

Digital Labor Trapped in "Audience Metrics": The Professional Identity and Confusion of Chinese Journalists

Yan Dong^{1,2}, Julia Wirza Mohd Zawawi¹, Rosmiza Bt Haji Bidin¹, Syed Agil Bin Syed Alsagoff¹

¹Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

²Faculty of Media, Henan University of Economics and Law, China

Correspondence: Julia Wirza Mohd Zawawi, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.

Received: July 31, 2025

Accepted: December 8, 2025

Online Published: December 12, 2025

doi:10.11114/smc.v14i1.7854

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v14i1.7854>

Abstract

With the advent of social media, the work of journalists is no longer limited to news interview and writing, and artificial intelligence technology is increasingly applied to news gathering and information distribution. These digital platforms and emerging technologies have brought unprecedented changes to journalism. Through in-depth interviews with 23 Chinese new media journalists, this study conducted a qualitative analysis to explore the interaction between journalists' role perception, professional identity and continuous changes in the industry in the digital media era. The research finds that at the level of news production, journalists seek the balance and self-consistency of "adhering to traditional news values and pursuing traffic and audience goodwill" in the daily high-intensity KPI workload. The unequal ability to use technology and the pressure of traffic competition make journalists confused about their role perception. The weakening of professional concept and the gradual loss of professional spirit have caused the crisis of journalists' professional cognition. The continuously transforming environment of China's news industry urgently needs to reflect and re-examine the erosion of the public value of journalism by the market and audience.

Keywords: Chinese journalists, professional identity, KPI, traffic, digital labor, audience metrics

1. Introduction

The integration of social media and AI technology has disrupted the traditional way of news production and transmission, forcing journalists to confront complex issues of professional identity while retaining "objective and true" journalistic ethics (Dhiman, 2023; Baharom, 2023). Journalists must not only balance technical and ethical constraints, but also navigate the confluence of personal and professional identities, particularly in the setting of regular contacts on social media platforms (Miller & Nelson, 2022; Mellado & Hermida, 2021). This shift reflects a larger challenge of how journalists may retain professional standards in a quickly changing digital world while meeting audiences' high needs for interactivity and involvement (Yang et al., 2022; Canedo et al., 2023).

Against this backdrop, "audience metrics" have become a crucial force shaping the logic of news production. Audience metrics typically consist of a series of quantifiable data points, such as clicks, page views, dwell time, interaction rate, number of shares, completion rate, and follower growth. These are used by news organizations and platforms to measure audience response and dissemination effectiveness (Kristensen, 2021; Ekström et al., 2022). In recent years, news organizations have embedded these metrics into their performance evaluation systems, making them not only "tools for understanding the audience" but also governance mechanisms influencing topic selection decisions, content presentation methods, and the organization of journalists' work. As algorithmic technology transforms these metrics into the basis for content ranking and recommendation, audience metrics have gradually evolved into a core force driving newsroom decisions, subtly reshaping news value, editorial judgment, and professional identity (Dodds, 2023; Ahva & Ovaska, 2023). Therefore, audience metrics are both a technological product and a power mechanism, profoundly influencing journalists' working methods and professional cognitive structures.

The widespread use of artificial intelligence exacerbates this problem. As news organisations rely more on AI technologies for content development and audience interaction, journalists must reconsider their job in this new technologically driven world (Charrua-Santos, 2023). The automation of AI may cause journalists to doubt the worth of their job, particularly when news producing chores are automated (Kioko et al., 2022). This uneasiness exacerbates the

confusion of professional identity, forcing journalists to strike a balance between professional self-identification and the realities of their employment (Dhombres et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the simultaneous demands that journalists experience - to attract an audience and make a profit while maintaining the authenticity and integrity of their tales - contribute significantly to the blurring of professional identities. Journalistic organisations are increasingly relying on social media data and algorithms to determine public opinion; yet, this practice may compromise journalistic objectivity (Al-Zoubi, 2023; Cloudy et al., 2022). In this setting, journalists' professional identities are becoming increasingly problematic as they struggle to maintain journalistic credibility while pursuing audience involvement (Wahyuni et al., 2022).

As a result, journalistic professional identity is more than just a subject of individual job identity; it is also a deeply rooted social issue that reflects the media environment and its structural changes. To effectively address this challenge, researchers must investigate how social media and AI technologies are influencing journalists' daily work, altering the relationship between journalists and their audiences, and predicting the future of the journalism profession in the context of digitalisation and technology (Bentivegna & Marchetti, 2018). To effectively address this challenge, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do the application of digital technologies and social media platforms affect the daily work and careers of journalists?
2. How is social media changing the relationship between journalists and their audiences?

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Traditional Role and Professional Identity of Journalists*

Professional identity is based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which relates to an individual's perception of the social and personal significance of their employment. For journalists, professional identity encompasses not only their grasp of the concept and value system of journalism (Deuze, 2008; Donsbach, 2009), but also their perception of the significance that professional positions can provide to the self (Wei, 2013). According to Deuze (2005), journalism is a profession, and journalists' professionalism enables them to reach consensus and shape social identity. According to Mellado (2022), a journalist's professional identity is heavily influenced by the social and cultural context in which he or she lives, and personal experience, combined with the broader institutional framework, shapes a journalist's perception of professional responsibilities and social expectations.

Historically, the essential ideas of journalistic values and ethics have formed journalists' conventional roles and identities, as well as directed their work practices (Mellado, 2021). Journalists are frequently regarded as the "watchdog" of democratic countries, entrusted with monitoring the government, educating the people, and giving a forum for varied viewpoints (Marquez-Ramirez et al., 2020). This identity is inextricably tied with a dedication to fair, truthful, and ethical reporting, which is required to retain public trust and journalistic independence (Hanitzsch, 2007; Hanitzsch, 2019). Journalists' obligations, particularly fact-checking, investigative reporting, and contextualising complicated social issues, are critical components of their roles as defenders of democracy (Ojala & Poyhtari, 2018; Joyce et al., 2022).

Furthermore, journalists' adherence to professional norms and ethical standards is a key component of their conventional professional identity. Journalists must always adhere to the journalistic standards of objectivity, impartiality, and transparency while reporting (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), which not only influence how news is handled but also form journalists' social standing and professional identity. In short, journalists' professional identities stem from their dedication to journalistic ethics, service to the public interest, and duty as democratic watchdogs. As the media landscape evolves, journalists must strike a balance between adhering to old standards and adapting to new technology and channels (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Cancela, 2021).

2.2 *The Impact of Social Media and AI on Journalists' Professional Identity*

The rise of social media and artificial intelligence has produced a fundamental shift in journalism, dramatically changing journalists' professional identities and news creation processes (Pavlik, 2021; Turksoy, 2022). These emergent forces are not only changing the significance of audience involvement, but also transforming the function of journalists, instilling fresh energy in journalism while offering new challenges to long-held journalistic traditions. In today's fast-paced, user-generated content-dominated work environment, power relations for journalists have shifted dramatically (Nielsen, 2020; Whittington, 2020).

