

JOURNALIST OR INFLUENCER?
EXPLORING YOUNG PUBLIC MEDIA JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
INDIVIDUAL BRANDING ON TWITTER

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis
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JOURNALIST OR INFLUENCER? EXPLORING YOUNG PUBLIC MEDIA JOURNALISTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL BRANDING ON TWITTER

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Yong Volz

Professor Janet Saidi

Professor Ryan Thomas

To Mom, Dad, David and Kelsey for taking me and my dreams just as they are, all parts reasonable or whimsical or somewhere in between. I love you guys more than you know.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	v
LIST OF APPENDICES	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Implications of the Study	3
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Roadmap	6
Theories and Frameworks	6
Branding Practices on Social Media	12
External Pressures for Branding	13
Internal Pressures for Branding	19
Young Journalists as Digital Natives and Journalism’s Future	20
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	22
Research Questions	22
Qualitative	23
Data Collection through Interviews	23
Sampling Strategy	26
Data Analysis	26
CHAPTER 4: YOUNG PUBLIC MEDIA JOURNALISTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF BRANDING	29
The state of journalism justifies branding	29
Branding’s wavering necessity	31
Branding’s role in public radio	34

General feelings about branding	38
Motivation to brand.....	45
Branding next to other news values	47
<u>CHAPTER 5: HOW YOUNG PUBLIC MEDIA JOURNALISTS ENGAGE IN INDIVIDUAL BRANDING</u>	50
Branding methods	50
Understanding Twitter	52
Adapting to the trend.....	56
Comparing to influencers.....	57
Matching works to actions	60
<u>CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....</u>	64
Summary of findings.....	64
Significance of findings	66
Future research.....	70
<u>REFERENCES.....</u>	74

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Theories and frameworks	11
2. Research questions	22
3. Ailsa Chang Tweet	36
4. Elicitation Tweet (P15)	60
5. Elicitation Tweet (P13)	61

LIST OF APPENDICES

A. In-depth interview protocol	78
B. Recruitment letter	82
C. Study consent form	84
D. Institutional review board approval	86

Journalist or Influencer? Exploring Young Public Media Journalists' Perceptions of Individual
Branding on Twitter

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Abstract

As the news continues to be increasingly crafted and consumed online, media practitioners and media scholars are becoming more engaged in a complex discourse about journalistic branding, how it manifests itself on Twitter, and where it belongs among the other traditional practices of journalism. The following research study explores how young public media journalists perceive individual journalistic branding and what motivates their own methods for curating their Twitter profiles. To better understand how these digital natives and young entrants into the work force are negotiating between traditional journalistic values and Twitter logic, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 participants. The research questions were guided by market theory, self-discrepancy theory and the individual level of analysis within the hierarchy of influences. Branding was found to be perceived as a justifiable addition to journalism, even though its necessity to journalism is in question. Young journalists also seem to be insecure about their branding methods and very self-conscious about how they will be perceived online. Here, the journalistic view of market theory that predicts gaining attention will become an end instead of a means to an end of informing does not seem to ring true for these journalists who are still prioritizing traditional journalistic values above having the most attractive Twitter profiles.

Keywords: journalistic branding, Twitter, popularity, attention, methods, motivation

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Chapter I contains the following sections: (a) background of the study, (b) purpose of the study, and (c) implications of the study.

Background of the Study

Anyone who is even remotely aware of journalist Twitter probably caught wind of the quote tweet Twitter war between Taylor Lorenz and Maggie Haberman, two journalists who used to be co-workers at the *New York Times*. Lorenz, who now works for *The Washington Post*, took to Twitter in March 2022 to share her thoughts about journalists developing a brand for themselves. Her verdict? It's necessary — especially for a young journalist trying to establish themselves in a sea of media organizations with tenuous business models and restrictive social media policies.

Haberman, though, wasn't having it. She dismissed Lorenz for needlessly seeking attention and rejected the idea that journalists need to look to their own popularity, not just the standing of their news organization, to feel secure in their career. The debate wasn't isolated though. Other establishment journalists chimed in with their own distaste at the idea of branding, likely because it brushes up against the traditional values of journalism that center the public and not the self. But Twitter users called out Haberman for hypocrisy, one saying, "How's your book selling, Maggie?"

This war, though brief and fought with 280-character quips and retorts, is just a microcosm of a rising tension among media practitioners about journalistic branding. As journalists develop online personas by posting selfies in the field (Olausson, 2018) or using humor and opinion in their social media posts (Bossio & Holton, 2018), journalists' noble roles as information-providing public servants can seem less recognizable as they join and adapt to an online sea of Twitter users who employ social media logic (Hermida, 2010). No matter where

journalists fall on the spectrum of journalistic branding, they are caught in an unresolved discourse about who a journalist is and what should motivate them to develop a public-facing social media profile. This desire to obtain “networked popularity” on social media can seem at odds with journalism as a public good, where a key contradiction begins to emerge: “whilst journalists vehemently disavow the financial rewards of the market, by competing for networked popularity, they expose themselves to the influence of capitalist markets” (Papanagnou, 2021, p. 15).

The youngest generation of journalists in the workforce are especially caught in this tension because they are digital natives who have spent nearly half of their lives crafting an image of authenticity, humor and relatability on the Internet. And yet, as this generation is entering news organizations that have varying takes on what is appropriate for social media (Bossio & Holton, 2018; Jukes, 2019), its perceptions of online personas and their acceptability and necessity in a professional workplace are relatively uncharted terrain. This phenomenon exists alongside other conversations surrounding young journalists about burnout, systemic inequity, and the resulting allure of public relations or journalism-adjacent jobs that are not in a newsroom (Laughlin, 2021, October 12). Research about these perceptions of journalistic branding can provide clarity about yet another way young journalists, with their influencer-like branding practices, are renegotiating their roles in society and potentially charting a new normal for journalists everywhere — or, in some cases, leaving the field to find the normal that suits them.

Previous literature about journalists and their identities situates journalists in a market for public attention (McManus, 1992), where journalists say in qualitative interviews that their branding practices are essential not only for audiences to read their content, but also to remain

relevant in an industry with tenuous job security (Bossio & Holton, 2018). Through content analyses and textual analyses, scholars have identified several branding practices that journalists use, such as including humor in their tweets, expressing their opinions, and sharing information about their personal lives (Molyneux, 2015; Johnson, 2020). Some of these branding practices are expected and encouraged by media organizations, but some journalists are using social media as a way to stand out from their organization and maximize their popularity with audiences and other journalists. While much has been done in recent years to understand this phenomenon of journalistic branding on social media, there have been few studies that have focused exclusively on how journalists verbally express their perceptions about and motivations behind their branding practices. A research focus on the branding perceptions among journalists in Generation Z and the youngest Millennial journalists in the workforce has been especially sparse.

The motivations for branding that have been discovered range from self-preservation (Jukes, 2019) to gaining respect and renown (Molyneux et al., 2019), but most of these discoveries and speculations have been made within research studies that were investigating other related topics. Thus, research that is especially dedicated to these inner motivations and perceptions, gained through in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews, will provide a novel exploration of this interiority.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of these semi-structured qualitative interviews with young public media journalists is to understand the perceptions of and motivations for individual journalistic branding on Twitter. This will be achieved through the theoretical framework of market theory, self-discrepancy theory, and the individual level of analysis within the hierarchy of influences.

Implications of the Study

This research will be exploratory in nature, laying the groundwork for how digital natives are potentially disrupting the traditional values espoused to journalism. Although market theory was originally explored in relation to the advertising-centered funding model for journalism, this research will focus on public media journalists who are *not* funded by advertising. This focus was chosen in order to evaluate how the effects of journalism operating in a market for public attention have potentially permeated into a sector of journalism that was meant to be driven by more than the eye-catching, emotionally arousing news that benefits advertisers. Even still, media organizations such as National Public Radio receive 37% of their funding through corporate sponsorships (National Public Radio, n.d.), so evaluating how that corporate support still affects its employees' social media behavior is worth exploring.

Theoretically, this research has the potential to challenge the purely altruistic identity that is usually associated with journalism. It will present evidence for the structural conflict that can come when a public good is mostly funded by a capitalist system that serves private interests. It will also illuminate the degree to which journalists present a performance to audiences and how that performance is crafted on Twitter, even among a culture that claims to value transparency and authenticity within journalists' behavior.

Practically, by using the individual level of analysis as a framework for exploring a journalist's interiority (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), this research can identify an emerging news value of popularity. Media practitioners can use this data to decide whether or not to embrace or reject this attention-seeking news value as they're guiding the next generation of journalists. They can also use the insight from young journalists to inform their organizations' social media policies and guidance on branding, specifically. Future research can investigate how this

tendency to brand is affecting the content being produced and if journalists are experiencing cognitive dissonance about this new news value.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REIVEW

Chapter II includes the following sections: (a) literature review roadmap, (b) theories and frameworks, (c) branding practices on social media, (d) external pressures for journalistic branding, (e) internal pressures for journalistic branding, (f) young journalists as digital natives and journalism's future.

Roadmap

Using market theory, self-discrepancy theory, and the hierarchy of influences as a lens through which to view research about journalistic branding not only displays the structural conflict of providing a public good in a capitalist market, but also how journalists could be internalizing these market influences into the values that motivate them to practice journalism, in the first place. Previous research has addressed the practices journalists are currently engaging in to brand themselves on social media, such as writing their posts with humor or sharing personal information. But research is mixed regarding how much news organizations are encouraging or discouraging a journalist's social media behavior. Though this research will focus on public radio journalists, there is hardly any existing research about public radio journalists and how their organizations, in particular, view and/or individualistic branding. Of the research that does exist about all journalists, though, journalists seem to be internally motivated to brand by values such as popularity and self-preservation. Young journalists are especially esteemed as potential agents of change within their respective news organizations when it comes to their expertise in social media logic.

Theories and Frameworks

Market theory and the desire for attention

It is essential to consider research about journalistic branding through the lens of market theory. In any well-functioning market, goods are voluntarily exchanged from a seller to a buyer for an agreed-upon price, with both parties benefitting from the exchange. For most commerce, this transaction is easy to identify, such as a vendor selling a necklace to a buyer for \$35. Using money as a means of exchange creates a momentary, impersonal seal of trust between the two parties, a way to guarantee a fair trade that often happens between strangers. And combined with Western neoliberalism and a digital age that gives several people access to just about anything (given they have an Internet connection), these exchanges are often simple and seemingly painless. But this interaction is not as simple with journalists.

In the most altruistic sense, a journalist's main job is to provide audiences with publicly available content to read, all while upholding social mores (Jackson, 2009). However, audiences do not directly pay journalists for each story a journalist writes, as is expected in a typical market exchange. Subscriptions to news organizations are the closest to this form of payment, but in this market-driven society, the business model for most journalists requires advertisers to provide that financial support. Within this model, advertisers pay journalists for adjacency with the news in exchange for the audience's eyes fixed on that news (and, subsequently, their well-placed advertisements). Instead of receiving direct payment for their work, "advertising has become the most powerful source of financing media products, (Fengler & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 532)" making the interest of garnering a large audience an important editorial consideration (Jackson, 2009). This influence is nothing new; advertisers have historically determined the trajectory of journalism as it's known today. For example, by placing their advertisements in penny presses that focused "more neutrally on sensational topics such as crime and scandal," they encouraged journalism to have a more universal approach that strayed away from the political papers from

which journalism in the United States got its start (Fengler & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 534). This secured more eyes for the advertiser, and to keep getting paid, journalists had to follow suit and write news with wide appeal.

By this market logic, the journalists are not operating within a news market at all, but a market for public attention (McManus, 1992). The market exchange between journalists and the public becomes even more impersonal with advertisers as the intermediary. Thus, the main driver of a trade made well becomes attractiveness, with or without thorough reporting work. Some dub this as the rise of infotainment, where even the practitioners of the more gossip, tabloid-like media are noticing that more “serious” organizations are tapping into emotional, human-interest coverage (Deuze, 2005).

Situating journalism within a market for public attention instead of a market for news presents a conflict “between corporate interest in selling and journalism’s interest in serving the public” (McManus, 1992, p. 197). Sales figures become increasingly important for making decisions about content (Deuze, 2005). “Market-driven news managers often seek news that has more of an entertainment value, because they believe these types of stories tend to lure larger audiences, and the result is larger profits” (Jackson, 2009, p. 155). The journalist’s focus can shift from providing audiences with the information necessary for participating in a democracy to providing audiences with content that is entertaining and emotionally arousing (Molyneux, 2015), thus giving advertisers the attention they seek. In an ideal world, this pursuit of public attention exists as a “necessary means to the end of informing” (McManus, 1992, p. 202) where providing high quality news remains the priority for a journalist. But the existence of journalistic branding on social media suggests this desire for appeal is becoming less of a mere means and

more of an end that journalists, themselves, are internalizing. This internalization manifests itself in self-promotion and behavior resembling that of a microcelebrity.

