

The Future of Canadian Journalism and Digital Media

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Abstract

By examining the digital media startups and publications that participated in the Digital News Innovation Challenge and Facebook's Local News Accelerator, this article identifies the factors that contribute to promote digital news innovation and sustainable journalism. This article shows that the two aforementioned programs play a vital role in helping digital media startups, tech companies, and digital publications adopt new ways to connect with readers and generate sustainable revenue. However, consistently funding startups is not a permanent solution. It is also important to address factors such as promoting public service journalism and community engagement to help ensure sustainability.

Keywords: Facebook, new media, digital innovation, local news, media business

Résumé

Le futur du journalisme canadien et médias numériques

En examinant les jeunes entreprises de technologies ainsi que les publications de médias numériques qui ont participé au défi d'innovation en presse numérique et à l'accélérateur de nouvelles locales de Facebook, cet article identifie les facteurs qui contribuent à promouvoir l'innovation dans le domaine de l'information numérique et le journalisme durable. Cet article montre que les deux programmes susmentionnés jouent un rôle essentiel en aidant les entreprises de médias numériques, celles technologiques, et les publications numériques à adopter de nouveaux moyens de communiquer avec les lecteurs et de générer des revenus viables. Cependant, le financement systématique des entreprises n'est pas une solution permanente. Il est également important de prendre en compte des facteurs tels que la promotion du journalisme de service public et l'engagement communautaire afin de garantir la durabilité.

Mots clés: Facebook, nouveaux médias, innovation numérique, actualité locale, entreprise médiatique

Since the 1750s, Canada's journalism industry has been forced to constantly evolve and adapt to a variety of social and technological obstacles. Kesterton (1967) describes the evolution of the Canadian journalism industry from 1752 to 1967 through Four Press Periods, from the First Press Period, where journalism was reliant on government support and primitive media technology, to the Fourth Press period, where the newspaper industry was in its prime. From the 1990s onwards, the rise of the internet and social media platforms such as Facebook have proved especially challenging for the journalism

industry. Since the internet was introduced during the 1990s, the total paid circulation of Canada's daily newspapers has severely declined (Communications Management Inc. [CMI], 2011; 2019). With Facebook reaching over two billion monthly users, many news publishers have come to rely on Facebook to publish and distribute their articles through their platform (Ingram, 2018). While there are numerous indicators that the internet and social media have negatively impacted traditional media, both arguably have several advantages as well. The benefits provided by the internet include the development of online

tools that make it easier to: access and gather information; disseminate information from anywhere in the world in real-time; and gain access to digital databases containing information from official and institutional sources (Castells, Parks & Van Der Haak, 2012; D’Haenens, Hermans & Vergeer, 2009; Pavlik, 2000). However, with the world more digitally connected than ever before and the old traditional business models failing, we must ask ourselves: How can we improve business models and digital media startups to allow them to adapt to this new environment?

This article explores how programs such as the Digital News Innovation Challenge (DNIC) and Facebook’s Local News Accelerator contribute to innovating the field of digital media, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Canadian journalism industry, and identifies additional factors that must be considered to further promote sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

The research for this article consists primarily of interviews with people who were involved, affiliated, and familiar with both the DNIC and Facebook’s Local News Accelerator between September 2019 and May 2020. They include Kevin Chan, head of public policy at Facebook Canada; Asmaa Malik, associate professor and graduate program director at Ryerson University’s School of Journalism; Roslyn McLarty, co-founder of The GIST; Armel Beaudry Kembe Tchemeube, CEO and founder of Trebble FM; Jeremy Klaszus, founder and editor of The Sprawl; Mario Vasilescu, co-founder of Rewordly Inc. and Redefined; Harleen Kaur, CEO and co-founder of Ground News; Jeanette Ageson, publisher for The Tyee; Farhan Mohamed, former editor-in-chief at The Daily Hive; and Christopher Dornan, associate professor and former director at Carleton University’s School of Journalism.

All participants were sent an email invitation asking if they would be willing to participate in the research for this article. After providing confirmation, each participant was emailed a consent form to review and sign. The form outlined the research objectives; re-iterated that participation was voluntary; explained that they

would be made identifiable; that the interviews would be recorded; and that the results of the research would be made publicly available. It also gave the participants an option to withdraw within a week of being interviewed. Chan, Malik and Roslyn were interviewed in person, and the rest of the participants were interviewed over the phone. Each interview lasted between 20 to 60 minutes.

THE DIGITAL NEWS INNOVATION CHALLENGE

The DNIC was a Canada-wide incubation program undertaken to help entrepreneurs—both inside and outside the field of journalism—to identify and improve new business models for digital media and tech startups that can help drive innovation in Canada’s journalism industry (K. Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019; April 29, 2020). It consisted of a partnership between the Ryerson School of Journalism, the Digital Media Zone—a leading accelerator for tech startups in Canada—and the Facebook Journalism Project, a global initiative that supports the broader news ecosystem by working with publishers to improve the relationship between journalists, the communities they serve, as well as the local news industry (K. Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019; Facebook Journalism Project, 2019). The DNIC featured five different startups that participated in weekly workshops and received mentorship by industry professionals from various fields, as well as funding capital that went towards improving their startups.

In two interviews, Facebook’s head of public policy, Kevin Chan, said that when he came up with the original idea for the DNIC, the intent was for Facebook to help support innovation in the news industry, such as an accelerator program for digital news innovators (personal communication, November 21, 2019; April 29, 2020). Facebook then took that idea to Ryerson’s Digital Media Zone (DMZ) where it was further developed and refined into the DNIC:

This was the first time we did anything like this in the world and so we wanted to make sure we were in a place that had the

right sort of capacity. Ryerson was in the biggest city in Canada and housed one of the best accelerators in Canada, but also one of the best journalism schools. (K. Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019)

Ryerson University's Asmaa Malik—who was also part of the DNIC's steering committee—said that Facebook first reached out to the Digital Media Zone. From there, the DMZ's director Abdullah Snobar reached out to Ryerson's school of journalism in Fall 2017. Malik said that Ryerson had prior experience with news incubators and recognized that the DNIC offered a unique opportunity:

I think that there is a really big space for innovation in the news in Canada and there's not a lot of investment. There are a few successful startups. But not a lot of deep pockets to invest in them. So, it was a great opportunity. (personal communication, December 10, 2019)

The DNIC was officially announced in November 2017 by the Facebook Journalism Project. In January 2018, Malik, along with other members of the steering committee—including Richard Lachman from Ryerson's Radio and Television Arts School of Media and Natasha Campagna, the director of the Digital Media Zone's Sandbox, a space that helps emerging entrepreneurs refine and develop their business ideas and skills—launched the program with a conference on the future of news (A. Malik, personal communication, December 10, 2019; DMZ, 2017).

