MARLUC

CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

Washington Post AI personal podcast

IMPLEMENTED 2025 ONWARDS · MEDIA AND PUBLISHING · US · BAND E · PARTLY PROVED

VERSION 1.0 · PUBLISHED 16 NOVEMBER 2026 · UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026 · FACTS CHECKED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

The Post launched AI-generated personalised news podcasts in its app in December 2025. An internal review reported by Semafor found most test scripts failed the paper's standards, and staff reported invented and misattributed quotes. The Post kept the product in beta; no results have been published.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

This is MarLuc's summary and grading of publicly available sources, for information only. It is not investment, legal, financial or professional advice, and should not be relied on for any decision. Readers must validate it against the original sources and, where appropriate, challenge its conclusions.

Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

No measurable effect: no results reported.

AI used: Generative AI news scripts read by AI voices, with Eleven Labs voice technology.

Implemented: 2025 onwards. Grade: band E, No measurable effect, Partly proved.

Headline result, as reported: Between 68% and 84% of test scripts failed the Post's standards before launch, per an internal review reported by Semafor, December 2025

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 5 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

The Washington Post. US national newspaper based in Washington, DC, owned by Jeff Bezos, per Semafor. Canvas block: 3. Customers and proposition. Also 8. Governance and risk, 6. Data and technology.

Business challenge

The challenge. The Post said the podcast gives its audience more flexible ways to access its journalism and could reach younger, more diverse audiences, per Digiday.

How it was addressed. Your Personal Podcast, in the Post's mobile app for registered users, selects about four top stories based on each user's reading and listening history and followed

Who implemented it

Eleven Labs (Software vendor): AI voice software under a multi-year agreement with the Post. In-house (In-house): The Post's product team built and tested the product.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: not established; the sources do not say how the system works. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Eleven Labs, Your Personal Podcast.

Where it was built in: In the Post's mobile app for registered users; builds episodes from each user's reading and listening history and followed topics.

What changed

Before: human-produced podcasts and AI-read articles. After: an AI-generated personalised audio briefing in beta alongside the Post's podcasts, with an in-app note advising listeners to check it against the source material. Measured effect on listening or subscriptions: Not reported. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

What it cost

Not reported

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Governance and control

The product team scored scripts for accuracy and attribution before launch and released the tool as a beta with a note to verify information. Head of standards Karen Pensiero told staff the errors were frustrating for all of us, per Semafor, and the Washington Post Guild said it was concerned about the product and its rollout, per NPR.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
The chief technology officer and head of product announced the tool to staff, and the product review team recommended release, per Semafor. [3]

A1 · Safe use · Not reported
Not reported.

A2 · Human in the loop · Missing (independent source shows it was absent)
A Post staffer told Semafor that the lack of human oversight raised major red flags; episodes are generated for each user. [2]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
The product team used an internal scoring algorithm and three rounds of testing, and the Post said it would track return and engagement rates. [1] [3]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Built under a multi-year agreement with Eleven Labs; vendor controls are not reported. [1]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Not reported

DID NOT

– In three rounds of pre-launch testing, 68% to 84% of scripts failed, per Semafor's account of the internal review.

– Staff reported misattributed or invented quotes and commentary presenting a source's quotes as the paper's position, per Semafor.

– The review concluded that further small prompt changes were unlikely to improve outcomes without introducing more risk, per Semafor.

UNPROVEN

– Return and engagement rates, which the Post said it would track: not published.

– Whether error rates fell after launch: Not reported.

Timeline

Dec 2025 Your Personal Podcast launches in the Post's app for registered users [1]

Dec 2025 Staff report errors including invented quotes; head of standards calls them frustrating [2]

Dec 2025 Semafor reports pre-launch tests in which 68% to 84% of scripts failed; the Post says the product is in beta [3]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: E, No measurable effect. Proof: Partly proved. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band E, a product in beta with no published results. Errors are reported, but no harm, sanction or withdrawal.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The product and newsroom teams applied different tests: the product team treated errors as part of a beta, newsroom staff treated them as breaches of the paper's standards. Releasing a tool its own review had scored poorly put that disagreement in front of readers. For a larger organisation, agree who sets the release threshold for AI output before launch.

1. Agree the quality bar for AI output with the people accountable for standards before launch.
2. Set the pass mark for testing before launch, and hold release until it is met.
3. Publish the measures you will use to judge a beta, and report them.

Evidence

Score 1 of 4. Independent reporting of internal documents and staff messages (Semafor, NPR); the Post's own statements; no published results.

Evaluation method. Press reporting of an internal test readout; no published results.

Sources disagree. The Post's product team saw the errors as a normal part of rolling out a feature still being tested, per Semafor; newsroom staff described them as below the paper's standards.

Status. Ongoing as of December 2025: the Post said the product was in beta and would continue. Later status: Not reported in the sources opened.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/washington-post-ai-personal-podcast

[1] Digiday: The Washington Post debuts AI-personalized podcasts to hook younger listeners
https://digiday.com/media/the-washington-post-debuts-ai-personalized-podcasts-to-hook-younger-listeners

[2] Semafor: Washington Post's AI-generated podcasts rife with errors, fictional quotes
https://semafor.com/article/12/11/2025/washington-posts-ai-generated-podcasts-rife-with-errors-fictional-quotes

[3] Semafor: Iterate through: Why The Washington Post launched an error-ridden AI product
https://www.semafor.com/article/12/14/2025/iterate-through-why-the-washington-post-launched-an-error-ridden-ai-product

[4] NPR (via WFAE): Questions of accuracy arise as Washington Post uses AI to create personalized podcasts
https://www.wfae.org/united-states-world/2025-12-13/questions-of-accuracy-arise-as-washington-post-uses-ai-to-create-personalized-podcasts

[5] TheWrap: Washington Post Stands Behind AI Podcast Plan Despite Staff Outcry
https://www.thewrap.com/washington-post-ai-podcast-defense/

The Washington Post website: https://www.washingtonpost.com

Version 1.0 · Published 16 November 2026 · Updated 16 November 2026 · Facts checked against sources 16 November 2026 · Downloaded 26 November 2026. This PDF may be out of date: the latest version, and a way to report an error or a better source, is at https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/washington-post-ai-personal-podcast

VERSION HISTORY

v1.0 16 November 2026 First published