The development of social media not only complements conventional media, but it also alters the news production process by speeding up information transmission and driving journalists to master new digital skills (Humeira & Ramadhan, 2022). According to Lestari (2024), these changes have resulted in a more collaborative approach to news reporting, with increased interactions between media, journalists, and civil society. However, the accessibility and

immediacy of social media creates issues, particularly the dissemination of false information and the difficulty in verifying sources. In this complicated information environment, journalists struggle to distinguish between spectacular news and credible reporting, thereby undermining public trust in the media (Khan, 2024).

Furthermore, journalists are forced to communicate with audiences on social media platforms, which complicates their work because they must strike a balance between adhering to traditional journalistic norms and encouraging interaction and participation. While internet contact is regarded as vital, journalists are afraid that such interactions will have an impact on their professional identity (Nielsen, 2016). The combination of personal and professional identities on social media may lead audiences to mix professional reporting with personal viewpoints, hurting journalists' identification and professional confusion and further undermining public faith in journalism (Papanagnou, 2021).

According to Dubois et al. (2018), journalists are increasingly using social media data to assess public sentiment, blurring the barrier between objective reporting and subjective interpretation. Journalists' reliance on acquiring news information can lead to ethical quandaries, particularly when combining the intricacies of factual reporting with audience involvement (Schmidt et al., 2022). Journalists may encounter ethical issues when developing attention-grabbing content, particularly if there is an overemphasis on audience involvement, which may compromise journalistic neutrality and veracity (Alzubi, 2023).

At the same time, the use of artificial intelligence technologies is altering the way the news industry operates. According to Al-Zoubi (2024), AI is being more commonly employed in data analysis and content creation, and while it enhances news production efficiency, it also raises ethical concerns such as prejudice, privacy violations, and journalist job losses (Simon, 2024). Journalists must address how automation affects traditional journalistic norms, specifically the authenticity and integrity of AI-generated information (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2022). Furthermore, algorithms tend to filter information based on audience engagement rather than newsworthiness, resulting in news content homogenisation (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2022; Martinisi & Lugo-Ocando, 2020). Overreliance on AI may lead journalists to prioritise eye-catching articles over important but unpopular themes (Gao, 2023; Wang et al., 2022).

These alterations not only call into question journalists' roles as impartial gatekeepers of information, but they also deepen their professional identity crisis. As journalists experience increased emotional demands and professional difficulties (Humeira & Ramadhan, 2022), it becomes more difficult for them to strike a balance between conventional journalistic standards and new technological realities.

In recent years, an increasing number of news organisations have incorporated key performance indicators (KPIs) to improve job efficiency, accountability, and productivity (Karpenko et al., 2020). According to Soubjaki and Choughri (2019), KPIs give a framework for assessing how well news organisations carry out their strategic objectives. Kpis in journalism usually contain indicators like audience engagement, content production, and adherence to editorial standards (Corzo & Salaverria, 2021). The increasing significance of these quantitative indicators underscores the media industry's steady shift to a data-driven decision-making model (Drulă, 2023). However, this transformation can have a significant impact on journalists' daily priorities and operations, particularly in a more efficient and production-oriented environment where traditional journalistic values, such as depth and quality of reporting, may be undermined (Ong, 2012).

When journalists are under pressure to fulfil predetermined performance targets, they may prioritise quantity above quality, jeopardising the impartiality and authenticity of their reporting. According to Kuchkorova and Rustamov (2022), the application of KPI can inspire personnel by establishing clear performance criteria and rewards, but journalists may become confused if they rely too heavily on quantitative metrics. Journalists may feel alienated and resentful, particularly when KPIs collide with journalistic ethics. This excessive emphasis on performance measurements can create a "surveillance culture" in news production, aggravating stress and burnout among journalists. Journalists may abandon journalistic ethics to suit organisational demands, resulting in a professional identity crisis (Ehovin & Lukan, 2024).

As a result, researching the impact of a KPI system on traditional news values is quite important. The contradiction between commercial pressure and journalistic ethics has been extensively explored in the literature, and it is especially worthy of critical examination (Kritikos et al., 2018).

3. Methodology

In this paper, the in-depth interview method is used to understand the professional identity of Chinese journalists in the context of the continuous development of social media and AI. In-depth interviews are a frequently used method in qualitative research (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). It is one of the effective methods to collect data, which can reveal the ideas or experiences in the research and explore the information in depth (Roller & Lavarkas, 2020; Showkat & Parveen, 2017). In order to ensure the representativeness and diversity of interview samples, the combination of purpose sampling and heterogeneity sampling is adopted in selecting interview subjects. Brayman (2012) states that a minimum of twenty to thirty interviews appear to be necessary for a qualitative interview study to be published.

Therefore, researchers interviewed 23 Chinese journalists between March and May 2024. To ensure the research findings fully reflect the diverse experiences of journalists during the transformation of mainstream digital media in China, the basic selection criteria for respondents were professionals from provincial-level or higher mainstream media outlets. The respondents' organizations included provincial-level Party media (such as newspapers, television stations, and their integrated media centers), national-level comprehensive news websites, and rapidly developing internet news platforms. Organization types encompassed traditional newspapers and magazines, television and radio media, portal news websites, regional integrated media centers, and social media journalists and editorial teams primarily responsible for operating platforms such as Weibo and Douyin. These organizations exhibit significant differences in organizational structure, content production mechanisms, and technological application levels, providing a comparative perspective for this study.

Researchers extended interview invitations to eligible respondents and conducted semi-structured interviews with invited journalists via online meetings or face-to-face interviews. The average interview duration was approximately 60 minutes. This multi-channel interview strategy ensured both flexibility and helped capture journalists' authentic narratives in different contexts. All interviews were recorded or transcribed, and some content was selectively translated into English. This study used an interview guide with open-ended questions to guide each interview. Respondents were aged 24 to 45, including 10 men and 13 women. In terms of professional experience, the respondents had a wide range of years of experience: the majority were young journalists with 2–5 years of experience, who were more deeply embedded in the platform-based production logic; those with 5–10 years of experience felt the institutional pressure of media transformation and the reshaping of professional values more prominently; while journalists with more than 10 years of experience showed a more pronounced sense of conflict between traditional journalistic values and the requirements of new media operations. This intergenerational difference allowed the study to capture the dynamics of professional identity.

Respondents generally adopted a "dual-track work model," undertaking new media content production and social media platform operation tasks in addition to traditional interviewing, writing, and verification responsibilities. Most organizations have incorporated "hot topic tracking—algorithm research—KPI evaluation" into their daily workflows, forming a highly data-driven and indicator-driven mechanism for topic selection and publication. This mechanism not only changes the work rhythm of journalists but also has a lasting impact on their professional autonomy and editorial judgment.

