

Reconfiguring Journalistic Authority as a Socio-Technical Information System in Platformized News Environments

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Abstract

Digital platforms increasingly operate as socio-technical information systems that reorganize how information is produced, distributed, and legitimized. This article examines how journalistic authority is reconfigured when journalists operate as individual news brands embedded within platform-based information systems such as YouTube and Instagram. Drawing on in-depth interviews with former institutional journalists and qualitative analysis of their platform-native news content, the study explores how professional legitimacy is constructed through algorithmic visibility, datafied performance metrics, and platform governance mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that journalistic authority is displaced from organizational information systems to individual actors whose credibility emerges through the interaction of professional norms, audience-mediated trust, and algorithmic ranking systems. By conceptualizing individual news brands as human-centered information systems operating within platformized environments, this study contributes to information systems research on platform governance, socio-technical infrastructures, and the transformation of professional authority in the digital era.

Keywords: *Socio-Technical Information Systems, Platformized Journalism, Algorithmic Visibility, Individual News Brands, Information Governance.*

Introduction

Digital platforms have evolved into complex socio-technical information systems that structure how information is produced, circulated, and evaluated in contemporary societies. In the domain of news, platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok increasingly mediate journalistic work through algorithmic ranking, datafication, and monetization infrastructures. These systems do not merely distribute journalistic content but actively shape the conditions under which journalistic authority, credibility, and visibility are established.

Historically, journalistic authority was embedded within organizational information systems of legacy media institutions, where editorial hierarchies, professional routines, and ethical codes functioned as mechanisms of information control and legitimacy. In platformized environments, however, journalists increasingly operate outside these institutional systems and instead rely on platform infrastructures to reach audiences. This shift raises critical questions for information systems research regarding how authority and trust are produced when information systems are governed by commercial platforms rather than professional institutions.

This study examines how journalistic authority is reconfigured as journalists transition from institutional news organizations to platform-based information systems and operate as individual news brands. Rather than approaching platforms merely as communication channels, the article conceptualizes them as socio-technical systems in which human actors, algorithms, metrics, and governance rules interact to shape information legitimacy. The study asks: (1) How do journalist-creators construct professional authority within platform-based information systems? (2) How do algorithmic visibility and datafied metrics function as information governance mechanisms? and (3) How is audience trust negotiated within these socio-technical environments?

2. Theoretical Framework

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This study draws on information systems (IS) scholarship to conceptualize platformized journalism as a socio-technical configuration in which authority, legitimacy, and visibility are produced through interactions between human actors and digital infrastructures. Rather than treating journalism solely as a cultural or professional practice, the framework positions journalistic authority as an outcome of information system design, governance, and use. Four interrelated theoretical perspectives guide the analysis: journalistic authority as information legitimacy, professional identity as a human component of IS, media convergence as information flow integration, and platformization as information infrastructure and governance.

Journalistic Authority as Information Legitimacy

Within information systems research, legitimacy refers to the socially recognized validity of information and the actors who produce it. Journalistic authority can thus be understood as a specific form of information legitimacy: the capacity to define what information is credible, relevant, and trustworthy within a given system. Historically, this legitimacy was embedded in organizational information systems of news institutions, where editorial hierarchies, verification routines, and professional norms functioned as stabilizing mechanisms.

In platform-based environments, however, these institutional information systems are partially displaced by commercial platforms whose governance structures prioritize engagement, datafication, and scalability. Authority is no longer guaranteed by institutional affiliation but must be continuously produced and recognized within platform infrastructures. From an IS perspective, this represents a shift from organization-centered legitimacy to system-mediated legitimacy, where credibility emerges from interactions among users, algorithms, and metrics. Journalistic authority becomes contingent, dynamic, and subject to ongoing evaluation through system feedback.

Professional Identity as a Human Component of Information Systems

Socio-technical approaches in IS emphasize that information systems are constituted by both technical components and human actors who enact, interpret, and adapt system functionalities. Journalist-creators exemplify this human component. They bring professional values such as verification, independence, and public responsibility into platform-based systems while simultaneously adapting to technical constraints and incentives.

This study conceptualizes professional identity not as an external attribute but as an integral component of the information system itself. Journalists' credibility, expertise, and ethical orientation shape how information is produced and interpreted within platforms. At the same time, professional identity is reshaped through continuous interaction with algorithms, metrics, and audience feedback. This reciprocal relationship highlights how authority is co-produced by human judgment and system design.

Media Convergence as Information Flow Integration

Media convergence has been widely discussed as the integration of technologies, content formats, and audiences across digital environments. From an IS perspective, convergence can be understood as the integration of information flows across multiple systems and interfaces. Platformized journalism operates within convergent environments where reporting, distribution, interaction, and monetization occur within a single infrastructural ecosystem.

