

# STRATEGIES IN JOURNALISTIC BRANDING ON SOCIAL MEDIA: THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC AND BUSINESS DIMENSIONS ACCORDING TO FUTURE JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS

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## ABSTRACT:

Social media have enabled journalists to promote their work and interact with audiences without the intermediation of their organisation. Branding on social media has become a new competency that journalists have to address. It is considered an indicator of any journalist's reputation and also a way to face the difficulties encountered in the sector. However, there is no research that specifically focuses on personal branding in the field of journalism education. Drawing on the perceptions of future generations of journalists, this research examines the specific skills, practices, attitudes and personality traits associated with branding on social media. By a quantitative approach based on surveys (n = 262), it aims to identify the most effective strategies that students of journalism can each adopt in building a personal brand. Findings show that the students consider that branding is what makes journalists unique, and is the way to show the character, skills and abilities that differentiate them from other journalists. Regarding the strategies, results indicate that positioning, interaction and content curation are the most valued. By contrast, neither self-promotion of own content nor humanisation skills are highlighted enough. On the other hand, a strong link has been found between the brand and the influence in society, as well as between the brand and the reformulation of some classic journalistic values and principles. Moreover, despite branding's origins in the field of marketing, future journalists repurpose the concept and value its implications in both the business and public dimensions of journalism equally.

## KEY WORDS:

classic journalistic norms, journalism students, journalism studies, journalistic branding, personal brand

## Introduction

A significant percentage of journalists consider that the future of journalism depends on improving their self-branding on social media.<sup>1</sup> The difficulties faced by the journalism sector and the lack of a clear business

<sup>1</sup> PICARD, R. G.: *Journalists' Perceptions of the Future of Journalistic Work*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2015. [online]. [2019-07-26]. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Journalists%27%20Perceptions%20of%20the%20Future%20of%20Journalistic%20Work.pdf>>.



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model in the digital environment<sup>2</sup> force journalists to contend with new skills and competences aimed at personal branding on social media as a possible way to optimise and strengthen their relationship with users.<sup>3</sup> Social media offer the possibility of directly connecting with a potential audience,<sup>4</sup> but that implies taking precautions and asking oneself about the image one cares to project. Indeed, a journalist's digital identity is considered an indicator of their credibility.<sup>5</sup>

The journalistic interest in promoting self-branding is justified by at least three reasons, according to Molyneux.<sup>6</sup> First, personal branding gives journalists their own voice, autonomy and independence from media corporations, because journalists can produce and disseminate content on their own.<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, digital social media contribute to the reevaluation of professionals who know how to adapt their image and content to audience demand. Second, in connection with the first reason, there are business motivations. As branding re-values the professional curriculum, it offers journalists the options of being promoted, finding a better job or even starting journalistic projects on their own. Third, a brand recognisable to the audience satisfies the narcissistic tendency of the journalist.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, self-branding is seen as one of the possible solutions for dealing with the crisis in the journalism sector. In the digital context, future journalists should be able to build their reputation and a personal brand that sets them apart from others, as well as know how to professionally manage their digital identity. In this regard, learning how to design a solid communicative strategy on social media appears to be essential for journalism students. All this is in order to achieve more followers and autonomy, to take advantage of the potential of the Internet, as well as to improve job opportunities or advance entrepreneurial journalism.

To the best of our knowledge, there is no research that specifically studies the process of personal branding in the field of journalism education. In this sense, the study delves into their perceptions of branding and its implications, considering that journalism students, who are digital natives, generally use social media during their formative years without evaluating the consequences of their posts, their image or reputation. This current research aims to contribute to a definitively improved understanding of the skills, practices and personality traits most strongly associated with the self-branding of journalism students on social media, which will allow us to compare the results with the literature about the practices of professional journalists.

## Journalistic Branding on Digital Social Media

The term "personal branding" was popularised by Peters<sup>9</sup> in the article *The Brand Called You*.<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, this expression has been used in areas such as advertising, marketing or Public Relations<sup>11</sup> in connection with a brand's reputation. In these fields, it has been defined as the way to present a person's

character and distinctive abilities.<sup>12</sup> More recently, this concept has been transferred to the field of journalism, due to the potential of the Internet and social media, which allow journalists to interact with the public.<sup>13</sup> Thus, research about personal branding is relatively recent in journalism, while practically null in the field of journalism education. On the other hand, despite most studies about journalistic branding being focused on *Twitter*, these findings can be generalised to other social media.