Regarding social media usage, respondents generally rely on platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, and WeChat Video Accounts for real-time news distribution, and frequently use community-based platforms like Xiaohongshu and Zhihu to obtain clues and observe public opinion. Simultaneously, they need to frequently use platform data tools (such as Weibo Index and Toutiao backend data) to monitor dissemination performance, providing a basis for topic selection, publication time, and content presentation. The high level of participation and tool dependence among respondents in social media usage provides crucial empirical material for understanding the indexing and platformization process of news production. All interview texts were sorted out and coded step by step by Nvivo14 software. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers adopted open coding and then spindle coding in the first stage of data collation. Through the analysis of the correlation and summary with the first round of coding, the topic is refined and the analysis results are more suitable for the research question (Tracy, 2019). No new concepts or categories emerged in the interview content after the 21 interviewee. This consensus-based coding result means that the research content has reached information saturation, which ensures the realization of the research purpose to a certain extent (Guest et al., 2012; Anderson & Dudo, 2023).

4. Results

4.1 Changes in Daily Work: New Tasks and New Technologies

The use and ubiquity of social media and AI has brought seismic changes to the news industry. All media organizations in China have started structural adjustment (He & Li, 2022). One result of this adjustment is the increase of journalists' work content and the change of assessment mechanism (Wang et al., 2024). As media organizations have opened official accounts on various social media platforms, journalists have had to start contributing to multiple platforms simultaneously. There are huge differences in audience groups and audience needs of different platforms, which requires journalists to take into account the characteristics of different platforms to adjust their narrative styles when reporting the same event. This increases their workload.

"Before I started working, I always thought that being a journalist was a very sacred profession. It can help many people, and you can participate in many people's stories. You will have a great sense of accomplishment. When I first started working, my job was that I used to be a reporter who wrote texts. My job was to interview and provide texts. At that time, the workload was not large, and I reported a lot of topics that I liked. I really felt that my personal value was reflected. Now, I need to feed news websites and

four social media at the same time, and I can't just write texts. I have to take pictures and videos, and I also need to edit them myself, and provide news articles of different styles. Every day I feel like a spinning top, spinning all the time, and I am very tired.”(A3)

The competition and integration between traditional media and online media also force journalists to choose between "depth" and "speed". This is actually a process full of contradictions. Because the pursuit of speed may sacrifice the quality and credibility of news. In the traditional media era, due to the limitations of paper media layout and television media time, speed has certain limitations. But at the same time, journalists can also conduct in-depth reports and produce good news works with critical thinking. However, although digital technology has greatly increased the speed of news and information dissemination, it has also broken the news production model of traditional media. In order to attract more audiences, the news industry excessively pursues the timeliness and speed of news. Under the normalized fast pace and high pressure, journalists have become "digital laborers" on the news production line.

“In the past, I could spend a month interviewing and writing investigative news. I hope that readers can learn some knowledge or think about certain issues through my reports. Now, I need to compete with many people for the time of news release. Sometimes, you can see more than a dozen media and countless netizens at the scene of a breaking news. When the situation at the scene is filmed by everyone at the same time, who can release it first depends on their own ability. The depth of news reporting is getting further and further away from my job.”(A1)

“Because I want to report quickly, sometimes before I interview, I already have a rough outline of the news to be released. When I interview, I just need to fill in the content of the outline. In this way, I only need a little time to complete the production and release of the news article after the interview. However, this kind of article usually does not have much in-depth thinking, it is just for the sake of speed.” (A10)

The popularization and application of new technologies also directly affect the daily work of journalists. In a speech, the President of China Xi Jinping mentioned that Chinese journalists should become all-media journalists and professional talents(He & Li, 2022). However, "all-media" and "professional" have a binary conflict. Journalists need to master a variety of digital skills, but media organizations do not provide professional training for journalists, resulting in journalists needing to learn other skills to meet their job requirements. This has caused many journalists to have more concerns and confusion about their own roles.

“In the past, news interviews were conducted in a team form, with someone responsible for shooting videos, someone responsible for on-site interviews, and someone responsible for taking photos. Now I often go out to interview alone. Because everyone has their own work tasks. While I am interviewing, I also need to shoot a video by the way. After shooting, I have to edit it myself and post it on different social media. But for many new skills, I need to spend a lot of time learning by myself. Our journalist department has been asking managers to provide us with professional skills training, but there has been no response so far. I can only rely on myself, although the learning process is very slow.” (A9)

The application of intelligence technology in the field of news production has improved the work efficiency of journalists to a certain extent, but it has also caused many journalists to re-evaluate their professional identity. In particular, the mastery of new technologies and the changes in the roles of journalists have forced many journalists to feel uneasy and confused about their own profession, which has led to the complication of their professional identity.

4.2 Changes in Salary and Performance Appraisal Systems: The Impact of KPIs

Kuchkorova and Rustamov (2022) argue that the use of KPIs in employee management can increase motivation by providing clear performance expectations and recognition for achievements. However, Jonsson and Rudberg (2017) suggest that the emphasis on indicators may create a culture of surveillance in which journalists feel constantly monitored and evaluated, which may lead to stress and burnout. Jonsson and Rudberg (2017) also emphasize that KPIs may inadvertently encourage practices that prioritize sensationalism or clickbait over thorough investigative reporting. This conflict may lead to a professional identity crisis as journalists grapple with the consequences of compromising their ethical standards in order to meet organizational expectations.

Changes in China's news system have made the "traffic is king" mindset gradually become the assessment mechanism and evaluation standard of the news industry. They try to strike a balance between valuable in-depth news and fascinating instant news, resulting in more obvious conflicts in journalists' news ethics. Many news organizations associate the "views, clicks, and forwardings" of news with the personal performance of journalists. The popularity of news articles on social media directly affects the salary of journalists. Although it has increased the enthusiasm of journalists to a certain extent, it has also directly affected journalists' choice and judgment of news value. Some journalists often feel confused and struggle in the process of creating high-value and high-traffic news content.

“The KPI of my work has a basic completion target. After exceeding the basic completion target, my performance salary is calculated based on the number of clicks. This is very attractive to me, but it also brings greater pressure. I often feel confused that the high-quality news I worked hard to write has not as many clicks as a small video shot by a reporter. For example, during the epidemic, a reporter filmed an empty street and unexpectedly received millions of clicks, but is this video newsworthy? I don’t think so, but the audience likes it! So now sometimes I don’t even have to go out for interviews. I just need to find topics that everyone likes on the Internet, organize some content on the Internet into a news article, and I can get a very high traffic. The news content may not have any depth, but it can bring me economic benefits.” (A8)

The pursuit of "audience indicators" is not a performance system for a media outlet, but a general situation in China's entire media industry. Organizations measure journalists' abilities and work efficiency based on "views" or "readings", and project the results directly into performance appraisals and salary income, forcing journalists to choose topics and content that attract traffic. The value of news works no longer depends entirely on the judgment of traditional news values, but is determined by the numbers presented by traffic.

