



Hybrid Professionalism in Platformized Journalism: Personal Branding, Professional Identity, and Career Attractiveness

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Abstract

Platformization is reshaping role performance, boundary work, and newsroom temporalities, influencing how Communication students imagine their professional selves and careers. This study investigates whether acceptance of personal branding undermines or can coexist with professional identity, how branding relates to the appeal of a journalism career, how students perceive digital-era workload, and how fears of AI align with readiness to use it. We conducted a cross-sectional, multi-campus survey in Yogyakarta with N = 150 communication students across diploma and bachelor's tracks, using Likert-type items grouped into three domains and combined into composite indices. The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and independent-samples t-tests by practice exposure in reporting and internships. The results indicate a hybrid form of professionalism, where the acceptance of personal branding does not erode professional identity and is positively associated with career attractiveness. Students anticipate high digital workloads, with pressure higher among those who have completed internships or reporting tasks. They show pragmatic ambivalence toward AI, expressing concern yet remaining moderately willing to use assistive tools under editorial governance. By jointly examining branding, professional identity, career attractiveness, AI perceptions, and practice-related workload in a Global South context, this study extends theoretical debates beyond Euro-American settings and highlights curricular implications, including the incorporation of brand-as-journalist ethics, AI oversight, and authentic workload simulations.

Keywords *journalism education; platformization; personal branding; professional identity; role performance; AI in the newsroom; workload; Global South; Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

The “platform turn” in journalism has redistributed power and practices across news ecosystems by embedding platform logics, such as visibility, algorithmic distribution, engagement metrics, and multi-format production, into everyday newsroom routines (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). These dynamics reshape role performance (information, interpretation, watchdog), recalibrate boundary work that distinguishes journalism from adjacent content industries, and transform professional temporalities through “always-on” analytics (Lewis, 2015; Petre, 2015). For students in communication and journalism tracks, platformization is not an abstract condition, but rather the horizon of employability: it defines how they envision their careers, present themselves to audiences, and value competencies such as community engagement, metrics literacy, and cross-platform production.

At the same time, this reconfiguration has revived deprofessionalisation anxieties: does personal branding “influencerize” journalism by privileging self-promotion and attention capture over verification, autonomy, and public service? Or can branding be domesticated as audience development in support of professional role conceptions (Deuze, 2005; Mellado, n.d.)? The debate intersects with concerns about precarity and intensified workloads linked to dashboards, deadlines, and content repurposing (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Petre, 2015), as well as with the fast-rising salience of AI in newswork. Generative AI promises augmentation background

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research, summarisation, text rewriting, and format conversion, but also raises questions of originality, bias, verification, and labour substitution; surveys indicate a differentiated acceptance of “assistive” versus fully automated uses contingent on editorial governance (Newman et al., 2024; Porlezza, 2019).

However, three gaps persist in the literature. First, most empirical studies are Global North-centric, limiting external validity for media systems like Indonesia’s, where platformization meets distinct institutional histories and educational infrastructures (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). Second, prior work often isolates single constructs, such as branding, AI attitudes, or workload, rather than modeling them jointly with professional identity and career attractiveness in one design, even though these attitudes co-evolve in students’ anticipatory socialization (Hanusch et al., 2015). Third, evidence on how practice exposure (e.g., reporting tasks, internships) conditions perceptions of workload and career appeal is scattered and rarely integrated with branding/AI attitudes in student samples from the Global South.

This study addresses these gaps through a multi-campus survey of communication students in Yogyakarta, as an Indonesian higher-education hub with diverse communication programs. We conceptually frame a hybrid professionalism pathway in which platform-facing competencies (branding, metrics, assistive AI) are incorporated without eroding professional identity rooted in verification, independence, and public service (Bright, 2018). Empirically, we jointly model students’ acceptance of personal branding, professional identity, perceived workload pressure, attitudes toward AI (fear and willingness to use), expectations about job security, and career attractiveness—and we examine how practice-linked exposure (reporting, internship) relates to these perceptions.