This centering of self, further cultivated in a digital market that rewards celebrity-like behavior, is not new for journalists. When providing reasons to the Pew Research Center for choosing and remaining in the field, journalists cite the ability to write for a living and to be in an exciting career as their strongest motivations (Fengler & Russ-Mohl, 2008). “Besides that, journalists may also consider influence and power an incentive offered by positions in the mass media; at least some journalists appreciate the chance to influence, if even in the slightest sense, the course of history ...” (Fengler & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 529-530). More recently, young journalists are still giving similar reasons for choosing this career. They want to play to their strengths in writing and communication, centering their own autonomy and career trajectory, with some even admitting to desiring prestige (Nölleke et al., 2022). “Journalists can and should be seen as rational actors seeking to promote own interests, calculating risks and benefits, reacting to material and non-material incentives and rewards while trading information for attention with their various sources” (Fengler & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 537). By swimming in social media spheres to disseminate their content, a journalist’s branding practices are one manifestation of this desire to promote their own interests, and this promotion bears much resemblance to those of social media influencers.

It’s essential not only to observe these influencer-like tendencies, but also to gauge the perceptions media practitioners have of these tendencies and to understand what motivates them to engage in journalistic branding in the first place. Doing so can provide a glimpse into how the values associated with journalism could be changing as journalists are growing up in an age of increased neoliberalism, ease of access, and the online commodification of self.

Self-discrepancy theory

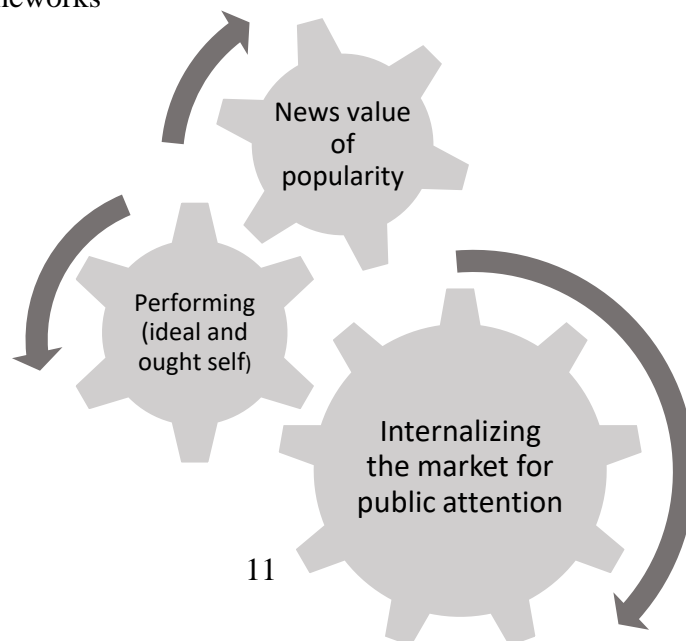
According to self-discrepancy theory, each person has an actual, ideal, and ought self (Higgins, 1987). The actual self represents the traits a person actually has. The ideal self represents the traits a person wishes they could have. And the ought self represents the traits a person thinks they should have, according to feelings of responsibility or duty. There is usually a pressure to behave as society expects when interacting with people in person (Hu et. al, 2015). However, when interacting with people online, people tend to be more like their actual selves because of the relative anonymity of the internet and the decrease in “rules” that exists in online spaces (Hu et. al, 2017).

When expressing themselves to others, people are usually motivated by a self-guide, a measure for self-evaluation that can be grounded in the ideal self or the ought self. Either direction involves a person trying to mold their actual self into something more desirable, whether it’s by their own standards (ideal self) or the standards they think they should achieve in order to be responsible or dutiful (ought self). When it comes to journalists and their online interactions, their self-guide is likely caught in conflict while they’re branding. Should they focus on an ideal self guide, where they present themselves as funny and unique? Or should they focus on an ought self guide, where their personality is professional enough to adequately represent their news organizations? Perhaps it is possible for both goals to be achieved at once. Either way, understanding the priorities journalists have while presenting themselves online will help determine to what degree the journalist’s internal ideals or obligatory pressures are guiding their strategy for journalistic branding.

The individual level of analysis and an emerging news value

Because an individual's personal values and beliefs have the potential to shape the media they produce (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), it is critical to evaluate where this desire for appeal falls among a journalist's myriad of priorities. Using the individual level of analysis as a framework to situate this study, then, is a natural choice. This individual level of analysis is of course smaller in scope compared to the other levels in the hierarchy of influences, as individuals are ultimately swimming within a pre-established social system and working within media organizations that unify their staff through rules and routines (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). But in using the individual level of analysis as a framework, we can better understand how this journalistic desire to be distinct and worthy of attention might be contributing to an emerging news value of popularity. In researching a journalist's personal motivations for branding, we can discover the extent to which journalists are embracing this news value of popularity, even though it would not be becoming of the institution of journalism to admit that such a value exists. Of course, it will be up to media practitioners to decide what to do with these emerging priorities for news. But research about why journalists feel as though branding is essential to their roles has to come first. And ultimately, a shift in perception at the individual level could eventually become a value that is embraced at the institutional level.

Figure 1. Theories and Frameworks



Branding Practices on Social Media

With these theoretical frameworks in mind, scholars have identified the many ways journalists are branding themselves online. To better organize these branding practices, scholars have separated their findings on journalistic branding into three categories: institutional branding, organizational branding and individual branding (Molyneux et al., 2019; Van Hove et al., 2018). Because this commodification of self is situated within the individual level of analysis (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), my research will focus on individual branding practices.

As journalists participate in individual branding on social media (which is usually further classified into either personal or professional branding), objectivity does not seem to be the standard for what they post. They write humorous tweets (Bossio & Holton, 2018; Molyneux & Holton, 2015), post personal information (Brems et al., 2017; Olausson, 2018), and share their opinion on various issues, even in the form of banter and arguments with their colleagues (Bossio & Holton, 2018; Brems et al., 2017). Where objectivity has taken a back seat, transparency and connection with the audience seems to have taken precedence for these journalists. Whether they are doing something as overt as proving their expertise in an area (Molyneux & Holton, 2015) or considering the visuals in their profile picture (Brems et al., 2017), these journalists are demonstrating concern for not only how their audience sees them, but also whether or not their audience can relate with them. “In a time where individual news consumption looks more and more like cherry picking (e.g. Blendle), building a strong connection with the audience can be an optimal way to create customer loyalty” (Brems et al., 2017, p. 456). News consumers are, once again, referred to as customers, and in this post-truth era where these customers are prioritizing information with which they emotionally identify,

journalists are answering the call by developing an attractive brand and becoming more than just information disseminators.

In fact, journalism students and practitioners, alike, are realizing that simply posting news articles on social media is not an ideal way to stand out among their peers. Journalism students who have grown up with the evolution of technology and social media recognize that positioning (sharing one's opinion or ideology on a topic), recommending and commenting on existing news content, and personalization are some of the most effective strategies for developing a winning brand (López-Meri et al., 2020). Some of these strategies are so far from traditional journalistic values that they more closely resemble celebrity behavior. For example, one content analysis of a Swedish journalist's Tweets demonstrated how several of his Tweets fit within a celebrity studies framework that separated the nature of his tweets into three categories: fame by association, asymmetrical communication and lifestreaming. This can look like posting pictures online with famous people, limited responses to comments and replies, and posting informal content about oneself, respectively (Olausson, 2018). By doing these things, journalists everywhere are embracing marketing tactics that decenter the news in favor of centering themselves. In one qualitative interview, a journalist said, “If you're only tweeting or retweeting the news, you're a snooze. You're a robot or an algorithm spitting out information that sooner or later gets ignored” (Bossio & Holton, 2018, p. 254). This journalistic branding on social media suggests that journalists are embracing and internalizing the market's constant push for commodification.

External Pressures for Journalistic Branding

Organizations as an External Influence

Though this research is focusing on the internal pressures of journalistic branding, it is important to examine what external pressures journalists feel for branding themselves. After all, even though the tendency to self-promote suggests that journalism is becoming more of an individualistic venture based more on networked popularity (Papanagnou, 2021) than organization-determined success, most journalists are still employed by organizations that mandate social media activity from their journalists, alongside varied policies about how that social media use should look. To begin, this requirement to be present in “always-on” social media environments is having adverse effects on journalists, and the pay off is not entirely clear.

Journalists are expressing the negative impacts of maintaining their social media platforms, including (but not limited to) anxiety about reputational risk, fatigue at the relational labor involved, increased stress associated with verifying the seemingly endless amount of information that comes from social media, and even what seems to be a psychological dependence on social media platforms that makes it hard to separate the personal from the professional (Bossio & Holton, 2021; Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). The burnout is especially intense for women who are facing critical comments about their appearance, misogynistic and possessive remarks about their relationships and availability, and even threats of sexual violence as they are posting behind-the-scenes and day-in-the-life photos of themselves (Finneman et al., 2019). To make matters worse, these same journalists tend to agree that social media is integral to the function of journalism (Bossio & Holton, 2021), even while not nearly enough data exists to prove that the benefits of this social media use outweigh the harm that use is wreaking on journalists’ mental and physical health (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). “Journalistic conduct that harms but is not in service of journalistic duty is ethically impermissible” (Finneman et al., 2019, p. 152).

Amid these requirements (and repercussions) of having a presence on social media, the current scholarship surrounding the role organizations are playing in the motivation for journalists to brand themselves is mixed.

Branding as Resistance

In one sense, journalists are branding themselves on social media in resistance against the media organizations for which they work. Some journalists see their social media profiles as spaces for themselves apart from the influence of their organizations (Molyneux, 2015), and losing that space causes journalists increased anxiety and distress (Holton & Molyneux, 2017). Journalists who do achieve that space by not aligning themselves with their organizations in their social media bios send out more personal self-branding tweets (Van Hove et al., 2018). This behavior suggests journalists want space away from their organizations, and they feel freer to be themselves online when they have that space.

And this space is more than just a matter of preference. Some journalists do not feel that a media organization can ultimately support them financially, so they decide to brand out of a need for self-preservation (Molyneux & Holton, 2015; Molyneux, 2019; Papanagnou, 2021). One journalist cited this job insecurity as a reason for needing to become ““a walking, talking, texting, whatever billboard”” for themselves (Molyneux & Holton, 2015, p. 233). Developing a persona distinct from an organization is becoming increasingly important, then, to journalists, both emotionally and financially.

Branding in Agreement

However, as previously discussed, some journalists brand themselves not in resistance against their organization, but because their organization encourages them to. Implicitly, some journalists seem freer to be themselves on social media because of the consistent income

provided by a media organization. However, freelancers are more likely to swap out the personal tweets with professional ones because they feel pressured to always appear hireable for the next freelancing opportunity (Carpenter et al., 2017). Also, some journalists and scholars argue that social media sites like Twitter serve as platforms for journalists to carry out practices that media organizations value such as being transparent (Van Hove et al., 2018) or holding those in powerful positions accountable (Olausson, 2017). Some media organizations overtly require their journalists to brand on social media (Holton & Molyneux, 2017; Jukes, 2019). Therefore, journalists can be in a mutually beneficial relationship with organizations when it comes to their branding practices because organizations can give them the space to brand in the first place, and this branding can work in tandem with organizational goals.

Based on the present literature, a journalist's relationship with their organization and their branding endeavors are unclear and complex. Research about the personal motivations of journalistic branding can provide some clarity to these contradictory stances and illuminate more sources of stress that can come with maintaining a public social media profile.

Increased Digitization as an External Influence

Whether affiliated to an organization or not, most journalists now live on social media, namely through Twitter. Even though some journalists seem to be getting tired of the toxicities of Twitter, they are still the most active and verified group on the platform (Mullin, 2015, May 26). That's likely because Twitter is a main actor of ambient journalism, a phenomenon in which information is constantly being shared and updated online (Hermida, 2010), with journalists existing to shepherd that information or generate their own news. And where there's information, a journalist is sure to follow.

Now that journalists are highly active on social media, they've recognized that while columnists and television personalities used to be the only journalists to stand out, social media offers *every* media practitioner an opportunity to distinguish themselves and foster their own following (Jukes, 2019). Given that an organization is not exercising harsh regulations on a journalist's social media use, journalists tend to enjoy the freedoms of tweeting as they wish without as much editorial oversight, even employing common Twitter techniques like snark and humor that might not otherwise show up in their typical content (Molyneux, 2015). Therefore, these journalists are constantly renegotiating their commitment to journalism norms and their commitment to the norms of Silicon Valley (Russell, 2019). For example, journalists will use this "Twitter logic" to do things like to post selfies with politicians, even if doing so seems counter hegemonic to the instilled institutional ideals of impartiality (Olausson, 2017). It's no surprise, then, that as journalists are swimming around in a Twitter-sphere that rewards hot takes and emotionally arousing visibility, they are sometimes behaving more like micro-celebrities and social media influencers than they are impartial conduits of information.

Enter Public Media

Whether public media organizations realize it or not, operating in a market where commercial media organizations are also operating is seeming to have an effect on their approach. The scholarly assertions about the nature of those effects are varied. Because public media organizations and commercial stations tend to share similar markets, especially in urban areas (Berry & Waldfogel, 1999), some argue that public media needs to be aware of these market forces and admit that they are taking a page out of commercial media's book — and not to everyone's benefit. "It is economic incentives which force them stepwise to turn into just another one of those large entertainment machines providing 'circus games' for the ordinary

people instead of ‘enlightenment’ to a much smaller crowd who is willing to learn” (Fengler & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 536). However, because of the moral codes many public media organizations uphold, and because they do not have the same overt pressure to draw in eyes to a website, they tend to prioritize providing rich content for their listeners, especially if it is targeted and niche (Mensing, 2017). Even still, public media is not oblivious to their need for funding.