“The media I work for has a fixed traffic requirement for manuscripts every month. Every month, a certain proportion of manuscripts must reach a reading volume of 100,000 or more than 1 million. If the requirement is not met, wages will be deducted.” (A7)

“Each manuscript I publish must reach a reading volume of more than 2,000 to be counted as effective workload. If the reading volume of your manuscript is not high, even if the manuscript is of good quality, it cannot be counted as workload.” (A12)

“We have a system for judging excellent manuscripts, which is divided into five levels, and different levels will give different economic rewards. A traffic volume of more than 50 million can be rewarded with 3,000 yuan. A traffic volume of more than 100 million will be rewarded tenfold. From this system, traffic accounts for 100% of the role.” (A17)

This pursuit of traffic and the temptation of economic benefits have, to a certain extent, played a motivating role for journalists, allowing them to be more proactive in their work. However, sometimes it conflicts with the traditional news values of "truth and objectivity" that journalists have long adhered to, causing confusion and confusion in journalists' professional identity.

“I think the KPI set by managers is very friendly to my work. Although there is a certain pressure to achieve KPI goals, it is also a good motivation for me. This year, the media I work for asked me to be responsible for the output of Douyin short video news. My KPI is to publish at least 5 short video news every day, 3 of which must be original news, and the minimum number of views of each news video must reach 10 million. This is a difficult task for many people, but I did it. As long as you grasp the content that users like and design the topic, you can meet the manager's KPI requirements. Of course, this topic may not be what I am interested in or what I think the audience must know, and it does not even need to be real-time news. Yes, this is different from the news values I used to insist on, but I have to complete my work, so I can only say that as long as it is liked by users, it is the best.” (A11)

In the era of traditional media, professionalism and values of news are important standards that the news industry must abide by. All this has changed significantly in the era of social media. This "traffic is king" incentive mechanism has also led some journalists to adopt special means to deal with the traffic assessment of news organizations.

“We will have a reporter group. After everyone publishes news, they will send the link to the group. The reporters will help each other forward and browse, thereby quickly increasing the number of views and forwarding.” (A14)

“I have many traffic mutual assistance groups on WeChat, and we will help each other. If my manuscript is a little short of the number of views to meet the reward standard, I will also go to Taobao to buy some clicks to get a higher salary reward.” (A15)

More and more journalists are trapped in the anxiety of technological innovation and the pursuit of traffic due to the workload requirements. In order to pursue traffic, journalists need to constantly compete with other media for timeliness, so that sometimes they sacrifice quality for speed and do not have enough time for in-depth research and interviews. Under the requirements of the "traffic" KPI, many news are no longer reports of recent facts, but a large amount of integration of network data. Journalists are often caught in huge traffic anxiety, and their daily work is dominated by various data. These phenomena have directly affected the journalists' recognition of their own profession and made it more complicated.

4.3 Changes in the Relationship Between Journalists and Audiences: Platform Preferences and User Focus

In the traditional media era, journalists had greater control over topic selection. Journalists often consider "what the audience needs to know" or look for news topics based on their own news sensitivity and news value. Journalism ethics also require journalists to serve the public interest and report news objectively and comprehensively. However, the emergence of social media and various platform algorithms has changed the original rules. Platform algorithms and audience needs have been pushed to an unprecedented height, limiting journalists' autonomy in topic selection.

In the platform algorithm dominated by traffic, journalists and their media will use different software to calculate the platform's preferences, understand the focus of user attention, and analyze the platform's review mechanism. These contents will become an important starting point for journalists to find topics.

"In the past, I only needed to collect news clues to find news-worthy content to report. Now I need to consider the platform's algorithm and user needs. Only by meeting their needs can my news increase enough traffic and exposure. Sometimes the topic I like may not be what users like, so I have to give up. When choosing news topics and writing news, it is inevitable to move closer to "audience needs", and in the end it is difficult for news content to remain purely newsworthy. Gradually, I only write content that I feel everyone likes to read or imitate other people's popular content." (A12)

"The only thing I can do is to choose the content that I think is important and worth reporting from the topics that the audience likes. This will not only comply with my professional ethics, but also complete my work tasks." (A14)

When reporting news, reporters should not only consider the platform's preferences and the audience's needs, but also take into account the news value such as the publicity and objectivity of news information. The differentiation of news topics and news information can bring more comprehensive information acquisition. Many reporters are trying to draw a clear line with traffic while actively looking for news topics from various hot search lists. On the one hand, they hope to be able to create freely without being influenced by the outside world, and on the other hand, they rely on various data indicators to help them judge what news is worth doing. As a result, the platform and audience preferences have deepened the control of reporters' search for topics. When journalists try to balance news value and audience needs, it will inevitably affect the flexibility of their work, and then cause confusion in their understanding of the profession.

4.4 The Cross-change of Journalists' Professional and Personal Identities: Self-Adjustment Of Career Choice

Many journalists open their own social accounts while completing their work. They hope to gain more recognition and affirmation in another way. Some of them use their personal accounts to attract more fans because of work requirements, thereby successfully diverting traffic to media accounts. Some media organizations will also give certain financial rewards to individual journalists with a large number of fans and high clicks. For individual journalists, their every move is watched by more people on the Internet, and some inappropriate behaviors or words may be infinitely magnified, thus affecting the image of the individual journalist or the media. This makes many journalists who operate personal accounts have to keep a high level of tension at all times, and even feel obviously restrained in their daily work.

"I am not only a journalist, but also a self-media operator. I now have a certain fan base, but the pressure is greater. Because I care more about my image than before, sometimes I feel restrained when I go out for interviews. I cannot make any mistakes. Otherwise, I may be attacked by everyone on the Internet platform." (A16)

"Many fans trust me. When they encounter any unfair problems, they will send me private messages on the Internet, hoping that I can help them promote the progress of this matter. But sometimes this trust brings me a lot of pressure. Every day I think about whether I can help them? Can this report be broadcast? What will be the result?" (A4)

"Sometimes in order to increase the number of fans and fan trust, We will create a specific personal image for ourselves on the Internet. My professional ethics constantly reminds me that I should be an objective and neutral recorder of news. My personal account requires me to be deeply involved in news events. If the journalist's participation is higher than the news itself, the news will lose its objectivity and truthfulness."
(A8)

When journalists are required to operate their social media accounts on the premise of increasing the number of fans and views, journalists often publish some content for the purpose of "catering to fans" in order to complete their work. These contents will conflict with the journalists' main reporting work, thus causing confusion in the journalists' behavioral cognition at work and causing anxiety about the journalists' professional identity and personal identity.

Another confusion of many journalists about their professional identity and personal identity lies in the limited right to express their opinions. As individual journalists, many journalists hope that their work can truly achieve public opinion supervision and present objective and true real-life problems. However, China's unique media system is extremely strict in reviewing news content. The gap between the personal pursuit of "journalistic ideals" and the "limited right to express" in reality is enough to make journalists slowly lose the power of professional identity at work.

"Once I worked on a topic that could be investigated in depth. My colleagues and I traveled to more than a dozen cities for this topic, interviewed dozens of people, and edited many versions of videos. As a result, the leader said that this topic could not be reported. I collapsed at that time, and at that moment I wanted to give up this job." (A9)

"The only criterion for my news production now is safety. Don't step on the sensitive line of news policy, focus on safe topics, the news may not be exciting, but this is the only way to ensure that there are no mistakes." (A11)

Chinese journalists often find a balance between reporters and propagandists, press freedom and limited discourse expression, which has given rise to professional pressure and cognitive confusion. Over time, this situation will inevitably affect the professional loyalty and professional persistence of journalists. Many journalists will self-adjust in this process, which often requires them to have the belief and determination to stick to their ideals.