The DNIC's open application period lasted between January 25 and March 9, 2018. During that time, around 70 to 80 applications were submitted by startup founders and entrepreneurs—both individuals and teams—with innovative ideas on how to change digital news and storytelling (A. Malik, personal communication, December 10, 2019). Ideal participants—preferably those with journalism, digital media or tech experience—were considered based on a variety of criteria (see Appendix A for a complete list of program requirements). In summary, ideal applicants

met required criteria such as: being Canadian citizens; proof of concept; at least one dedicated full-time founder; a robust lean canvass business model; pitched an idea with a core technological component; whether applicants pitching an existing business made less than \$100,000 in previous annual revenue; whether the participants could provide diverse voices in underserved communities; as well as having a plan to help resolve issues affecting digital news and journalism in Canada (A. Malik, personal communication, December 10, 2019; DMZ, n.d.).

From more than 70 applicants, the committee narrowed the list down to five finalists who were notified in March 2018. On April 23, 2018, the finalists began a five-month incubation period at the DMZ's Sandbox, where they participated in weekly workshop meetings to develop and scale ideas while being coached by industry professionals such as Malik, an expert in journalism, Corrine Sandler an expert in marketing, as well as Uzair Chutani, an expert in digital marketing and business development (A. Malik, personal communication, December 10, 2019; DMZ, 2017; K. Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019; April 29, 2020).

According to Chan each group of participants initially received \$20,000 out of the \$100,000 seed capital. In co-operation with the mentorship team, the applicants established performance goals and milestones. Chan explained that the challenge was designed in a way that, theoretically, not all the teams would be able to receive the maximum funding (personal communication, November 21, 2019). Ultimately, the participants surpassed expectations and completed their performance goals and milestones, allowing them to access the maximum amount of seed capital for improving their startups. Participants also received \$50,000 worth of Facebook ad credits which contributed to the scaling and growth of their startups (A. Malik, personal communication, December 10, 2019; K. Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019). While Facebook was not part of the steering committee or the selection process they did organize symposiums, bring in academics for discussions, invite experts to coach the teams and provide funding capital (A. Malik, personal communication, December 10, 2019; K. Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019).

On Sept. 28, 2018, the participants had the opportunity to present the results of their startups on “demo day.” While the participants from all five startups surpassed expectations, Chan said the real test would be to see how they perform in the years following the DNIC (A. Malik, personal communication, December 10, 2019; K. Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019).

FINDINGS

The GIST

The GIST is an online news startup that focuses on sports content and contextualizes it for female audiences (Pope, 2018). Roslyn McLarty is one of the co-founders of The GIST, alongside Ellen Hyslop and Jacie deHoop. McLarty explained:

The purpose of The GIST is to empower women through sports and fill a gap in the traditional sports media landscape that is really targeted towards the avid male fan (...) It can really bring people together, create community and be a big equalizer in workplaces (personal communication, December 10, 2019).

In 2018, UNESCO reported that less than 5% of sports news was devoted to women’s sports and only about 12% of sports-related news was reported by women (UNESCO, 2018). “For a lot of women, it’s a social currency that they don’t have access to and is a community and conversation that they are often excluded from,” said McLarty (personal communication, December 10, 2019).

According to McLarty, the DNIC provided their team with the opportunity to be mentored by industry professionals like Malik, work with other entrepreneurs, as well as obtain seed capital and Facebook ad credits (personal communication, December 10, 2019). This helped The GIST expand awareness and readership, which grew from a few thousand to the 10,000 range during their time at the DNIC. Since the end of the challenge, this growth has continued; as of April 2020, the GIST had more than 90,000 members across North America (deHoop, 2020; R. McLarty, personal communication, December 10, 2019; April 17, 2020). Towards the end of April 2021, The GIST

surpassed a revenue target of \$1 million in seed funding from various investors (Canning, 2021).

Additionally, The GIST also participated in other programs such as The Future of Sport Lab in early 2019, which focuses on sports innovation in the news ecosystem. They also participated in an accelerator during Summer 2019 known as Techstars—a global platform that seeks to advance innovation and help entrepreneurs to succeed—where they had access to a variety of experts and professionals who assisted them (R. McLarty, personal communication, December 10, 2019). In August 2019, the group launched The GIST USA. By September 2020, The GIST had local newsletters in cities across the United States, including New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, as well as Chicago (deHoop, 2020).

In terms of its business model, The GIST focuses on brand partnerships with partners such as FanDuel, Lululemon, Adidas and the NBA (Canning, 2021; Shapiro, 2019; Romero, 2021). They also had a partnership with the NHL’s Ottawa Senators, through which The GIST brought some of their subscribers to Ottawa for a Senators game and hosted a panel where they interviewed players and notable women from their organization (R. McLarty, personal communication, December 10, 2019). Their decision for that model was because not all members of their audience are avid sports fans willing to pay for content they can find on other sports sites. Instead, they focused more on making both sports content and the sports community more accessible to women (R. McLarty, personal communication, December 10, 2019; April 17, 2020). As they continue their expansion into the United States, The GIST plans to continue using brand partnerships but are also looking for opportunities to expand into direct consumer streams by offering content of value that their audience would pay to access, such as exclusive memberships or even premium content (R. McLarty, personal communication, December 10, 2019).

One of the challenges they faced was acquiring sufficient capital investment to help build audience numbers and getting the interest of brand partners. According to McLarty, it takes a significant amount of money for a startup eager to become the first to own and market a space that not many people have tried to access before, such

as the case with female-centric sports (personal communication, December 10, 2019). McLarty stated that for startups like The GIST to become sustainable, their audiences must reach sufficient size to generate enough revenue to cover operating costs. In the case of The GIST, McLarty estimated this would be somewhere in the 100,000's range (personal communication, December 10, 2019; April 17, 2020). McLarty also said that it is also important to listen to what their audience wants by collecting feedback and data to identify what resonates best with them and use that information to improve their startup (personal communication, December 10, 2019).

After reaching a sufficient audience size, The GIST was able to pursue brand partners. The experience also pushed them to think about what else they could do to improve and expand their startup such as how to leverage and integrate new technology, introduce offerings of value such as premium content, as well as expand to multiple media platforms (R. McLarty, personal communication, December 10, 2019; April 17, 2020).

In terms of long-term impact, McLarty and her co-founders' want to make The GIST a go-to source for sports for women in North America:

There's kind of been a shift in society towards women's empowerment. As you know, people are growing up. Younger and younger generations, they're not necessarily looking for an authoritative source for news. They're looking for something where they can build relationships with that news provider, be a part of a niche community around where that's coming from and be able to voice their own opinions within that too (R. McLarty, personal communication, December 10, 2019).

Overall, McLarty said she and her co-founders were grateful for the opportunity to be part of the challenge. She also said that their mentors at the DNIC helped them to think about how and what they could do to improve the growth of their startup in the future.

