

Final report for Audience Engagement Project at FrontPage Africa and New Narratives

Reporting Period: April 15 — October 22, 2025

The goal of the Audience Engagement Project at FrontPage Africa (FPA) and New Narratives (NN) was to explore the digital space as a potential source of revenue for a Liberian newspaper. FPA is one of Liberia's leading newspapers, delivered to the offices of major businesses, embassies and aid organisations across Monrovia.

Through this report, we will do a deep dive into the activities, which included growing audiences across social media platforms, instituting video workflows, launching an ePaper and newsletter and identifying new opportunities for ad revenue at FPA. For each of these activities, we will share learnings and look at what worked and what didn't. We'll also share what these learnings could mean for future revenue streams for newsrooms like FPA.

This report also analyzes the six months of analytics of the digital content being published across Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Google Analytics for FPA. While the organization excels at generating viral reach and audience growth, a challenge exists in the conversion of that social media attention into monetizable traffic. We addressed this by developing alternative revenue streams like digital subscriptions and advertising.



The Partners

This project, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, was a collaboration between three organisations — FrontPage Africa, New Narratives and InOldNews. The teams worked together to experiment and learn from one another about revenue in digital news.

FrontPage Africa

FPA was launched in 2005 by Rodney Sieh with the mission to focus on hard-hitting investigations. Their work won them the 2014 Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Award. The newspaper has a wide reader base not only in Liberia but across the world, including a large digital audience in the U.S.

New Narratives

NN is a women-led organization founded in 2010 that drives collaborative, people-centered investigative journalism and news innovation with teams in Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and The Gambia.