In this context, both the fact that social media work like a shop window and users employ social media for the purpose of personal branding are widely accepted.<sup>14</sup> Social media offer journalists the opportunity to show how they develop their work and what their private life is like in a transparent way.<sup>15</sup> Journalists are very aware of the importance of the brand, with which they want to be accepted by the audience not only for their work, but also for their way of being.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the setting up of a personal brand is a continuous process. Thus, it is vital to remain vigilant, because steps taken in public have a direct impact on how users perceive journalists' digital identities.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, how journalists choose to present themselves on social media also explains how they understand journalism and their own role in society,<sup>18</sup> and perceptions about their roles also position journalists in their professional sector and the culture of journalism.<sup>19</sup>

Instead of defining the concept of "journalistic branding", scholarly literature has focused on the main digital practices or skills that promote journalistic branding,<sup>20</sup> but without identifying connections between them. Practices such as self-reference, spreading opinions, interacting with followers, joking, being ironic or sharing private life details are the most mentioned.<sup>21</sup> However, there is no consensus about how much journalists should reveal about themselves. That decision usually depends on the specific position in the company or roles attributed to each journalist.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, Brems et al. remark upon four dilemmas to be faced by journalists in the building of their digital personal brand.<sup>23</sup> Firstly, journalists have to decide if they only disseminate information, or if they also converse and network with users. Secondly, they have to decide if they should limit their pursuits to the facts, or if they should also give opinions. Thirdly, there is the option of talking about private issues or exclusively practising professional issues. Finally, journalists can choose a strategy of explicit or implicit self-promotion. Those dilemmas are related to both the reformulation of some classic norms, values and principles of journalism<sup>24</sup> and the image projected by journalists and later perceived by social media users. That is to say, generally speaking, decisions about the mentioned dilemmas will shape the journalist's personal brand.

2 See also: CASERO-RIPOLLÉS, A.: Prensa en Internet: Nuevos Modelos de Negocio en el Escenario de la Convergencia. In *El Profesional de la Información*, 2010, Vol. 19, No. 6, p. 601; PEW RESEARCH CENTER: *State of the News Media*. [online]. [2019-06-21]. Available at: <<https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/>>.

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7 MOLYNEUX, L. et al.: How Journalists Engage in Branding on Twitter: Individual, Organizational, and Institutional Levels. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 10, p. 1398.

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16 MOLYNEUX, L., HOLTON, A. E.: Branding (Health) Journalism: Perceptions, Practices and Emerging Norms. In *Digital Journalism*, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 237.

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18 OLAUSSON, U.: The Reinvented Journalist: The Discursive Construction of Professional Identity on Twitter. In *Digital Journalism*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 78.

19 HANITZSCH, T.: Deconstructing Journalism Culture: Toward a Universal Theory. In *Communication Theory*, 2007, Vol. 17, No. 4, p. 369.

20 CANTER, L.: Personalised Tweeting: The Emerging Practices of Journalists on Twitter. In *Digital Journalism*, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 6, p. 897.

21 COZMA, R., CHEN, K. J.: What's in a Tweet? Foreign Correspondents' Use of Social Media. In *Journalism Practice*, 2013, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 42.

22 ROGSTAD, I. D.: Political News Journalists in Social Media: Transforming Political Reporters into Political Pundits? In *Journalism Practice*, 2014, Vol. 8, No. 6, p. 700.

23 BREMS, C. et al.: Personal Branding on Twitter: How Employed and Freelance Journalists Stage Themselves on Social Media. In *Digital Journalism*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 449.

24 See also: HERMIDA, A.: #Journalism: Reconfiguring Journalism Research about Twitter, One Tweet at a Time. In *Digital Journalism*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 301.; PARMELEE, J. H.: Political Journalists and Twitter: Influences on Norms and Practices. In *Journal of Media Practice*, 2013, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 302.