"When you successfully promote the smooth resolution of a matter through a report and your efforts, you can feel full of pride." (A12)

"I have always believed that journalism is a sacred profession because it can help many people and even participate in many people's stories. Although I feel very tired a lot of the time now, I have found my self-worth in the process of being a journalist." (A11)

"When the news content I make is well received, I will have a strong sense of accomplishment. This is the reason for me to stick to it." (A15)

The sense of accomplishment and pride gained from this kind of work comes from the realization of social value and self-value, which enhances personal professional identity and to a certain extent offsets the cognitive confusion caused by professional pressure and the gap between reality.

5. Discussion

This study, based on semi-structured interviews with 23 new media journalists from mainstream Chinese media outlets, reveals how digital platforms and algorithm-driven audience metrics create a complex interaction between news production, professional identity, and the public value of news. Overall, the interviews indicate that audience metrics are both a significant external driver of changes in news organizations and journalistic behavior, and a mediating mechanism that triggers confusion in professional cognition; their impact exhibits both direct and multiple indirect effects. In this environment, journalists strive to uphold traditional journalistic values while simultaneously seeking new points of reference in a constantly evolving landscape. They hope to find a better way to balance these two aspects.

We also found that journalists have contradictory attitudes towards social media. On the one hand, they use social media to collect and distribute information. They attempt to use social media to enhance their media influence and information dissemination. They constantly pursue "audience indicators" and obtain higher economic benefits. They study the algorithm preferences of social media platforms, analyze the hot topics that the audience likes, and "customize" news based on these contents. They hope to get higher traffic and attention in this way (Hayes, 2021; Higgins-Dobney, 2021). They have obvious audience preference tendencies when selecting news topics, which also causes competition and compromise between traditional news values and traffic. However, this catering to audience preferences is likely to deepen the commercialization of news organizations and further undermine the public service nature of journalism (Ekström et al., 2022; Lamot & Van Aelst, 2020).

On the other hand, they are skeptical about the pursuit of traffic brought by social media. They believe that the popularity and development of social media are the main reasons for the change in KPI assessment standards and the increase in workload. The increasing application of digital technology forces journalists to constantly learn new skills (Hayes & O'Sullivan, 2023), which to a certain extent causes their work pressure (Omidi et al., 2022) and reduces professional identity. As Cohen (2019) believes, the development of technology is also considered to bring insecurity to journalists. The standards of KPIs are becoming higher and higher, and they often feel exhausted in order to complete the workload. The reliance on data will also lead to poor news quality (Fürst, 2020) and may even cause tension between journalists and managers (Lamot et al., 2021).

Although many journalists believe that the pressure of KPIs also brings motivation to work, allowing them to produce news more actively. However, this half-original and half-adapted news production has also been questioned by many people. Journalists' work is digital labor to carry other people's content. They often question and confuse the future development of their careers because of this (Mathews et al., 2021; Song & Jung, 2021). This result is also consistent with the research of Bunce (2019) and Hayes (2021). The excessive focus of the news industry on traffic indicators will threaten the professional autonomy of journalists based on professional judgment and make news more commercialized. When "audience indicators" become the most important link in news control, it also means that the jurisdiction of the news industry is being challenged by non-news actors. This result also forces us to re-examine the relationship between journalists and audiences (Wu, 2024).

At the same time, journalists also believe that the blurred boundaries between personal image and professional image in social media have caused a certain degree of confusion in their professional identity. This research result also verifies the analysis of Tennant (2022) as the same as Holton and Molyneux (2016). Journalists increasingly need to establish emotional connections with their audiences. The contradiction between the personal image design of social media that deviates from reality and the need for objective and true news interviews makes them conflict between chasing traffic and publishing authoritative information. This conflict ultimately endangers some core values and public service functions of journalism. Although professional achievement and social value are their insistence on respecting their career choices, the development of media transformation and digital technology has also reshaped the career prospects of journalists.

The sense of gap in reality, the intertwined professional pressures and multiple and complex professional identities have made journalists' professional cognition vague, the space for professional functions to play is limited, and the concept of free expression of the press has not been fully realized. The pure vision of journalism in the heart impacts every Chinese journalist in the media transformation period, and the professional identity of journalists is in a state of contradiction and confusion. Of course, this situation not only appears in the daily work of Chinese journalists, but is also reflected in the journalist groups in Switzerland (Alsalem, 2020), Spain (Rodríguez-Martínez et al., 2021), Serbia (Mitrović & Milojević, 2022), Cyprus (Sahin, 2022) and the United Kingdom (Mark, 2020).

In summary, within the media ecosystem dominated by digital platforms, the transformation of social media has led news organizations to become increasingly reliant on quantifiable audience metrics, thereby giving the logic of traffic an overwhelming structural advantage. Platform algorithms, commercial incentives, and organizational performance systems collectively form a top-down pressure chain, making metrics such as readership, likes, and shares crucial for evaluating journalistic work. Under this structural constraint, journalists' practices are forced to adjust: topic selection increasingly caters to algorithmic preferences, content exhibits emotional and entertainment-oriented tendencies, production processes become fragmented, and social media operation becomes a core daily skill. This strategic adaptation at the practical level further shapes journalists' professional identity: professional value is weakened, the sense of public mission declines, and the tension between personal brand and professional role intensifies, leading to an overall weakening of professional meaning and identity. Ultimately, structural pressure, practical adjustments, and changes in identity form a cyclical feedback mechanism, continuously reinforcing the dominant position of audience metrics in journalism, causing news production to fall into a long-term tension between commercial logic and professional value. This analysis reveals the systemic impact of audience metrics on news production through a three-pronged path of structure, action, and identity.

Of course, different journalists exhibit significantly different attitudes towards audience metrics, moderating the effects of factors such as experience, job role, technical proficiency, and professional values, leading to diverse outcomes for these metrics. This study constructs a reasonable causal deduction based on interview data, proposing and validating an operational conceptual model. This model reflects the multi-directional causal logic discovered in the study and provides a clear measurement path for subsequent quantitative testing and policy experiments.

Based on these findings, several implications are offered for the practice of Chinese journalism. First, the evaluation system needs to shift from a "single-flow" approach to a diversified set of indicators encompassing "quality + influence + public value": introducing indicators such as verification rate, in-depth reporting ratio, and public service audience coverage into KPIs can buffer the erosion of professional autonomy by flow-driven approaches at the institutional level. Second, institutions should establish systematic technical training and skills support, especially on-the-job training focusing on algorithm understanding, data literacy, and content compliance, to reduce professional insecurity caused by skills imbalances. Third, editors and management should explicitly reserve editorial judgment space—through mechanisms such as "editorial exemptions" or special topic funds—to support investigative or background reporting that is not driven by immediate flow but has public value. Fourth, attention should be paid to the career development and psychological support of journalists, providing diversified career paths (such as cross-pathways between feature reporters, traffic operation, and content strategy) and building a mental health assistance system to alleviate the risk of job loss or burnout caused by career confusion.

