



## Publisher Background

Disinformation represents a critical threat to democracies such as Taiwan. Cyber armies often take advantage of complex, deep-rooted ideological, cultural and political differences among the country's 23.8 million citizens to spread misinformation through tech platforms and messaging apps.

The fight against disinformation, today, encompasses the government, nonprofit groups and digital media companies such as READr. Born as an experiment in digital storytelling in 2012, READr aims to make reporting more diverse and create awareness about misinformation and disinformation by means of data analysis, open information sharing, multimedia interaction and citizen participation.

## Partnership Overview

Taipei-based media start-up READr partnered with the [Google News Initiative Design Accelerator \(GNI DA\) program](#) in 2019 to design a collective approach to fighting disinformation, driven by the belief that technology, open information sharing and citizen participation can empower people to engage with social and political issues, thereby contributing to a better Taiwan. READr is a small outlet supported by a larger media organization, Mirror Media Inc. Relying mostly on donations, it is critical for the organization to build business sustainability. In addition to that, citizen journalism has its own challenges including source verification, quality control, and both physical and digital safety of professional and citizen journalists.

READr used the power of technology and design to employ open data in driving engagement, motivating its readership and ultimately empowering its community to hold governments and powerful organisations accountable.

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# Taiwanese publisher uses bespoke model to boost reader engagement

Crowd-sourced storytelling on READr drives engagement and provides access to reliable information in an aim to build a better Taiwan.

## The Project

READr began with a business challenge, initially seeking to generate revenue to support their fact-checking platform. Through the GNI Design Accelerator (GNI DA), they collaborated with [Echos Innovation Lab](#) and [Splice Media](#) to address a foundational challenge—understanding their audience's needs. They conducted desk research, surveys and in-depth interviews with readers. By analysing and synthesising this qualitative and quantitative research, they determined that what truly motivates their audience is a desire to build a better future for Taiwan—and read a reliable, trustworthy source of news.

They were then able to translate this vision into actions they could encourage in readers, like doing small tasks that contributed to news production and fact checking. Readers could transcribe videos, upload photos and share their opinions on content topics. READr also made its data open and transparent and encouraged their audience to rate their content, creating a healthy feedback loop.

**MICRO-PARTICIPATION**  
Collaborators can find a number of features in the collaboration section, where they can participate by transcribing videos, submitting photos and sharing their personal experiences.

**ENGAGEMENT**  
Based on direct reader feedback through the design process, READr introduced engagement motivators to the reading experience. These include a reading progress bar that tracks the amount of content readers consume and a user rating system to highlight the value of that content.

**QUALITY AND RELIABILITY**  
The article rating system also helped READr understand deep engagement behaviors and enhance quality content over time.

In addition to implementing small steps for users to act on, READr also created and shared a manifesto highlighting their vision and the impact of their work, clearly communicating the organization's brand value to their readership. By engaging in design thinking, and its research methodologies, READr discovered clear user needs and developed a platform based on those needs, creating a digital community for both passive readers and active collaborators to engage on common goals and values.



“We began this project with the idea of creating a new revenue model, but soon realised we needed to understand our audience better and adjust our product to meet their needs before we could start thinking about profits.”

HSIN-CHAN CHIEN, FOUNDER AND CEO AT READr

## The Results

The GNI DA helped READr clarify their product’s vision and purpose: to empower people and play a significant role in shaping Taiwan.

It helped READr develop a value proposition for both collaborators and readers, while providing clear goals and metrics for success. This includes creating a community of active members who donate content and funds to keep the mission of an open newsroom and citizen journalism alive. The goal is to increase membership from 2,000 to 20,000 and increase donations to NTD \$300,000 per month.

READr is getting more exposure as part of their short-term strategy. Their first step was to introduce READr to people, and around 80% of the monthly users between September to November are new users.

READr has also observed an increase in the average article quality rate. Through the rating system, READr has been able to engage with readers for user feedback on content and seen an increase in article rating from 4.3 in October to 4.6 out of 5 stars in November.

The long-term health of the model will depend on READr’s ability to keep attracting the right audience, convert them into donors, provide them with a great experience and retain them as loyal users.

### IMPACT OF THE NEW PLATFORM

**401.5%**

Increase in page views in the first week

**40k**

New users during the first two months after the launch

**23.8%**

Increase in time spent on platform from 4:12 min to 5:12 min

“Throughout the program, we learned how to try, test and iterate our product quickly. We learnt how to prioritise between features for immediate user testing and those we can roll out over time. We examined our user journey time and again to see what points needed adjusting and how to measure success. Finally, our most important lesson was learning how to be confident and bold in our breakthroughs.”

TIN CHEN, PRODUCT MANAGER, READr