Research Objectives

1. To describe students’ distributions on key constructs relevant to platformized newswork: Branding acceptance, Professional identity, Career attractiveness, Workload pressure, AI fear, AI willingness, and Future job security.
2. To test relationships central to the hybrid professionalism thesis:
 - a) Whether branding acceptance undermines or coexists with professional identity;
 - b) Whether branding acceptance is positively associated with career attractiveness.
 - c) Whether perceived workload pressure is associated with career attractiveness (the “hustle paradox”).
3. To assess AI ambivalence, i.e., whether AI fear and willingness to use AI are dissociated, indicating pragmatic coexistence rather than pro- or anti-camps.
4. To evaluate practice exposure effects by comparing workload perceptions between students who have and have not completed reporting tasks and internships.

Research Questions

1. RQ1 (Descriptive): What are the central tendencies and spreads for branding acceptance, professional identity, career attractiveness, workload pressure, AI fear, AI willingness, and future job security?
2. RQ2 (Branding–Identity): Is acceptance of personal branding negatively related to professional identity, as deprofessionalisation accounts would predict, or null/positive as hybrid professionalism suggests?
3. RQ3 (Branding–Career): Is branding acceptance positively related to career attractiveness (branding as career capital within platform logics)?

4. RQ4 (Workload–Career): Is perceived workload pressure positively related to career attractiveness (a “hustle paradox” compatible with vocational commitment under platform temporalities)?
5. RQ5 (AI Ambivalence): Are AI fear and willingness to use AI weakly related, signalling pragmatic ambivalence contingent on governance rather than binary positions?
6. RQ6 (Practice Exposure): Do students with reporting and internship experience report higher workload pressure, reflecting anticipatory socialisation into production rhythms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Platformization embeds platforms’ economic and infrastructural logics into news production, reorganizing visibility, distribution, and coordination through algorithms and metrics, and expanding what counts as journalistic role performance across formats and communities (Dijk & Poell, 2013; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). These shifts are not merely technical but constitute boundary work in which professional communities renegotiate legitimate practices while reaffirming core norms, verification, independence, and public interest so that personal branding can be framed as audience work (discoverability, trust) in service of role performance rather than as ethically untethered self-promotion (Bright, 2018; Lewis, 2015). The rising salience of analytics normalizes “always-on” temporalities and multi-platform repurposing, which intensify workload. Whether this erodes or energizes vocational commitment depends on organizational scaffolds and professional socialization (e.g., internships), suggesting that workload and metrics literacy should be explicitly taught in journalism programs (Petre, 2015).

In parallel, AI adoption follows an augmentation-first trajectory, background research, transcription, summarization, translation, formatting under human oversight and disclosure, reopening boundary questions about accountability and transparency; audiences themselves display a legitimacy gradient, more accepting of backstage AI than fully automated news, which supports governance-first pedagogy (Newman et al., 2024; Porlezza, 2019). Evidence from the Global South adds contextual depth: qualitative work with Pakistani journalists portrays AI as assistive infrastructure that boosts efficiency and audience work but raises salient risks (misinformation, opacity, privacy, bias, job displacement), hence calls for training and ethical policy to keep human editorial judgment central (Kazmi & Ali, 2025). Comparative research with journalism students in Finland, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zambia reveals that ideals are being renegotiated toward openness, collaboration, and accountability, while maintaining commitments to verification and public interest. This underscores that professional identity formation is contextual rather than simply transplanted from Euro-American cases (Hujanen, 2018).

