loyalty and trust.

Ultimately, the project confirmed that a digitally agile, user-focused model is both viable and necessary for local media survival. The collaborative framework and shared technology significantly reduced development costs, while the public sharing of results

ensured broader sector benefit. This model now serves as a blueprint for other local media in Europe seeking sustainable transformation in the digital age.

WP3 was a critical work package that significantly contributed to the overall success of the **NEWLOCAL project**. By focusing on interactive tools, gamification, and user engagement strategies, participating media companies are able to build deeper connections with their audiences. The mobile apps and features developed in this work package provided valuable insights into audience preferences, helping to guide future editorial and advertising strategies. Through continuous testing and iteration, WP3 proved that audience engagement and gamification could have a lasting positive impact on both user loyalty and revenue generation for local media outlets.

8. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING (WP4)

The success of the **NEWLOCAL project** was not only measured by the creation of advanced digital products or the enhancement of audience engagement, but also by the deepening of knowledge and the development of skills within the consortium's local media companies. **Work Package 4 (WP4)** was dedicated to facilitating the internal exchange of expertise, enhancing the capabilities of all partners, and ensuring that best practices were shared across different media organizations. The ultimate goal was to create a sustainable knowledge-sharing ecosystem within the consortium that could continue to benefit all involved long after the project's conclusion.

WP4 had a crucial role in transforming the internal processes of the participating media organizations by providing opportunities for **skills development, cross-organizational collaboration** and **best practice sharing**. This work package encouraged both editorial and commercial staff to learn new tools, techniques, and strategies that would enable them to remain competitive in the rapidly evolving media landscape. WP4 also aimed to amplify the impact of these learnings by making them accessible to the broader local media community, ensuring that the benefits of the NEWLOCAL project could be extended beyond the consortium.

In this section, we will outline the structure, objectives, activities and outcomes of WP4. We will also highlight the challenges faced and lessons learned in the process of skills development and knowledge sharing.

8.1 OBJECTIVES OF WP4: SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The primary objectives of WP4 were designed to ensure that all consortium partners not only benefited from the project but could also disseminate the knowledge and skills gained to the broader local media industry and all interested stakeholders. These objectives included:

- **Internal knowledge sharing:** Internal knowledge sharing was crucial to foster a culture of learning and knowledge exchange within the consortium.

- **Developing key skills:** The project sought to upskill both editorial and commercial teams in areas such as digital product development, data analytics, audience engagement strategies, monetization techniques and new digital tools.
- **Best practice sharing:** To create comprehensive documentation, such as a **guidebook on best practices** (which is available on project's website), to ensure that the knowledge acquired during the project could be easily accessed and implemented by other local media organizations.
- **Sustaining the knowledge ecosystem:** WP4 also aimed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the skills and knowledge developed by providing opportunities for ongoing exchange and cooperation even after the project ended.
- **Empowering local media:** One of the overarching goals was to increase the competitiveness of local media outlets by equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital and competitive landscape.

8.2 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

WP4 employed a combination of structured activities and collaborative approach to achieve its objectives. These activities included a mix of **workshops**, **work-exchange programs** and **documenting lessons learned**. Below are the methodologies and approaches adopted to foster knowledge sharing and skill development:

8.2.1 Work exchanges for editorial and commercial staff

One of the most significant components of WP4 was the **work exchange program**, which enabled editorial and commercial staff from participating media organizations to spend time working in different partner organizations. This approach allowed staff to learn directly from their peers, experience diverse workflows, and understand the challenges and strategies used by other local media outlets.

- **Editorial work exchange:** Editorial staff participated in short-term exchanges (5 working days) where they could learn new editorial strategies, digital content development processes and tools for content personalization. These exchanges

were especially beneficial for understanding different editorial approaches to data-driven content creation and user engagement.

- **Commercial work exchange:** Commercial staff, including sales, marketing, and business development teams, exchanged best practices related to monetization strategies, advertising sales, and user engagement tactics, during a 5 day stay at partnering organizations. They shared insights into how different organizations approached advertising, sponsorship, and premium content, and developed strategies for increasing ad revenue.
- **Impact of work exchanges:** The work exchanges were highly successful in fostering cross-organizational collaboration. They not only enhanced individual skills but also helped build stronger relationships between participating media outlets, which will continue after the project's completion. Several participants mentioned that the exchanges helped them view challenges from different perspectives and provided them with actionable insights to implement in their own organizations.