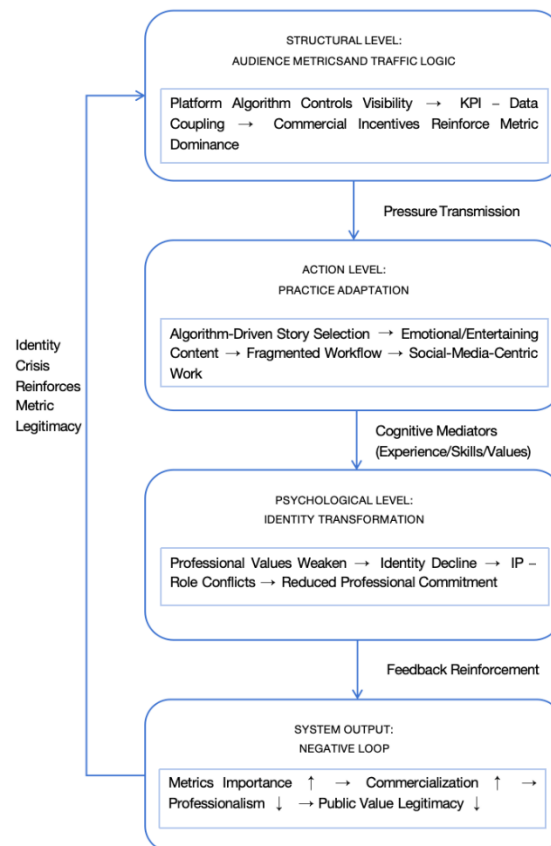


Figure 1. System model impact of audiencemetrics

6. Conclusion and Limitation

This study focuses on the impact of "audience indicators" on the daily work of Chinese journalists, and further discusses the views of journalists on professional identity and their confusion about future development in the era of social media. According to our research results, journalists question the threats that "audience indicators" bring to journalism, such as affecting the quality of reporting and challenging professional autonomy, but at the same time compromise with the performance evaluation indicators proposed by news organizations. This contradiction is concentrated in the confusion of journalists about their own professional identity and future development. In order to get rid of the impact of traffic on news production, journalists try to explore news autonomy through the realization of self-value and traffic fraud, and find a dynamic balance in the constant game.

This study provides practical significance and reference value for the study of professional identity of Chinese journalists. The particularity of media ownership in China makes international research on Chinese journalists very rare. Our study discusses in depth the current working status and performance evaluation standards of Chinese journalists, and provides certain practical value for scholars from other countries to understand the development of China's journalism. Secondly, our study provides information reference for how to ease the tense relationship between managers and journalists in China's journalism industry. Journalists are trapped in a specific news environment created for them by news organizations. This "audience indicator" and structural system restrict their press freedom and professional autonomy.

This study has certain limitations, which also provide references for future research. First, the researchers obtained empirical materials through in-depth interviews. Although the diversity and heterogeneity of the research were taken into account, the interviewees were mainly concentrated in mainstream media above the provincial level in China, and did not involve a large number of commercial media. Therefore, the research results may only provide the current situation of a part of the media. In the future, the media can be categorized and a comparative study of the current working status of journalists in different types of media can be carried out. In addition, interviews are subjective to a certain extent. Future research can increase the quantitative analysis of questionnaires, or enter specific newsrooms to obtain more fresh first-hand materials through field observations. Of course, the researchers also believe that journalists' confusion about professional cognition is not only in China. It is necessary to conduct more cross-national research to understand how

changes in the news production environment affect the professional identity and long-term news values of journalists in different countries around the world.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Authors contributions

Yan Dong and Dr. Julia Wirza Mohd Zawawi were responsible for study design and revising. Yan Dong, Dr. Rosmiza Bt Haji Bidin and Dr. Syed Agil Bin Syed Alsagoff was responsible for data collection. Yan Dong drafted the manuscript and Dr. Julia Wirza Mohd Zawawi revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the study.

Funding details

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

- Ahva, L., & Ovaska, L. (2023). Audience metrics as disruptive innovation: Analysing emotional work of Finnish journalism professionals. *Nordicom Review*, 44(2), 152-171. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2023-0009>
- Alsalem, F. (2020). Journalism in kuwait: journalists' practices, professional values, and perceived roles. *Media Watch*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.15655/mw/2020/v11i4/204640>
- Al-Zoubi, O. (2023). Journalists' objectivity via social media: jordan. *Humanities and Management Sciences - Scientific Journal of King Faisal University*, 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.37575/h/edu/230027>
- Al-Zoubi, O. (2024). Artificial intelligence in newsrooms: ethical challenges facing journalists. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 12(1), 401. <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v12i1.6587>
- Anderson, J., & Dudo, A. (2023). A View From the Trenches: Interviews With Journalists About Reporting Science News. *Science Communication*, 45(1), 39-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10755470221149156>
- Baharom, M. (2023). Challenges of journalist verification in the digital age on society: a thematic review. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(14). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v13-i14/18356>
- Bentivegna, S., & Marchetti, R. (2018). Journalists at a crossroads: Are traditional norms and practices challenged by Twitter?. *Journalism*, 19(2), 270-290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917716594>