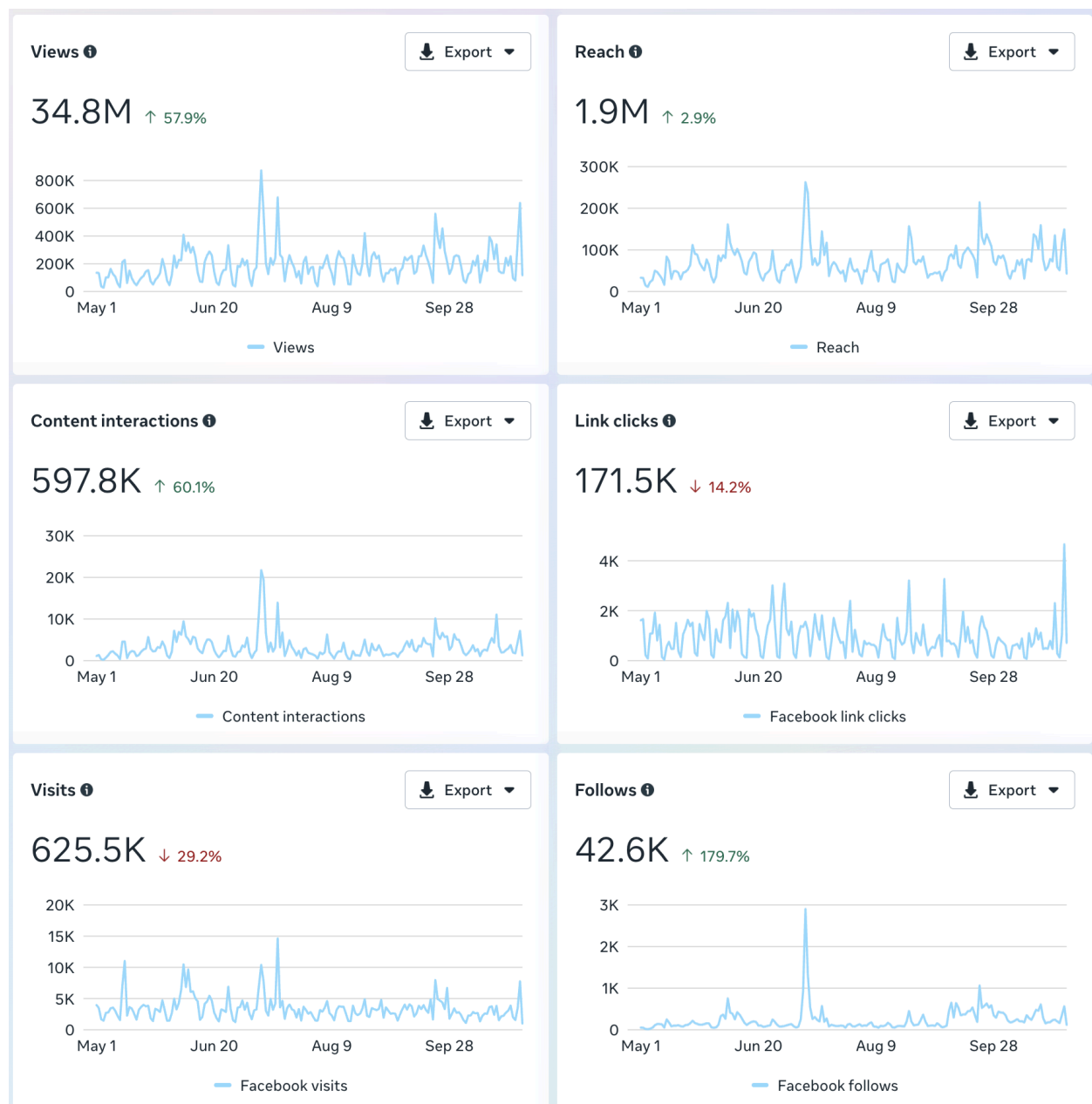
InOldNews

ION is a media organisation dedicated to supporting a diverse journalism ecosystem. The team achieves this mission through consulting, training and providing journalists with free resources.



Key Performance Highlights

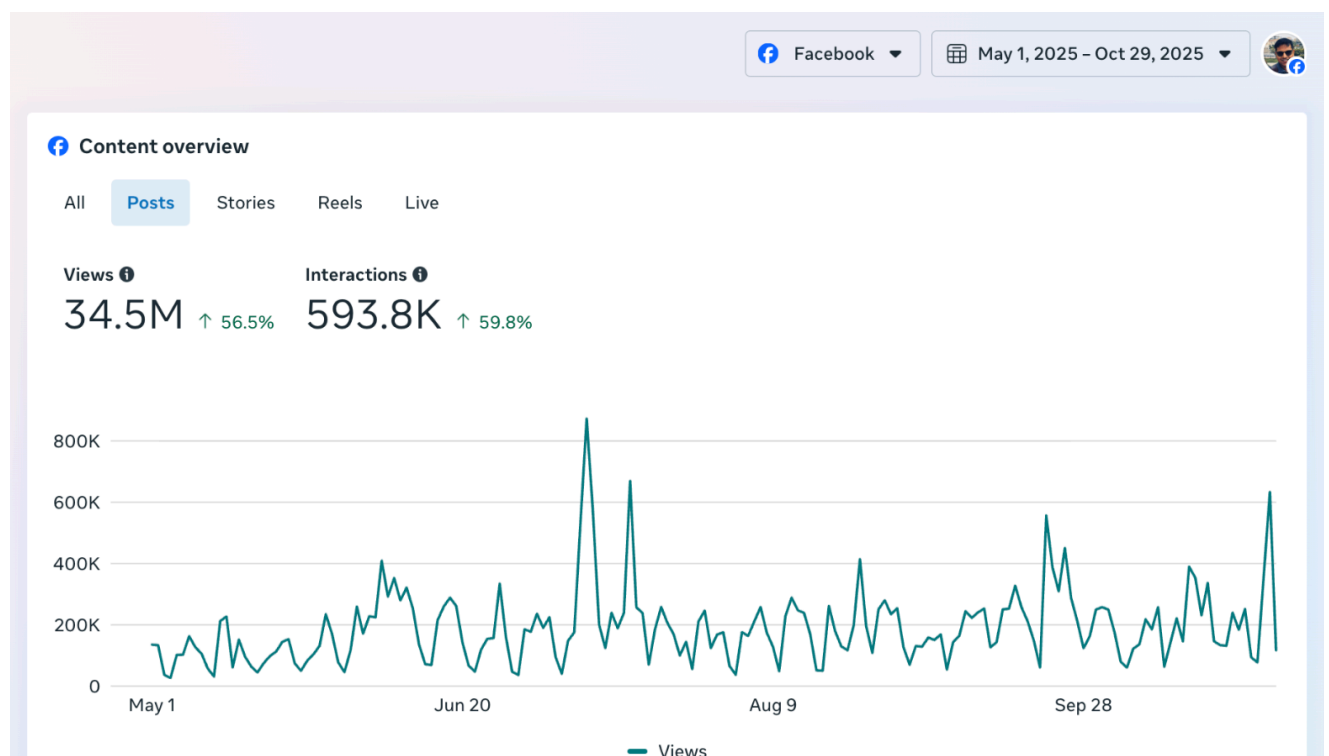
FPA has successfully established itself as a dynamic presence on social platforms, particularly in visual and email formats in the last 6 months. Journalists across FPA and NN have contributed to this feat by working closely with the consultants from ION and the editors at the respective organisations. Training and workshops were organized to upskill the journalists in leveraging new forms of distribution and engagement on digital platforms.