The public-funded model that relies on memberships lends itself to public radio journalists fostering bonds of loyalty with their listeners, whether by asking listeners to become paying members during pledge drives (Durango-Cohen, 2013) or publishing blogs that encourage engagement and offer longer formats of on-air stories (Rooke & Odame, 2013). Aside from corporate sponsors and the support many radio stations get from public universities, public media practitioners know that it is to their benefit to attract listeners, especially young ones on social media who can become long-term supporters (Rooke & Odame, 2013). Being that those younger listeners are active on social media, these bottom-line priorities to secure funding can be addressed by public media journalists crafting an attractive persona on Twitter. The bottom line is not as obvious as it is for commercial media, but that does not mean it simply vanishes for public radio. Market forces are powerful. And those forces reward newscasters and podcast hosts who cultivate popularity on their own social media profiles.

There has been little research about journalistic branding on social media within the realm of public radio, specifically. What has been done about branding, though, points to a similar tendency for public media organizations to encourage their journalists to develop a brand, even if they are doing so implicitly. The intimacy of public radio podcasts, for example, makes it so that the people on air can become the centerpiece of the story itself, where following the podcast host from episode to episode, season to season, becomes a significant part of the show’s

intrigue (Cwynar, 2019). Beyond the content produced, social media now provides a channel for intimate, two-way communication between public radio journalists and listeners that did not exist when radio journalism made its debut as a one-way method of communication to listeners (Rooke & Odame, 2013).

The introduction of intentional social media branding does not seem to inherently spell doom for organizations intending to maintain a neutral personality. C-SPAN, which also de-centers advertising revenue in its business model, does not seem to sacrifice its impartial, “boring” persona with the social media profiles of its employees, likely because of its strict social media policies. But even with them, one employee felt enough license to use humor in some of their posts, all while being fair in what side of the aisle they were poking fun at (Meyer & Zempter, 2020). So, even though public media falls outside of the typical advertising-centric model for journalism, the nature of the medium lends itself to its journalists presenting favorable personas in order to secure loyalty with their listening base, even if the journalist prefers to present as a fair, unbiased public media journalist.

Internal Pressures for Journalistic Branding

Just as it would be ideal for the pursuit of public attention to be a means to an end of informing, it would also be ideal, according to traditional journalism standards, for journalists to market themselves as just a means to an end of informing. However, journalists, especially in younger generations (Ferucci, 2018), seem to have different motivations for their branding practices that don’t necessarily include their desire to be reliable informants for the sake of a healthy democracy. One of the most down-to-earth motivations was wanting to develop meaningful connections with the audience, often through transparency (Bossio, 2021). However, other motivations were not as rosy.

Some motivations for journalistic branding clearly demonstrate that the journalist's benefit is the primary concern. Whether they want to gain respect and renown (Molyneux et al., 2019), maintain a platform in which they can share their unique experiences (Bossio, 2021), or gain friendship with other senior media practitioners (Brems et al., 2017), journalists seem to be seeking public attention and exposure for their own advancement. One journalist in a qualitative interview said they saw journalism as a building block for their popularity, a way to make a name for themselves before moving on to another attention-giving venture (Ferucci, 2018). Other journalists saw "internet glory" as one way to achieve success, one saying that going viral on Twitter felt like "a f**king rush" (Ferucci, 2018). These accounts are not entirely conclusive, but they are certainly telling of an emerging "why" for journalists that is not entirely noble and public-focused. It seems that capitalistic forces aren't forcing a journalist's hand to post a picture of their dog or retweet a humorous quip. Some journalists seem to actually enjoy the limelight, even if it's only a light as wide and tall as a phone or computer screen.

Young Journalists as Digital Natives and Journalism's Future

In line with the journalism industry's obsession with newness is the idea that young journalists are an important key to bringing necessary change within the field (Broersma & Singer, 2021). But even though young journalists, themselves, are aware of and passionate about this need for change (Broersma & Singer, 2021), they are also more likely to experience burnout as they enter the field of journalism. They say their weariness comes from the pressure to be ethical and objective, pressures that have recently intensified amid an increasingly hostile environment surrounding media practitioners, and a digitized, fast-paced work environment that demands both speed and accuracy (Nölleke et. al, 2022). These young journalists are becoming disillusioned with journalism as a career (Nölleke et. al, 2022).

And even with the desire for the industry to change alongside the ever-evolving world of social media, they do not seem to be keen on straying away from legacy organizations to assist digital-only initiatives (Broersma & Singer, 2021). This is likely because of a desire for job security (Jukes, 2019; Molyneux, 2017) and their loyalty to the journalistic norms, a loyalty that makes it harder to be a change agent within their news organizations (Broersma & Singer, 2021). As a group of young professionals who spent some of their formative years facing a pandemic, they could also be hesitant because they simply lack the energy to champion another cause in addition to just getting through a week. Despite these increasing pressures and threats of burnout, young journalists are poised to lay the foundation for what journalism can and should look like in a digital age where audiences are guided by algorithms and influencers.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter III includes the following sections: (a) research questions, (b) using a qualitative method, (c) data collection through interviews, (d) sampling strategy, and (e) data analysis.

Research Questions

In the interest of acutely examining the interiority of young journalists in public radio, the research questions and sub-questions investigated the research participants’ perceptions of branding, in general, and their thoughts behind their own branding practices:

Figure 2. Research Questions

Central concepts and research questions	Questions to address each concept
RQ1: How do young public media journalists perceive branding?	
Internalized market for attention	Why do you engage in individual journalistic branding?
Branding as a personal news value	Where does (self-preservation, popularity or other discovered motivation) fall in relation to other news values like objectivity and impartiality?
RQ2: How do young public media journalists practice branding, themselves?	
Performing to the ideal or ought self	What did you want to achieve in this tweet?

These questions were apt for the research goals because they explored the thoughts and attitudes behind well-known branding practices. The first question, especially, sought to evaluate to what extent the participants’ perceptions about branding are either rubbing up against or keeping in line with other long-held values of journalism. Exploring these questions in relation to each other provided important data about young public media journalists’ approach to commodifying the self.

Using a Qualitative Method

This study utilized a series of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with public media journalists aged 22 to 28 that mostly followed a predetermined research protocol that left room for follow-up questions and different lines of questioning depending on interviewees' answers. The qualitative method was ideal for this research because the method encouraged an exploration of multiple realities that was present among the interviewees (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These differences were compounded based on the journalists' backgrounds, education, and media organization social media policies. In this case, the research was not meant to land on a finding based in its generalizability. Common themes were found, but given the relatively unexplored terrain of young public media journalists and their perceptions of journalistic branding, the emergent nature of qualitative research presented new and unexpected insight.

Data collection through interviews

Semi-structured interviews were best for this research because the topic in question was not merely *what* young public radio journalists are doing to brand themselves on Twitter, but *how* they describe their motivations and thought processes while they are branding. The goal of using interviews as a research method, then, was to unearth this interiority about how these journalists perceive their branding practices. Therefore, in a neo-positivist sense, the interviewee provided a glimpse into their true selves when they provided answers about their branding practices in an interview (Roulston, 2010). Some of the most telling and colorful data about what journalists think of their own commodification has come from studies that also used qualitative interviews as a method (Ferucci, 2018; Molyneux & Holton, 2015), and using interviews for this thread of research that was wholly focused on the journalist's interiority was equally meaningful. My background as a digital native and journalist with public radio experience also lent itself to a

studying sideways approach during the interview, where these shared experiences provided a “common horizon of meaning” with the interviewee (Plesner, 2011). Building rapport in this way seemed to foster more authenticity and clarification from certain participants, as speaking with a researcher who understood their experiences likely helped them feel freer to talk about journalism as it is, unabridged, with no need to sugarcoat. Additionally, informing the participants that their anonymity was being secured throughout the research process by my labeling their interviews under identifiers other than their names likely helped them be more candid in their responses.

Still, it was not entirely expected for the people interviewed to be completely honest about the perhaps egotistical motivations for branding. Even in the interview, the tendency for journalists to put on a performance concerning their professional and personal identity at times seemed to dominate the call for complete transparency. These performances likely aligned with the journalist’s ought self (Higgins, 1987). In this case, the interview as a method still accomplished the goal of exploring the journalist’s tendency to perform. In a postmodern sense, this interview served as a “vehicle for producing performance texts and performance ethnographies about self and society” (Denzin, 2001). Therefore, taking note of how the journalists responded to certain questions about their motivations for branding and how they situate it among their other news values illuminated how they might try to temper these desires or repackage them in terms that are more acceptable to others. When it comes to these responses, my intuition about journalism as an industry empowered me to explore the “limits of commonality” (Plesner, 2011). At times, I explored these limits by pushing back on the interviewees’ interpretations, especially if they seemed to be too properly constructed toward an ought self or seemed contradictory to other answers. Doing this introduced some tension that

helps me and other scholars identify where structural conflicts are arising among news values and the logic inherent to digital natives. So, whether parts of the interview are fully authentic, avenues of performance, or balance of both, the interview responses provided rich data about the motor behind a young public radio journalist's social media behavior and how they articulate those inner influences.

Using interviews as a method also addressed the gaps in previous research about journalists' perceptions of individual branding. One scholar sought to discover journalists' interiority by giving journalists a survey to complete and by conducting a content analysis of the journalists' Twitter profiles. However, the scholar found an incongruence between the data in the content analysis and the values the journalists expressed in the survey (Olausson, 2017). This could be because no journalist wants to admit that they are seeking attention for themselves when they are posting on social media. The scholar suggested that further research should be done to evaluate this discrepancy (Olausson, 2017). One research study did combine a content analysis with an interview to discover how and why journalists engage in personal branding on Twitter (Brems et al., 2017), which is a great way to closely analyze journalistic behavior and journalistic perceptions about that behavior. However, these components were studied separately, which didn't allow journalists to comment on their own behavior.

So, to address these gaps, the research interview included a method similar to photo elicitation (Harper, 2002), where journalists were shown their own tweets and asked in real time what motivated them to construct the tweet the way they did. This was done in the latter portion of the interview so that rapport was already built with the journalist and so that the questions could be based on the journalist's pre-disclosed perceptions of their own branding tendencies. This portion of the interview at times revealed similar incongruences that have been found in

previous studies, and some journalists took the opportunity to recognize the discrepancy themselves and offer an observation about it.

Sampling Strategy

Through purposive sampling, I found and interviewed 16 young public media journalists about their branding practices and perceptions. Purposive sampling was an ideal sampling strategy because of its intention to find subjects who could provide rich data (Palinkas et al., 2015). As mentioned above, interviews with participants who are vocal about their branding thought process were ideal for this research as it is exploratory in nature. More rich research can be conducted using this thesis as a framework because of the variety of responses present in this study that beg further discussion and insight. As a young journalist, myself, who is fairly active on Twitter, I eliminated as much potential for bias as possible by working with Janet Saidi, the assistant director at KBIA, to identify young journalists who work for public media organizations. Utilizing Saidi's network allowed me to cast a wide net for participants who were deemed eligible if they were a full-time public media journalist in the United States between the age of 22 and 28 and had a public-facing available Twitter account.

Because these journalists were from across the country, interviews were conducted over Zoom, and Zoom software was used to record the interview. The interviews lasted for about an hour.

Data Analysis

The audio recording from the interview was submitted to Otter.ai in order for the software to make a transcript. I openly coded the 16 interview transcripts by reading through them for clarity and highlighting participant responses by thematic colors, assigning certain colors based on the themes that emerged in the responses. This thematic color coding guided the

rest of the coding process, where specific colors were used to identify patterns of thought among the participants. I then read through the interview transcripts a second time and utilized in vivo coding to write down and organize similar responses in a separate notes document, mostly organizing the data based on what prompt they were responding to. When similar ideas were shared, I tallied how many participants gave nearly identical responses, so that I could quantify the frequency of these thoughts in the data analysis. I also stripped out certain relevant quotes that richly communicated a perception of branding or a description of a branding practice. I also identified outliers, with the intention of validating the research by not merely sharing the information that most easily correlated with each other.

To improve validity, the interviewees were asked for participant feedback. The anonymous questionnaire the participants responded to asked them how it felt to analyze their tweets with the researcher in real time. In addition, I used self-reflexivity during the data analysis to disclose any normative judgments I have on journalistic branding and to be clear about my own biases as a media professional who is also working within a capitalist system that encourages commodification of the self.

The research study was concluded by a discussion of the major ideas discovered during the research process, which seemed to debunk the assumption that an increased exposure to social media logic would directly correlate to a wholly attention-seeking drive behind branding. Still, the research provides pointers, theoretically, concerning how these young journalists understand themselves, regardless of what characteristics are assumed of them. This research design was more than adequate to investigate how journalism's placement in a capitalist system has impacted an internalization of the market for public attention within young, digital native public media journalists. Their reflections are indicative of a negotiated acceptance of individual

branding that recognizes its importance while also tempering the perceived need to be always “on” with the reality of the boundaries they think are necessary concerning their online exposure. These reflections will likely serve as the foundation for how journalists decide what should be required of them to fulfill their role as public servants online. This is especially relevant considering that these young journalists are already being given editor’s roles within their media organizations; young journalists could very well utilize that degree of leadership to establish how their colleagues should approach branding on Twitter.

CHAPTER IV: YOUNG PUBLIC MEDIA JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTION OF INDIVIDUAL BRANDING

Chapter IV includes the following sections: (a) an exploration of how participants justify branding within the current state of journalism, (b) how necessary (or not) participants think branding is, (d) how branding fits within public media, (e) how participants feel about branding, (f) what motivates the participants to brand, and (g) how participants rank branding motivations next to other news values.