For journalist-creators, convergence requires the alignment of traditional journalistic practices with platform-native modes of communication such as visual storytelling, real-time interaction, and personalization. This integration reshapes how information is structured, circulated, and validated. Authority is produced not only through content accuracy but also through effective navigation of convergent information flows that connect journalists and audiences within platform systems.

Platformization as Information Infrastructure and Governance

Platformization refers to the growing dominance of digital platforms as infrastructural systems that organize social and informational activity. In information systems terms, platforms function as large-scale infrastructures that govern information visibility, accessibility, and monetization through algorithmic rules and data-driven mechanisms.

These infrastructures introduce new forms of information governance that profoundly affect journalistic authority. Algorithms act as gatekeeping mechanisms that prioritize certain content and actors over others, while metrics provide quantified representations of relevance and trustworthiness.

Authority within platformized systems is therefore shaped by governance logics that are external to journalism but deeply embedded in system architecture. Understanding journalistic authority thus requires attention to how platform infrastructures configure power, visibility, and legitimacy.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that journalistic authority in platformized news environments is best understood as an emergent property of socio-technical information systems rather than as a fixed professional attribute. By integrating insights from the findings with information systems theory, the discussion highlights three key implications for IS scholarship: the reconfiguration of authority, the role of algorithms as governance mechanisms, and the transformation of professional legitimacy within platform infrastructures.

First, the findings show that authority is no longer anchored primarily in organizational information systems but is redistributed across individual actors embedded within platform-based systems. This challenges traditional IS models that assume stable institutional control over information legitimacy. Instead, authority emerges through continuous interaction among journalists, audiences, and technical components. Individual news brands function as decentralized nodes within platform systems, illustrating how legitimacy can be produced without formal organizational hierarchies.

Second, the analysis foregrounds the role of algorithms as central governance mechanisms within information systems. Algorithmic visibility determines which journalistic content gains prominence and shapes how authority is recognized. While journalists retain professional autonomy over content decisions, their visibility and reach are contingent upon algorithmic processes that operate according to commercial and engagement-driven logics. This finding contributes to IS research by illustrating how governance is enacted not only through formal rules but through technical architectures that structure information flow.

Third, the study reveals a transformation in professional legitimacy under conditions of platformization. Journalistic norms such as verification and ethical responsibility remain central, but they are enacted through hybrid practices that combine professional judgment with creator-oriented strategies. From an IS perspective, this hybrid professionalism reflects adaptive alignment between human values and system constraints. Authority is sustained when journalists successfully integrate professional norms with platform infrastructures, rather than resisting them entirely.

Taken together, these insights suggest that information systems research must expand its analytical focus beyond organizational settings to account for platform-based configurations of authority and legitimacy. Platformized journalism provides a critical empirical context for examining how socio-technical systems reshape professional power and information governance. By conceptualizing individual news brands as human-centered information systems, this study advances IS theory on platform governance, legitimacy, and the co-production of authority in digital environments.

Research Paradigm and Design

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative information systems (IS) research paradigm. Interpretive IS research is particularly suited to examining how meaning, legitimacy, and authority are socially constructed through interactions between human actors and technological infrastructures. Rather than seeking causal generalization, this approach aims to develop a contextualized and theoretically grounded understanding of how journalistic authority emerges within platform-based socio-technical systems.

The research is designed as a qualitative, multi-source study combining in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis. This design enables the examination of both articulated professional understandings (through interviews) and observable information practices (through platform content), allowing for analytical triangulation within a socio-technical framework.

Research Context

The empirical context of this study is platformized news production on commercial digital platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. These platforms function as large-scale information systems governed by algorithmic ranking, engagement metrics, and monetization logics. They are particularly relevant for studying journalistic authority because they decentralize news production while simultaneously imposing new forms of infrastructural control over information visibility.

The study focuses on journalist-creators who have transitioned from institutional news organizations to independent, platform-based news production. This group represents a critical case for information systems research because it illustrates how professional authority is reconfigured when institutional information systems are replaced by platform infrastructures.

Sampling Strategy and Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure theoretical relevance. Three inclusion criteria guided the sampling process: (1) participants had prior professional experience as journalists within mainstream or legacy news organizations; (2) they currently operate independent news channels on digital platforms such as YouTube or Instagram; and (3) they have achieved sustained platform visibility, indicated by consistent content production and an established audience base.