8.2.2 Workshops and conferences

Two online workshops and **two live conferences** were organized throughout the course of the project to facilitate hands-on learning and to share insights in real-time. These events provided a platform for participants to exchange knowledge and learn from experts in the fields of digital media, audience engagement, gamification, and mobile app development.

- **Workshops:** Workshops focused on key areas such as developing interactive content, using analytics to drive engagement, and building sustainable revenue streams from digital platforms. These workshops were led by experts within the consortium as well as external professionals with specific knowledge of digital media trends.
- **Conferences:** Two major conferences were held during the course of the project. The first was held at the end of year 1 of the project to showcase everything done in the project and to ensure the foundation for collaboration and knowledge sharing. The second, closing conference was held at the end of the project to present findings, share lessons learned, and discuss future opportunities for local media.

The conferences attracted both project partners and external stakeholders, providing an excellent platform to disseminate findings and foster industry-wide collaboration. The recordings of these conferences were made available online (on project's YouTube channel), ensuring that knowledge could be accessed beyond the immediate consortium.

8.2.3 Guidebook on best practices

A key output of WP4 was the **Guidebook on best practices**. This document contains the insights and strategies developed during the project, creating a valuable resource for local media outlets that were not part of the consortium but wanted to benefit from the knowledge gained through the project.

- **Content of the Guidebook:** The guidebook covered a wide range of topics and was designed to be accessible and practical, with concrete examples and case studies from the participating media outlets.
- **Updating the Guidebook:** The guidebook was not a static document; it was updated three times throughout the project to incorporate new findings and adaptations based on real-time experimentation and feedback. This ensured that the guidebook remained relevant and reflective of the most current trends and tools in the local media industry.

8.2.4 Online resources and knowledge repository

In addition to the guidebook, the project developed a website on which all materials related to WP4 activities were published, as well as other project results. This included recordings from workshops and conferences, detailed reports, case studies and best practice examples.

- **Access to materials:** The website is publicly available, ensuring that local media companies and other stakeholders could freely access the materials and learn from the consortium's experiences.
- **Ongoing updates:** The website will continue to be updated with new resources, insights, and reports, contributing to an ongoing exchange of knowledge long after the project concludes.

8.3 KEY OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

WP4's activities had a profound impact on the skillsets of the participating media organizations. Some key outcomes included:

8.3.1 Enhanced skill sets across the consortium

- **Editorial teams:** Editorial staff gained significant expertise in data-driven content creation, digital storytelling, and the integration of interactive tools into their workflows. These new skills enabled them to better understand audience preferences, create more engaging content, and integrate gamification and interactivity seamlessly into their editorial strategies.
- **Commercial teams:** Commercial teams improved their understanding of digital monetization strategies, including advertising sales, subscription models, and paid content offerings. They also became adept at using audience insights to create targeted advertising strategies and improve ad performance.

8.3.2 Cross-organizational collaboration

WP4 fostered a culture of collaboration and knowledge exchange that went beyond the formal work exchanges. Partners were encouraged to regularly share insights, challenges, and strategies with one another through informal channels. This culture of openness and collaboration will continue even after the project implementation, with partners continuing to share knowledge on digital tools, audience engagement strategies and revenue generation.

8.3.3 Long-term sustainability and industry-wide impact

The skills and knowledge developed through WP4 not only enhanced the consortium partners but also contributed to the long-term sustainability of local media outlets in the digital age. By equipping editorial and commercial teams with cutting-edge digital media skills, the project ensured that local media organizations could remain competitive in a rapidly changing media landscape.

Moreover, the knowledge-sharing framework created through WP4 has laid the groundwork for future collaboration among local media companies, strengthening the entire industry's ability to adapt to digital transformation.

8.4 LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

While WP4 successfully contributed to skills development and knowledge sharing, several challenges were encountered:

- **Time constraints:** Coordinating the exchange of knowledge across organizations with different work schedules and priorities was a logistical challenge, which was overcome with proper planning and timely execution.
- **Sustaining engagement post-project:** While the activities were successful in building short-term skills, ensuring that the knowledge-sharing ecosystem continues after the project concludes requires ongoing effort. It will be essential to create mechanisms for continued collaboration beyond the project's lifecycle.

WP4 played a critical role in ensuring that the **NEWLOCAL project** was not just about developing innovative tools and increasing engagement but also about building a sustainable knowledge-sharing ecosystem that would benefit all participating local media organizations. By fostering skills development, promoting cross-organizational collaboration, and disseminating best practices, WP4 empowered project partners to remain competitive and thrive in an increasingly digital world.

9. DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION (WP5)

Effective dissemination and communication are crucial for ensuring that the results of any collaborative project reach the widest possible audience. The **NEWLOCAL project**, with its innovative approach to local media transformation, sought to share its findings and successes not only with the consortium's partners but also with the broader media industry, stakeholders and communities.

Work Package 5 (WP5) was dedicated to the dissemination of the project's results, strategies, and tools, making the project's achievements accessible to local media outlets, advertisers, policymakers and the public.

WP5 aimed to ensure that the knowledge gained during the course of the project was effectively communicated to key stakeholders. The core activities of WP5 included the creation and management of the project's **website**, the use of **social media channels**, and the organization of **live conferences**. The goal was to provide platforms for knowledge exchange, offer insights into the processes and tools developed during the project, and engage a broader community in discussions about the future of local media in a digital world.

This section provides a detailed overview of the methodologies, activities, outcomes, and impact of WP5, focusing on the communication strategies employed and their role in spreading the project's findings across the media industry.

9.1 OBJECTIVES OF WP5: DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION

The objectives of WP5 were designed to ensure maximum exposure for the results and deliverables of the **NEWLOCAL project**. The main goals included:

- **Maximizing the each of the project's findings:** To ensure that the knowledge, tools, and strategies developed during the project were shared with a wide range of stakeholders in the local media industry, from media companies to policymakers and local communities.

- **Building awareness of the project:** To raise awareness about the importance of innovation and digital transformation in local media, emphasizing the role of interactivity, gamification and audience engagement in ensuring the future success of these outlets.
- **Encouraging engagement and dialogue:** To create platforms where media professionals, industry leaders and other stakeholders could engage in discussions about the project's results, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Providing accessible resources:** To ensure that all materials created by the project, including best practice guide and reports, were easily accessible and disseminated to those interested in implementing similar strategies.

9.2 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND METHODS

WP5 employed a multi-channel communication strategy that used both digital and in-person methods to ensure the project's findings reached as wide an audience as possible. The core communication activities included:

9.2.1 Project Website

A central hub for all project-related content, the **project website** was the most important communication tool for WP5. It served as a digital platform where interested parties could access detailed information about the project, its progress, outcomes, and lessons learned.

- **Content of the Website:** The website was designed to be user-friendly and content-rich, featuring sections on the project's results and the media companies involved. It also included downloadable reports, case studies, and best practice guidebook. Furthermore, all workshops and conferences materials were made available on the site.
- **Regular updates:** Throughout the duration of the project, the website was continuously updated with news, results, and event announcements.
- **Long-term access and sustainability:** After the project's conclusion, the website will continue to serve as a resource for local media organizations, offering a repository of tools, insights, and best practices that could be used to

sustain the changes and improvements initiated through the **NEWLOCAL project**.

9.2.2 Social media platforms

To maximize outreach and engage with a broader audience, WP5 utilized several **social media channels**. These platforms allowed the project to reach media professionals, policymakers and stakeholders who may not have visited the project website directly.

- **LinkedIn:** As a professional networking site, LinkedIn was used to share detailed updates and reports related to the project. The platform also enabled the project to connect with industry experts and organizations interested in the future of local media.
- **Facebook:** Facebook allowed for a more informal approach to sharing the project's progress, featuring engaging posts and project results. The platform's broad user base helped amplify the project's message and reach a diverse group of media professionals.
- **Twitter:** Twitter was used for more frequent, real-time updates on project events and research findings.

9.2.3 Conferences and online workshops

Two major **live conferences** were central to the project's dissemination strategy. These conferences allowed for face-to-face engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders and served as key events for presenting the results of the project.

- **First Conference:** The **First conference** was held at the end of year 1 of the project to introduce the consortium, showcase everything done in the first year of the project implementation, and initiate discussions on local media's digital transformation. It provided a platform for partners and stakeholders to share their initial thoughts on the evolving needs of local media and set the tone for the second year of the project implementation.
- **Closing Conference:** The **closing conference** marked the culmination of the project and was designed to present the results of the work packages in detail. It featured presentations on the tools and strategies developed, lessons learned, and future recommendations for the local media industry. This

conference was aimed at a wider audience, including local media outlets, advertisers, government representatives and local communities.

- **Online workshops:** In addition to the physical conferences, **two online workshops** were held throughout the project to present specific findings or delve deeper into particular aspects of the project, such as audience engagement strategies or mobile app development. These online events were recorded for later viewing on the project's YouTube channel.