The state of journalism justifies branding

Nearly every participant agrees that building an individual journalistic brand, even if doing so might feel annoying and compulsory, fits the environment surrounding media consumption as of late. For instance, several participants see branding as a way to build trust with audiences, especially considering that we are living in an era of poor media literacy and rising skepticism of media. They find, then, that giving a behind-the-scenes look into a journalist's day-to-day or using a Twitter thread to explain how a story came to be can help audiences understand and trust that a story is executed through processes of connection and verification. Participant 6 understands this audience-oriented focus because they work as an audience editor for their radio station ("P" will be used as shorthand for "Participant" throughout this study).

Part of why this is sort of like a scary conversation, like why people get scared about the implication of journalists cultivating personal brands is, like, it's still the same thing. It's still just your reputation. It's just now that we're more accepting or more open to the fact that that's not just the work you produce, but also like, "Are you a good human being?" ... We're now allowing journalists, in some cases more than others, to acknowledge that they have lives outside of their work and that they are people, humans in residence, other than being journalists. (P6)

The role of a journalist has been understood for decades as that of a public servant. Therefore, these journalists understand and accept their duty to be accessible to the public in online mediums, even if some participants seem less comfortable with the idea than others. For most, though, social media is simply an extension of the accessibility journalists maintained before online spaces even existed. Branding, then, is not an entirely new concept that was first introduced when Twitter first launched. It's always been important for journalists to maintain a trustworthy reputation.

Some participants find that journalists are especially more likely than other professionals to craft their social media presence intentionally. For example, one participant who recently became the community engagement editor for their radio station, said the community-building goals of a journalist can be at times pursued more efficiently in digital spaces. "I think ... there's a certain aspect of just like saving time, and just eliminating certain amounts of like tedium with community building because it's just like you're able to communicate with people from anywhere, anytime, instantaneously" (P11). This participant maintained that this type of community building should not be the only avenue of finding connection with audiences, but these participants do not seem to see digital connection as a direct antithesis to the traditional values of journalism. This is likely because being online and discoverable has become common enough in their society and is even something that has become structurally implemented into journalism. For example, one participant fields questions from the community through a texting service that their news organization established to take tips and questions. Another participant, whose voice has been recognized by members of her community when she is not working, says that even their name has become a tool for their work because they have to say it on air. "Your professional identity and your personal identity is really hard, especially when the name from

your personal identity is co-opted for your professional identity, and then those lines become blurred” (P9). Journalists, then, are accepting (some, begrudgingly) digital, discoverable spaces as tools to complete their work. And, even without a job to justify a presence on social media, their acceptance of online branding likely comes from the reality that they are living among their neighbors and friends who are in online spaces simply because they want to be. Using social media as a presentation tool, then, feels ubiquitous, whether it is intentionally done for work or not. “I think the image that we're projecting is meant for public consumption” (P12).

Now, however, regardless of how intentional young journalists decide to be with their branding on Twitter, they are still facing the pressure to give into what one participant describes as a celebrity era of journalism, where journalist names such as Anderson Cooper and Barbara Walters are widely known. Some participants find this pressure to be harmful, especially when they are perceived as young and, thus, automatically qualified to lead the way in these efforts. For example, some participants expressed that simply the existence of celebrity journalism creates an expectation that every journalist is meant to be extremely available to the public. “A problem with it is like the general public then thinks that they are owed information about (our) personal lives as public figures. It's like a cumulative effect” (P12). But journalists are not yielding to the pressure just because it exists. Some female participants were especially aware of the potential for harassment online, and other participants were clear that they would stand by their work even if it causes them to be disliked by social media users. They are grounded in the belief that branding is not a pursuit to please everyone. And even though they recognize the potential (or, even allure) to brand themselves into popularity, they seem hopeful that they won't have to take that path, if they don't wish to.

Branding's wavering necessity

Even though most participants understood how branding serves or is even inherent to journalism, they say its absolute necessity to the practice is questionable. For instance, when asked to rate the importance of branding on a scale from 1 to 10, most participants rated it above a 5, likely because of the realities of ambient journalism keeping them on Twitter to stay abreast of the news (Hermida, 2010). Some could even personally attest to the value of branding as a tool that impacted their ability to network and be recruited to jobs. Below are some examples of how participants described branding's value in relation to their hiring prospects:

I remember when I was in grad school, I tweeted out like, "Hey, I'm about to graduate, looking for jobs," and like an old editor saw my tweet and was like, "Oh, DM me, like ASAP." So, I think it is useful, because people just have like a point of access for communication to you. (P1)

I think that if I were someone who had a stronger brand, and also just the kind of person who were inclined to build a stronger brand, I might not be here (at their current job) anymore. I might be at a better outlet and a place I'm more likely to settle in. (P12)

When I got this job that I currently work at, like, a lot of it did go back to, you know, "Why do you want to be in public radio? Why do you want to report on politics?" I think that kind of does go back to how I've branded myself in the past as being a journalist who wants to do more service journalism, who wants to work for not for profit versus for profit, who likes politics and stuff. (P16)

These responses speak to the growing importance of being easily discoverable by prospective employers online, even outside of the journalism field. Many college students start seriously developing their LinkedIn profiles as they approach their final semesters because they know that making critical connections can yield job offers if their work is noticed by the right mutuals. Because many of the participants likened Twitter to a professional portfolio for their work, it is only natural that they would find value in their Twitter branding as it pertains to their discoverability by potential employers. After all, it is fairly common, now, to see hiring managers for news organizations tweet out calls for applicants to newly posted positions within their organization.

However, 14 of the 16 participants said that branding is not necessary for practicing journalism, and they largely pointed to journalists they know who are faring just fine without branding as examples. “I’ve seen some people who have outright deleted their accounts, like all of their accounts, when they used to be super active ... And it seemed like it probably was great for their mental health” (P13). Some of these participants took the level of necessity literally, reasoning that technically, a journalist can interview people, conduct research, and write stories without ever putting effort into sharing the stories with people, yet the fact that they have done their newsgathering duties is enough to consider them active media practitioners. “Now, will people care about your stories? Maybe not if you don’t have any branding, or, you know, function to get them to readers, but I still think you’re a journalist if you’re producing them.” (P5). Participants who took this view agreed that branding was helpful for finding sources or demonstrating their humanity. But they also identified other options for branding that do not require being on Twitter, such as other online groups, conventions, community engagement events, and manually staying in touch with other journalists. They find that branding online is helpful to some news consumers, but not all. And the level of a person’s branding moves from helpful to necessary depending on what kind of journalism they do, and who they do it for.

These conflicting sentiments about branding among participants suggests that there is some dissonance among young journalists about how necessary they think branding is. P2’s one-word motivation for branding was “relevance.” P2 recently started working in a new city and mentioned their slight dilemma of still having a following based in their previous city. In comparing relevance to other news values, they said, “I want to be all those things, but if you’re not relevant, like, are people going to care? ... If you’re not relevant, then what’s the point of what you’re doing?” Other participants seemed to agree with this perspective, knowing that their

work does matter, but largely because they are visible enough for people to see the work as they scroll through their Twitter feeds. These journalists, while claiming that branding is not necessary, still seem to acknowledge the market for attention inherent to news media (McManus, 1992). “If an investigation falls in the forest, and no one's around to hear it ... did that all that work matter?” (P6). Young journalists, then, seem to want the best of both worlds, holding to both the idea of branding as necessary for the public nature of journalism and the idea that they could still do well without it. Perhaps the deciding factor in the dissonance is that every journalist interviewed, regardless of their stance on branding's necessity, still have public-facing Twitter profiles. Perhaps, even without feeling the profile is necessary, it still functions as a sort of security blanket for their careers and relevance.

Branding's role in public media

Participants largely agreed that branding was appropriate for public media journalists. In wanting to isolate how working in public media affects thoughts about branding, one portion of the interview asked participants if they think their thoughts about branding would be different if they worked for a commercial news organization. Overall, participants had only ever worked in public media, so they could not confidently disclose how they thought their perceptions about branding might be different if they were approaching it from a commercial perspective. Still, they could not envision themselves having drastically different perceptions about branding if they did work for a commercial outlet. “I feel like public media really embraces people being their individual selves ... We have, of course, social media guidelines and stuff that we follow. But in terms of like, the branding, I would say there's not much that would be too different” (P14). Many of these journalists were not too far removed from their college education, so they

likely understand the basic ideologies behind either funding model to be people-driven, not assuming there would be a highly noticeable difference in a pressure to brand.

One journalist who did work for a television station, though, is now especially cautious when it comes to personal branding, noting that she disliked how her previous employers encouraged their journalists to include the station letters in their Twitter handle and get verified. She resisted on the verification front because she was aware of how female television anchors face disturbing amounts of harassment online (Finneman et al., 2019). “I would say that's probably like the main reason I didn't want my account to be verified or have that checkmark or anything of that because I feel like it opened myself up to more harassment” (P4). Even without these prior experiences, participants seemed to have similar hesitations to engage in personal branding, even if they found it fine for public media journalists to do. That permissibility did not seem to exclude their dread at the thought of keeping up with the demands of visibility present in commercial media (specifically, in television). It is likely that for them, being in public media makes practicing branding something they can opt to do or not, without much consequence.

Some journalists still find that branding is more fitting for roles like public radio hosts or big national producers, where public visibility and recognition are higher than that of individual reporters. One participant, who is a senior producer, said that their role did not lend itself to needing a brand. “If I was a host, then I would engage more. But I don't think that my job hinges on like people knowing who I am and being able to relate to me” (P13). Participants also admitted that people can fall farther from grace in these highly visible roles if their Twitter behavior earns them negative attention, a reality that seemed to keep them from wanting to take on that kind of position, themselves. This apprehension carried through to a portion of the interview where participants were asked to analyze a tweet from NPR's *All Things Considered*

host Ailsa Chang. Every participant appreciated the nature of the tweet, as it was a public service announcement about the retinal tear that was found on one of her eyes during a visit to the eye doctor. They understood how tweeting things like this gave audiences an inside look at her personal life — all while being helpful and amicable.

I love when I see tweets like this from like NPR hosts with like a national presence, who everyone who listens to public radio knows their name. And they tweet about like some really, really common daily thing. I love it ... For people who are famous like that, in that sense, I like to see a little bit of their personal lives. And also, it's a PSA. You could make that into journalism. (P7)

Figure 3. Ailsa Chang Tweet



But even with the favorable responses, the participants ultimately decided that such tweeting was not necessary. It is helpful and, in some ways, fitting to the role of a journalist. But most said they would have been fine without ever having seen it. They seem to have a hard time making tweets similar to it, themselves “I’m just really nervous about trying to post more like humorous or even just like relatable, like life updates, like very informal stuff like that because ... it doesn’t— it’s not attached to any content. It’s just me talking” (P11). These journalists seem to be especially self-conscious about being annoying to their followers or inconsistent with the brand

they have already worked hard to establish, likely because they do not want to harm their reputation so early on in their careers. To them, people like Ailsa Chang have some more leeway to be informal.

Still, some participants recognize that public media has some unique features that does warrant an intentional branding strategy, regardless of someone's professional role. Some participants simply hailed radio, in particular, as an inherently intimate medium (Cwynar, 2019), where hosts and reporters' voices are connecting listeners to the stories as told by the neighbors and experts around them. Therefore, a listener might expect branding from a public radio reporter because they know that reporter's voice, already. One participant, while speculating about what would warrant a journalist to use social media as a means of making money, mentioned pledge drives as a potential parallel. "Which would be another ethical conundrum, I suppose if a reporter was making money for their social media ... Maybe if you're in public radio, when you're fundraising for your organization during pledge drive it would be" (P2). It raises an interesting justification for branding in public media, in general. Public radio listeners, in particular, are already hearing reporters encourage listeners to support their local stations financially during pledge drives; what's the difference in a journalist indirectly garnering such support from intentionally branding their Twitter profiles?

Some others commented on the practicality of using Twitter as a branding platform because it can also help to reach younger audiences on Twitter who are not necessarily tuning into live radio. This can also be a good thing for member stations who don't get a lot of name recognition. One participant, who is 28, said a challenge for public media is that people don't know it exists. "Truly eight out of ten people in (Name of reporter's city) have just never heard

of us in the first place” (P6). Branding as a means of being relatable (which was P6’s one-word motivation) is a way, then, for public media reporters to still be recognizable to their neighbors.

General feelings about branding

From embracing to cringing

One portion of the interview prompted journalists to place themselves on a spectrum of responses to the concept of branding, somewhere between embracing the concept and its practices or cringing at the thought of either. There was an even distribution of sentiments across the participant responses. Those who leaned toward embracing it expressed that they see the value in branding and look forward to the opportunities to be unique and display their personalities. One journalist, again, cited the utility of having a profile that attracts younger news consumers. “I do feel like a lot of young people want to get their news from Twitter because it's convenient, and it's what's coming up, so I don't think there's anything wrong with like, curating your Twitter feed, to appeal to that audience” (P7). Others were more neutral, feeling as if they’ve gotten used to branding as a part of their routine. P3 went so far as to use a double negative in describing his embracing of branding: “I definitely, you know, don’t despise doing it,” they said.