# Strategies Aimed at Personal Branding in Journalism

From the practices and skills associated with journalistic branding, four strategies to build a personal brand in journalism have been proposed: *positioning*, *content curation*, *personalisation* and *specialisation*.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, *positioning* is the most valued strategy aimed at boosting journalistic branding; it consists of giving opinions, taking sides in a political conflict, openly defending ideas and even showing one's ideology. The higher the level of the journalist's ideological involvement, the higher therefore is the impact on audience perception and on the creation of the personal brand. In addition to expressing opinions in favour of one's ideas, *positioning* includes practices such as supporting groups and citizen movements and monitoring the elites in power. In this regard, journalists, especially editorialists and freelancers, are increasingly inclined to giving opinions on social media.<sup>26</sup>

*Content curation* is the second most valued strategy and it consists of gatekeeping, prioritising and recommending content for the audience. This strategy is connected to the journalistic competence of evaluating information and 'separating the wheat from the chaff' in a context characterised by information overload. In this sense, the more content from competing media, experts or alternative sources journalists recommend, the greater the credibility and appearance of independence they obtain is. Moreover, *content curation* includes the task of checking to refute rumours and fake news. All these skills and practices reinforce journalists' personal brands.

*Personalisation* is the third most mentioned strategy to promote journalistic branding and includes two dimensions: *interaction* and *humanisation*. *Interaction* includes any practice aimed at directly contacting users (shared posts, retweets, links, mentions, hashtags, likes and favourites, replies and conversations) to gain audience loyalty and engagement. It has been assumed that the more intense the dialogue, the more reinforced the personal brand. However, dialogue with the audience is limited in some contexts.<sup>27</sup>

*Humanisation* is the second dimension of *personalisation* strategy and involves any skill or practice different from interaction that also promotes an approach to the public,<sup>28</sup> such as sharing one's private life and hobbies, reporting backstage goings-on during journalistic coverage, expressing oneself in an informal tone, or using humour and entertainment.<sup>29</sup> The use of personal photographs and funny videos, memes or gifs can be useful to appear more humanised. In this context, freelancers are more likely to share private issues than mainstream media journalists.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, *specialisation* is the fourth and least frequent strategy to boost journalistic branding and it consists of promoting specialised content. Not only do journalists search and share as content curators, but they also generate their own specialised content. Expert content holds added value for the audience. Therefore, this strategy also contributes to building a personal brand.

25 LÓPEZ-MERI, A., CASERO-RIPOLLÉS, A.: Las Estrategias de los Periodistas para la Construcción de Marca Personal en Twitter: Posicionamiento, Curación de Contenidos, Personalización y Especialización. In *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación*, 2017, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 66.

26 HUNTER, A.: Crowdfunding Independent and Freelance Journalism: Negotiating Journalistic Norms of Autonomy and Objectivity. In *New Media & Society*, 2015, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 284.

27 See also: LEE, N. Y. et al.: Tweeting Public Affairs or Personal Affairs? Journalists' Tweets, Interactivity, and Ideology. In *Journalism*, 2016, Vol. 17, No. 7, p. 859; PÉREZ-SOLER, S., MICÓ-SANZ, J. LL.: El mito de la conversación global. Usos de Twitter en las redacciones periodísticas catalanas y belgas. In *El Profesional de la Información*, 2015, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 252.

28 MOLYNEUX, L. et al.: How Journalists Engage in Branding on Twitter: Individual, Organizational, and Institutional Levels. In *Information, Communication & Society*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 10, p. 1398.

29 CANTER, L.: Personalised Tweeting: The Emerging Practices of Journalists on Twitter. In *Digital Journalism*, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 6, p. 901.

30 BREMS, C. et al.: Personal Branding on Twitter: How Employed and Freelance Journalists Stage Themselves on Social Media. In *Digital Journalism*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 456.

## Method and Data

The study applies the previous literature on the practices and skills associated with journalistic branding to interview journalism students and inquire if their perceptions match with the practice and impressions of professional journalists. Specifically, the aim is to know what students perceive regarding the implications of having a personal brand in journalism, and which strategies contribute to its development. In addition, to deepen the potential implications of the study, several categories distributed into two dimensions have been set: the public dimension and the business dimension of journalism.

The public dimension is related to the commitment of journalism to citizenship, beyond the economic interests of media companies, as well as the development of its social and democratic functions in society.<sup>31</sup> In this work, this dimension includes five categories: influence on public opinion and the media agenda; credibility to become a benchmark; capacity to make messages go viral; capacity to cause changes in society; and public accountability.

On the other hand, the business dimension is related to the job opportunities that journalistic branding implies, as well as concepts such as marketing, entrepreneurship or business models in the sector of journalism.<sup>32</sup> This dimension includes seven categories: options to find a job or improve working conditions; options to start up a journalistic business; options to collaborate with mainstream media; more working hours; autonomy with respect to a company; benefits for a company; and harm to a company.