Here are some of the successes from this work:

Exceptional Follower Acquisition: The new social strategy of adding links and photo posts was really effective at growing FPA's audience on social platforms. Especially on Facebook and TikTok. Facebook saw a massive 38k increase in followers over the duration of the project, while TikTok added another 9.7k. Subscriber growth is expected to continue on these and other platforms based on what we've seen in the last 6 months.

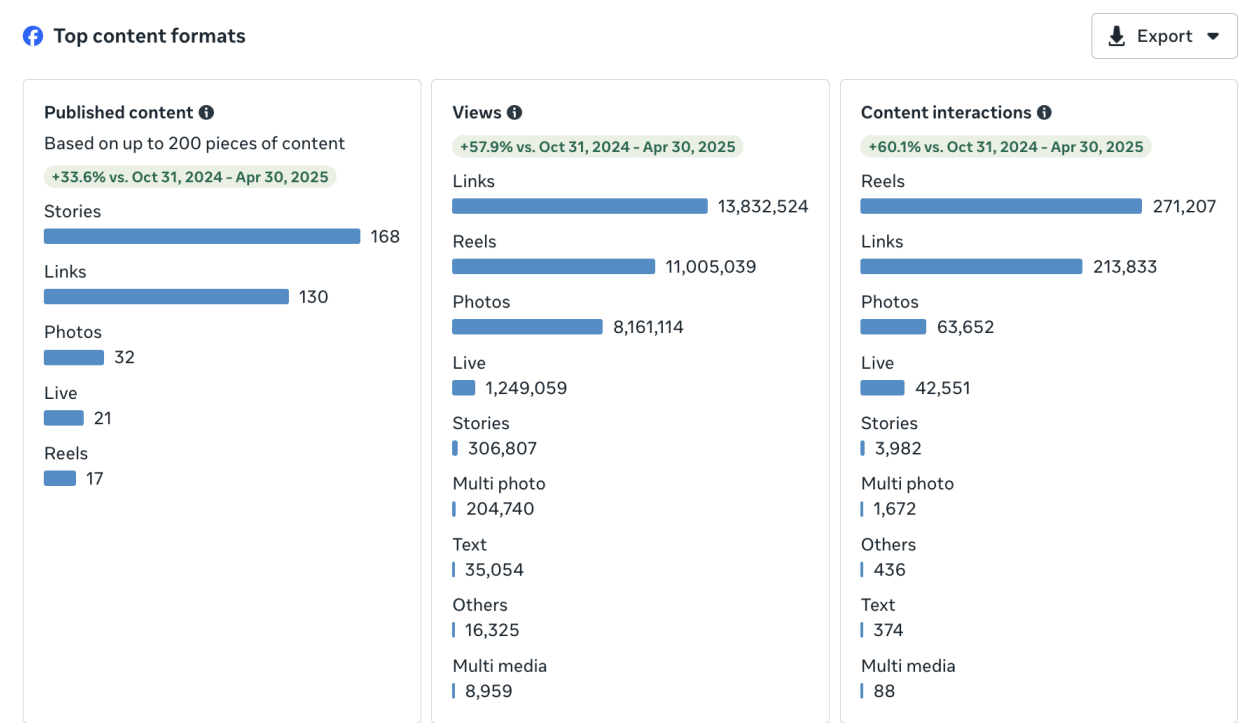
Viral Reach and Engagement: The videos made by NN and FPA did well on social media in terms of views too. Facebook views surged by 56.5% to 34.5M, compared to the previous period. These views were driven primarily by non-followers. TikTok is engaging the crucial 18-34 demographic, which makes up 61% of FPA's audience on the platform. Building a subscriber base from a younger audience is an important part of ensuring FPA's success in the years and decades to come.



Shortform is King (for now): Facebook Reels were the most effective type of content over the duration of the project. Over the reporting period, the format generated 11M of the views, roughly 30% of total views on Facebook. Algorithms do change, so strategies around video content will have to adapt over time. But for now, shortform seems to be the most effective way to reach audiences on social media.

ePaper and Newsletter reach: Since its launch in mid-August, the ePaper along with the weekend roundup newsletters have added over 125k views to FPA’s reach, in particular to FPA’s lead stories of the day. This has created a completely new channel for distribution that is already being monetized as an optional ePaper subscription. The newsletter has also helped increase the online reach of the Democracy in Focus podcast. As SEO traffic from search engines like Google dips around the world, this method of distributing FPA and NN’s work is crucial.

Photo posts: On Facebook, introduction of templated photo posts has contributed to over 8 million of the total views on the platform itself. In addition to that, photo posts with FPA’s branding are also circulating via Whatsapp increasing the brand recognition of the publication.