9.3 IMPACT AND RESULTS

WP5's communication and dissemination efforts had a significant impact on the visibility of the **NEWLOCAL project** and the adoption of its findings across the local media landscape.

9.3.1 Increased awareness and engagement

The website and social media platforms successfully engaged a broad range of stakeholders, including local media outlets, advertising professionals and policymakers. Posts about the project's activities received high engagement. This interaction helped generate discussions about the future of local media and the role of digital transformation in sustaining small media companies.

9.3.2 Knowledge sharing and adoption

The **project website**, conferences, and workshops provided accessible platforms for sharing knowledge and best practices, which contributed to the uptake of the project's findings. The recorded materials, including reports, ensured that the lessons learned were available for long-term use and dissemination.

9.3.3 Strong partnerships and industry collaboration

Through effective dissemination, WP5 helped foster stronger relationships between local media companies and other stakeholders. The project also built a network of media professionals interested in continuing to collaborate on digital transformation efforts beyond the project's lifespan.

9.4 LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Several lessons were learned through WP5's dissemination activities that will be useful for future projects:

- **Early engagement:** Ensuring that communication materials are shared from the very beginning of the project can help build anticipation and increase engagement over time. Early outreach also helps align the project's goals with the needs of the wider industry.
- **Regular and consistent updates:** Maintaining a consistent flow of information, through social media and website updates, ensures that stakeholders remain engaged and informed throughout the project. Regular engagement keeps interest high and invites ongoing feedback.
- **Balancing formal and informal communication:** Combining formal reports with more informal, engaging posts helps reach a wider audience. Using multiple channels for different types of content is key to broadening the scope of dissemination.

WP5 was instrumental in ensuring that the **NEWLOCAL project** not only achieved its internal objectives but also had a lasting impact on the local media industry. Through the strategic use of a project website, social media, conferences and workshops, the project's findings were shared with key stakeholders, leading to increased awareness, knowledge dissemination, and industry-wide dialogue on the future of local media.

The successful implementation of WP5's dissemination and communication strategies will ensure that the **NEWLOCAL project** continues to influence the digital transformation of local media, providing valuable insights for years to come.

10. PROJECT RESULTS AND IMPACT

The **NEWLOCAL project** was designed to address several key challenges faced by local media companies, project partners, in the digital age. By focusing on innovation, audience engagement, and the creation of sustainable revenue models, the project has made significant strides toward revitalizing the business models of local media outlets in the consortium. In this section, we will present the main results of the project, discussing both the tangible and intangible impacts on the participating media companies, as well as the broader local media industry.

The **NEWLOCAL project** aimed to provide local media outlets with the tools, strategies and knowledge needed to increase interactivity with their audiences, boost digital revenues and foster long-term growth. Through the creation and implementation of mobile applications, gamification features, and personalized content delivery, the project has provided the foundation for local media to transform into more engaging and financially viable enterprises.

10.1 KEY PROJECT RESULTS

10.1.1 Development of mobile apps with audience-centric features

One of the primary deliverables of the **NEWLOCAL project** was the development of **mobile apps** for the participating media companies. These apps are designed with features that allow for greater interaction between the media outlet and its audience, paving the way for personalized user experiences and enhanced engagement.

- **Mobile app features:** The apps incorporate a variety of interactive tools such as polls, quizzes, smart push notifications and gamification elements. These features are designed to keep users engaged, encourage repeat visits, and provide insights into user behavior and preferences.

- **Testing and launch:** These apps were tailored to meet the specific needs of each media outlet, ensuring that the local context and target audience were considered in the design process.

10.1.2 Increase in audience engagement through gamification and interactivity

The introduction of **gamification** and **interactive content** plays a central role in increasing audience engagement. By introducing features such as user-generated content, personalized content recommendations, and the ability to earn points and rewards through engagement, partners are able to create more dynamic and personalized experiences for their audiences.

- **Polls, quizzes and user-generated content:** Engaging users through polls and quizzes helps build a stronger relationship with the audience, allowing for real-time feedback on content and gathering valuable insights about user preferences. The integration of user-generated content also provides audiences with the opportunity to contribute to the media's content offerings, creating a more participatory media environment.
- **Personalization and user profiles:** The project's focus on user profile development leads to highly personalized content delivery. By collecting data on user preferences and behavior, the mobile apps can offer recommendations tailored to each individual, ensuring that users receive content relevant to their interests. This not only improves engagement but also fosters loyalty among users, which is essential for the long-term success of local media companies.
- **Gamification and rewards:** The introduction of gamified features, such as earning points or rewards for interacting with content, encourages users to engage more frequently and for longer periods. This helps drive sustained user activity, which in turn leads to higher retention rates and increased audience involvement in the media's content offerings.