Reform-oriented evidence from China documents a persistent mismatch between curricula and integrated media markets. It tests practice-heavy remedies, such as teaching-hospital or imitation newsroom environments, practitioner co-teaching, networked classrooms, individualized pathways, and competitive project work to build platform readiness, metrics literacy, and workload management without sacrificing quality (Zhang, 2022). Taken together, the literature anticipates hybrid professionalism: visibility work and assistive AI can be domesticated through ethics and governance to serve role performance, and Global South settings such as Indonesia are essential sites for testing how platform logics, workload dynamics, and AI use are incorporated into professional formation and curriculum design.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applied a cross-sectional, multi-campus survey in July–August 2025 among Communication Science students in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, including journalism and broadcast

tracks. Using purposive recruitment through course groups and program announcements, we targeted students with exposure to journalism coursework or practical experience. The final analytic sample comprises 150 respondents, drawn from 15 universities. Participants' age averaged 20.59 years ($SD = 1.41$; range = 18–25; $Q1 = 20$, median = 20, $Q3 = 22$). Cohorts span from early to late semesters, and participating universities and majors are diverse and heterogeneous. Importantly, respondents were enrolled across Diploma programs (D3 and D4) and bachelor's programs (S1); in our sample, S1 predominates, with smaller contingents in D3/D4 (see Tables B–E; Figures 1–5 for distributions).

The instrument comprised three sections aligned with our conceptual frame: Future of Journalism, Professional Identity & Practice, and Digital-Era Challenges. The questionnaire items were developed with reference to prior literature rather than being copied wholesale. Items measuring *professional identity* were adapted from Deuze (2005), while those on *branding acceptance and career attractiveness* drew on constructs discussed by Hanusch et al. (2015) and Bright (2018). Items concerning *AI fears* and *willingness to use AI* were designed with reference to Porlezza (2019) and Newman et al. (2024). Workload-related items were inspired by Petre (2015) and Nieborg & Poell (2018). Where necessary, wording was localized and simplified to fit the Indonesian student context. Reliability checks (Cronbach's α values reported above) indicate that the adapted items formed consistent indices suitable for group-level inference.

All items used five-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and showed acceptable internal consistency for group-level inference (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.805, 0.767, 0.635$, respectively). For relational tests, we constructed composite indices: Branding_Accept; Professionalism_Index (with deprofessionalising items reverse-coded); Career_Attractiveness; Workload_Pressure; AI_Fear; AI_Use_Will; and Future_JobSecurity. We report descriptive statistics (means, SDs, ranges), Pearson product-moment correlations, and independent-samples t-tests comparing Workload_Pressure by practice exposure (reporting, internship). Where relevant, we complement statistical significance (p) with effect sizes (Cohen's d) and provide substantive interpretation consistent with a platformized newsroom context. The interpretation of findings is not purely descriptive but guided by the theoretical frameworks of platformization and boundary work (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019; Lewis, 2015; Deuze, 2005). Accordingly, correlations and group differences are read in relation to newsroom practices shaped by platform logics. For instance, the integration of personal branding is understood as part of *hybrid professionalism*, while workload pressure is interpreted through the lens of metric-driven temporalities. This approach ensures that the analysis goes beyond numerical reporting to make a conceptual contribution to journalism studies in the platform era.

Figure 1. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age group (years)	Count	Share (%)
18–19	34	22.67
20–21	74	49.33
22–23	39	26.00
24–25	3	2.00
Total	150	100.00

Source: Authors' analysis

Figure 2. Top 15 Universities/Institutions by Respondent Count

University (canonical)	Count	Share (%)
Universitas Ahmad Dahlan	42	28.0
UPN "Veteran" Yogyakarta	25	16.67

University (canonical)	Count	Share (%)
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta	19	12.67
Universitas Aisyiyah Yogyakarta	18	12.0
Akademi Komunikasi Radya Binatama	8	5.33
Universitas Islam Indonesia	8	5.33
UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta	7	4.67
Universitas Gadjah Mada	7	4.67
Universitas Respati Yogyakarta	5	3.33
Universitas Teknologi Yogyakarta	3	2.0
Sekolah Tinggi Multimedia MMTC Yogyakarta	2	1.33
Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta	2	1.33
Universitas Mercu Buana Yogyakarta	2	1.33
Universitas Amikom Yogyakarta	1	0.67
Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta	1	0.67

Source: Authors' analysis

Table 3. Educational Level of Respondents

Educational level	Count	Share (%)
D3 (Diploma)	8	5.33
D4 (Diploma)	1	0.67
S1 (Bachelor)	141	94.00
Total	150	100.00