Challenges

The emergence of AI has presented a major challenge to news organisations around the world as audiences get their answers directly from LLMs without needing to go directly to news websites. In particular, the AI summaries at the top of search results can reduce website traffic. [Studies show](#) that around 60% of searches do not lead to users clicking on a website link. And it's getting worse year on year. In 2024, 44% of U.S.-based searchers clicked on a website following a search, but by March 2025, it was down to 40.3%, [according to](#) SEO trends website Search Engine Land.

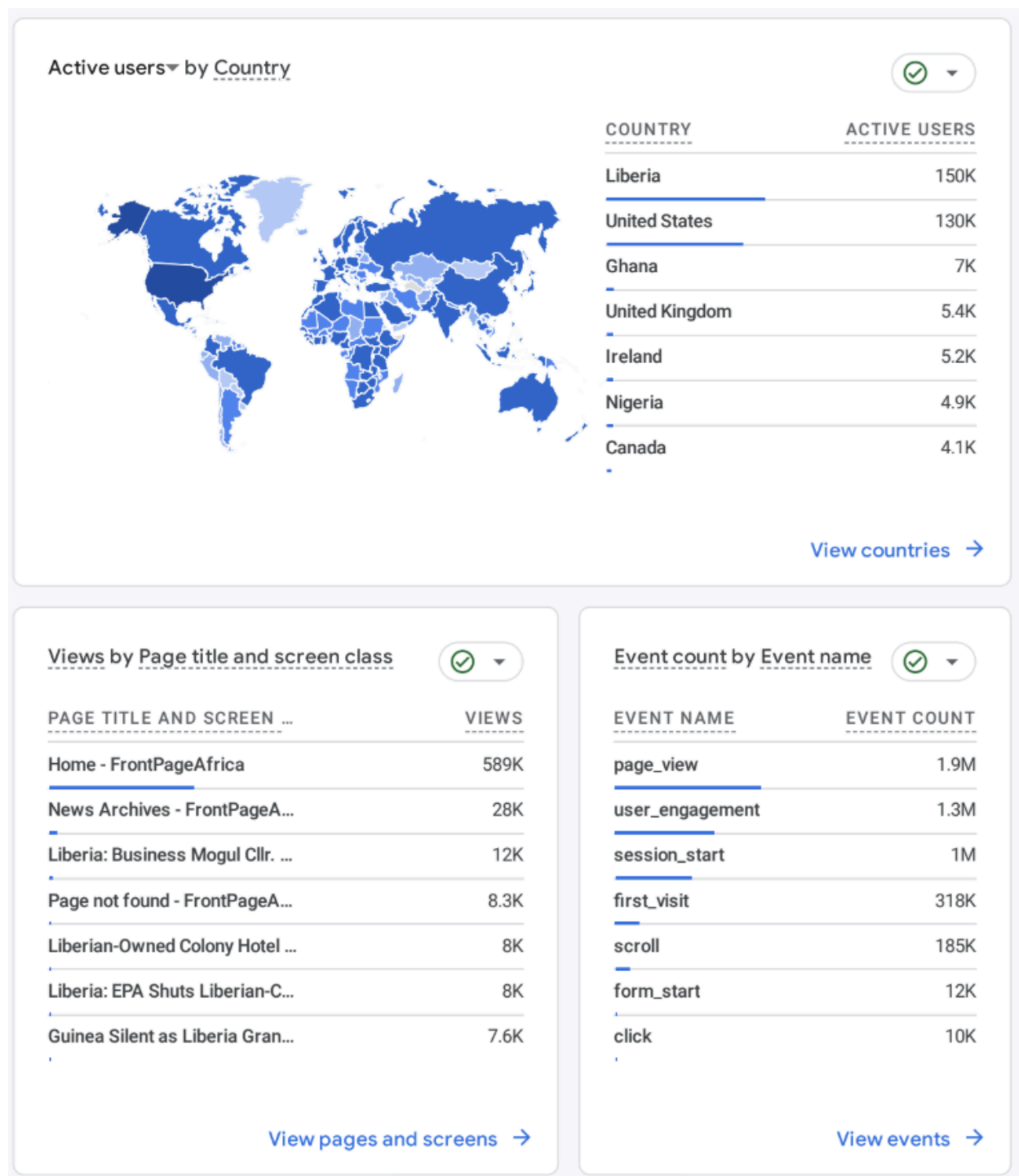
This is a concern for a publication like FPA because a significant portion of the web traffic the news organisation receives is from its U.S.-based audience. According to Google Analytics, up to 50% of FPA's website traffic can be from the U.S. A drop in web traffic can lead to a drop in advertising revenue from the website.

So it's important to understand audience behavior on the website to better understand how to address the present challenge.