The Sprawl

Jeremy Klaszus is the founder and editor of The Sprawl, a form of pop-up journalism in Calgary that focuses on local civic affairs and covers in-depth local stories and issues, such as how Calgarians have opposed plans for reckless urban development (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019; Lambert, 2020; Sandbox by DMZ, 2018). The Sprawl's business model sustains itself through crowdfunding: "It's not a subscription model, but a membership model where nothing is behind a paywall that people can sign up for. They sign up because they believe in the work and they value it" (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

Through crowdfunding, The Sprawl was earning more than \$9,000 per month as of April 2020. Klaszus said this amount goes towards paying salaries for him and his team and contributes to the publication's freelance budget (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019; April 17, 2020).

The Sprawl listens to its audience to identify what they would like to see covered, according to Klaszus. During Fall 2019, Klaszus surveyed the Sprawl's members by emailing them a Google form, then later held a meeting at a local pub for further discussion. According to Klaszus, the in-person component is vital in helping to build a community around The Sprawl (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019). At the start of the DNIC, The Sprawl had between 300 to 400 monthly contributors. Towards the end of April 2020, their number of monthly contributors has increased significantly to more than 1,000. This increase in membership comes with additional benefits, such as paying more for freelance pieces (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019; April 17, 2020).

In terms of challenges, Klaszus (personal communication, December 12, 2019) said that one of their ongoing struggles was building an audience. He also explained that one of the issues he had with the DNIC is how they constantly refer to the idea of "going to scale"—which he described as expanding The Sprawl to other markets and replicating its model in other cities. Klaszus said that this idea did not correspond with honing The Sprawl's model "for the community that it serves"

(J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019; April 17, 2020).

I think that's more of what the challenge is. When you do that, and you focus on doing better in the area you're serving—serving your audience—then that does drive people to engage with it and drives new people to sign up. So, I guess I came at it from a new angle (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

Klaszus said that the challenge did touch on the topic of local focus and community, but that it was mostly geared towards helping startups “go to scale.” While he understands the importance of going to scale, he also said that it should not be the overarching aspiration:

I think that with incubators like this, they need to be a little more conscious of the reality of running these things. For example, a small journalism startup is not a tech startup. The idea is not to take it to scale or to replicate it in cities elsewhere. That might be a model but it's not necessarily the model (...) The tech startup world is all about growth and growing fast and journalism is not about that if you're going to do it sustainably. (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019)

In terms of ensuring sustainable journalism in Canada, while Klaszus is more focused on sustaining journalism on a local level in Calgary than across Canada, The Sprawl still provides an inspirational model for others to replicate and contribute to the “ecosystem of emerging digital journalism startups” (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

Overall, participating in the DNIC helped to increase their number of monthly contributors and the \$50,000 in Facebook ad credits helped to promote people's awareness of The Sprawl and its philosophy. The funding capital they received also allowed them to create a new and improved website (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

Treble FM

Armél Beaudry Kembe Tchèmeube is the founder and CEO of Treble FM, an online platform where a variety of media publications, such as *CNN* and *CBC News*, can produce micro podcasts, or shortcasts, across voice-activated devices such as Amazon Echo, Google Home and Samsung voice systems (Pope, 2018; A.B.K. Tchèmeube, personal communication, December 13/16, 2019; April 20, 2020).

Treble makes it easy for people to stay informed in a short amount of time (...) The way it works is through our mobile app, you follow different people and different organizations that you trust and every day you get a personalized feed of shortcasts that you can listen to. (A.B.K. Tchèmeube, personal communication, December 13/16, 2019)

Despite not having a journalism background, Tchèmeube's experience in software development proved useful in creating Treble. Around the start of the DNIC, Treble was originally a web platform and its business model involved charging media publishers. After updating its business model, Treble offers its product for free and generates revenue by charging the “listener experience” instead of the publishers (A.B.K. Tchèmeube, personal communication, December 13/16, 2019).

Tchèmeube said the reason for this was because they realized that Treble would not receive enough money by charging publishers. Instead, they decided that because of the new media ecosystem, the best way to attract publishers was to offer it for free:

The current business model is really to run all your ads for people that are listening to the conventional platform or to allow publishers to provide premium content. So, we could publish premium content for like a dollar a month, then Treble would get a percentage of it and then the publisher would get the rest. (A.B.K. Tchèmeube, personal communication, December 13/16, 2019)

If publishers choose to provide content for free,

Treble will “put ads between their content and a percentage of the revenue generated through those ads will go to the publisher.” However, Tchameube said that if a publisher offers Treble shortcasts—for example, say \$1-2 per month—then Treble would receive 20% of the revenue (A.B.K. Tchameube, personal communication, December 13/16, 2019). According to Tchameube at the time of the interview, they were not yet monetizing content (personal communication, December 13/16, 2019; April 20, 2020). Before deciding to monetize—which he said was expected to go into effect by the end of 2020—they were more focused on raising awareness for Treble and building its audience, rather than generating revenue.

When Treble joined the DNIC, they ran into difficulties competing with Google and Amazon, which had access to features that Treble lacked. As a result, they refocused their efforts to work on a mobile app. In April 2019, Treble launched its app and, after a year, it was downloaded by around 7,000 people (A.B.K. Tchameube, personal communication, December 13/16, 2019; April 20, 2020).

One of the biggest challenges that Tchameube faced was that most media publishers prioritized their core business and were not likely to try new products unless it was shown to be beneficial to them. “They wanted to be sure that this was going to bring them revenue right away or increase the popularity of their main business,” Tchameube said (personal communication, December 13/16, 2019). When reaching out to publishers, Tchameube said he looked to both traditional and new media (personal communication, December 13/16, 2019). While people in new media were more open to trying new things and had fewer restrictions, they were also less likely to try Treble unless it could bring them revenue and benefit their business.

One of the advantages offered by Treble is that it is not only limited to publishers but can also be beneficial for local media. According to Tchameube, independent journalists can also use Treble to distribute news information through shortcasts, which could potentially create a sustainable way for them to generate revenue:

We’ve seen that a lot of local newspapers have limited their reach or content

because it is very difficult to sustain the operation of running local media publications. We think by offering a new way to reach the audience and a new way to monetize the content distributed to the audience, we can track and create a sustainable way for independent journalists to do their job. (personal communication, December 13/16, 2019)

Overall, Tchameube said that he benefited from the DNIC’s weekly workshops and being mentored by Malik, and the other mentors in the fields of business, digital marketing and media. As well, the \$100,000 in financial support and \$50,000 Facebook ad credits helped raise awareness for Treble online (personal communication, December 13/16, 2019).