Thus, by a quantitative method based on a survey conducted on the students of Journalism from the Universitat Jaume I of Castelló (Spain), this work aims to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do future journalists perceive personal branding and its implications regarding both the public and business dimensions of journalism?

**RQ2:** What strategies do journalism students most strongly associate with journalistic branding on digital social media in terms of skills and professional practices?

**RQ3:** What personality traits and attitudes are the most valued by journalism students in order to boost personal branding?

The field survey was carried out during March and April 2018. From an initial sample of 360 participants, 262 students responded (a rate of 72.78%). Moreover, a double stratification has been applied to the sample, by both gender and educational level. The T-student statistics test takes a value of 35.063 with 261 degrees of freedom (n-1) and a significance of .000. The value of significance (p<.05) indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the tested sample and the population. The margin of error is equal to  $\pm 3\%$ , with a confidence interval of 95%.

Concerning the educational level, there is a distinction between Starter Students (first and second years of the Journalism Degree), with 100 respondents (that represent 38.2% of the sample); and Advanced Students (third and fourth years), with 162 people responding (61.8%). Regarding gender, 47.7% of the respondents are female while 52.3% are male. However, no statistically significant differences were observed either with respect to the educational level or the gender of the respondents. For this reason, the results are presented only in a general way, without considering this double stratification.

31 See also: CHRISTIANS, C. G. et al.: *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies*. Chicago : University of Illinois Press, 2010, p. 114; HAAS, T., STEINER, L.: Public Journalism: A Reply to Critics. In *Journalism*, 2006, Vol. 7, No 2, p. 238.

32 See also: ACEITUNO-ACEITUNO, P. et al.: University Training on Entrepreneurship in Communication and Journalism Business Projects. In *Comunicar*, 2018, Vol. 26, No. 57, p. 92; CASERO-RIPOLLÉS, A.: Prensa en Internet: Nuevos Modelos de Negocio en el Escenario de la Convergencia. In *El Profesional de la Información*, 2010, Vol. 19, No. 6, p. 600.

The survey, with closed questions, allows us to approach how journalism students perceive self-branding in journalism. There are three types of questions. Firstly, a question in which the respondents must select which definitions of personal branding provided best fit those they believe. Secondly, there are some questions, such as the one about the skills, in which each value was measured with a five-level Likert scale. The scale ranges from 'not important' (1) to 'very important' (5). And thirdly, questions such as those referring to personality or practice, in which students can select up to a maximum of three options from those proposed. The processing of the data was carried out with SPSS software (v.24).

## Results

### *Defining Personal Branding in Journalism*

To answer the RQ1, journalism students were asked about the term "personal branding" and its implications in their future profession. Concerning the concept, the first of the three definitions provided to the respondents was the most selected (Table 1). Most students considered having a recognisable personal brand that makes a journalist unique and helps to distinguish them from others the most important fact (63.7%). Meanwhile, other dimensions associated with the brand, such as reputation or authenticity, did not obtain a remarkable result (below 20%).

Table 1: Definitions of personal branding in journalism

1. The personal brand of each journalist is what makes them unique, the way in which they demonstrate their character, skills and abilities that differentiate them from other journalists.	63.7%
2. The personal brand of the journalist is the reputation, set of sensations, perceptions and memories generated in others, the impression that is gathered, what others think about them as a journalist.	18.7%
3. The personal brand of each journalist is their authenticity, showing their essence and making the best of themselves deriving from their own actions.	17.6%

Source: Own processing

Perceptions about the implications of having a personal brand also contribute to defining this term in the field of journalism (Table 2). Students had to value 12 items with a five-level Likert scale ranging from 'not at all probable' (1) to 'very probable' (5). According to the respondents, the ability to influence public opinion and the media agenda is the most probable implication of self-branding in journalism (mean = 4.17; SD = .687), followed by the possibility of gaining credibility, becoming a benchmark for journalism and society (mean = 4.10; SD = .774), and the capacity to make their particular messages go viral because of an increase in followers (mean = 4.08; SD = .813). Indeed, from the perspective of the public dimension of journalism, both the credibility and the increase in followers could be considered factors that influence society. Moreover, the capacity to cause changes or develop actions in the offline public sphere is also considerably valued (mean = 3.81; SD = .824). That also implies increased responsibility and accountability to the public (mean = 3.80; SD = .971).