Website Traffic: GA data shows the Facebook referral channel, tracked as Organic Social, generated 174k sessions, which is a near-perfect match for Facebook's own Link Click data 171.5k which declined by 14.2% versus the prior period. It also highlights FPA's reliance on Facebook algorithms for website traffic.

SESSION PRIMARY CHAN...	SESSIONS
Organic Search	483K
Direct	309K
Organic Social	174K
Referral	48K

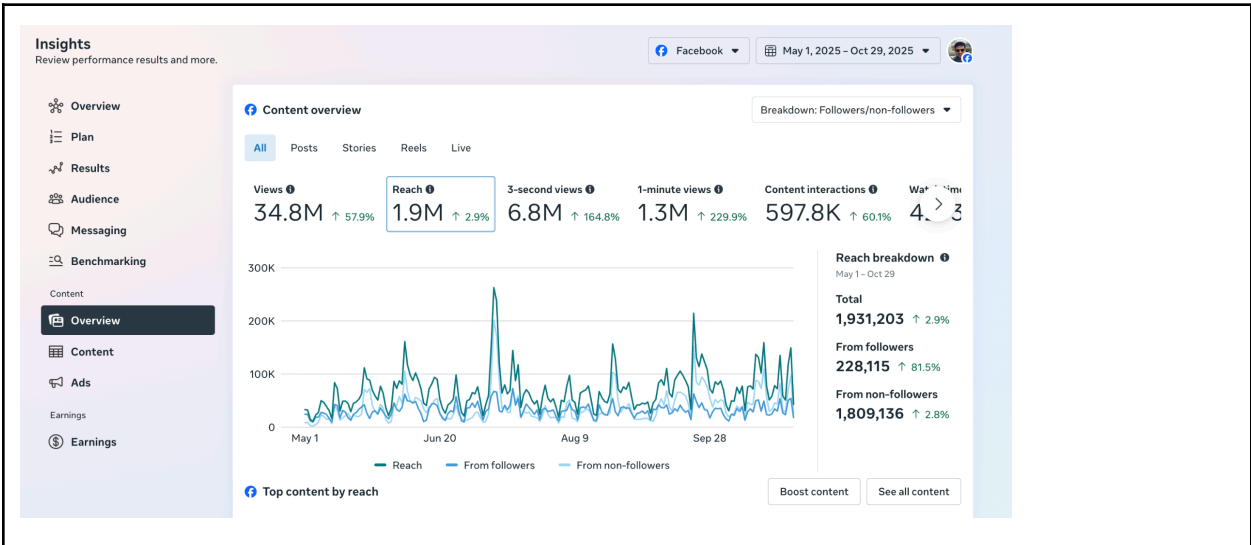
Direct Traffic: Over 2,000 people log on to frontpageafricaonline.com every day. This number is down from an average of over 2,600 visitors per day in the previous six months. This is a trend that is being seen across the industry.



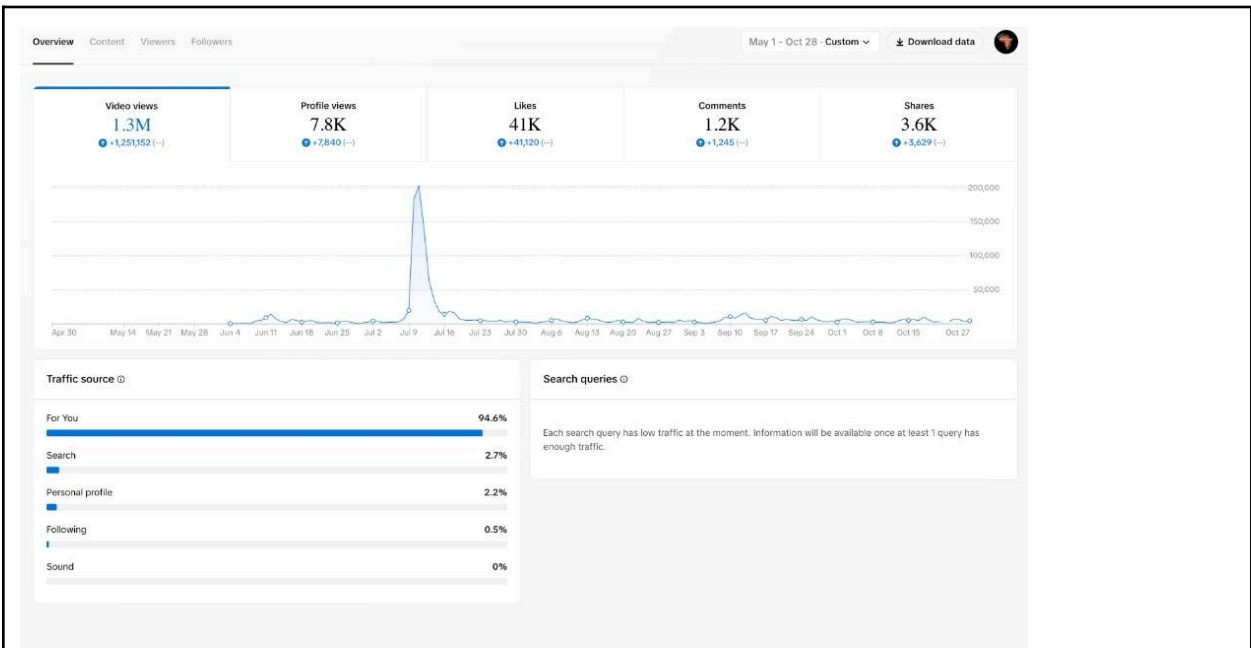
Sales deficit: There are opportunities for a more proactive approach to sales for ads and subscriptions. Right now, the team does not have enough dedicated resources to implement a higher sales target.