Readeined

Mario Vasilescu is the CEO and co-founder of Rewordly Inc., a corporation that includes the startups Rewordly, Readeined and Readocracy (M. Vasilescu, personal communication, January 24, 2020). During the DNIC, Vasilescu and his team were focusing on Readeined, a continuation of Rewordly, which provides content analytics to online publishers who use it to verify how intensely people pay attention to and engage with their content (Pope, 2018; M. Vasilescu, personal communication, January 24, 2020).

During the DNIC, Vasilescu said they were trying to determine which type of publishers they wanted to help such as bloggers, as well as both local and large publishers. The business model used by Readeined is known as “Business to Business Software as a Service” or B2B SaaS. It is considered the “backbone” of most contemporary businesses and relies on a subscription-based model where businesses pay for a subscription to regularly access tools and software to help their operations run more efficiently (Coleman, 2021; M. Vasilescu, personal communication, January 24, 2020; April 17, 2020). As cited on Readeined’s website, they offered either “The Lean Blogger” option, which costs \$5 a month, or “The High Potential” option, which offers additional services and benefits for \$19 a month. These services were also offered for free via the startup’s “Partner & Ads program (Readeined, n.d.).

According to the website, the monthly rates for both options corresponded to limited beta pricing. In terms of issues faced when first starting up, Vasilescu explained that there is “no playbook for doing a startup correctly,” and that each startup and its challenges are unique. In terms of challenges, people often underestimate how difficult it is to find new ways to make money in ways that no one has done before (M. Vasilescu, personal communication, January 24, 2020).

Vasilescu said a recurring problem for most startups—especially in the journalism and publishing spaces—is that, while they are likely to receive plenty of interest, this is mostly an opportunity for people to educate themselves and their colleagues for free on the latest trends in the ecosystem. Even if some people show interest in a startup, this does not mean they have the desire to buy what it is offering (personal communication, January 24, 2020). “Getting the meetings, getting people excited is very easy. Closing the deal is a different conversation and that is a recurring issue everywhere, but especially in journalism,” he said (M. Vasilescu, personal communication, January 24, 2020).

Another common problem is that many startups that attempt to engage in journalism spaces often end up diverting into non-journalism spaces or shut down completely because of how hard it is to succeed (M. Vasilescu, personal communication, January 24, 2020). For example, in the case of the failed media startup OpenFile.ca, many in legacy media recognized its potential to change online news and community journalism. However, due to financial issues, it suspended operations in 2012 (Renders, 2018).

The DNIC’s workshops and learning from experienced mentors helped them identify which publishers would be best for Redefined. Both during and after the DNIC, Vasilescu said they found beta partners to help generate early revenue. While participating in the DNIC did generate some publicity for Redefined and the Facebook ad credits did help in terms of running ad campaigns and experiments which generated exposure, Vasilescu said they found a lot more exposure with other organizations such as the Online News Association, which gave them a lot more brand awareness (personal communication, January 24, 2020).

For programs such as the DNIC, Vasilescu said that they force participants into a schedule and add milestones, which provides structure to startups, especially early ones, and narrows their focus towards a single objective. Vasilescu added that the funding was also beneficial when building something technological, and can help with testing, experimenting, and producing a viable product (personal communication, January 24, 2020); April 17, 2020).

The validation of working with a reputable institution, organization or program, was also beneficial, as it can promote people’s interest in a startup and what it has to offer. However, as a Canadian program, the DNIC would not be as well known outside of Canada or to people unfamiliar with the journalism space. According to Vasilescu, one thing that would have made a big difference in the DNIC was the possibility of establishing formal partnerships with Canadian publishers (i.e. the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, etc.), which could potentially result in beneficial opportunities for the tech and digital media startups, such as testing their products or collaborating on a media series (personal communication, January 24, 2020).

While journalism is not the primary focus of Vasilescu and his team, the broad objective of their startup is to have an impact on the information ecosystem in digital media and to change how people value and think of information online (M. Vasilescu, personal communication, January 24, 2020).

Ground News

Harleen Kaur, a Ryerson alumnus and a former space system engineer affiliated with NASA, is the CEO and co-founder of the tech-based digital media startup Ground News (Pope, 2018; H. Kaur, personal communication, February 28, 2020). According to Kaur, Ground News is the first news source comparative platform that helps audiences better understand the news ecosystem by consuming news derived from over 50,000 news sources worldwide (personal communication, February 28, 2020).

All Ground sources, including suggestions for under-represented publications, are properly vetted and fact checked, before being allowed on

their site. (H. Kaur, personal communication, February 28, 2020; Ground News, n.d.). Along with helping people understand and identify potential media bias by showing both sides of the news spectrum, Ground News also addresses misinformation. As an engineer, Kaur was surprised by the fact that most people can't easily get access to reliable news. "We have so much tech around us that we can send spacecraft to Pluto, but people, if they're reading news on Facebook or something, they can't tell if a piece of news is real or not," she said (personal communication, February 28, 2020).

In recent years—especially during Donald Trump's presidency—the rise of fake news and misinformation has negatively affected many people's trust in the media, including traditional media (H. Kaur, personal communication, February 28, 2020; Newman et al., 2020; Strömbäck et al., 2020). Nowadays, most young adults between 18-24 years old—especially during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic—are more likely to get their news from social media but are also likely to encounter false and misleading information (Vorhaus, 2020; Newman et al., 2020, p.9-10). Ground News is intended as a tool to help people with no journalism experience better understand how a news story is covered by different media sources (H. Kaur, personal communication, February 28, 2020; Sampathkumar, 2020). In terms of their targeted audience, Kaur said an ideal consumer for their startup is someone who reads the news but is not tied down to a single source and is open to multiple perspectives of the same news story (personal communication, February 28, 2020). During the DNIC, Ground News had around 5,000 to 10,000 users worldwide. In February 2020, Ground had more than 30,000 daily users (H. Kaur, personal communication, February 28, 2020).

Ground News relies on a subscription-based business model where people pay for the pro-version for either a monthly or yearly fee. According to Kaur, a subscription-based model makes more sense to her than an advertising one. "We think ads are not the way to go forward. Ads have done a lot of disservice to the news industry," she said (personal communication, February 28, 2020). Studies have shown that media outlets that rely too much on advertising are more likely to

engage in media bias (Ellman & Germano, 2009, p. 680-681, 699; Brangwynne, 2020).

Before the launch, Ground News was a free product. For the last two years, including the time at the DNIC, the team has been gathering data to test and evaluate people's responses to Ground News and whether they liked its features. Overall, Kaur said the responses were positive, and the number of users continues to grow following the launch of the pro version in January 2020 (H. Kaur, personal communication, February 28, 2020).

When it comes to challenges that Ground News faces, Kaur identifies marketing as one of the biggest, saying, "Making people aware that a product exists is a very difficult and expensive task to do for a small company" (personal communication, February 28, 2020). In the long term, Kaur hopes that Ground News will not only become a vital news tool but a self-sustaining organization. Furthermore, by helping people to better understand how the news is presented from multiple sources, it helps to restore people's trust in the media ecosystem (H. Kaur, personal communication, February 28, 2020).