Table 2: Implications of having a personal brand in journalism

Statements included in the survey	Mean	Standard Deviation
I1. A journalist with a personal brand increases the ability to influence public opinion and the media agenda.	4.17	.687
I2. A journalist with a personal brand gains credibility and becomes a benchmark for journalism and society.	4.10	.774

I3. A journalist with a personal brand has a greater capacity to make messages go viral because of the increase in followers.	4.08	.813
I4. A journalist with a personal brand has more options both for finding work as well as improving their working conditions.	3.97	.913
I5. A journalist with a personal brand has a greater capacity to cause changes/ actions in the offline sphere.	3.81	.824
I6. A journalist with a personal brand has a great responsibility to be accountable to the public.	3.80	.971
I7. A journalist with a personal brand has more options to start a viable journalistic business.	3.78	.912
I8. A journalist with a personal brand benefits the company.	3.75	.851
I9. A journalist with a personal brand has more options to collaborate with the mainstream media.	3.53	1.001
I10. A journalist with a personal brand has to work more hours than others if they want to maintain and consolidate it.	3.53	1.096
I11. A journalist with a personal brand loses privacy but gains autonomy with respect to the company.	3.08	.987
I12. A journalist with a personal brand harms the company.	2.13	.892

Source: Own processing

On the other hand, implications regarding the business dimension of journalism are also highly valued (Table 2), especially those related to job opportunities such as achieving more options to find work and improving working conditions (mean = 3.97; SD = .913), starting a viable journalistic business (mean = 3.78; SD = .912), or collaborating with the mainstream media (mean = 3.53; SD = 1.001). Finally, journalism students do not tend to believe that having a brand harms journalistic companies (mean = 2.13; SD = .892). This fact is actually the only implication with a value below 3 points. By contrast, respondents consider personal branding as a benefit for journalists as well as their companies (mean = 3.75; SD = .851).

Therefore, according to the data, the implications related to the public dimension of journalism (I1, I2, I3, I5, I6) and those related to the business dimension (I4, I7, I8, I9, I10, I11, I12) play a similar role in the students' perceptions. There is no statistically significant difference between the effects of branding on the public dimension (mean = 3.65; SD = .460) and on the business dimension (mean = 3.63; SD = .535) (Table 3). Therefore, generally speaking, journalism students understand that personal branding contributes to reinforcing both the public and business dimensions.

Table 3: Branding implications and dimensions of journalism

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Public Dimension (I1, I2, I3, I5, I6)	3.65	.460
Business Dimension (I4, I7, I8, I9, I10, I11, I12)	3.63	.535

Source: Own processing

### *Strategies Aimed at Journalistic Branding on Social Media*

Regarding the RQ2, journalism students were asked about the skills that ought to distinguish a journalist to build their personal brand in the digital environment. They had to value 8 items with a five-level Likert scale ranging from 'not important' (1) to 'very important' (5). In this regard, polyvalence (mean = 4.23; SD = .859) is the most valued skill (Table 4). This data shows that students consider the use of different formats in their

publications, such as images, multimedia content or infographics, as an ideal way to differentiate themselves from other journalists. In addition, interaction (mean = 4.15; SD = .919) and regularity (mean = 4.12; SD = .793) are viewed as positive options to boost personal branding in journalism. In other words, journalism students highly value their discussions, responses and debates with followers, not only with those people in the public eye or celebrities but also with ordinary people, as well as retweeting or sharing valued messages from their followers.

Table 4: Skills to build a personal brand in journalism

Statements included in the survey	Mean	Standard Deviation
Polyvalence. Using all kinds of formats in their publications (photographs, videos, multimedia content, infographics ...).	4.23	.859
Interaction. Discussing with and responding to followers (not only people in the public eye or celebrities). Generating debates and continuing them. Retweeting or sharing messages valued from the followers.	4.15	.919
Regularity. Constancy and rapid updating, both in the publication of content and in the interactions with followers.	4.12	.793
Content curation. Selecting and recommending content of interest and quality, usually through links to the original sources (content regardless of source, even from rivals).	3.96	.822
Professionalism. Indicating in their social media accounts that they are journalists and including data such as the company where they work or curriculum details.	3.85	.976
Specialisation. Posting or recommending content linked to specialised journalism.	3.82	.895
Community building. Appealing to common or shared interests and objectives, ideologies or ideals, in order to build loyalty and strengthen the link between groups of followers.	3.39	.976
Humanisation. Being close, using an informal tone and simple language, making jokes, sharing private life details (family, friends, hobbies, travel ...).	3.05	1.318