10.1.3. New technological approaches

- **Mobile applications framework**

The mobile apps were developed using a single customizable framework deployed for both iOS and Android platforms.

- **Push notifications and content personalization**

Users can select content categories of interest (e.g. sports, culture, municipality updates), enabling highly-targeted notification campaigns.

- **User interactivity (Polls, quizzes, gamification)**

Editors can create:

- Daily polls on topical issues
- Quizzes with gamified scoring systems
- Predictors for sports and civic events

- **User-generated content and engagement tools**

Users can upload text, photos and videos via the app, and editors review submissions before publication. This turns app users into community correspondents and adds authentic content to the platforms.

10.1.3 New revenue streams from advertising and audience engagement

Through the implementation of these new tools and technologies, participating media companies are able to generate **new revenue streams** in the future. The enhanced engagement facilitated by the mobile apps and interactive features will provide an attractive platform for advertisers.

11. PROJECT IMPACT, KEY LEARNINGS AND BEST PRACTICES

Project impact

The NEWLOCAL project has had a transformative impact on local media companies in Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, and Montenegro by fostering innovation and increasing audience engagement. As a cross-border consortium of 10 diverse media outlets - spanning to radio, print and digital - this initiative has redefined how small media enterprises operate within constrained markets.

At a **local and regional level**, the project empowered media outlets in smaller cities to develop and adopt a unified mobile app framework, interactivity features (polls, quizzes, gamification) and personalization technologies. These tools created new touchpoints with users, encouraging deeper engagement and generating valuable first-party data.

At a **national and European level**, NEWLOCAL demonstrated a scalable model for revitalizing local media. It addressed common challenges like shrinking advertising revenues, political pressure and limited digital transformation capacity. Importantly, it also contributed to **media pluralism** and the **preservation of independent journalism**, particularly in politically sensitive regions.

The consortium projects additional **advertising revenue** and **audience revenue** after the project implementation, which is significant for local media sustainability. App users, more engaged than website visitors, are expected to generate **additional pageviews**, improving ad yield and user value.

Key learnings

1. Unified framework for scalable development

Developing a single mobile app framework with modular features enabled cost-effective rollout across multiple companies. This collaborative model maximized

technological investment and minimized duplication of effort, which is an important strategy for small enterprises with limited budgets.

2. Gamification drives engagement and loyalty

Integrating gamified elements such as quizzes and digital badges not only entertains users but cultivates habitual engagement. These mechanisms transform passive consumers into active participants, thus strengthening user retention.

3. User-generated content builds community trust

Allowing readers to submit stories, photos, and videos via the app empowers audiences to co-create content. This not only adds local relevance but enhances the perception of the media as a community platform rather than a top-down broadcaster.

4. Personalization increases content relevance and monetization

Personalized push notifications and tailored app feeds, based on user preferences and profile data, enhances content relevance and allows for more efficient ad targeting, thereby improving monetization potential for hyper-local campaigns.

5. Work-exchange and peer learning accelerate innovation

The work exchange programme, during which editorial and commercial staff visited partner media in different countries, proved invaluable. It enabled hands-on learning, fostered cross-border relationships, and catalyzed the adaptation of successful practices across organizations.

Best practices

1. **Develop joint technological infrastructure**

Shared development of app frameworks or backend systems saves cost, standardizes quality, and allows iterative improvements to benefit all. Local media should consider consortia for any tech-heavy innovation.

2. **Introduce structured user profiles early**

Encourage users to register and build profiles from the start. Even minimal user data (e.g., location, interests) can improve personalization and monetization strategies.

3. **Gamify regular content offerings**

Implement daily quizzes, polls and point systems that tie into badges or contests. This builds repeat engagement and can be monetized through sponsorships.

4. **Enable easy content contribution from users**

A streamlined process for user-submitted content - text, photos, or video - should be integral to apps. Editorial teams should incorporate quality submissions to deepen community ties.

5. **Publish knowledge openly**

The consortium's commitment to public dissemination - via best practice reports, sharing of project results and online workshops - is a model to replicate. Transparency in successes and failures fosters sector-wide improvement.