- Brems, C., Temmerman, M., Graham, T., & Broersma, M. (2017). Personal branding on Twitter: How employed and freelance journalists stage themselves on social media. *Digital journalism*, 5(4), 443-459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2016.1176534>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th ed.). New York, United States: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Bunce, M. (2019). Management and resistance in the digital newsroom, *Journalism*, 20(7), 890-905. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916688963>
- Cancela, P. (2021). Between structures and identities: Newsroom policies, division of labor and journalists' commitment to investigative reporting. *Journalism Practice*, 15(9), 1361-1382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1971549>
- Cañedo, A., Demeter, M., & Goyanes, M. (2023). The nonpartisan, the equidistant and the allied: how journalists negotiate their digital selves on social media. *Journalism*, 25(6), 1365-1382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231183246>
- Charrua-Santos, F. (2023). Artificial intelligence in automated detection of disinformation: a thematic analysis. *Journalism and Media*, 4(2), 679-687. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia4020043>
- Cloudy, J., Banks, J., & Bowman, N. (2022). Ai journalists and reduction of perceived hostile media bias: replication and extension considering news organization cues.. *Technology Mind and Behavior*, 3(3). <https://doi.org/10.1037/tmb0000083>
- Cohen, N. S. (2019). At work in the digital newsroom, *Digital Journalism*, 7(5), 571-591. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1419821>
- Deuze, M. (2005). What Is Journalism?: Professional Identity and Ideology of Journalists Reconsidered. *Journalism*, 6(4), 442-464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884905056815>
- Deuze, M. (2008). The Professional Identity of Journalists in the Context of Convergence Culture. *Observatorio (OBS) Journal*, 2(4), 103-117. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsOBS242008216>
- Deuze, M., & Witschge, T. (2018). Beyond journalism: Theorizing the transformation of journalism. *Journalism*, 19(2), 165-181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916688550>
- Dhiman, B. (2023). *Does artificial intelligence help journalists: a boon or bane?*. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202303.0428.v1>
- Dhombres, F., Bonnard, J., Bailly, K., Maurice, P., Papageorgiou, A., & Jouannic, J. (2022). Contributions of artificial intelligence reported in obstetrics and gynecology journals: systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 24(4), e35465. <https://doi.org/10.2196/35465>
- Dodds, T., de Vreese, C., Helberger, N., Reséndez, V., & Seipp, T. (2023). Popularity-driven metrics: Audience analytics and shifting opinion power to digital platforms. *Journalism Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2167104>
- Drulă, G. (2023). The Impact of SEO on News Websites. Understanding Audience Traffic and Engagement. *Journal of Media Research-Revista de Studii Media*, 16(47), 5-28. <https://doi.org/10.24193/jmr.47.1>
- Dubois, E., Gruzd, A., & Jacobson, J. (2018). Journalists' use of social media to infer public opinion: the citizens' perspective. *Social Science Computer Review*, 38(1), 57-74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439318791527>
- Ekström, M., Ramsälv, A., & Westlund, O. (2022). Data-driven news work culture: reconciling tensions in epistemic values and practices of news journalism, *Journalism*, 23(4), 755-772. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211052419>
- Fürst, S. (2020). In the service of good journalism and audience interests? How audience metrics affect news quality, *Media and Communication*, 8(3), 270-280. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i3.3228>
- Gao, Z. (2023). The change and development of journalism in the age of artificial intelligence. *BCP Business & Management*, 49, 529-532. <https://doi.org/10.54691/bcpbm.v49i.5458>
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Cheng, Z., & González-González, P. (2022). Effects of the News Finds Me perception on algorithmic news attitudes and social media political homophily. *Journal of Communication*, 72(5), 578-591. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqac025>
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384436>
- Hanitzsch T, et al. (2019) Role orientations: Journalists' views on their place in society. In: Hanitzsch T, et al. (eds) *Worlds of Journalism*. New York, NY: Colombia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/hani18642-008>
- Hanitzsch, T. (2007). Deconstructing journalism culture: toward a universal theory. *Communication Theory*, 17(4), 367-385. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00303.x>

- Hanitzsch, T. (2019). Journalistic roles. *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0029>
- Hanusch, F. (2017). Political journalists' corporate and personal identities on twitter profile pages: a comparative analysis in four westminster democracies. *New Media & Society*, 20(4), 1488-1505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817698479>
- Hayes, K., & O' Sullivan, M. (2023). Labouring the news: management control strategies and work intensification in the digital newsroom, *Journalism*, 25(6), 1346-1364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231174059>
- Hayes, K. (2021), The networked newsroom: navigating new boundaries of work, *Journalism Practice*, 18(4), 803-817. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1949627>
- He, Y. F., & Li, L. F. (2022). Routine "De-embedding and Re-embedding": The Action Logic and Professional Cognition of Journalists from the Perspective of Media Integration, *Media Convergence Research*, 465(9), 26-33.
- Hedman, U. (2016). When journalists tweet: Disclosure, participatory, and personal transparency. *Social media+ society*, 2(1), 2056305115624528. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115624528>
- Higgins-Dobney, C. L. (2021). Not on air, but online: the labor conditions of the digital journalist in U.S. Local television newsrooms, *Electronic News*, 15 (3-4), 95-108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19312431211045741>
- Humeira, B., & Ramadhan, A. (2022). The uses of social media in journalism practices: the reversed-agenda setting on television news production. *Jurnal Studi Jurnalistik*, 4(2), 19-34. <https://doi.org/10.15408/jsj.v4i2.28964>
- Joyce, V., Harlow, S., Weiss, A., & Alves, R. (2022). Spatial dimensions within hierarchy of influences: how re-conceived notions of space in networked societies impact latin american journalists. *International Communication Gazette*, 85(6), 498-519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485221130908>
- Karpenko, A., Karpenko, N., & Shudrik, O. (2020). Development and implementation of a strategic personnel management system according to goals based on key performance indicators. *Management and Entrepreneurship: Trends of Development*, 2(12), 22-35. <https://doi.org/10.26661/2522-1566/2020-2/12-02>
- Khan, S. (2024). Navigating the dynamic terrain: a comprehensive analysis of journalism in pakistan. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, 11(2), 1896-1903. <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2024.11.2.0726>
- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The Elements of Journalism*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Kristensen, L. M. (2021). *Audience Metrics: Operationalizing News Value for the Digital Newsroom*. Journalism Practice. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1954058>
- Kritikos, K., Plexousakis, D., & Woitch, R. (2018). A flexible semantic kpi measurement system. *Cloud Computing and Service Science*, 237-261. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94959-8_13
- Kuchkorova, R., & Rustamov, D. (2022). Use of kpi system (key performance indicator system) in effective management of employees. Information Technologies and Management in Higher Education and Sciences. Part 2. <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-277-7-138>
- Lamot, K., & Van Aelst, P. (2020). Beaten by chartbeat? An experimental study on the effect of real-time audience analytics on journalists' news judgment, *Journalism Studies*, 21(4), 477-493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2019.1686411>
- Lamot, K., Paulussen, S., & Van Aelst, P. (2021), Do metrics drive news decisions? Political news journalists' exposure and attitudes toward web analytics, *Electronic News*, 15(1-2), 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19312431211018141>
- Lestari, R. (2024). Collaborative newsroom of local journalists in investigative coverage on online media. *Komunikator*, 16(1), 28-41. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jkm.21655>
- Lewis, S., & Molyneux, L. (2018). A decade of research on social media and journalism: assumptions, blind spots, and a way forward. *Media and Communication*, 6(4), 11-23. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i4.1562>
- Luo, H. (2023). Analysis of chinese hotel social media strategies and effectiveness on xiaohongshu. Highlights in Business, *Economics and Management*, 23, 1042-1047. <https://doi.org/10.54097/6kfw0j86>
- Mark, S. (2020). Existential crisis? UK journalists make sense of their professional practice. Doctoral, Sheffield Hallam University.
- Márquez-Ramírez, M., Mellado, C., Humanes, M. L., Amado, A., Beck, D., Davydov, S., & Wang, H. (2020). Detached or interventionist? Comparing the performance of watchdog journalism in transitional, advanced and non-democratic countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(1), 53-75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219872155>
- Martinisi, A., & Lugo-Ocando, J. A. (2020). *Statistics and the Quest for Quality Journalism*. Anthem Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17rvxf9>