The Road Ahead: Advisory for sustainable growth

Growing a Social Media Audience



Facebook Analytics for all posts



Tiktok Analytics for all posts

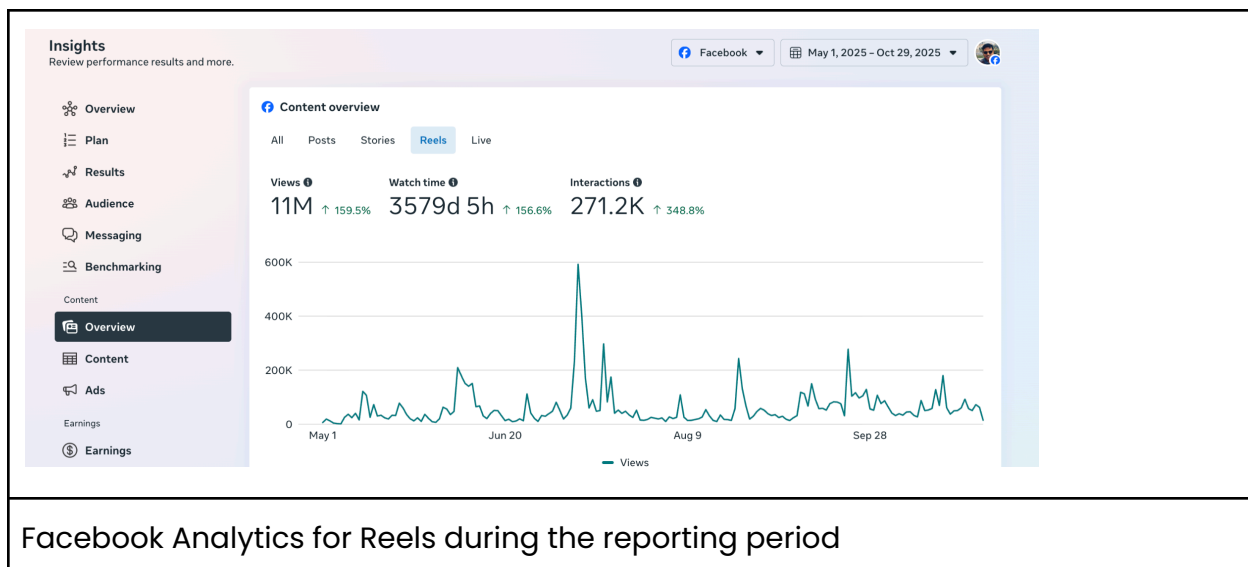
As website traffic dips across the internet, improving FPA’s ability to connect and engage with their audience on platforms like FB and TikTok are more important than ever. Seeing a 60% increase in views and interactions along with a 180% increase in follower growth in the last 6 months was very promising.

Growing audiences on social media is a crucial revenue strategy. Because advertisers are attracted to the wide reach that publications have on platforms like Facebook and TikTok. In 2025, an effective social media strategy does require a video component, and that was one of the areas we focused on.

Here is the growth we observed over the course of the project:

Social Platform	Before the project	After the project
Facebook	211,000 subscribers	250,000 subscribers
Instagram	181 subscribers	302 subscribers
TikTok	0	9,600 subscribers
Twitter	16,000 subscribers	16,200 subscribers
YouTube	17 subscribers	231 subscribers

Facebook and TikTok saw the most growth in terms of subscribers out of all the platforms. But that doesn’t mean the other platforms didn’t see meaningful growth. YouTube, for example, may only have 231 subscribers, but it has gathered 83k views over the duration of the project. And 25% of FPA’s audience on YouTube is from the United States. FPA had a YouTube channel previously, but wasn’t using it much. The analytics in terms of views and location of viewers suggests that while the number of subscribers may be low, YouTube can be an important channel through which FPA can engage with its U.S.-based audience.