Source: Authors' analysis

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Overview

Consistent with platform-era accounts of intensified production rhythms, Workload_Pressure ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.827$) is the highest index, while students also report elevated Branding_Accept ($M = 4.063$, $SD = 0.838$) and Career_Attractiveness ($M = 3.873$, $SD = 0.885$). Professional identity remains moderately positive, Professionalism_Index ($M=3.133$, $SD=0.578$). Students express relatively high AI_Fear ($M=3.877$, $SD=1.074$) alongside only moderate AI_Use_Will ($M=3.227$, $SD=1.088$), with Future_JobSecurity ($M=3.667$, $SD=1.109$) sitting in the mid-to-high range. Taken together, these distributions sketch an anticipatory orientation to multi-platform newswork: heavy workload is expected, yet journalism remains attractive and anchored in a recognizable professional self-concept.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Composite Indices (Likert 1–5).

Index	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Branding_Accept	150	4.063	0.838	1.0	5.0
AI_Fear	150	3.877	1.074	1.0	5.0
AI_Use_Will	150	3.227	1.088	1.0	5.0
Professionalism_Index	150	3.133	0.578	1.8	4.8
Workload_Pressure	150	4.230	0.827	1.0	5.0
Future_JobSecurity	150	3.667	1.109	1.0	5.0
Career_Attractiveness	150	3.873	0.885	1.0	5.0

Source: Authors Analysis

Branding and Hybrid Professionalism

The non-significant association between branding acceptance and professional identity ($r = 0.092$, $p = 0.265$) challenges declensionist claims that personal branding inevitably ‘influencerizes’ journalism. Rather than diluting identity, branding appears to be integrated as a visibility practice compatible with verification, fairness, and independence. The strong positive link between branding and career attractiveness ($r = 0.454$, $p < 0.001$) suggests that students perceive branding as a form of career capital, proper for audience development and employability within platform logics. This resonates with boundary-work perspectives in journalism studies, which show that professional communities redraw boundaries to incorporate new routines without abandoning core norms (Bright, 2018; Lewis, 2015). Within a platformization framework, hybrid professionalism names this settlement: role performance is expanded (community management, metrics literacy, brand stewardship) while professional ethics remain the anchoring grammar (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Nieborg & Poell, 2018, 2018).

Workload and The ‘Hustle Paradox’

The positive correlation between workload pressure and career attractiveness ($r = 0.403$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that anticipated intensity does not dampen students’ career imagination; if anything, it coexists with vocational commitment. This pattern is compatible with accounts of newsroom metrics and ‘always-on’ temporalities, where dashboards and engagement targets shape work rhythms (Petre, 2015; Porlezza, 2019). Rather than deterring students, such demands may be reframed as opportunities for craft mastery, audience impact, and rapid learning predominantly when guided by programs that scaffold time management and wellbeing. The finding suggests that curricula can leverage this motivation while preventing burnout through realistic workload simulations and reflective analytics.

Table 2. Selected Pearson Correlations Among Indices.

Var A	Var B	N	r	p-value
Branding_Accept	Career_Attractiveness	150	0.454	0.0000
Workload_Pressure	Career_Attractiveness	150	0.403	0.0000
AI_Fear	AI_Use_Will	150	0.102	0.2160
AI_Fear	Branding_Accept	150	0.249	0.0021
Professionalism_Index	Branding_Accept	150	0.092	0.2654

Source: Authors’ analysis

AI Ambivalence, Not Binary Camps

The fear of AI and willingness to use it are weakly and non-significantly related ($r = 0.102$, $p = 0.216$), supporting a pragmatic ambivalence view rather than a pro/anti dichotomy. This aligns with recent evidence that audiences and practitioners tend to accept AI for ‘assistive’ back-end functions while remaining wary of automated content production without robust editorial safeguards (Diakopoulos, 2019; Reuters Institute, 2024). Pedagogically, the implication is not to suppress AI but to govern it teaching AI literacy through editorial governance (disclosure, verification, bias auditing) so that students can reap the benefits of augmentation without compromising integrity.