- Mathews, N., Bélair-Gagnon, V. & Carlson, M. (2021). Why I quit journalism: Former journalists' advice giving as a way to regain control, *Journalism*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211061958>
- Mellado, C., & Hermida, A. (2022). A conceptual framework for journalistic identity on social media: how the personal and professional contribute to power and profit. *Digital Journalism*, 10(2), 284-299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1907203>
- Mellado, C. (2021). Theorizing journalistic roles. Beyond journalistic norms: Role performance and news in comparative perspective, 22-25. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429425509>
- Mellado, C. (ed.) (2021). *Beyond journalistic norms: Role performance and news in comparative perspective*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429425509-3>
- Miller, K., & Nelson, J. (2022). “dark participation” without representation: a structural approach to journalism’s social media crisis. *Social Media + Society*, 8(4), 205630512211291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221129156>
- Mitrović, M., & Milojević, A. (2022). Professional identity of journalists then and now: a perspective of journalists from southeast serbia. *Media Studies and Applied Ethics*, 3(1), 53-67. <https://doi.org/10.46630/msae.1.2022.04>
- Negreira-Rey, M. C., Vázquez-Herrero, J., & López-García, X. (2022). Blurring boundaries between journalists and tiktokers: journalistic role performance on TikTok. *Media and communication*, 10(1), 146-156. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i1.4765>
- Neilson, T. (2016). ‘I don’t engage’: online communication and social media use among new zealand journalists. *Journalism*, 19(4), 536-552. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916667871>
- Neilson, T. (2020). *Journalism and digital labor: Experiences of online news production*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429266096>
- Ojala, M. & Pöyhtäri, R. (2018). Watchdogs, advocates and adversaries: journalists’ relational role conceptions in asylum reporting. *Media and Communication*, 6(2), 168-178. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i2.1284>
- Omidi, A., Dal Zotto, C., & Picard, R.G. (2022). The nature of work in the media industries: a literature review and future directions, *Journalism and Media*, 3(1), 157-181. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia3010011>
- Ong, M. Y., Muniandy, B., Ong, S. L., Tang, K. N., & Phua, K. K. (2012). Comparing the acceptance of key performance indicators management systems on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in a higher education institution in Malaysia. *International Journal of Modern Education and Computer Science*, 4(10), 9-16. <https://doi.org/10.5815/ijmees.2012.10.02>
- Papanagnou, V. (2021). Who is a good journalist? evaluations of journalistic worth in the era of social media. *Journalism*, 24(5), 1052-1068. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211036848>
- Pavlik, J. V. (2021). *Disruption and digital journalism: Assessing news media innovation in a time of dramatic change*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111788>
- Rodríguez-Martínez, R., Mauri-Ríos, M., & Merino-Arribas, A. (2021). A penny for your words. job insecurity as the chief problem affecting spanish professional journalism. *Estudios Sobre El Mensaje Periodístico*, 27(1), 409-424. <https://doi.org/10.5209/esmp.68776>
- Şahin, S. (2022). Journalism in conflict-affected societies: Professional roles and influences in Cyprus. *Media, War & Conflict*, 15(4), 553-569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635220987746>
- Schmidt, T. R., Nelson, J. L., & Lawrence, R. G. (2022). Conceptualizing the active audience: Rhetoric and practice in “engaged journalism”. *Journalism*, 23(1), 3-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920934246>
- Showkat, N., & Parveen, H. (2017). In-depth interview: Communications research. e-PG Pathshala (UGC & MHRD). India. <https://cutt.us/FdbeO>
- Simon, F. M. (2024). *Artificial Intelligence in the News: How AI Retools, Rationalizes, and Reshapes Journalism and the Public Arena*.
- Song, H., & Jung, J. (2021). Factors affecting turnover and turnaway intention of journalists in South Korea, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 99(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990211042593>
- Soubjaki, M., & Choughri, R. (2019). New strategic thinking in mitigating the challenges in implementing key performance indicators (kpis) and increasing efficiency in corporate performance management in mena region. *Journal of Management and Strategy*, 10(4), 59-70. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jms.v10n4p59>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior.” In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by S. Worchel and G. Austin, 2nd ed., 7-24. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human Groups and Social Categories*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Tandoc, E. (2014). Journalism is twerking? how web analytics is changing the process of gatekeeping. *New Media & Society*, 16(4), 559-575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814530541>
- Tang, C. (2023). An analysis of the impact of AI from the news practitioners perspective: opportunities and challenges. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 28(1), 166-171. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/28/20231323>
- Tennant, J. I. (2022). Journalists' social identity: the case of two calgary newspapers. *Facts & Frictions: Emerging Debates, Pedagogies and Practices in Contemporary Journalism*, 2(1), 65-79. <https://doi.org/10.22215/ff/v2.i1.03>
- Tracy, S. J. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119390800>
- Türksoy, N. (2022). The Future of Public Relations, Advertising and Journalism: How Artificial Intelligence May Transform the Communication Profession and Why Society Should Care?. *Türkiye İletişim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 40, 394-410. <https://doi.org/10.17829/turcom.1050491>
- Vobič, I., & Milojević, A. (2013). what we do is not actually journalism": role negotiations in online departments of two newspapers in slovenia and serbia. *Journalism*, 15(8), 1023-1040. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884913511565>
- Vos, T. P. (2017). *Historical perspectives on journalistic roles*. In: Mellado C, et al. (eds) *Journalistic Role Performance: A New Research Agenda in a Digital and Global Media Environment*. New York, NY: Routledge, 41-59. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315626015-4>
- Wahyuni, S., Aras, R. A., Mokoginta, D. M., & Muhiddin, S. (2022). Psychological well-being of contract employees at pt. bank x: the roles of job insecurity. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220203.018>
- Wang, D., Niu, Z., Sun, C., Yu, P., Wang, X., Xue, Q., & Hu, Y. (2022). The relationship between positive workplace gossip and job satisfaction: the mediating role of job insecurity and organizational identity. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.989380>
- Wang, J. Hu, S. Q., & Xie, P. (2024). Embrace or Resist: An Empirical Study of Journalists' Attitudes toward Media Convergence from the Perspective of Organizational Change, *Journalism Research*, 22(8), 66-81.
- Wang, Y., Rod, M., Ji, S., & Deng, Q. (2017). Social media capability in b2b marketing: toward a definition and a research model. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 32(8), 1125-1135. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-10-2016-0250>
- Whittington, R. L. (2020). *Analysing the impact of digital tools on news production, identity and jurisdiction at regional newspaper newsrooms in the UK*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds.
- Wunderlich, L., Hölig, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2022). Does journalism still matter? the role of journalistic and non-journalistic sources in young peoples' news related practices. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(3), 569-588. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211072547>
- Yang, J., Wu, S., Dai, R., Yu, W., & Chen, Y. (2022). Publication trends of artificial intelligence in retina in 10 years: where do we stand?. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2022.1001673>

APPENDIX A

Core Structured Question:

1. How do you perceive your professional role in the current media environment?
2. What impacts have social media had on your daily news work?
3. How do you view the role of "audience metrics" (such as traffic, likes) in news production?
4. What impact has the KPI pressure had on your professional identity and professional values?
5. In terms of balancing traditional news value with traffic orientation, what conflicts have you encountered?
6. How do you view the influence of social media algorithms on the selection and presentation of news topics?
7. Do you think that digital technology has changed the core principles of journalism professionalism?
8. How do you view the development path of the journalism profession in the future?