6. **Combine editorial and commercial learning**

Integrate editorial innovation with commercial strategy. For example, editors involved in gamified content should align with sales teams offering related sponsorship packages.

The NEWLOCAL project has not only innovated technologically, but structurally reimagined how local media can thrive in the digital age. It has created a collaborative blueprint for small, independent outlets to pool resources, build sustainable business models and remain editorially independent in politically sensitive regions. The project's real success lies in its **replicability, transparency** and **commitment to open knowledge**. As such, it stands as a benchmark for journalism partnerships and local media resilience across Europe.

12. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The NEWLOCAL project successfully demonstrated how innovation, collaboration and a regional approach can revitalize local media. The tools developed proved effective in increasing audience engagement, monetization, and editorial creativity.

Key takeaways:

- Shared infrastructure reduces cost and increases agility
- Push notifications, gamification and user generated content can be powerful engagement tools when properly moderated
- Internal capacity building through exchanges leads to long-term innovation

Recommendations:

1. Scale the mobile framework to include more European partners
2. Create a centralized hub for local media knowledge exchange
3. Develop a revenue-sharing ad network for independent local publishers
4. Advocate for further EU support for regional journalism innovation

The NEWLOCAL model is replicable and ready to be adapted by other consortia of small media organizations across Europe.

The NEWLOCAL project has effectively demonstrated that even small, local media organizations can become agile, innovative, and sustainable when they collaborate through a well-structured partnership. By harnessing the collective strength of ten local media outlets across four countries, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, and Montenegro, the consortium has successfully implemented a unified digital transformation strategy that directly addresses the structural weaknesses of local journalism ecosystems.

One of the most valuable conclusions is that **shared infrastructure and collaborative innovation significantly reduce costs and development time**, while enhancing the quality of output. By creating a joint framework for mobile apps and implementing interactive and gamified content models, the project has laid a foundation for sustainable engagement and diversified revenue streams.

Another critical insight is that **user interactivity and personalization are key to audience retention and monetization**. Through polls, quizzes, user-generated content, and push notifications tailored to individual user preferences, the project shows the potential for local media to reclaim audience loyalty in a crowded digital marketplace.

Moreover, the **work exchange programme** stands out as a unique and effective strategy for mutual learning. Editors and commercial staff gained firsthand experience with new workflows, tools, and cultural perspectives, thus contributing not only to the project's outcomes but to long-term professional development and cross-border cooperation.

Finally, the comprehensive dissemination strategy and a continuously updated website ensures that knowledge gained will have long-term value beyond the project's lifetime.

Future recommendations

1. Expand the consortium and scale the model

Building on the current success, future efforts will aim to include additional media partners from other European regions. This would increase the project's impact and contribute to a broader, pan-European network of resilient local media.

2. Evolve the technology with AI and data insights

As audience behaviors continue to evolve, it's crucial to integrate **AI-driven content recommendation engines** and **advanced analytics dashboards** into the mobile app framework. These features can further enhance user engagement and advertising effectiveness.

3. Establish a central hub for ongoing collaboration

A permanent digital hub or online platform could support continued exchange of best practices, templates, technical updates and case studies. This hub could also be used to launch joint future initiatives and attract external funding.

4. Standardize and localize training modules

Building on the work exchange programme, modular training content should be developed and standardized for onboarding new staff and replicating successful processes. This can be tailored to local languages and editorial contexts.

5. Strengthen advocacy for policy support

Engage with national and EU-level policy discussions to advocate for continued support for local journalism innovation. Use documented successes and measurable impacts from NEWLOCAL as case evidence.

6. Future-proof content formats and monetization

Consider future shifts in platform usage (e.g., voice assistants, wearable tech, messaging apps) and begin prototyping content and monetization strategies accordingly. Staying ahead of these trends will allow local media to continue thriving in disruptive environments.

7. Host recurring public events and conferences

To maintain visibility and momentum, organize annual public conferences with updated findings, best practices and stakeholder debates. Make recordings and toolkits publicly available to support sector-wide learning.

The **NEWLOCAL project** serves as an exemplary model of how digital innovation, community-oriented values and cooperative action can transform the prospects of local journalism.

By combining **editorial integrity with digital strategy**, the consortium has achieved not only immediate operational improvements but a framework for lasting change.

Moving forward, scaling these efforts, expanding partnerships and institutionalizing knowledge sharing will be crucial for sustaining the momentum and strengthening Europe's local media ecosystem.



NEWLOCAL Consortium

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