Practice Exposure and Anticipatory Socialization

Students with internship experience report higher workload pressure ($M=4.58$ vs 4.12 ; $p=0.002$), as do those with reporting experience ($M=4.34$ vs 3.82 ; $p=0.006$). These group differences are consistent with anticipatory socialisation: exposure to real production cycles

reveals the coordination costs of multi-platform work and the porous boundaries of time. The finding aligns with comparative research on journalism students' motivations and expectations, which notes that encounters with real-world newsroom constraints can recalibrate role conceptions without negating their commitment to the field (Hanusch et al., 2014). Curricular design should therefore sequence practice-based learning with structured reflection, emphasising boundary work (what is and is not professional journalism) and role performance (information, interpretation, watchdog) under platform conditions.

Table 3a. Independent-samples t-test: Workload_Pressure by Reporting Experience.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Workload Pressure	Reporting Experience					
	Yes	119	4.336	0.773		
	No	31	3.823	0.909	2.886	0.0061

Table 3b. Independent-samples t-test: Workload_Pressure by Internship Experience.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Workload Pressure	Reporting Experience					
	Yes	119	4.336	0.773		
	No	31	3.823	0.909	2.886	.006

Source: Authors' analysis

By modelling branding, identity, career attractiveness, AI attitudes, and practice-linked workload within a single design in a Global South context, this study extends platformization and boundary work debates beyond Euro-American cases (Bright, 2018; Lewis, 2015; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). The Indonesian multi-campus setting matters theoretically because platform logics, such as visibility, algorithmic distribution, and metrics, have differentiated institutional ecologies outside the Global North; yet, much of the literature derives from U.S. and European newsrooms. Our evidence supports a hybrid professionalism model, where the acceptance of personal branding coexists with a stable professional self-conception and is positively aligned with career attractiveness. Rather than accelerating a slide into "deprofessionalisation," students appear to domesticate platform-facing practices as audience development in service of public interest reporting, consistent with boundary work accounts that show professional communities redrawing lines to incorporate new routines while maintaining core norms (verification, independence, service to the public) (Deuze, 2005).

Empirically, the non-association between branding acceptance and professionalism, alongside the positive association between branding and career attractiveness, nuances deficit narratives that cast branding as antithetical to journalism's ethos. Read through the role performance lens, branding is not a repudiation of the information, interpretive, or watchdog repertoire but a complementary competence for discoverability and community ties in platformed environments (Mellado, n.d.). Likewise, the positive link between perceived workload and career attractiveness resonates with work on metrics and newsroom temporalities, where analytics and cross-platform production intensify cycles without necessarily eroding vocational commitment if routines are scaffolded by supportive organizational practices (Petre, 2015; Porlezza, 2019). Our group differences by practice exposure (reporting or internship) also align with anticipatory socialization research: early contact with production rhythms raises awareness of temporal pressures while helping students calibrate expectations without abandoning professional aspirations (Hanusch et al., 2015).

On AI, our pattern of “pragmatic ambivalence,” higher concern coexisting with moderate willingness to use, aligns with findings that stakeholders accept “assistive” AI uses such as research, summarization, and format conversion more readily than fully automated content, provided governance ensures transparency and editorial oversight (Porlezza, 2019). This bolsters a pedagogical shift from defensive exceptionalism to guided integration: (1) brand as journalist ethics that treat branding as audience work bounded by truthfulness and independence; (2) AI editorial governance involving disclosure, verification, bias auditing, and source transparency; and (3) realistic workload pedagogy using sprint style cross platform production with analytics reflection to prevent burnout while building metrics literacy (Petre, 2015; Porlezza, 2019). In short, the contribution is twofold: conceptually, we empirically specify hybrid professionalism in a Global South setting; pedagogically, we translate it into a curriculum architecture that operationalizes boundary work for a platformized newsroom.