Social platforms don't currently allow Liberia-based channels to monetise. But that may change in the future. So it's good that FPA is getting a head start in building an audience across social media. It also helps the newsroom get important information out to their audience.

Free footage

Seeing the success of social video, we prepared some resources that would make it easier for the journalists to keep making videos. Among those resources was a small bank of footage that is being hosted on the [New Narratives Google Drive](#). The footage in this bank includes footage of the Capitol, the courts, protests, and more. This footage can be used for any stories on topics related to the War and Economic Crimes Court, the drug crisis in the country, anything related to the government and legislation and more. It saves journalists time as we have some establishing shots that can be used again and again.

This is a resource that can be built upon. We recommend that a folder of photos and video clips be updated by NN fellows so that they can re-use their own footage for future stories and so that other fellows can benefit too. This is especially useful as video takes up a lot of space, so fellows will be able to save it on NN's server without running out of space on their own devices.

Launching an ePaper and Newsletter

Analytics from the FPA website indicated that a significant portion of FPA's audience was based in countries outside Liberia — especially the U.S. In fact, between 40–50% of FPA's website traffic came from the U.S. every month. Since the newspaper is not printed in the U.S. we wanted to find a way to make it easier for U.S.-based audiences to get news from Liberia. We analysed various online distribution channels, including Patreon and Ghost, before selecting Substack as the best platform to run the distribution of the ePaper and take payments.

Our strategy to launch the ePaper was based on wanting to address the challenge mentioned previously in the report, which is that search results that lead to website clicks are going down. A product that lands in the audience's email inbox is one of the most direct ways to reach audiences without having to worry about algorithm changes. It also allows FPA to reach its international and diaspora audience in a way that it was not able to do before — by giving them a PDF version of the newspaper.

In addition to helping FPA weather the storm of web traffic dipping, the ePaper is also a great monetization opportunity for the paper. Readers can pay \$6 per month if they want to receive the ePaper. And if they want to get updates for free, they can receive the weekly email update of the top stories. The free weekly roundup serves as an opportunity to advertise and funnel readers towards the paid subscription. And the results of this launch have been exciting to watch.

Since its launch a few months ago, the ePaper + newsletter combo has brought FPA an additional 125,000 views. The ePaper and newsletter are also driving clicks to the FPA website, especially the weekly roundup, which links out to the top stories of the week. When a new *Liberia: Democracy in Focus* podcast episode is released, it is also distributed via the newsletter audience, and can double the number of downloads of the podcast.

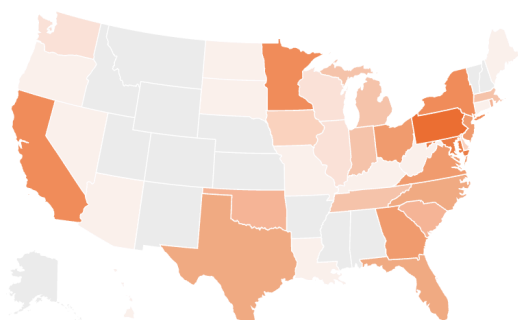
Anecdotally, the Audience Engagement Editor hired under this project shared that if there are any delays in the ePaper being sent out, the audience will check in to find out why. This indicates that there is a devoted audience that is looking forward to receiving the newsletter every day.

Audience location

Subscribers located across 36 states and 44 countries.

USA ▼

All subs ▼



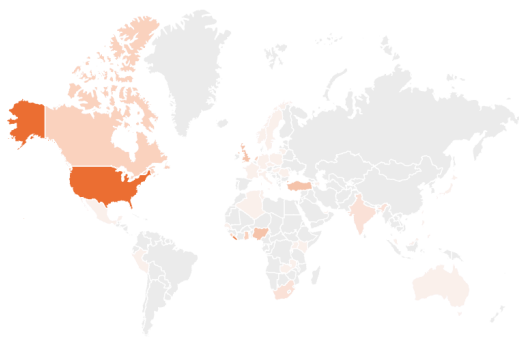
State	Subscribers
Pennsylvania	25 (11%)
Maryland	19 (8%)
New York	17 (8%)
California	16 (7%)
Minnesota	16 (7%)

Audience location

Subscribers located across 36 states and 44 countries.

