


# Chapter 13

## Journalism Practice and Personal Branding on Social Media: A Review of Freelance YouTuber Journalists

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### **ABSTRACT**

*An important area of expertise that takes its share from digital transformation is journalism. Social media and the enhanced online services, which reshaped many sub-elements of journalism from news production to publishing activities, enabled the emergence of independent working models differentiated from the practices of corporate life. While the freelance working model brought ease in terms of providing flexible working hours and practical decision-making processes in the content creation process, it also led to the need for additional promotional activities for journalists in terms of personal branding awareness and reliability. The current study aims to examine the digital publishing practices and personal branding processes of freelance YouTube publisher journalists. Findings indicate journalists aim to seek balance among three contextual dilemmas, namely, user interaction, self-promotion, and news content creation.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media has significantly transformed social and business in developing and developed countries since the mid-2000s. Music sharing platforms (e.g., Myspace) and Internet forums have gradually left their places to social media platforms that have reached significant number of users worldwide such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. It is possible to find the traces of such transformation on these networks, which enable the flow of information to take place quicker and in a more intense manner

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in many areas of daily interaction, including interpersonal communication and corporate communication. Journalists have been one of the most important social actors who has taken a considerable share from this transformation.

Journalism has become an important expertise with a strong background, aiming to provide information to the public objectively since its introduction in social life with the first newspaper published in the United States in 1690 (Kobre, 1940). Traditional journalism has not lost its essence with networked communication; however, various transformations have started to appear in professional norms and practices in the field. For example, while professional journalism has been associated with printed publishing activities and strict bureaucratic relationships until the mid-2000s, it has transformed into an Internet-oriented professional activity with the rising popularity of the online social networks. One of the most important instances is associated with freelance Internet journalists who carry out journalistic activities without being connected to any established media corporation.

One of the prominent examples of transformed practices and reader expectations are related to interactive features such as “liking”, “sharing” and “commenting” that are only available in online social networks. Despite the fact that an important criterion determining the commercial success of newspapers until the middle of 2000s was daily sales figures (circulation), criteria such as clicking and sharing rates in social networks replaced former factors over time. This situation has led to the necessity of reconsidering what commercial success is under the light of the transformations in the field of journalism.

The present study aims to evaluate the personal branding processes of freelance YouTube publisher journalists on social media via content analysis and in-depth interviews. Specifically, self-employed YouTube publisher journalists have been identified as the research population of the current study, in order to observe the transformation of the profession in a concrete and systematic way.

Founded in February 2005 as an Internet-based video sharing platform in the United States, YouTube is an initiative project implemented by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, former employees of the online payment platform PayPal (BBC, 2010). Today, YouTube offers its users the ability to upload, view, rate, share, complain, comment and book favorites. Videos on YouTube include feature stories created by users, as well as corporate contents from global mainstream media organizations such as the BBC and CBS. Despite that the majority of content provided on YouTube are based on video format, their duration may show differentiations. Content producers can earn advertising revenue via the Google AdSense online advertising tool and have the option choose the video advertisings they aim to place on their platform, in line with the context of their contents. Consumers of the platform have the option to choose paid membership, such as YouTube Music and YouTube Premium in order to avoid contents associated with advertising and promotion.

According to the data of 2022, it uploads about 400 hours of content to YouTube every minute. An average of one billion hours of video are watched every day by users (Smith, 2022). According to Alexa (2023) data, YouTube is the second most visited website worldwide, following Google. YouTube is also an important platform in the sense that it gives the opportunity to observe the transformation of journalism profession under the light of the new information and communication technologies. Its interaction-oriented nature allows journalists to communicate one-on-one with their audience, while also providing them editorial freedom.

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