Educationally, the evidence strengthens a shift from defensive exceptionalism to guided integration. First, a brand as a journalist ethics strand can position personal branding as audience development bound to truthfulness, independence, and transparency, refining identity formation within platform routines (Bright, 2018; Deuze, 2005). Second, an AI in the newsroom module should codify disclosure, verification, sourcing transparency, bias auditing, and harm mitigation, aligning classroom practices with emerging professional standards (Kazmi & Ali, 2025; Newman et al., 2024; Porlezza, 2019). Third, workload literacy requires explicit instruction. Sprint-style, cross-platform production with analytics reflection can reveal the labor implications of metrics and help students pace their output without sacrificing verification (Petre, 2015). Reform-oriented evidence from China, including practice-heavy teaching hospitals, practitioner co-teaching, and networked classrooms, offers concrete implementation pathways that are compatible with our recommendations and with resource conditions common in the Global South (Zhang, 2022). Comparative student studies spanning Finland, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zambia further suggest that ideals are being renegotiated toward openness, collaboration, and accountability, while retaining commitments to verification and public interest. This underscores why Indonesia is a crucial site for theory building and curricular design (Hujanen, 2018).

In short, our contribution is twofold. Conceptually, we specify hybrid professionalism in a Global South context by showing that visibility work (branding) and assistive AI can be domesticated through ethics and governance to serve role performance rather than supplant it (Deuze, 2005; Mellado, n.d.; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2019). Pedagogically, we translate this into a curriculum architecture comprising ethics-forward branding, AI editorial governance, and realistic workload pedagogy, supported by international evidence and tailored to the realities of platformized newsrooms (Newman et al., 2024; Petre, 2015; Zhang, 2022). Future research should test moderated mediation structures, run classroom experiments around AI policies and branding ethics, and extend comparative sampling beyond Yogyakarta to assess generalizability across Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms the emergence of hybrid professionalism among aspiring journalists in Indonesia’s platformized media environment. The findings indicate that the acceptance of personal branding among communication students does not diminish their sense of professional identity but rather coexists with it, suggesting that branding is being domesticated as a legitimate form of audience engagement and visibility management rather than self-promotion detached from ethical obligations. Students view branding as a form of career capital, an adaptive competence aligned with the realities of multi-platform journalism.

The strong association between branding acceptance and career attractiveness underscores

that visibility practices are now internalized as part of employability within digital news ecosystems. Meanwhile, the positive correlation between perceived workload and career attractiveness reflects what can be termed a hustle paradox—the belief that intense production demands are both challenging and motivational, providing opportunities for learning and professional growth.

The findings also reveal that students' fears of AI coexist with moderate readiness to use it, supporting the notion of pragmatic ambivalence rather than technological determinism. Students appear cautious yet open to AI as an assistive tool under proper editorial governance, confirming the importance of integrating AI ethics and governance modules in journalism curricula.

Empirically, this study extends the theory of hybrid professionalism beyond Global North contexts by demonstrating how Indonesian journalism students negotiate visibility, technological change, and professional identity within a unique institutional ecosystem. Conceptually, it contributes to journalism studies by demonstrating that platform-facing competencies, such as branding and AI literacy, can coexist with enduring professional values of verification, fairness, and service to the public. Pedagogically, it suggests that journalism education should prepare students for platformized work by guiding their integration rather than resistance, emphasizing ethics, governance, and workload literacy.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, making it difficult to infer causality or changes in students' professional orientation as they gain experience. Future studies could adopt longitudinal or mixed-method designs to track how hybrid professionalism evolves through coursework and newsroom exposure. Second, the sample is limited to universities in Yogyakarta, which may not represent the diversity of journalism education across Indonesia. Broader and comparative sampling would help test the generalizability of these findings in different institutional and regional contexts. Finally, this research focuses on self-reported perceptions rather than observed practices. Future studies can combine survey data with interviews or newsroom observations, or apply moderated mediation models to clarify how factors such as internship experience, gender, or AI literacy shape the development of hybrid professionalism.

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