Those who leaned more toward cringing at the idea of branding said they did not care to be disingenuous or be put on display in association with their stories, even though they did not seem to have this same level of criticism for other journalists. They understand the utility of branding, but one participant finds it unfair that branding requires more chipping away at a person’s privacy. “I don’t want to be a part of the story” (P2). Five journalists used the word “fake” to describe how some journalists might approach branding, expressing distaste at the lack of authenticity others use in their branding strategy. One participant, who started working full

time last year, expressed frustration that journalists tend to only share the good things about their jobs, when they all know how truly stressful — and, sometimes, defeating — the career can be. They reflected on a feature story that was weeks behind in its production because one of the important sources dropped out.

So, that sucks. Like that part of the job sucks so much. But that's not put out there. Like, that's not part of the embrace. That's why I think it's cringy when it's like, I feel like we're just being fake sometimes about putting out this branding. And I fall into that. I feel like I'm being fake, too. (P10).

Their frustration makes sense considering that this selectivity brushes up against the values of transparency and authenticity that is so often heralded as pillars of good journalism. However, on a platform that distorts reality and exists as a way for young journalists, in particular, to market themselves to employers and sources, it is difficult to be completely transparent about challenges and failures. After all, who's to say that being transparent about a mistake on Twitter won't stir up a negative response that Twitter algorithms choose to amplify? Maybe a Twitter algorithm won't even be necessary to make a future employer reconsider how "good" and "worth following" a journalist is who is not solely displaying their wins. Regardless of their reason for cringing, it seemed that, similar to feelings about Ailsa Chang's tweet, the participants feel more self-conscious about their *own* branding practices than they do about others. "I cringe for myself. I don't cringe at them doing it, but like me thinking about doing it, I do cringe" (P8). Besides conveying the utility of branding, these journalists, again, seem to be hesitant to admit any personal pleasure derived from branding. Some of this hesitance is likely genuine, coming from a place of concern about how they'll be perceived as young people starting out their careers. This heightened caution was present during other portions of the interview.

Conflicts of interest

Some participants expressed mixed feelings about branding's end goal, still finding it too related to the pursuits of a public relations specialist than that of a journalist. Some participants, for example, don't find that Twitter, as a platform, is even suited to a journalist's goal and professional ability. One participant says journalists are addicted to Twitter, using it for their own enjoyment; P10's editor told them the app is not even good for connecting with the community. When encouraged by one of their editors to do a call out for sources on Twitter, another editor told them, "Your followers, or your people that are reading your stories, aren't on Twitter. Twitter is just a journalism space, so you're not going to reach anybody there." Besides its questionable utility as a tool for genuine connection, several participants expressed unease at how branding on Twitter can promote meanness and ego building. P6 noticed that they used to find themselves getting very angry on Twitter, likely because of the platform's ability to lock people into disputes fought over 280-character quips and quote-tweet clap backs. To some participants, then, spending time online to curate their personas could form them to that platform's logic in ways that are not quite in line with the priorities they think a journalist should have.

Participants also expressed internal conflict when it came to posting specific types of content that seemed inconsistent with who they should be as journalists. Below are some examples of how participants described the content they struggled to post about while considering their professional roles:

I think January 6 insurrection ... I'm thinking to myself on my personal Twitter, I'm like, "This is an insurrection like, what is going on?" And we had newsroom leadership telling us "Don't call it an insurrection. Don't call it a riot. You could say it's a group of people gathering." Like "Hell, no, it's not." (P3)

I read this story the other day about a hospital chain that made me like so angry. ... So I like, quote tweeted it from there and was like, commenting about how it was one of the hospitals in (Name of city) ... but I had just forgotten that I have, like, executives from

that hospital that follow me, and then they commented on it. And I was like, “Oh, right. I wish I had maybe even just like, remembered that they followed me before I tweeted it.” (P5)

I think when Indiana was banning abortion, it was hard for me not to want to like repost certain things, you know, about my view of that. And it was really hard for me not to like, share that ... but it is what I took on, being a journalist, having to do that. (P15)

Tension arises as the participants are weighing their individual values and the professional expectations to be objective and non-reactive. These participants feel a great deal of loyalty to their professional roles and the collective reputation they seek to maintain as journalists. They seem to be mourning these choices with a sober-minded approach of the tradeoffs one has to weigh in any job. This even includes remorse for not being able to engage in funny banter or interact with humorous tweets with their friends like they used to before they were journalists.

Fear and stress

Apart from conflicting values, several participants were vulnerable about the fear they associate with their activity on Twitter. They are very concerned about the potential for them to show bias, and they are deeply worried about how others might perceive them. Nearly half of the participants expressed fear and stress as emotions they associate with their Twitter activity. One participant said they once deleted a funny tweet out of pure embarrassment after it got no interaction. They said it only took them two minutes to make the decision, as they wondered if it was too aggressive and cringy. For P10, deleting tweets is not even an option; that would be even more embarrassing. The thought alone keeps them from being more personal in their Twitter branding:

It'd be cool if I could, but I think I'm just too scared to be myself or to get personal with people because of like ... what if it flops and no one says anything? That's so embarrassing. I would delete it, but then if I delete it, people would be like, “What is she hiding?” (P10)

This stress is enough to give this particular participant hives when they think about branding on Twitter. In addition to avoiding embarrassment, participants do not want to burn bridges with sources and want to avoid unnecessary conflict. Some attribute their fears to their own anxiety, which is present both in and out of work. But this fear also likely stems from the increased pressure of being a young journalist surrounded by other community members who are older than them and, perhaps, more critical of their less experienced approach to their work.

Age's impact on branding perceptions

Even though the research participants are aware that being digital natives allows them to have a more natural approach to their social media, they still have a sober minded and, at times, fearful perspective about how their online personas will affect them in the long term. The participants recognized that their age has allowed them some inherent freedoms in their social media expression that other generations might not enjoy as seamlessly. They expressed an awareness that as digital natives, it is commonly accepted for them to be more like themselves online, given that they have had access to social media platforms as a welcome destination for their streams of consciousness. Therefore, people don't tend to be surprised when individuals in their age group push the boundaries on their social media expression, especially when it comes to advocacy and discussion about social justice concerns. Some participants find that sharing their personalities more freely on Twitter is a way to set themselves up for good careers, too. One participant expressed that a goal they has with branding is to become someone who is liked enough to not need to stick to a script; in a way, a certain level of fame will grant them the freedom to post however they want. "I think at a certain level when you reach a certain following level on Twitter, or just any kind of like level of fame, there's almost like this guarantee that

someone's going to interact with this, and almost a guarantee that somebody's going to interact with it in a positive way" (P11).

Some of the participants on the younger end of the age range, though, expressed an acceptance of needing (or having needed) to stand out among other recent graduates as they look (or looked) for work. Some of this desire for employability comes from a fear of not being taken seriously because of their age. P15 recently moved to a new state for their new job. "I'm extra careful because I think just in general, in this field, it's kind of hard to be taken seriously when you're 22, like just kind of starting out and graduating school. So that is something I take into account" (P15). A few journalists who recently moved into new roles at their news organizations expressed that their shift toward professionalism was largely connected to a need to prove that they are right for the role they'd earned. Still, some participants seem to have more fears about being found out on social media than others, leading them to have different standards for what is both funny and appropriate enough to be posted on Twitter. One participant describes it as scaring themselves into branding, so that they can never be accused of saying something too controversial or offensive.

Some participants would be fine with not needing to do the dance between professionalism and personality at all. They would be fine without a future of social media. Unlike some news organizations who are becoming increasingly intentional about their social media strategy, these journalists don't find social media platforms like Twitter to be novel and worth their investment. Because Twitter has been around since adolescence, it has become an accepted part of life, and an unhealthy part of life, according to these participants. They expressed feelings of burn out when it comes to social media, and one participant says she cannot mentally fathom adopting a more intentional approach with her Twitter behavior. This

sentiment of feeling burnout is consistent with other research about young journalists becoming disillusioned with the demands of journalism (Nölleke et. al, 2022). It's not that these participants think their social media aversion makes them outliers within their age group. P9, who started working full time two years ago, said their age was the major reason *contributing* to their position, especially after being restricted to online spaces for connection during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown periods. "I was just tired. And I don't think I've really come back from that yet. And I don't know if I ever will. I really don't have a desire to be too much more active on social media, particularly Twitter than I am right now" (P9). Now, they do not care for the expectations of journalists to brand themselves online. They'd rather spend meaningful time away from a screen.

Some people will be famous for journalism. But I think most of us will not be. And I think that to try to make all journalists behave in a way that the celebrity ones do is unreasonable. I'm just trying to talk to people and write my stories. And then, you know, go live my life. (P9)

The pandemic had another similar effect on another participant. Because they started working during a time when COVID-19 safety precautions kept them working from home, they feel like they can't identify who they are as a working professional and who they are as their own individual. Their whole working life has seen the two identities playing out in the same space, making it hard to discern between the two. Therefore, they can't decide who to brand when they post on Twitter. That indecision, coupled with not knowing ideal branding strategies, has kept them from acting. In a way, several other participants can likely relate to this. The expectations on them to be social media experts are not necessarily translating to a desire to be branding leaders. They have their own goals in mind. They don't consider themselves a monolith of social media crazed micro-celebrities.

Variation based on race and gender

Participants' other intersectional identities have uniquely shaped the way they view social media. One participant, whose parents immigrated from Mexico, said branding is a way to even the playing field, as someone whose low-income background can make them otherwise on the outskirts of the visible journalism world. "I was not in the power structure of typical journalism, and kind of the media space. So I felt like, 'Okay, I may not have ... those legacy contacts, but I can build a platform online, and I can interact with people'" (P3). Their uninhibited access to Twitter, then, allows them to drum up a following based on their skill and personality, without as many institutional barriers to success and inclusion. They also commented on the fun and familiarity of spaces like "Mexican Facebook," where it's possible to find humor and connection with people of similar backgrounds.

Still, another person of a racial minority said that being in a marginalized community is causing them to seriously grapple with their comfortability to breach certain topics concerning social justice. Similarly, a female participant who identified herself as a racial minority feels especially vulnerable to negative interpretations of her Twitter behavior because she is the only minority in her newsroom. She, and other female participants, also seemed more likely to admit these anxieties and worries about their social media use coming back to haunt them. The harassment of female journalists on Twitter, specifically, was one of the acute fears that some of these female participants expressed. These acute actions of harassment and discrimination probably account for why female journalists do not see branding as an "opportunity," like one male journalist within a racial minority deemed it. There are added pressures and dangers they are facing, as women. So, even though they have a chance to carve out their own space, they aren't clawing for a chance to be exposed to inappropriate, insensitive users.

Motivation to brand

As participants brand themselves, they are largely doing so because of a unique range of internal motivations, and not because they feel their news organizations are pressuring them to. For some, their actions are more closely rooted to the lessons they learned about social media in college. Most said they are not asked by their news organizations to brand and are not regularly consulting their employer's social media policies as they post on Twitter. "I am not gonna lie. I don't know any policies we have. So, I don't really think about them" (P5). This unawareness is likely because news organizations are still deliberating over what is appropriate for their journalists to say online and to what degree they can associate themselves with social issues and causes without introducing bias and alienating audiences.

However, participants also say they have an innate compass for what is appropriate for their Twitter profiles because of the way their universities taught them about social media use. One participant called the onslaught of social media education annoying, especially as it pertained to the digital footprint and its potential to damn their career into oblivion if someone were to find a questionable post. They say older generations are unnecessarily concerned about how old social media posts can haunt people later. "I kind of already have an idea of who's going to be interacting with when I post and that a majority of the people have to like go looking for me to find my stuff. So, I think that's one way that I don't feel as much stakes, as say, like, my coworkers do" (P11) Even still, these consistent warnings in college did make a larger number of participants express fear at the responsibility of maintaining a non-problematic Twitter profile. "I'm very conscious of how I would be viewed on social media. So, it's honestly, it just made me really cut back on like, using a lot of it just because I'm paranoid about how it could be viewed" (P13).

One interview question asked participants to sum up their motivation for branding into one word. Some did not identify with branding as an action they practiced, so these participants were asked to use one word to sum up their reason for curating the profile the way they do. Each response was unique and included more sentiments than just fear, such as “reliability,” “community,” “trust,” and “staying relevant.” Some, then, did not seem to take issue with the idea of branding themselves because they took the definition of branding as a literal description of their end goal as journalists: to brand themselves as a reliable source of information, depending on what their followers are looking for. They want to prove they are helpful public servants and engaged community members by staying rooted in their beats and focusing on what their audience wants to learn. “I think, a lot of what I hope to do through my branding is to make sure that people are aware that what I'm putting out there is something that's worth them looking at, and something that they feel that they don't have to keep fat checking with other people on” (P14). To that end, these participants also expressed a desire to be positive, authentic, and lighthearted for the sake of their followers. Some, though, preferred to be “boring,” which probably comes from a desire to not cause unnecessary issues in an already tense media environment. All of these motivations make sense for young journalists who want to demonstrate their worth to their employers and to the communities they serve. They are likely eager to make great first impressions and secure support from their community; in fact, with not quite securing “tenure” yet, their careers can ride on how they brand themselves on Twitter, now.

Branding next to other news values

One portion of the interview involved participants ranking their branding motivations next to other news values, such as accuracy or holding the powerful to account. Some participants struggled with the concept, not seeing the values for either branding or reporting as

related enough to be included in the same ranking. For example, one participant called values associated with branding too “self-interested” to be considered in the same ranking as traditional news values. The struggle to associate them likely comes from journalists still being steeped in the rigid separations between journalism and public relations and in not wanting to blend the two professions in their work.