World ▼

All subs ▼



Country	Subscribers
United States	283 (44%)
Liberia	238 (37%)
United Kingdom	14 (2%)
Nigeria	13 (2%)
Turkey	10 (2%)

Going forward, continuing to encourage audiences to subscribe to the ePaper will be important. This can be done through regular social media posts, and included as a call for subscriptions at the end of shortform videos. It would also be helpful to encourage international organisations working in Liberia to subscribe to the ePaper and newsletter for their employees in the country. Being able to reach subscribers directly over email also means that FPA would not be overly dependent on algorithms to reach their audience, so this product is worth continuing to invest in, even if it will take time for it to pay for itself.

Fundraising Campaign

Audiences aren't always able to pay a monthly subscription to get their news, but that doesn't mean that they don't care about supporting journalism. That's where a fundraising campaign can be useful, and NewsMatch was the perfect opportunity to develop the assets for what a fundraising campaign for NN and FPA could look like. We prepared 18 photo posts, 8 videos and 4 newsletter inserts for the campaign, which can be repurposed for future fundraising opportunities, such as for Liberia Giving Month. The campaign will run from the beginning of November until the end of December. An analysis of how the campaign went in January will be helpful in guiding future fundraising campaigns.

We believe there is potential for effective fundraising for FPA for people living outside of Liberia. For people living in Liberia, it would be more challenging as FPA does not have an online payment system that works in the country. Creating a way for people to contribute via mobile money would be helpful for FPA. We've even heard anecdotally that some people based in Monrovia have asked if they can pay for the ePaper via mobile money, so there is an interest even for people who don't necessarily have access to debit and credit cards that work using online systems.

Advertising opportunities

When we started working with FPA, we learned that advertising was only being placed in the newspaper and occasionally the website. So we wanted to explore what advertising on platforms like Facebook and TikTok would look like for FPA.

We found that there are many opportunities for advertising across FPA's assets. Especially platforms like Facebook, TikTok and the newsletter, which reach thousands and tens of thousands of viewers and readers.

To make it easier for FPA to sell advertising slots on its digital platforms, we put together a media kit that can be sent or shown to potential advertisers. We also put together some assets that would clearly differentiate FPA's journalistic content from its advertising content. These assets include a logo that says FPA Advert and some guidelines on how ads should be displayed on FPA social platforms. We felt these

guidelines would be important as clearly labeling advertising content is important for maintaining audience trust.

We also made two proposal presentations for potential advertisers. These proposals can be repurposed. But FPA would need more dedicated resources that can put time into making bespoke proposals for advertisers and go door to door in Monrovia to land advertising deals. Video ad production work was undertaken to promote Kadi's.

Finally, we put together FPA's first video advertisement for a restaurant, which can be used to attract new advertisers as it can show the potential of advertising via FPA's social channels. Despite being an ad, the video did well. Many commenters asked about the location of the restaurant, which boosted engagement and was answered in the video itself.

Given the amount of time it takes to put together personalised proposals for advertisers and finding the right business contact at organisations, it would be helpful for FPA to add more people who can work on this aspect of the business.

Investing in longform content (podcast and video)

While shortform video has enabled FPA to increase its reach and engagement, longer videos have also shown promise in their own way. Sit down interviews longer than 10 minutes have been received well by the audience, prompting us to create a workflow for video podcasts in the future.

We also produced FPA's first doc on [rewilding of an endangered parrot species](#) which has been selected for the [FABA Film festival](#).

Opportunities for other newsrooms

The success with FPA suggests that many other newsrooms in Liberia and beyond could benefit from an audience engagement strategy that is built with monetization in mind.

We had the chance to work a bit with Alternative Youth Radio on developing a business proposal for the launch of an internet cafe from their station. We supported AYR in an audience survey and the development of a presentation that they could submit to their board. Our experience with FPA and AYR showed us the gaps that exist in terms of business development for newsrooms — especially in the digital space. There are many digital opportunities that newsrooms are not able to take advantage of. And the reasons they are not able to take advantage of these opportunities are in part because of resource issues and also because there aren't many educational opportunities for newsrooms looking to monetise in the digital space.

This is something that NN has been working on and that this project was able to make major strides towards with FPA specifically. NN and its partners could work with other newsrooms to help them develop media kits and identify what digital revenue approaches would be most effective for each newsroom.



Conclusion

Despite challenges in converting social media attention into monetizable web traffic, our analytics-driven approach and experimentation with alternative revenue streams have yielded promising results. These are some key takeaways:

- Leveraging social media platforms can drive significant audience growth.
- Developing digital subscriptions and advertising can provide new revenue streams, but requires a robust content offering and re-evaluation of monetization strategies and resources required for it.
- Continue investing time and effort in data-driven content strategies to optimize audience engagement and conversion.
- Continue exploring new revenue streams, such as sponsored content and events, to diversify revenue sources.
- Periodical analysis and reporting of audience engagement and conversion metrics to inform content and revenue strategies.

Prepared by InOldNews for New Narratives