Overall, Kaur described her time at the DNIC as a valuable experience. She said the team learned a great deal from mentors like Malik and Chutani, who provided valuable insight into the news industry, marketing and how to grow a user base. The \$100,000 in funding and the Facebook ad credits also contributed to the growth of Ground News (personal communication, February 28, 2020).

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF DNIC PARTICIPANTS

Overall, the participants responded positively to the DNIC and described it as a beneficial experience. Correlating benefits include being mentored by industry professionals with expertise in journalism, marketing and business, as well as the funding capital and Facebook ad credits used to promote growth and awareness for their startups.

According to each of the participants, areas of improvement include:

1. Provide access to a model where participants could choose from a diverse selection of mentors best suited to assist them;
2. Avoid making “going to scale” assumptions and taking into account that some models may want to maintain a local or hyperlocal focus instead of expanding or replicating into a model that covers larger areas;
3. Increase the duration of the program which can lead to more support;
4. Devote their focus to establishing formal partnerships with Canadian publishers, as well as making connections and increasing access to news organizations.

According to Carleton University’s Christopher Dornan, programs such as the DNIC and Facebook’s Local News Accelerator help address the difficult circumstances affecting the journalism industry. “Certainly, just on their own merits, both the local news initiative and the digital media startup funds are indeed welcome as they’re beneficial contributions to a difficult situation,” he stated (personal communication, April 21, 2020). On the other hand, Dornan also said that while the DNIC startups had original and worthwhile ideas, they are not sufficient. The startups consisted of mostly digital tools and niche publications—which Dornan said are doing well in the current information landscape—that focus on specific information interests (personal communication, April 21, 2020). Overall, the DNIC startups do not solve the issue involving the collapse of the public service community journalism’s business model (C. Dornan, personal communication, April 21, 2020). This was also a concern expressed by Bob Franklin (2014) when presenting at the conference *The Future of Journalism: in an Age of Digital Media and Economic Uncertainty* when he refers to the “crisis of civic adequacy” (p. 482).

Dornan argues that digital news startups that acquire funding must use what they receive to become self-sustaining, rather than constantly rely on “cash injections” such as Facebook’s Local News Accelerator, which he said fails to address the structural financial issues affecting local news, as a form of life-support (personal communication, April 21, 2020). Likewise, Franklin (2014) presents evidence citing that most hyperlocal media do not possess the same resources that local newspapers

had when it comes to “local government coverage” (p. 482).

While Dornan says Facebook’s initiatives do help support the journalism industry (personal communication, April 21, 2020), others argue it should be doing more. Instead of relying on platforms such as Facebook to provide funds for journalism innovation and production, some experts claim that another option would be to subject social media companies to a tax or levy similar to the CanadaMedia Fund, which receives levies and fees from cable and media companies that go towards funding the production of Canadian content (*Financial Post*, 2017; Menzies, 2020). According to Dornan, this would yield revenue that can be used to support the civic journalism that platforms such as Facebook have negatively impacted (personal communication, April 21, 2020).

HOW DID COLLABORATION BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS HELP?

During the DNIC, the participants benefited by learning from and helping each other to develop solutions to different problems. Interestingly, The Sprawl’s Klaszus was the only DNIC participant with a traditional journalism background.

I think everybody in our cohort brought something different to it. Some had more of a platform or a tech solution. Certainly, I was coming from the journalism side (...) We bounced around ideas and kind of supported and gave each other insight of what was working in our worlds and what wasn’t (J. Klaszus, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

McLarty and her co-founders from The GIST, who have backgrounds in business, seemed to benefit from a lack of traditional journalism experience:

The fact that we did not have a journalism background ended up being a competitive advantage to us because we ended up being able to create this voice that just sounded like it’s your sports-obsessed witty best-friend that’s telling you the gist

of what's happening in the sports world (R. McLarty, personal communication, December 10, 2019).

Similarly, Kaur said that despite not being a journalist, she did not have any trouble running Ground News. Both she and Tchemeube from Trebble FM also benefited from interacting with their fellow participants (H. Kaur, personal communication, February 28, 2020; A.B.K. Tchemeube, personal communication, December 13/16, 2019).

It's not just us doing everything on our own. Because this is an ecosystem challenge of what the future of news could be online. That is not something that any one entity or institution can figure out. It is important to work with partners. (K. Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019)

While it is uncertain if the DNIC will be repeated, it still proved a successful pilot project considering the positive experiences reported by the five startups. Building on the initial idea of the pilot, Facebook went on to conduct a three-month local news accelerator for local news publishers in North America (Chan, personal communication, November 21, 2019).

FACEBOOK'S LOCAL NEWS ACCELERATOR

First announced in February 2019, Facebook's Local News Accelerator is a global effort to support and promote innovation in the journalism industry by assisting local publishers to develop effective self-sustaining business models. This project, in collaboration with the Canadian Journalism Foundation, invited 11 publishers from across Canada as part of a \$2.5-million investment. For more than three months, the program provided resources such as tools, training, and access to industry professionals to assist with digital audience development (Dinsdale, 2019).

The Tyee and The Daily Hive, which are both local publications with a focus on digital media, were among the participants.

The Tyee

The Tyee is a digital news magazine in Vancouver, B.C., that publishes mostly provincial stories, along with a few international ones, on a variety of topics. Jeanette Ageson, the publisher of The Tyee, said their business model is mixed with approximately half of their budget coming from ongoing investments from The Tyee's owner. Thirty-five percent and growing is from the "Tyee Builders"—a reader donation program—and the rest of the funding comes from advertising and renting out office space (Ageson and Cooper, 2019; J. Ageson, personal communication, March 6, 2020).

The Tyee was invited to participate in Facebook's Local News Accelerator, which provided three in-person multimedia workshops, where they were given training and presentations from industry leaders who introduced them to audience development concepts and practices such as how to attract people to their site, get them to sign up for their email list, as well as how to convert readers into paying members. They also received a \$100,000 grant after submitting a plan for how they were going to use the funds, followed by a report explaining how the funds were spent (J. Ageson, personal communication, March 6, 2020).

According to Ageson, their coach was not an expert in journalism, but rather digital marketing (personal communication, March 6, 2020). They were introduced to basic marketing concepts and best practices on how to attract readership to The Tyee, which has seen noticeable improvements in recent months. In December 2019, they launched a fundraising campaign that increased the number of monthly donors by 25%. They also introduced a newsletter sign-up campaign at the end of January 2020 which increased their email list by 11% (J. Ageson, personal communication, March 6, 2020). The Tyee's "Follow Us" webpage, reports some 30,000 subscribers read their eNewsletter each week (The Tyee, n.d.). According to The Tyee's 2020 Impact Report, along with support from the Facebook Journalism Project, over 6,500 people supported The Tyee, which received a total of \$553,000 in revenue, a 58% increase compared to 2019 (The Tyee, 2020, pp. 11-12).