Source: Own processing

To a lesser degree, journalism students also highlight skills such as content curation (mean = 3.96; SD = .822) (Table 4). This aspect is complemented by recommending content linked to specialised journalism (mean = 3.82; SD = .895). Students also value journalists indicating their occupation and other curriculum details on their social media accounts (mean = 3.85; SD = .976) as a way of showing their professionalism and being honest with users. Nevertheless, using an informal tone, making jokes and sharing private life details to promote a personal brand would be less important skills (mean = 3.05; SD = 1.318), along with appealing to common or shared ideologies or ideals (mean = 3.39; SD = .976) (Table 4).

Findings also show the professional practices journalism students consider most significant in this field. For evaluating these practices, respondents had to choose a maximum of three options from those proposed in the survey. Posting comments and criticisms (45%); discussing and responding to any type of user (45%); correcting fake news, rumours or unverified details (43.9%); arguing when debate is generated (42%); and reporting current events and sharing news (40.5%) are the most valued journalistic branding practices (Table 5). Indeed, the first two mentioned parameters are associated with practices inherent to social media management and the remaining items are linked to the values of traditional journalism such as rigour, independence, credibility, truth or precision.

Table 5: Professional practices associated with journalistic branding

Statements included in the survey	
Commenting, taking sides, criticising, making moral judgments.	45%

Discussing, asking, responding to any type of user.	45%
Correcting fake news, rumours or unverified details.	43.9%
Arguing when debate is generated.	42%
Reporting on current events, sharing news.	40.5%
Self-promoting work.	21.8%
Reflecting on journalistic practice.	21.4%
Broadcasting live while covering news.	11.8%
Sharing backstage aspects of work, unknown to the public.	11.1%
Posting scoops in social media before their media.	5.7%
Promoting other journalists' work.	5%
Sharing aspects of private life.	1.5%

Source: Own processing

At the midway point, according to the students, journalists can develop their brand by self-promoting their work (21.8%), reflecting on journalistic practice (21.4%), broadcasting news coverage (11.8%), and sharing the backstage goings-on of their daily work (11.1%) (Table 5). In other words, despite the modest support (between 11% and 21%), according to the respondents, the aspect of journalists showing their professional daily lives could be a way to build a personal brand in this profession. It is, therefore, a matter of transparency. On the other hand, posting scoops on social media (5.7%); promoting other journalists' work (5%); and sharing private life aspects (1.5%) are the least valued professional practices (Table 5). Namely, the same tendency is observed regarding skills. In the students' opinion, private issues do not seem to be important when building a brand (Table 4).

## *Influence of the Personality Traits and Attitudes on Journalistic Branding*

In order to answer the RQ3, journalism students were asked about the personality traits and attitudes that favour personal branding (Table 6). Respondents had to choose a maximum of three options from those proposed in the survey. The personality trait most valued by students is being critical of oneself (64.1%). The respondents positively view that journalists are able to recognise their mistakes publicly and are willing to rectify whenever possible. This aspect agrees with the fact that the second most valued trait is being coherent and maintaining the same attitude across all social media (56.5%) (Table 6). That is to say, students hold in esteem that journalists act in the same way across all their social media accounts, so if they rectify some content on one platform, they suppose that the same will be done on the rest of their social media accounts.

At the intermediate stage, respondents positively value being critical of power and reporting its abuses (47.7%), being accessible, responding to comments and giving advice (45.4%) (Table 6). Consequently, on the one hand, students highly value journalists being critical of people in power and exercising the function of the watchdog traditionally assigned to journalists. On the other hand, they highly value both interaction and humanisation as mechanisms to promote a self-brand in journalism. In other words, they appreciate journalists having personal contact with other users, either by responding directly to a message or using tools such as retweets, hashtags or mentions. This aspect seems to be reinforced if journalists are witty in their publications (26.7%) or have a sense of humour and demonstrate it in their messages (8.8%) (Table 6).