Other participants who did find the values related were very clear that the values they have to brand themselves are still at a significantly lower priority than the other news values that drive their journalistic work. They see branding as a way to display the process behind their jobs, but the work they’re doing remains their primary focus. “I think the most important part of my job is my job” (P4). Similarly, other participants agreed that if they are reporting about a controversial issue, their priority is their reporting, and not necessarily how some stakeholders will react to it.

However, others do see the values behind their branding as “high up” in the ranking of their news values. As previously mentioned, there’s a level of visibility that these participants see as inherent to their work. As people providing a public service, these journalists think it is important to be discoverable to audiences so that their information actually reaches the communities it’s meant to serve. “If we’re going to view journalism as a public service, it really, really matters that people are actually getting the information that you’re producing” (P7). Participants also see branding as a way to build community and develop meaningful relationships, a way to follow through on the journalist’s promise to be a responsible neighbor. These journalists still maintain, though, that being a responsible neighbor means being accurate above all else. “If I was like, the most hated, most biased journalist out there, I would still want all of my facts to be 100% accurate. That’s all that would matter” (P14). The participants realize

the intensity of their branding values might shift depending on whether or not they are actively looking for work. But no matter how they ranked their branding motivations, none of the journalists expressed a willingness to sacrifice their commitment to truth and verification for the sake of being liked and followed. To them, pursuing these journalistic ideals, first, is likely one of the best things they can do to maintain job security and remain true to the work they've committed themselves to. For them, it will pay off in the long run to curate a Twitter profile that does not compromise news values for popularity.

CHAPTER V: HOW YOUNG PUBLIC MEDIA JOURNALISTS ENGAGE IN INDIVIDUAL BRANDING

Chapter V includes the following sections: (a) young public media journalists' branding methods, (b), participants' understanding of Twitter, (c) how participants are adapting to and enjoying Twitter branding (d) how participants compare themselves to influencers, and (e) observations from the photo elicitation portion of the interview.

Branding methods

Most participants indicated that when it comes to branding, they aren't quite sure what they're doing, even though it might seem inherent for people their age to be social media experts. This is likely because as digital natives, co-workers are looking to them for answers about how to be a responsible, engaging journalist for online audiences (Broersma & Singer, 2021). However, these journalists are still looking up to their superiors for guidance and approval of their own, especially as some of them have been recently hired into their roles. Therefore, these journalists are establishing their branding practices by using their accumulated knowledge of Twitter logic (Olausson, 2017) to inform their choices and by simply paying attention to what other journalists are doing.

Similar to previous research about journalistic branding methods (López-Meri et al., 2020), these journalists are showing behind-the-scenes content, using tags and hashtags to get more reach, drafting tweets on a "Notes" app, and using visuals, threads and emojis to enhance their tweets. These intentional decisions make for a longer process than the average user when it comes to posting tweets. For example, several participants expressed some embarrassment at how long it takes for them to post something on Twitter. "I typically do not tweet very off the cuff. I honestly probably spent way too much time thinking about it before I send something"

(P5). One participant says they use Google trends to stay in touch with what people are discussing online, and another participant says they shorten their story links to keep their character count low. On average, participants are tweeting multiple times a week, with some tweeting several times a day and others only a few times a month. These journalists are not short of ways to intentionally curate their Twitter profiles, and they are taking great care to make sure the presentation is free of flaw. In this way, contrary to previous observations about their Twitter behavior, presenting a technically impressive profile to demonstrate their sharpness and employability seems to win out over being the most flashy, eye-catching journalist on Twitter.

This preference to make a smart profile manifests in another key deviation from previous research: the participants do not seem to take as many risks with humor and personality as do other journalists who have been interviewed and observed for branding research. Where some journalists seemed comfortable in previous research to share opinions or get into arguments (Bossio & Holton, 2018; Brems et al., 2017), these younger journalists are significantly more concerned with being professional. They do not like inserting themselves into arguments and controversies and only share opinions on low-stakes topics like television shows. “I think online discourse and arguing can be very unreliable. And I think on Twitter, it's not really helpful” (P14). And now that a person’s Twitter feed shows what the people they follow are ‘liking,’ some participants are more careful than usual about even ‘liking’ funny tweets, for fear of causing offense or throwing their followers off. Some journalists are lamenting the need for this restriction but are still well-convinced of its value, especially when it comes to sourcing. “I’m worried that if I like something that like makes fun of conservatives, they're not going to want to talk to me, or they're going to think of me differently” (P10). P10, who started working full time

last year, was referencing recent tweets concerning George Santos that were dominating people's Twitter feeds for a week or so.

Several participants used words like “worry” and “self-conscious” to describe their approach to their Twitter profiles, and this is likely because, just like the freelancers observed in previous branding research (Carpenter et al., 2017), they are much more concerned about their job security and do not want to jeopardize their careers as, for some, they are just beginning in them.

Sometimes there has to be conflict, like, that's what journalism is. There has to be stories that are going to make people upset, make people mad, make people feel angry, make people feel like they weren't treated fairly. And I feel like I would rather my energy go towards worrying about doing those stories correctly than worrying about pissing random people off online who I'm gonna have to deal with and who I know will give me anxiety if they come for me for some dumb thing I said. (P5)

In the interest of wanting to focus on their work, some of the participants have similarly decided not to put a lot of energy into their Twitter profiles at all, only using them to share their stories or retweet things of relevance to their audiences. They're playing it safe, a reasonable choice considering the burnout they are already experiencing and anticipating (Laughlin, 2021, October 12). For them, there is no need to bump up the personality and potentially risk their peace of mind.

Understanding Twitter

But it wasn't always this way. Participants described a range of emotions and responsibilities ascribed to different social media platforms (namely Twitter) that were largely determined by how they were choosing to step into their professional identities. For example, before becoming journalists, most of the participants said their Twitter profiles used to be much more personal, with focuses on making people laugh, talking about sports and culture, and even advocating for social justice. Some didn't have Twitter profiles at all and preferred to use social

media sites like Facebook and Instagram for personal content and LinkedIn for professional content. Some still find platforms other than Twitter more useful for their work and are even encouraged by their editors to use platforms other than Twitter to aid them in finding sources, for example. “I don't really value Twitter as much as Facebook groups or some of these niche communities that are in Facebook and tend to be talking about a specific topic” (P1). But where some journalists are using Facebook (an app commonly known for its personal use) to connect with sources, Instagram remains the most popular site for participants’ personal lives. Twitter, on the other hand, has seemed to dethrone LinkedIn as a hub of journalist portfolios and networking opportunities.

In addition to using Twitter as a professional development aid, participants have varying opinions on their enjoyment of Twitter as an online community and its benefit to journalism, in general. Some seem more convinced than others that the platform is a natural aid to a journalist’s work and mission. Some participants were honest that their news organizations encouraged its use. But even still, other participants indicated that they personally enjoyed the humorous characteristics of Twitter and find it interesting how easy it is to connect with niche communities on the app. “It’s crazy how you can just create the bubble that you want. And then you think about like, ‘How could someone have a different idea from this? Like, how could someone not like believe the same thing that I do?’” (P10). Some mentioned Twitter as a good platform for reaching younger audiences and for amplifying others’ work. One journalist said they get excited when they think about the impact they can have by posting something on Twitter and seeing it go viral, a desire that’s been similarly expressed in other research about people’s motivation to practice journalism, in the first place (Fengler & Russ-Mohl, 2008).

But participants do not necessarily see Twitter as the ideal platform for journalists to exist. For example, one journalist called Twitter a distraction:

If I had a choice of not to use Twitter, I would delete Twitter in an instant. I'll network with journalists another way. I'm part of other groups. I'll go to conventions, whatever. But the utility of Twitter to me is like mostly distraction. And like occasional information, or like things that interests me personally. (P1)

Similarly, another participant doesn't think the online community reflects reality, sometimes functioning instead as a place for public officials and journalists to have activist conversations or as a less-encouraging flood of negative news. As an audience editor for their news organization, they finds themselves cautioning reporters against spending too much time on the app so they don't start to take the witty, argumentative nature of their feeds as an accurate lens for their lives, both personal and professional. "I want people to be careful, but also careful for themselves. Because it takes a toll on your mental health to be involved in conversations like that all day, every day" (P6). Another journalist related with this inherent pressure to adapt themselves to Twitter's personality and significantly cut back on their use of the app as a response. "I think I kind of got tired of the pressure to try to be funny all the time. And to have a take on everything all the time" (P12). They now only tweets once or twice in a month, while others remain comfortable tweeting multiple times in a week. So, there does not seem to be one general consensus on how young public media journalists view Twitter. Every participant uses it, even sparsely, but they do so while knowing that even though its fast-paced, trends-oriented focus makes it compatible with a journalist's need to stay aware of the latest news, its platform is not entirely helpful to a journalist's goals or personal well-being. This conveys a responsible approach to social media that does not take it at face value, but maintains a critical perspective of its bottom line. A few participants even mentioned when Elon Musk became Twitter's CEO, they started considering whether or not they wanted to remain on the platform.

Regardless of their comfortability with branding (or just existing) on the platform, about half of the research participants say that they do brand on Twitter, some with more intention than others. Any refusal of associating with the term came from either a lack of posting, in general, or a disagreement with the term as a description of them simply sharing their stories or being themselves on Twitter. Even if they are unsure of Twitter's viability as a platform or uncertain about if they are branding "correctly," some of them are making these branding decisions intuitively. "It does attract a group of followers and attracts a group of people who come to expect certain things from my feed. But for the most part, I wouldn't say that I have a great grasp on branding, and it's something that I'm building on" (P14). This ability to practice journalism without confidently understanding how branding works likely comes from being digital natives who are working media practitioner in an era of ambient journalism, where journalists seem to have no choice but to live a significant part of their lives online; that's where information lives and discourse is happening (Hermida, 2010). They're following the news, especially the news in their beats. And being transparent to their Twitter followers about what they're discovering in that pursuit is, to some, an act of branding in and of itself.

My Twitter branding is a lot about me trying to either follow up on stuff that I've already recorded, or just acknowledge that there's a lot going on that I haven't reported and giving my followers a sense that like, just because you haven't seen this in your email newsletter, or you haven't seen this on our website, doesn't mean that like our organization isn't following it. (P14)

Others who echo this motivation to brand see their Twitter use as a natural extension of their work as a journalist, an adoption of Twitter logic (Olausson, 2017). Still others prefer the traditional method of sticking to fully reported stories, not Tweets, to convey important information to their followers. One participant said they once experienced a dilemma about

whether or not to making a standalone tweet that conveyed a shocking, disturbing piece of a sexual abuse investigation that he'd already reported on in full.

So, it wasn't new news. But like, this is like, such an example of how terrible it was. And I was going to tweet a picture of that ... and I decided not to, because our state government reporter said, "It's horrifying, but I think you need more to it than that. ... If you want to tweet about it, you should just do a story about that one instance." (P2)

Adapting to the trend

Even with varying perspectives on how they should brand or use Twitter in tandem with their reporting, several participants are experiencing some enjoyment from the pursuit of branding. Some expressed that they enjoy the challenge it presents and the opportunity to show their humanity and develop a unique voice. The tangible results of getting likes and building a larger following are also nice perks. Below are some examples of how participants described this enjoyment:

I got 10 likes or whatever, like that just makes you feel good. That's like a whole other thing of that relationship of, like, getting affirmation online. (P10)

I like seeing those types of results where it feels like things are going right. (P8, when talking about her tweets winning her more followers)

I was really excited and really happy that like, this happened. And then I guess, with branding, it felt like something that I did that I was like, "Look. I'm actually a journalist." Especially because I did this while freelancing. (P5, when discussing a tweet that shows how her reporting made a tangible impact)

Similarly, one participant expressed that because they are a photojournalist, they sometimes receive validation from engagement on Twitter that they might not get from their news organization, otherwise. Several participants are glad to see the connections they are building with their Twitter community and are even attributing Twitter as a place to find sources. One participant said that engaging in these interactions on Twitter can even go so far as to disrupt the

idea of journalists as a part of the wealthy elite. It can help demonstrate that they are also “normal,” experiencing the same day-to-day as their neighbors.

Even though several participants criticize the tendency for journalists to be “fake” when they brand on Twitter, they still seem to enjoy sharing when journalism is going well or when they are having a fun day in the field. At the end of the day, Twitter still exists for them as a fun space and deviation from the seriousness of their role, a way for them to be more lighthearted and personable. P6 noticed that journalists can spend most of their times being unrelatable because of their need to be critical and skeptical. Using Twitter in a fun way, then, can be a nice deviation, for both the journalist and the audience. “Twitter has also always been a playground in a way for goofy, clever, funny, being part of the conversations. And so that was also just something that I enjoyed in general, as someone who likes cultural conversations, online and offline” (P6). Even with their conflicting views on its utility, it is understandable for these participants to have Twitter as a bit of an anchor, considering the increasing stress associated with the job. After all, even if they might feel too afraid to like a tweet, they are still free to humor it in a private message with their friends. For some, even this allowance helps the app remain a bit of a respite.