According to Ageson, The Tyee faces challenges

such as figuring out how to develop and adopt a business model that can generate revenue, as well as promote discoverability:

Getting your materials out there to new people is a different kind of challenge than working with a print product (...) Getting your publication in front of the right people and bringing them on board and making them loyal readers, that can sometimes be a challenge, especially if you don't have a huge marketing budget. (personal communication, March 6, 2020)

Ageson said the program allows participants the opportunity to learn from each other and other industries, allowing them to come up with potential solutions and adapting them to the digital journalism space (personal communication, March 6, 2020).

The Daily Hive

The Daily Hive is an online newspaper founded in 2008, where it started as a two-person opinion-focused blog based in Vancouver (F. Mohamed, personal communication, March 9, 2020). Today, The Daily Hive is part of Buzz Connected Media and operates across North America. They focus on covering local news in the cities they are based in, as well as some coverage of national and international stories (F. Mohamed, personal communication, March 9, 2020). Their business model generates advertising revenue through sponsored content and display advertising. According to Mohamed, their primary focus during the program was not on how to make more money, but rather how to grow and develop their audiences (F. Mohamed, personal communication, March 9, 2020).

As a digital media platform, most of the work and growth they have done has been on social media. According to Mohamed (personal communication, March 9, 2020), the growing level of competition within the social media space has been especially challenging. However, despite this, Mohamed said that there is also room for opportunity. This includes finding new ways to overcome digital media issues, such as diversifying revenue streams.

Mohamed explained that The Daily Hive

participated in the Local News Accelerator to find new opportunities to learn from their peers in the industry, both local and international. "It was really interesting to learn about what people were doing and how they were growing. Everyone has different challenges they were facing, but they all pretty much line up," Mohamed said (personal communication, March 9, 2020).

According to Mohamed, one of the best things about the accelerator is that participants can talk about the problems they face with experts and professionals and come up with different solutions to address them. "Not all of us are in direct competition with one another. The market is huge, and we will all benefit from working together rather than trying to tear each other apart," Mohamed said (personal communication, March 9, 2020). Additionally, Mohamed said that in the journalism industry, it is not sufficient to rely solely on journalism experience:

One of the biggest weaknesses of the industry is that there's been just a sole focus on journalism. There is more to it, a business can't just be that. You have to look at all the different facets of the business and all the different factors that are weighing into it. (personal communication, March 9, 2020)

CONCLUSION

Historically, journalism has always been considered one of the most resilient institutions in a civilized society (Kesterton 1967, p.1). Even now, it continues to survive and adapt to the evolving media ecosystem. However, compared to previous press periods, the rise of the internet and social media platforms has created new challenges that threaten traditional media.

To ensure their survival, most traditional media have turned to the internet and digital media platforms and are still considered a trusted source of news by most people (News Media Canada, 2019; *The Economist*, 2006). Programs such as the DNIC and Facebook's Local News Accelerator encourage startups, tech companies, and digital publications to adopt new ways to

connect with readers and generate sustainable revenue. They provide similar resources such as access to funding to support startups and promote awareness, networking opportunities, as well as experts and professionals from different industries and disciplines, all collaborating to come up with viable, innovative solutions. Additionally, while most digital media startups benefit from expanding and replicating their model in different cities, some startups are better suited towards maintaining a hyperlocal focus.

When it comes to digital journalism startups, the elements to ensure their success and growth include:

- (a) building audiences' interest in a startup;
- (b) listening to the audience's feedback on how they can improve it;
- (c) creating a sense of community with the people that follow them—preferably with an in-person element;
- (d) tapping into markets that receive little attention or are underserved by mainstream media;
- (e) being familiar with journalism and other fields such as business, marketing and digital strategy;
- (f) having a reliable source of revenue; and
- (g) promoting awareness of the startup.

In the case of tech startups within the

journalism space, they must be able to generate revenue, promote a publication's popularity, as well as increase their readership and traffic. Despite not producing original content, the tech startups interviewed for this study provided benefits to both traditional and local media. The DNIC participants provided positive feedback on the usefulness and advantages gained from participating in it and have taken advantage of the benefits provided to further develop and improve their startups.

Additional factors must be taken into account when looking into future sustainability. Firstly, consistently funding digital media startups is not a long-term solution. Secondly, it is important to address the issue surrounding public service journalism, which is not adequately addressed by the DNIC startups. Additional efforts to support public service journalism must allow for greater engagement at a community level through digital media. Consequently, this could also contribute to promoting readership and developing sustainable business models.

Developing effective business models in the digital ecosystem is a top priority. The DNIC and Facebook's Local News Accelerator are a necessary lifeline to assist in empowering digital media and tech startups to identify barriers and determine potential strategies they can implement to ensure their success and viability.



APPENDIX A

DIGITAL NEWS INNOVATION CHALLENGE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Source: <https://dmz.ryerson.ca/digital-news-innovation-challenge/>

1. INTRODUCTION

Ryerson University (the "Sponsor") and Facebook Inc. have collaborated to create this Digital News Innovation Challenge. The Sponsor, through the Sponsors' university incubator the DMZ has launched 'Digital News Innovation Challenge' to find and support leading digital news ideas and early-stage tech companies driving innovation in journalism and news organizations and to establish a customized incubation program (the "Program").

2. APPLICATION OPEN PERIOD

- (a) Applications for the Program will be accepted between the period of January 25, 2018 and 11:59 p.m. on March 9, 2018 (the "Application Open Period"). To be considered, your Application (defined below) must be submitted during the Application Open Period.

3. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

- (a) The Program is open to individuals, teams or start-up businesses (each an "Applicant") who meet the eligibility requirements set out in this Section.

- (b) If the Applicant is an individual or team, each individual must:
 - (i) be a resident of Canada;
 - (ii) be of the age of majority in their province of residence at the time of submission of the Application; and
 - (iii) be willing to incorporate a business if selected as a Program Participant.
- (c) If the Applicant is a start-up business, the Applicant must:
 - (i) Have prior year annual revenue of less than \$100,000 for the business that is the subject of the Application;
 - (ii) Have at least one dedicated full-time founder who is able to bind the start up business and who is resident of Canada and the age of majority in their province of residence at the time of submission of the Application (the "Representative");
 - (iii) be incorporated or willing to incorporate the start-up business if selected as a Program Participant; and
 - (iv) not have any bankruptcy, insolvency or other similar proceedings brought by creditors or government agencies pending against the business.
- (d) An individual, team or start-up business is not eligible to have any Application considered if the individual, any team member or any directing mind (founder, co- founder, CEO, president, officer, director) of the start-up business is: a) an employee (except an employee who is also a student of Ryerson University), officer, director, governor, representative or agent of either Ryerson University or Facebook, including each of their subsidiaries, affiliates or related companies (the "Sponsor Parties").
- (e) Applicants must,
 - (i) Have a driven and coachable leadership team
 - (ii) Have a robust lean canvass business model;
 - (iii) Plan to solve a compelling problem within the Canadian digital news and journalism landscape; and
 - (iv) Have an idea that has a technological component at its core.