By contrast, journalism students do not believe that personality traits and attitudes such as expressing personal feelings (0%), interacting only with publicly active people (0.8%) or being controversial (2.3%) can help journalists to create their own personal brand in the digital environment (Table 6).

Table 6: Personality traits and attitudes associated with journalistic branding

Statements included in the survey	
Being critical of oneself. Recognising own mistakes and rectifying publicly.	64.1%
Being coherent and maintaining the same attitude on all social media.	56.5%
Being critical of power and denouncing its abuses.	47.7%
Being accessible, answering, solving doubts, giving advice...	45.4%
Being witty in publications.	26.7%
Being generous. Recognising the successes and merits of other people.	23.7%
Linking only content that comes from official or authorised sources.	9.3%
Having a sense of humour and demonstrating this in messages.	8.8%
Being critical of conventional media.	5.7%
Being controversial in their opinions.	2.3%
Interacting only with publicly known people and avoiding anonymous users.	0.8%
Being vulnerable and expressing personal feelings.	0%

Source: Own processing

## Conclusions and Discussion

Results show that journalism students attribute an important role to influence as the main implication of having a personal brand in journalism. In other words, in relation to RQ1, when journalists build their brand based on specific skills, practices, attitudes and personality traits that make them unique and recognisable by users, they can improve their ability to influence society and the journalism sector.

Moreover, brand implications are equally valued in the public and business dimensions of journalism. On the one hand, regarding the public dimension, the influence drawn from branding is strongly linked to some classic journalistic norms and values such as credibility, honesty, independence and accountability to the public. Besides, journalism students positively associate the ability to produce changes in public opinion and the media agenda with journalistic branding. On the other hand, regarding the business dimension, students also associate the improvement of working conditions with personal branding. Indeed, they highly believe that personal branding on social media promotes journalists, from the marketing perspective, and gives them the chance of working or collaborating with mainstream media.

Thus, branding effects on both the public and business dimensions of journalism play a similar role in the students' perceptions. That is a significant finding when we consider that personal branding is a concept traditionally linked to marketing. There is an obvious polarisation among students over this issue. Against every expectation, the future generations of journalists reconfigure the concept of branding and reinforce the public dimension of journalism, focusing the importance of branding not only on the effects on marketing or employment, but also on journalism's social and democratic functions.

Concerning RQ2, in the journalism students' opinion, the most effective strategies aimed at journalistic branding would be positioning, interaction and content curation, according to the classification set by López-Meri and Casero-Ripollés.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, in the perception of the students, the most effective practices for journalists to build a personal brand on social media would be making comments and criticisms, even taking a side in conflicts (positioning); discussing and talking with users (interaction); and sharing information,

33 LÓPEZ-MERI, A., CASERO-RIPOLLÉS, A.: Las Estrategias de los Periodistas para la Construcción de Marca Personal en Twitter: Posicionamiento, Curación de Contenidos, Personalización y Especialización. In *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación*, 2017, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 67.

verifying news and refuting rumours (content curation). In addition, the most valued skills are the ability to discuss and generate debate, being consistent both in posting and replying to followers, and doing all that across whichever format. The capacity to select and recommend contents of quality or specialised contents is also highly valuable.

By contrast, the least effective strategy would be humanisation. Indeed, the skill that journalism students value the least is the ability to be close, through practices such as using an informal tone, making jokes, being ironic, sharing private information or showing what is going on backstage. The capability to build a community, related to the practice of appealing to common interests, ideologies or ideals to strengthen the link between one's followers' group is, in addition, also poorly appreciated. On the other hand, the fact that most of the positively valued skills and practices are related to competences that journalism students acquire in their training years is remarkable. Instead, the least valued skills and practices are those that depend on their initiative, creativity or personal attitude.

Finally, regarding RQ3, being critical of power and being accessible to the audience would be the most effective attitudes and personality traits to build a personal brand in journalism. These two items can be linked to positioning and interaction strategies. Therefore, there is concordance between the practices and attitudes most valued by journalism students in order to further personal branding. Paradoxically, despite the importance given to practices of making comments and criticisms or taking sides, journalism students barely choose other attitudes such as being controversial or being critical of conventional media through their opinions.

The most important contribution of this study is to fill a gap, because there is no research that specifically focuses on personal branding in the field of journalism education. Therefore, this work reviews the previous literature to verify whether professional journalists' practices match those of future journalists' perceptions. In this sense, some concordances and contradictions have been observed.