Comparing to influencers

In light of the participants’ varying measures of self-promotion on Twitter, a portion of the interview asks them if they compare themselves to social media influencers. Given the relatively new and at times elusive nature of social media influencing as a profession, answers were mixed. This range of responses could also be attributed to journalists’ varying degrees of awareness and acceptance for the market of attention they are living and working in (McManus, 1992). For example, some participants were not put off by the comparison, likening journalism

to social media influencing in the way that journalists try to drum up a following unique to them and their beats. “It’s not like I’m posting pictures of myself every day, I guess, so I feel like sort of detached in that sense. ... I just don’t have a strong reaction because I’m not like trying to sell people anything” (P1). The participants also reasoned that journalists tell people what news the public should be thinking about, whether by promoting their own work or amplifying the work of others. These participants are probably not bothered at drawing this connection because they have grown up around social media personalities and also understand the reality of the journalist’s need to draw in eyes. For instance, one participant’s one-word motivation for branding was “readers.” “I feel like social media is one of the few ways that you can kind of directly tap into that, like, ‘I wrote something I think people will care about, and here's people who care about it and are responding to it and are talking about it.’ Like that's a very gratifying feeling as a journalist” (P5).

There were other participants, though, who did not consider themselves social media influencers and who seemed strongly repelled at the thought of the comparison. “I would not say that I'm an influencer. And I would hope to God no one considers me to be an influencer” (P9). They see social media use as a tool for connection more than a tool to gain popularity. Even though they are sharing news, and thus, giving their followers topics and stories to think about, participants say their goals as journalists deviate from those of influencers in that they do not tell people how to think, but give them enough information and context to make a decision, themselves. “We're not advocates. We're just telling stories. We're just telling truth” (P4). From a practical perspective, participants noticed that journalists do not boast the same measure of parasocial relationships that social media influencers do, going about their work without a goal to be flashy and stir audiences to a decision on their behalf. “I feel like I do see journalists who

do have that (parasocial relationship), but ... it feels like they tend to be the ones who are more so tweeting their personal opinions about things ... and then people are like responding to that” (P8).

No matter how journalists felt about the comparison, several of the participants did admit to seeing an overlap between the roles of a journalist and an influencer, mainly in the way of techniques. Journalists do situate themselves in their audiences’ lives as trustworthy experts, reporting news stories and sharing their thoughts on the general chatter of news taking place on Twitter. One participant noticed that when Southwest Airlines was coming under fire for its flight cancellations in December, journalists who chimed in on Twitter were probably pretty influential because of the credibility they’d established with their following. Regardless of their ability to sway people from purchasing Southwest Airlines tickets, journalists are known for live tweeting and using their Twitter feeds as a direct channel of communication to their followers, offering bits of news that their audiences might not otherwise have access to. Leveraging this proximity is similar to a social media influencer giving their followers in inside scoop on some news related to the companies they represent.

One participant says they compare themselves to influencers mostly because of their own personal insecurities. They say that as a host and producer, they feel they are not doing their audience or shows justice by putting minimal effort into their Twitter feed. Even though they do not work for commercial TV stations, where the obligation to be visible to the audience is a lot more tangible, they still see their public-facing role as something that deserves more online attention when they are not on air. Even their follower count remains mostly friends or people they went to school with. “I do have people who follow me because of my job at (News organization name). And I think those people are probably disappointed” (P12). The participant

painfully consider the gap between their social media activity and that of influencers who they think have “perfectly” curated profiles. Amid the already existing lack of confidence about their branding practices, the existence of social media influencers who seem to understand the science behind growing a following and keeping a following engaged seems to only add to the unsteady grip these journalists have on how they should approach branding, themselves.

Matching words to actions

The final portion of the interview involved journalists discussing one of their tweets in real time, talking about the motivation behind their decisions, identifying whether or not it was a branding tweet, and even describing how it feels to analyze their own tweet with the researcher. By using a method similar to photo elicitation (Harper, 2002), this portion of the interview was designed to help address some of the dissonance present in previous research about journalistic branding (Olausson, 2017).

The researcher searched through the participant’s Twitter feed before the interview and chose a tweet that seemed particularly intentional in its construction, whether the tweet included visuals, several tags, or a long, threaded construction. These tweets were chosen so that there would be a rich discussion concerning how the participant made these decisions. Most of the participants said they were internally motivated to make the tweets, and they often wanted to acknowledge professional milestones or fun aspects of their career. They said that sharing these parts of their lives, whether it was starting a new job or getting an opportunity to do a fun story, was to both remind people of their presence and create lighthearted opportunities for connection. Not all the posts were entirely rosy, though.

Figure 4. Elicitation Tweet (P15)



Some shared negative experiences from their lives to convey a sense of relatability. For example, P15 used a tweet to share their woes with being in a place that experiences heavy snow for the first time in their lives. They said they constructed her tweet without the word “I” (a method that was common for other participants, too) in order to make the tweet more relatable. In their words, not having “I” in the tweet gave their audience an entry point into her story of not having a scraper for their car. “And it shows, you know, I’m a human, too. I had to ask for a snow scraper because I didn’t have one, and no one told me I needed one” (P15). Using emojis and sharing visuals was another way these journalists tried to be lighthearted and fun with their followers, able to display their “humanity.”

Participants said they took notes from other journalists about how to construct their tweets and tagged others to show their connection with others and their ability to be interpersonal. One participant tweeted a photo of themselves collecting tape on the street that one of their followers took and sent to them. They found it funny to see their professional and personal worlds collide. But on further thought, they found that another underlying motivation was one to demonstrate that they are engaged with the community both on and off of Twitter, and they have enough of those friends to be spotted and noticed at random. Another journalist figured that by tagging a lot of users in their job announcement tweet, they gave the impression that they were a good boss, someone who is willing to acknowledge how others contribute to their success.

Figure 5. Elicitation Tweet (P13)



Most participants agreed that their tweets were branding tweets. Some hesitated, saying that branding was “maybe” their intention when they were fashioning the tweet. But, whether the construction of their tweet was meant to be intentionally self-promoting or not, most agreed that a certain measure of branding was probably achieved, regardless. One participant was very adamant that the tweet the researcher selected was not a branding tweet, but a “me” tweet. “This is not sort of an effort to like change or bolster. This is just, like, my personal brand, my personality. It’s the things I do and say on a consistent basis. ... Consistency across online and offline” (P6). In this view, their Twitter profile is simply their authentic self. When asked if being authentic was a form of branding, in and of itself, they disagreed. The difference for them is that by sharing who they are online, they are not trying to have an effect of some sort. The tweet was “on brand” for them, but it was not an intentional act of personal branding. It was just them being themselves online. This was a key moment during all of the elicitation portions.

It demonstrates that perhaps some journalists, especially those who are younger, are not seriously considering their branding practices because sharing about themselves online does not

feel like a careful construction that is working toward a specific goal. To them, Twitter simply exists as a platform for their usual personas to exist. This idea of exuding authenticity could be an idealist perspective that they are holding, which does not adequately leave room for the human experience of presenting an ideal or ought self to others (Higgins, 1987). But holding close to this ideal has the potential to either keep young journalists from being too performance-based or make them unaware of how performative their posting patterns really are. It can be hard to discern the line between a true value being held or an idealist perspective keeping a person oblivious.

When asked how this real-time analysis felt, most expressed that it was simply weird and even uncomfortable to be discussing their tweets in this way. Others said it reinforced their intentionality or even made them feel crazy for putting as much time and consideration in their tweets as they do. Still others called the exercise fun. One participant compared it to therapy, as it felt like an opportunity to tap into her self-awareness.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter VI includes the following sections: (a) summary of findings, (b) significance of findings, and (c) guidance for future research.

Summary of findings

By drawing from marketing theory, self-discrepancy theory and the hierarchy of influences' individual level of analysis, this study uniquely contributes to other research about journalistic branding to 1) identify specific branding perceptions among the youngest generation of working journalists, 2) identify how these perceptions are shaping their branding practices and utilization of Twitter, specifically, and 3) explore how these perceptions and practices are playing out among public media journalists. In so doing, this research adds to the scholarly discourse surrounding branding by exploring how younger generations are setting the stage for how branding could be perceived and encouraged by news organizations as they advance in their careers. The study involved interviewing 16 public media journalists in the United States who were between the ages of 22 and 28 and had a public-facing Twitter account. Interviews were then thematically coded to identify similar patterns across the journalists' perceptions and practices.

The study's findings were surprising in the way they seemed to debunk common perceptions of this young age group on social media. These journalists are poised as the most social media savvy of their colleagues and probably have demonstrated that their understanding of Twitter logic and their sense of humor seamlessly fits into the personality of Twitter, specifically. But their upbringing as digital natives does not make them branding experts or automatically predisposed to the whims of social media algorithms and pressures. Their insights

convey a certain blend of journalistic values and branding values that seems responsible and promising as the future leaders of the public media newsrooms for which they work.

First, these journalists were overwhelmingly more concerned with upholding traditional journalistic values than they were with garnering attention for themselves. They largely saw branding as an extension of their work, but not an end in and of itself that they were interested in maximizing for the sake of popularity. At least for now, then, there does not seem to be a linear progression toward internalizing the market for self that comes with journalists being steeped in a market for public attention (McManus, 1992). It is possible that their concern for journalistic values comes from being more recently graduated journalists from colleges that taught them the proper motivations to be a journalist. Over time, they might start to take on the branding perceptions of journalists from previous research who were more comfortable using opinion and humor in their branding (Bossio & Holton, 2018; Brems et al., 2017). But it is clear now that their branding perceptions are not necessarily born from their status as digital natives, who might be assumed to be more carefree and narcissistic with their social media use. One participant described their generation as people who are addicted to social media, but certainly don't want to be. Like any addict, they did not wake up one day hoping to be drawn to their phones, or, more specifically, to updates on Twitter. But they *are* deciding to be intentional about how they use their time on the platform. They're surrendered to Twitter logic, yet resistant, internalizing the market for public attention as a means of posting their stories and connecting with relevant audiences. But this internalization is a means to an end of informing. Their standards are based more in their professional identities as public servants and unbiased reporters and community members.

This preference to use Twitter as a means to an end is especially relevant now that, at the time of writing this thesis, National Public Radio has decided to halt Twitter activity on all of its 52 official Twitter accounts in response to being erroneously labeled “state-affiliated media.” Many of the research participants felt strongly that their first responsibility is to the communities for which they report, not to government interests or even their own. Twitter functions for them, then, as a way to connect with their audiences. But even that use of the platform could now be in question for some of the participants, in light of the platform’s growing incompatibility with their goals as media practitioners.

Second, the journalists’ youth makes them very self-conscious about how they are presenting themselves online. Many of the participants cited emotions like fear, stress, worry, and caution as the dominant emotions that characterize their posting patterns on Twitter. Their youth doesn’t necessarily make them bold and fearless. It instead makes them increasingly aware of their disadvantage in the work force, as they have yet to establish deep-rooted reliability and tenure with their employers and their audiences. Even if the reality is that audiences and employers *do* trust them and would be fine with seeing more of their personalities on Twitter, in these journalists’ minds, being more like themselves on social media is risky. It’s not something they are entitled to because of their age group’s comfortability with the platforms, themselves. This hesitancy to take risks makes sense when considering that many journalists their age are already feeling overwhelmed and disillusioned with the demands of journalism (Nölleke et. al, 2022) and find more value in maintaining job security by being unproblematic. At the time of writing this thesis, National Public Radio has laid off 10 percent of its staff in the past month, and BuzzFeed News is shutting down entirely. Their concerns about employability and not creating frivolous reasons to be considered a potential cost cut is more than reasonable.

Finally, these journalists do not claim to be experts in branding and do not seem eager to claim the title of change agents often ascribed to them in the realm of branding, specifically (Broersma & Singer, 2021). None seem to have come from a college that formally trained them in how to brand, besides being scared by their professors into never posting something that might come back to harm their reputation, later. So, they have instead needed to carve out their branding standards on their own, taking tips from other journalists or just observing how differently styled tweets and techniques tend to play out differently on Twitter's algorithm. Therefore, many participants admitted that they are figuring branding out as they go. These responses do not convey a sense of natural leadership in the realm of branding, just because they have grown up with social media at their fingertips. They feel confident about the technical prowess this upbringing grants them. But even though they have developed their own philosophies around social media and how journalists should use it, it does not seem like they are grasping at the opportunity to show their colleagues the way. It seems that, instead, some of them would like to have guides that haven't come from their own brainstorming processes.

Significance of findings

Theoretical implications

Even with the introduction of social media branding in the past decade, winning public attention as a means to an end of informing (McManus, 1992) still seems to be the dominating mindset that guides young journalists' approach to presenting themselves online. These journalists are still certainly feeling the urge (and acting on them, at times) to tweet content that is more emotionally stirring (Deuze, 2005), from pictures of animals to shocking aspects of sexual abuse investigations. But even as public media journalists who do not seem to notice much difference between their branding motivations and those of journalists working for

commercial outlets, they are not becoming sensational junkies. Scholars and media practitioners, alike, do not need to subscribe to the assumption that there is a direct correlation between having an intentionally curated social media profile and becoming more concerned with the likability of that profile than with the journalism, itself.

In this view, the market for attention's structural conflict does not seem to be swiftly toppling or disrupting beyond recognizability the understanding of journalism as a public service. Young journalists still experience an urge to perform (Higgins, 1987), but they are at the same time developing personal values that work alongside journalistic ones, not against. There does not seem to be an emerging news value of popularity that will erroneously shape their approach to branding and, subsequently, the values eventually adopted into journalism as a practice. This study can put those concerns to bed, or, at the very least, delay them until more conclusive hints of such a disruption are discovered.