4. HOW TO APPLY?

- (a) An Applicant may apply for entry into the Program anytime during the Application Open Period by completing and electronically submitting the application form available at: <https://dmz.ryerson.ca/digital-news-innovation-challenge/> (the "Application Form" and once submitted, the "Application").

5. CONDITIONS TO APPLICATION

- (a) There is a limit of one (1) Application per Applicant (individual, team or business) during the Application Open Period. If it is discovered that any Applicant attempted to submit more than one Application, that Applicant (including all individuals associated with the Applicant) may be disqualified from consideration for the Program.
- (b) All Applications are confidential and will be used by the Sponsor (and any other company or individual engaged in the provision services related to this Program, including judges and mentors) for the sole purpose of administering and judging the Application. Applications will not be returned to the Applicants.
- (c) By submitting an Application, the Applicant agrees as follows:
 - (i) to comply with these Program Requirements and with the decisions of the Sponsor, which are irrevocable and are binding in all matters related to the Program;
 - (ii) the Application, including the technological solution developed or conceptualized by the Applicant does not violate the rights of any third party (for example, it does not defame, infringe or violate publicity or privacy rights or any person, living or deceased, or otherwise infringe upon any person's, entity's, or organization's personal or property rights, including but not limited to, intellectual property rights); and
 - (iii) if selected as a Program Participant:
 - (A) the Applicant (including the team) must be willing to locate at the Sandbox by DMZ during the 5 month incubation period starting on or about April 23, 2018, exceptions will be at the discretion of the Sponsor;
 - (B) the Applicant must sign a Program Participant Agreement that includes performance based targets for access to seed capital;
 - (C) a member of the Applicant (the individual, team member or Representative) must be present at one of the four weekly meetings with the Entrepreneurs in Residence at the DMZ in Toronto, Ontario;

(D) the Applicant must be present in person on demo day, on or about September 28, 2018; and

(E) the Applicant must be present or have a virtual presence for in-progress demos during up to three (3) public events during the Program.

6. PROGRAM DETAILS

- (a) There are five (5) Program participant spots available for the Applicants that obtain the highest scores for admission judging in accordance with these Program Requirements.
- (b) The Program consists of:
 - (i) acceptance into a customized digital news incubation program for a period of five (5) months at the Sandbox by DMZ, including access to academic and business mentorship and workshops;
 - (ii) Sponsor and the Program Participant entering into the Sponsors Digital News Innovation membership agreement (the "Program Participant Agreement"), including performance based targets and milestones for the new business;
 - (iii) if necessary, establishment of a business entity for the Applicant; and
 - (iv) potential access to seed capital of up to \$100,000 (payable to the business entity only) if performance targets and milestones (as set out in the Program Membership Agreement) are met to the satisfaction of the mentorship team for the business.

7. PROGRAM PARTICIPANT SELECTION

7.1 Stage 1 - Shortlist

- (a) A panel of judges (the "Stage 1 Judges") will be appointed by the Sponsors to judge each Application on the basis of the following criteria ("Stage 1 Criteria"):

	Evaluation Criteria	Weight
(a)	Business is scalable and has viability to solve a problem in digital news innovation (measured by size of market opportunity)	20%
(b)	Make innovative use of technology (software) as part of their business solution	20%
(c)	Quality of a lean canvas business model and, if applicable, prototype.	20%
(d)	Have an effective brand/business presentation	20%
(e)	Have evidence of a well-developed set of milestones and goals for the 5 month program	20%

- (b) Each Application will be given a score (the "Stage 1 Score") by the Stage 1 Judges. Applications with the top

ten (10) Stage 1 Scores will be selected as eligible shortlisted Applicants (“Eligible Shortlisted Applicants”). Judging is scheduled to be completed on or about March 16, 2018 (the “Stage 1 Selection Date”). In the event of a tie between two or more Applications based on the Stage 1 Score, the Application that receives the highest combined score in criterion (d) of the Stage 1 Criteria will be deemed to have the higher Stage 1 Score.

(c) The Sponsor, or its designated representative, will make a maximum of three (3) attempts to contact the representative for the Applicant (as set out in the Application) of each of the Eligible Shortlisted Applicants by telephone or email (using the information provided on the Application) within three (3) days of the Stage 1 Selection Date. If the representative of the Eligible Shortlisted Applicant winner cannot be contacted within three (3) days of the Stage 1 Selection Date, or if there is a return of any notification as undeliverable, then the applicable Applicant will be disqualified, and the Sponsor reserves the right, in its sole and absolute discretion, to select an alternate Applicant as an Eligible Shortlisted Applicant. Eligible Shortlisted Applicants will be contacted on or about March 16, 2018. Once confirmed, the Eligible Shortlisted Applicant will become a “Shortlisted Applicant”.

7.2 Stage 2 – Selection for the Program

(a) The Shortlisted Applicants will be invited to make a twenty (20) minute in-person pitch to a separate panel of judges appointed by the Sponsor (the “Stage 2 Judges”) on March 27 and March 29, 2018. The Stage 2 Judges will judge each pitch on the basis of the following criteria (the “Stage 2 Criteria”):

	Evaluation Criteria	Weight
(a)	Size and importance of the problem addressed (economic or social).	20%
(b)	Quality of lean canvas business model (robust, well thought out).	20%
(c)	Uniqueness of the solution (relative to competitors and in terms of intellectual property).	20%
(d)	Clarity and effectiveness of the business presentation.	20%
(e)	Have a leadership team comprised of driven, coachable and collaborative people with some expertise in the area of focus.	20%

(b) Each pitch will be given a score (the “Stage 2 Score”) by the Stage 2 Judges. Shortlisted Applicants with the top five (5) Stage 2 Scores will be selected as the eligible participants for the Program (“Eligible Program Participants”). Judging is scheduled to be completed on or about March 27 and March 29, 2018 (the “Stage 2 Selection Date”). In the event of a tie between two or more Shortlisted Applicants based on the Stage 2 Score, the Application that receives the highest combined score in criterion (d) of the Stage 2 Criteria will be deemed to have the higher Stage 2 Score.