On the one hand, both journalists' practices and journalism students' perceptions are linked to the reformulation of some classic norms, values and principles of journalism.<sup>34</sup> Firstly, if journalistic branding involves taking sides and making comments and criticisms,<sup>35</sup> it contradicts the journalist's objectivity and the principles of independence and impartiality.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, if journalistic branding is highly associated with discussion and interaction, not only with official sources but also with users, as journalism students suggest, that implies understanding gatekeeping, sourcing and verification practices as more collaborative processes.<sup>37</sup> Thirdly, according to students, traditional journalistic gatekeeping functions would have definitely become "gatewatching",<sup>38</sup> where the verification process even acquires more importance than reporting and sharing news, aside from helping personal branding. Moreover, the watchdog function is strongly valued, thus journalism students legitimise journalism's independence with respect to political and economic powers.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, journalism students barely connect the fact of sharing the backstage goings-on of work to personal branding, in the same way that only a minority of professional journalists take advantage of social media to make journalism more transparent and offer details of how a newsroom functions.<sup>40</sup> Thus, students seem inclined to prioritise their professional identity before their personal one, in the same line that professional journalists do.<sup>41</sup>

34 HERMIDA, A.: #Journalism: Reconfiguring Journalism Research about Twitter, One Tweet at a Time. In *Digital Journalism*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 301.

35 BREMS, C. et al.: Personal Branding on Twitter: How Employed and Freelance Journalists Stage Themselves on Social Media. In *Digital Journalism*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 452.

36 HUNTER, A.: Crowdfunding Independent and Freelance Journalism: Negotiating Journalistic Norms of Autonomy and Objectivity. In *New Media & Society*, 2015, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 281.

37 BROERSMA, M., GRAHAM, T.: Social Media as Beat: Tweets as a News Source during the 2010 British and Dutch Elections. In *Journalism Practice*, 2012, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 407.

38 BRUNS, A.: *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005, p. 11.

39 ERIKSSON, G., ÖSTMAN, J.: Cooperative or Adversarial? Journalists' Enactment of the Watchdog Function in Political News Production. In *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2013, Vol. 18, No. 3, p. 305.

40 HEDMAN, U.: When Journalists Tweet: Disclosure, Participatory, and Personal Transparency. In *Social Media and Society*, 2016, p. 10. [online]. [2019-06-21]. Available at: <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2056305115624528>>.

41 HOLTON, A. E., MOLYNEUX, L.: Identity Lost? The Personal Impact of Brand Journalism. In *Journalism*, 2017, Vol. 18, No. 2, p. 204.

Concerning contradictions, the future generations of journalists do not remark upon the skills related to humanisation strategy<sup>42</sup> such as sharing one's private life and hobbies, expressing ideas in an informal tone or using humour to engage users.<sup>43</sup> Generally speaking, something similar happens in newsrooms, where only a minority of journalists have assimilated the hybridisation between the professional and private spheres.<sup>44</sup> However, digital media journalists and freelancers become exceptions, as both are usually more innovative and use humanisation strategy.<sup>45</sup> In this sense, journalism students would be outdated if they wanted to promote their personal brand, because adopting a more personal, emotional and human tone is potentially empowering to connect with the public.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, the data shows a contradiction about interacting. Despite both students and journalists highlighting its importance, the dialogue level is still reduced or it only happens between colleagues.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, whereas the literature says that self-promotion is one of the main uses of social media in journalism,<sup>48</sup> students give it a lower priority than other practices such as making comments or interacting. Perhaps journalism students are aware that an excess of self-referentiality can lessen their authenticity and credibility.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, there is an unexpected aforementioned result. Despite journalism students recognising the business motivations behind personal branding, like professional journalists, they give the same emphasis to motivations related to the public dimension and democratic functions of journalism. In this manner, the journalistic brand is also conceived as a tool for journalism to develop its social functions efficiently.

This work has limitations because it focuses on the Spanish case. However, most conclusions can be extended to other contexts. Indeed, no significant differences have been observed regarding the education level or the gender. That makes results more consistent and generalisable to other countries. In any case, if personal branding acquires as much prominence as it seems, the perceptions of the future generation of journalists could very well be essential to a better understanding of how classic norms and values of journalism are being reformulated in the digital age. Along these same lines, the education that journalists receive is being reformulated to introduce new strategies in the tools and practices associated with personal branding.

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