This is an especially interesting conclusion considering the goals of this research in isolating public media journalists, specifically. As previously mentioned, most of the research participants did not think their branding practices and motivations would be significantly different if they worked for commercial organizations instead of public ones. This suggests that even though their values drive them to work for independently funded outlets whose funding models won't compromise the integrity of their work, those values do not seem to be medium-dependent. Their confidence in remaining true to their mission regardless of working publicly or professionally could mean that the nature of a news organization's funding does not bear much weight in how this generation approaches their work. Perhaps more time exposed to the fallout of either funding model would shift their perspectives. But for now, it does not seem that the market for public attention is infiltrating the perceptions of public media journalists in addition to its

infiltration of commercial journalists. In fact, the opposite could be true. The goal to be independent could be dominating the values of all journalists, to the point where branding motivations are similar in either group.

Practical implications

Practically, this research has revealed that there is more that can be done in journalism schools across the country to prepare journalists for a future of branding themselves alongside their work. Most journalists seemed to only associate social media use with finding jobs or being found out for an old post made in bad judgment. While these uses of social media are important to pay attention to, only presenting social media as a means of getting or losing a job seems to have taken some focus away from the opportunity of using as a companion to journalism. This did not stop the participants from recognizing, for themselves, the capabilities they have fostered engagement and community through their Twitter profiles. But more coaching in this area can help them feel more confident about this pursuit and perhaps less focused on the fear often associated with being themselves online.

More guidance can also be provided in terms of how these journalists can avoid and mitigate the effects of the negative aspects of social media use, such as burnout and harassment. Previous research has identified these adverse effects, but the fact that young journalists are still citing them as sources of stress associated with their job is telling. It seems this research has yet to take effect in the curriculums that are teaching journalists how to navigate the professional world by being others-focused and protective of their own well-being at the same time. Implementing these protective strategies is critical so that fewer journalists become disillusioned with the profession before even spending much time in the field. Right now, even journalism students are anticipating needing to change careers before they even start. Instead, colleges can

empower them with the solution and effective boundaries that can still make a career in journalism possible.

It is not all up to journalism professors, though. Even though some of these participants did not seem confident enough to be leaders in the realm of branding, they will likely need to step up into that responsibility, regardless of their feelings. They are only going to start advancing more in their careers and having more influence in their news organizations. And they have important insights about the desire to protect their privacy and mental health while navigating social media, especially as they have witnessed the adverse effects of intense social media use during the pandemic's lockdown periods. Their adherence to journalistic values and understanding of Twitter logic are great building blocks from which to establish branding standards that are reasonable and effective. It is worth it for them to start approaching their employers with their ideas, so that their news organization's social media policies can be updated to reflect branding as an inherent part of practicing journalism. Of course, as they have nearly all indicated, the choice to brand will be up to the journalist, themselves. But young journalists can at least speak to its value and give their colleagues the tools they've discovered to be successful and honoring to one's personal values, should a journalist choose to add branding to their job responsibilities.

Future research

In order to further the discourse on how branding is taking shape differently for younger entrants into the work force, more research about branding should be done through a comparative lens, so that scholars and media practitioners can start to better understand how these differing views between older and younger journalists are affecting interpersonal relationships within a newsroom. Conducting a study like this by means of a focus group could

be especially beneficial, as the discussion in a focus group can illuminate how journalists of any age are making and negotiating the meaning and usefulness of branding, together. There might also emerge assertions of inherent understanding based on the journalists' varying ages and experience that could provide rich insight into what makes one journalist's stance about branding more "grounded" than another.

More research about how journalists' intersectional identities shape their branding practices would also be important to pursue. There seemed to be variations in feelings about branding based in gender and race, and identifying more of these differences and why they exist will help scholars and media practitioners isolate and find solutions to the structural inequities that could be responsible for these variations. Female journalists, in particular, seemed more likely to express stress and worry at the tangible, adverse effects of their social media behavior, such as people choosing to harass them. Journalists who are in racial minorities seemed more likely to express inner conflict with what causes to associate themselves with online and how those associations might make people question their ability to be unbiased or their comfortability in their newsrooms. These worries need to be explored in more depth so that scholars can continue disrupting the idea that journalists approach their work from a view of nowhere. Further research can empower individuals in marginalized identities by suggesting strategies for harm mitigation and validating their experiences through other research participants' expressed experiences.

Although the photo elicitation section was meant to confront cognitive dissonance present in the participants' perceptions about branding, there still seemed to be some discrepancies in some of the participants' responses that warrants studies on those topics. For example, conducting studies about the degree of importance journalists assign to the witnesses of

their work would be an interesting focus, as journalists in this study seemed to be undecided, themselves, at how important it was to them to have an audience to share their work with. Some seemed eager to deny the need to brand themselves to an audience, holding to the work they produce as evidence of their role as journalists. But some of the same participants also identified the importance of having that work seen by others, namely through their own means of promoting that work. Studying this need for an audience can provide rich insight into how much of a journalist's validation is shaped from simply having others positively interact with their work. Another potential avenue of study could involve focusing on how journalists separate their professional and personal identities online. There seemed to be some difficulty among participants identifying when their online presentation was just a natural extension of self or an intentionally curated presentation of self. Conducting research to learn more about how journalists make those distinctions would be beneficial so that scholars can have clarity about when a personal brand could even be considered an act of branding. Perhaps there are more definitions that need to be considered to account for those who do not find that sharing information from their personal lives, even in relation to their work, an act of branding.

As journalism continues to be increasingly practiced and consumed in online spaces, it is important to research how journalistic values are taking shape in online spaces that have their own inherent values and priorities. This study has identified how young journalists, in particular, are negotiating these online values with which they've grown up with the traditional journalistic values that they began learning a little later on in life. Even still, in discussing branding perceptions with these journalists and how those perceptions shape their branding practices, this study revealed that pillars that uphold the morality of journalism seem to be winning out against the logics of social media use. For these journalists, embracing one or the other does not have to

be done in a mutually exclusive manner. That does not mean a desire to be funny or liked online is completely outside of these journalist's view. It does mean that there also exists an ability to temper these branding desires in tandem with their professional responsibilities.

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APPENDIX A
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introductory Questions:

How regularly do you Tweet?

How would you describe the content of your tweets?

Professional? Personal? A mix of both?

How would you define branding?

Would you define any of your posting patterns on Twitter as branding? Why or why not?

To what extent is branding something you embrace, or something that you cringe at?

Can you explain why you think you might feel this way?

RQ 1: What motivates young public radio journalists to engage in individual journalistic branding on Twitter?

Why do you engage in individual journalistic branding? OR 1. Why do you tweet regularly?

If self-preservation: Why do you feel like you must make yourself secure?

If popularity: Why do you want to be known?

Would your thoughts about branding be different if you worked for a commercial news organization? Why or why not?

How do you think your age might impact the way you approach branding?

What is your process when you brand on Twitter? OR 3. What is your process when you tweet on Twitter?

Are the pressures to brand more internal or external?

Can you describe the internal pressures to me?

Can you describe the external pressures to me?

Which do you find most influential – internal or external pressures?

How did you approach social media use before becoming a journalist?

What do you enjoy about branding? OR 4. What do you enjoy about tweeting regularly?

What do you dislike about branding? OR 4. What do you dislike about tweeting regularly?

Does the amount of branding you do affect your career? How so? OR 5. Does the amount of tweeting you do affect your career? How so?

How do you describe your audience, and who they are to you? Who are you to them?

To what extent do you compare yourself to an influencer?

RQ 2: How do young public radio journalists situate journalistic branding among their other news values?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is journalistic branding to you? On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is tweeting regularly to you?

Where does (self-preservation, popularity, or other discovered motivation) fall in relation to other news values like accuracy, holding the power into account, objectivity?

To you, is there a difference between the value of branding and other news values like objectivity and impartiality?

Do you need to brand to be a journalist? OR 3. Do you need to tweet regularly to be a journalist?

If YES: Why?

If NO: Why not?

What is something you won't tweet, and why? Can you describe those boundaries to me?

Can you give me an example of a time when you experienced an internal conflict while tweeting something (wanting to post something but questioning whether that content was appropriate for your audience and your image)?

If YES: How did you decide what to post?

If NO: Why do you think you don't experience those conflicts?

Say a story you reported/produced and handles a sensitive topic is published. You are very proud of how it turns out. How will you post about it on Twitter?

What do you think of this tweet from Ailsa Chang (pasted below)? What do you think she's trying to accomplish? How might you accomplish something similar?

“PSA from a very nearsighted woman: The next time you go in to renew your contact lens prescription, pay extra for retinal scans. They found a blob in the back of my eye, which turned out to be a retina tear. Now getting lasered to avert future disaster. So glad I caught this!”

How necessary is this type of tweeting?

How do you navigate your newsroom's policies regarding social media use?

How pressured do you feel by your newsroom to brand OR 6. How pressured do you feel by your newsroom to tweet regularly?

Photo elicitation section:

What were you trying to achieve in this tweet?

Were you internally or externally motivated to make this tweet? Can you explain what led you to this internal or external motivation?

Why do you think you structured the tweet this way?

Why do you think you worded the tweet this way?

If you were to describe the persona being portrayed in this tweet, who would you describe? What are the characteristics of the person tweeting this?

Does this tweet seem like a branding tweet to you? Why or why not?

How does it feel to analyze the tweet in this way?

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

I am writing to you in regards to research I am conducting for my thesis study. I am working toward my Masters at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, and conducting research is a part of my degree requirement. I've chosen to research journalistic branding — specifically, how young journalists working in public radio perceive their own branding practices. As a public radio journalist starting out your professional career, I am hoping you will be able and willing to take part in this very important study exploring how young journalists are navigating their presentation on social media within a news organization that has its own social media policies. I know you would have great insight into this topic and would be honored if you would be willing to participate.

The study will involve an hour-long interview regarding what motivates you to brand yourself on Twitter and how you situate branding among your other news values. In addition, I will ask you about your thought process behind some of your Tweets. The interview will take place on Zoom and will be arranged at a time of your convenience. By taking part in this research, you will further the knowledge of how a generation of digital-native journalists are renegotiating the roles journalists have in society. Do know that while your insights will be valuable to the study, your identity will remain completely anonymous throughout the data analysis process and in final publication. I hope you are interested and able to participate.

Please respond to this email with any questions that you might have about the study. If you are interested, please fill out the interest survey [here](#) to determine your eligibility. Once eligibility is determined, I will send you a consent form. Please fill in your name where indicated on the form in order to provide your consent.

APPENDIX C
STUDY CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: Journalist or Influencer? Exploring Young Public Radio Journalists' Perceptions of Journalistic Branding on Twitter
Principal Investigator/Researcher: may also include advisor for student-led projects

IRB Reference Number: 2094849

You are being invited to take part in a research project. You must be a full-time public radio journalist in the United States who is 22 to 28 years old and has a public-facing Twitter account in order to participate. Participation is voluntary, and you may stop being in this study at any time. The purpose of this research project is to understand young public radio journalists' perceptions about branding. You are being asked to undergo an hour-long Zoom interview about your thought process behind your branding practices, including your motivation to brand and how you situate branding among your other news values. The information you provide will be kept confidential and only the research team will have access to it. All identifiers will be stripped after the interview is completed, as all of the data associated with your interview will be de-identified and stored under a letter in the alphabet. Therefore, your identity will remain completely anonymous throughout the data analysis process and in final publication. After the interview is completed, you will receive a follow-up survey that will ask you questions about your interview experience. Completing this survey should take five to ten minutes.

If you have questions about this study, you can contact the Katelynn McIlwain at 815-297-2852.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-3181 or muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you want to talk privately about any concerns or issues related to your participation, you may contact the Research Participant Advocacy at 888-280-5002 (a free call) or email muresearchrpa@missouri.edu.

You can ask the researcher to provide you with a copy of this consent for your records, or you can save a copy of this consent if it has already been provided to you. We appreciate your consideration to participate in this study.

APPENDIX D
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board
 University of Missouri-Columbia
 FWA Number: 00002876
 IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

310 Jesse Hall
 Columbia, MO 65211
 573-882-3181
 irb@missouri.edu

December 09, 2022

Principal Investigator: Katelynn M McIlwain
 Department: Journalism

Your IRB Application to project entitled Journalist or Influencer? Exploring Young Public Radio Journalists' Perceptions of Journalistic Branding on Twitter was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2094849
IRB Review Number	386317
Initial Application Approval Date	December 09, 2022
IRB Expiration Date	December 09, 2023
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(ii)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
HIPAA Category	No HIPAA
Approved Documents	Informed Consent & Assent - Consent (Exempt Studies Only): #623716 Other Study Documents - Follow-Up Letter/Communication to Participant: #623246 Other Study Documents - Instruments (i.e. surveys): #623245 Other Study Documents - Interview Questions: #623553 Recruitment Materials - Recruitment E-Mail: #623715

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All study changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
3. Major noncompliance must be reported to the MU IRB on the Event Report within 5 business days of the research team becoming aware of the deviation. Major noncompliance are deviations that caused harm or have the potential to cause harm to research subjects or others, and have or may have affected subject's rights, safety, and/or welfare. Please refer to the MU IRB Noncompliance policy for additional details.

4. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
5. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure: http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board