(c) The Sponsor, or its designated representative, will make a maximum of three (3) attempts to contact the

representative for the five (5) Eligible Program Participants by telephone or email (using the information provided on the Application) within five (5) business days of the end of the Stage 2 Selection Date. If the representative cannot be contacted within five (5) business days of the end of the Stage 2 Selection Date, or if there is a return of any notification as undeliverable, then the applicable Applicant will be disqualified, and the Sponsor reserves the right, in its sole and absolute discretion, to select an alternate Applicant as an Eligible Program Participant in accordance with these Program Requirements. Eligible Shortlisted Applicants will be contacted on or about March 29, 2018.

8. DECLARATION OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

(a) Before an Eligible Program Participant is declared a participant of the Program (after such declaration a "Program Participant"), the Eligible Program Participant must: A) sign and return a declaration of compliance and release of liability (the "Release") for the Sponsor that requires the Eligible Program Participant to: i) to confirm compliance with these Program Requirements; ii) release the Sponsor Parties from any and all claims, damages, liabilities, costs, and expenses arising from any liability in connection with its participation in the Application process for the Program; iii) indemnify the Sponsor Parties against any and all claims, damages, liabilities, costs, and expenses arising from use of the Application including, without limitation, any claim that the Application or innovative business solution of the Applicant infringes a proprietary interest of any third party; (v) agree to the publication, reproduction and/or other use of the Applicant's name (and its employees, officers and directors) name, address (province and city), statements about the Program and/or photographs or other likeness without further notice or compensation, in any publicity or advertisement carried out by or on behalf of the Sponsor or Facebook in any manner whatsoever, including print, broadcast or the internet; and B) sign the standard Program membership agreement on behalf of the Applicant (the "Program Membership Agreement") which will include a requirement to establish key performance indicators that will be tied the availability of seed funding. If the Eligible Shortlisted Applicant fails to return the properly executed Program documents within 10 business days and/or cannot be a declared a Program Participant in accordance with these Program Requirements for any reason, then the applicable Applicant will be disqualified (and will forfeit all rights to be a Program Participant) and Sponsor reserves the right, in its sole and absolute discretion, to select the Applicant who received the next highest judged score to be an Eligible Program Participant (in which case the foregoing provisions of this section shall apply to such new eligible Applicant).

9. RIGHT TO SUSPEND/MODIFY/TERMINATE

(a) If for any reason the Program is not capable of running as planned, including but not limited to infection by computer virus, bugs, tampering, unauthorized intervention, fraud, technical failures, or any other causes which corrupt or affect the administration, security, fairness, integrity or proper conduct of the Program, the Sponsor reserves the right to cancel, suspend and/or modify the Program or the application period, or any part of it, and disqualify any individual or entity who is responsible for such action.

10. LIMITATIONS OF LIABILITY AND RELEASE

(a) No liability or responsibility is assumed by the Sponsor or the Sponsor Parties resulting from the any Applicant's or individual's participation in or attempt to participate in the application process for the Program or ability or inability to upload or download any information in connection with the Program. No responsibility or liability is assumed by the Sponsor or the Sponsor Parties for any of the following occurrences which may affect the operation of the Program or the application process: hardware or software errors; faulty computer, cable, satellite, network, electronic, Internet connectivity or other online or network communication problems; errors or limitations of any Internet service providers, servers, hosts or other providers; garbled, jumbled or faulty data transmissions; failure of any online transmissions to be sent or received; lost, late, delayed or intercepted transmissions; inaccessibility of the Sponsor website in whole or in part for any reason; traffic congestion on the Internet or the Sponsor website; unauthorized human or non-human intervention of the operation of the Program or Sponsor Website, including without limitation, unauthorized tampering, hacking, theft, virus, bugs, or worms; or destruction of any aspect of the Program, or loss, miscount, misdirection, inaccessibility or unavailability of an email account used in connection with the Program. The Sponsor and the Sponsor Parties are not responsible for any printing, typographical, technical, computer, network or human error which may occur in the administration of the Program, the uploading, the processing of Application, the judging of Applications, the announcement of the Program Participants or in any Program-related materials.

Use of the Sponsor website and on-line resources is at user's own risk. The Sponsor and the Sponsor Parties are not responsible for any personal injury or property damage or losses of any kind which may be sustained to user's or any other person's computer or video equipment resulting from application into or participation in the Program.

(b) By submitting an Application, the all Applicants (including all individuals associated with any Applicant) agrees: (i) to release the Sponsor and the Sponsor Parties from any and all claims, damages or liabilities arising from or relating

to such Applicant's participation in the application process or Program; (ii) under no circumstances will the Applicant (or any individual associated with the Applicant) be permitted to obtain awards for, and Applicant hereby waives all rights to claim, punitive, incidental, consequential, or any other damages, other than for actual out-of-pocket expenses; (iii) all causes of action arising out of or connected with the application process for the Program, or any selection as a Program Participant will be resolved individually, without resort to any form of class action; and (iv) any and all claims, judgments, and award shall be limited to actual out-of-pocket costs incurred, excluding legal fees and court costs.

(c) By accepting selection as a Program Participant, recipient agrees that the Sponsor Parties will have no liability whatsoever for, and shall be held harmless by Program Participant against, any liability for injuries, losses or damages of any kind to persons or property resulting in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, from participation in the Program. The Sponsor and the Sponsor Parties are not liable in the event that any portion of the Program is canceled due to weather, fire, strike, acts of war or terrorism, or any other condition beyond their control.

11. PRIVACY AND PUBLICITY RELEASE

(a) The Sponsor and its authorized agents will collect, use, and disclose the personal information provided upon application for the Program for the purposes of judging the Applicants and selecting Program Participants, in accordance with the Sponsor's privacy policy, available at <http://www.ryerson.ca/privacy>.

(b) By accepting selection as a Program Participant, Program Participants (including the founder or any employee, officer or director of the Program Participant) consent to the publication and use of their name, address (city, province), voice, statements, photographs, image and/or likeness, logo, trademark in any form, manner or media whether now known or hereafter devised, including, without limitation, in print, radio, television and on the Internet for any purpose in connection with the Program including, without limitation, for the purposes of advertising and trade, and promoting the Sponsor, Facebook and /or Program, without further notice or compensation.

12. GENERAL

(a) The Program is governed in accordance with the domestic laws of the Province of Ontario and the federal laws of Canada applicable therein.

(b) The Sponsor reserves the right, in its sole and absolute discretion, and without prior notice, to adjust any of the dates and/or timeframes stipulated in these Program Requirements, to the extent necessary, for purposes of verifying compliance with these Program Requirements or for any other reason.

(c) In the event of any discrepancy or inconsistency between the terms and conditions of these Program Requirements and disclosures or other statements contained in any Program-related materials (except the signed Release and the Program Membership Agreement) or the French version of these program requirements, the terms and conditions of the English version of these Program Requirements shall prevail, govern and control to the fullest extent permitted by law.

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