Participants were identified through publicly accessible platform profiles, professional networks, and snowball sampling. This strategy enabled the recruitment of information-rich cases capable of illuminating how journalistic authority is enacted within platform-based information systems. To protect confidentiality, all participants are referred to using pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis of platform-based content. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted either online or in person. The interview protocol focused on participants' professional trajectories, experiences of transitioning from institutional newsrooms to platform-based production, interactions with platform algorithms, and strategies for establishing credibility and trust with audiences.

In addition to interviews, the study analyzed participants' platform content, including videos, captions, channel descriptions, and audience interactions such as comments and live chat discussions. This material was treated as naturally occurring data that reflects how journalistic authority is performed and negotiated within platform-based information systems.

Data Analysis

All interview transcripts and platform materials were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed an iterative process that involved initial open coding, focused coding, and the development of higher-order themes. Sensitizing concepts from information systems theory—such as socio-technical systems, information governance, and algorithmic mediation—guided the analytical process without imposing rigid categories.

The analysis paid particular attention to how human agency, technical infrastructures, and governance mechanisms interact to shape information legitimacy. Themes were refined through constant comparison across cases and data sources.

3.6 Research Quality and Trustworthiness

To enhance research quality, the study employed several strategies commonly used in qualitative IS research. Triangulation was achieved by combining interview data with platform content analysis. Reflexive memo-writing supported analytical rigor by documenting interpretive decisions throughout the research process. Thick description is provided to support transferability, while transparency in methodological reporting enhances credibility.

Results

The findings indicate that journalistic authority in platformized news environments is reconfigured through a set of interrelated socio-technical processes. Four major themes capture how authority is produced, maintained, and challenged within platform-based information systems.

4.1 Personalization of Authority as an Information System Process

Participants described a fundamental shift from institution-centered authority to personalized authority. Within institutional news organizations, credibility was embedded in organizational information systems such as editorial hierarchies and brand reputation. In platform-based environments, authority becomes attached to the individual journalist as a recognizable and continuously evaluated information node within the system.

This personalization requires journalists to actively manage their professional identity through consistent presentation, transparency, and interaction. Authority is no longer stabilized by organizational routines but must be continuously enacted through visible performance within platform infrastructures.

Algorithmic Visibility as Information Governance

Algorithmic ranking systems play a central role in shaping which journalistic content becomes visible. Participants described platform algorithms as opaque but powerful governance mechanisms that regulate information flow. Metrics such as views, watch time, and engagement function as proxies for legitimacy, influencing both audience perception and platform amplification.

While participants sought to understand and adapt to algorithmic logic, they also emphasized the limits of such adaptation. Many reported resisting sensationalism or click-oriented strategies that conflicted with professional norms, illustrating the tension between algorithmic governance and journalistic ethics.

Audience Interaction as a Feedback System

Audience interaction emerged as a crucial component of authority construction. Through comments, direct messages, and live interactions, audiences provide continuous feedback that shapes content production and credibility. Participants described these interactions as a distributed editorial process in which audiences contribute corrections, suggestions, and evaluations.

Trust is thus negotiated through ongoing interaction rather than assumed through institutional affiliation. Responsiveness and transparency were identified as key practices for sustaining authority within platform-based information systems.

Hybrid Professionalism and Socio-Technical Adaptation

Participants articulated a hybrid professional identity that combines journalistic norms with creator-oriented practices. Verification, ethical responsibility, and public service remain central values, but they are enacted through platform-native formats and engagement strategies.

This hybrid professionalism reflects socio-technical adaptation: journalists align their practices with platform infrastructures while seeking to preserve professional authority. Authority emerges from the successful integration of human judgment, technical systems, and audience relationships within the platform environment.

The findings reveal that journalistic authority in platformized environments emerges from the interaction of human professionalism, algorithmic visibility, and audience feedback. Participants described how platform metrics such as views and engagement function as proxies for information legitimacy, while audience interaction operates as a continuous feedback loop that shapes trust and credibility. Algorithms act as gatekeeping mechanisms that structure information visibility, requiring journalist-creators to negotiate between professional norms and platform incentives.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that individual news brands function as human-centered information systems embedded within platform infrastructures. Journalistic authority is no longer secured primarily through organizational systems but is dynamically produced through socio-technical interactions among journalists, platforms, and audiences. This reconfiguration challenges traditional models of information governance and highlights the need for information systems research to account for professional authority as an emergent property of platform-based systems.

Conclusion

This study shows that platformized news environments reconfigure journalistic authority as a socio-technical information system. Individual news brands emerge as key sites of information legitimacy, shaped by algorithmic governance and audience-mediated trust. By situating journalist-creators within information systems theory, the article contributes to understanding how professional authority is transformed in platform-based digital infrastructures.

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