

Article

Journalism: Innate Talent or Academic Discipline? Reassessing Professional Identity in Greece

Foteini Gioltzidou ^{1,*}, Georgia Gioltzidou ²  and Theodoros Chrysafis ³¹ School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 541 24 Thessaloniki, Greece² School of Social Sciences, Hellenic Open University, 263 35 Pátrai, Greece; gioltzidou@gmail.com³ Faculty of Law, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 541 24 Thessaloniki, Greece; theodoros_c@yahoo.com

* Correspondence: gioltzidoufotini@gmail.com

Abstract

The ontological status of journalism in Greece has long been marked by a profound tension between the perception of the field as an innate craft and its institutionalization as an academic discipline. This paper investigates the perceived utility of university-level journalism education and its impact on professional identity within the Greek media landscape. Utilizing a quantitative methodological approach, the study involved the distribution of structured questionnaires to professional journalists in Greece to capture their attitudes toward academic training, press freedom, and contemporary journalistic practices. The findings suggest differentiated perceptions within the professional community, reflecting an ongoing negotiation between practical experience and academic approaches to journalism. Notably, despite the fact that only a small fraction of the surveyed journalists hold academic degrees in journalism, a large proportion of respondents acknowledges the utility of specialized higher education for aspiring professionals entering the field. Furthermore, the study explores how these perceptions correlate with views on press autonomy and ethical challenges, emphasizing consensus on the positive contribution of university education to journalistic practices related to press freedom and editorial independence. However, a persistent “theory-practice gap” remains evident, as respondents identified deficiencies in journalism curricula regarding preparation for practical demands and real-time reporting. Ultimately, the findings reveal strong criticism of the current state of press freedom in Greece, highlighting the need to re-evaluate the role of higher education in strengthening the professional legitimacy and democratic mandate of Greek journalism.

Keywords: journalism; journalism education; reporting; professional identity; press freedom; journalistic ethics; university studies; journalism curriculum; theory-practice gap



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1. Introduction

The ontological status of journalism has long been characterized by ambiguity and contestation, reflecting its position at the intersection of public service, commercial imperatives, and creative expression. Despite its progressive institutionalization within higher education since the mid-twentieth century, journalism has not achieved a universally accepted epistemological foundation. On the contrary, the expansion of journalism education has intensified debates regarding the nature of the field and the legitimacy of academic training.

As [Tumber \(2019\)](#) notes, journalism education and journalism studies are shaped by three overlapping yet often competing communities: professional practitioners, vocational

educators, and academic researchers. Each group advances distinct claims regarding what journalism is and how it should be taught. Practitioners tend to privilege experiential knowledge, arguing that the complexities of journalistic work can only be fully understood within the newsroom. From this perspective, academic approaches are frequently regarded with scepticism, reinforcing what Zelizer (2009) describes as a divide between practical immersion and theoretical abstraction. Conversely, academic scholars emphasize the importance of analytical, ethical, and sociological frameworks, arguing that without theoretical grounding journalism risks being reduced to a purely technical activity devoid of democratic purpose.

These tensions are further exacerbated by the interdisciplinary origins of journalism studies. Historically, journalism programs emerged not from an autonomous scientific core but as extensions of established disciplines such as sociology, political science, and psychology. While this cross-disciplinary foundation enabled the development of influential theoretical frameworks—such as gatekeeping (White, 1950) and agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)—it also hindered journalism’s ability to establish epistemological autonomy. As Zelizer (2009) argues, journalism studies as an academic field has often been ‘housed’ within other disciplines, adapting to external methodological frameworks rather than developing a fully autonomous epistemological identity.

Within this context, journalism education occupies a particularly contested position. While some practitioners continue to view journalism primarily as a craft acquired through professional experience, scholars have emphasized that university education contributes to the development of analytical skills, ethical awareness, and a broader understanding of journalism’s democratic responsibilities (Richards & Self, 2017). Consequently, journalism education should not be understood solely as vocational preparation, but also as a process through which professional knowledge, values, and journalistic identities are constructed.

The relationship between education and professional identity is particularly significant in fields such as journalism, where professional boundaries remain relatively open and where formal mechanisms of entry are limited compared with other professions. As a result, universities may play an important role in legitimizing journalistic knowledge and contributing to the formation of shared professional norms.

Building upon this institutional role in norm formation, contemporary scholarly discourse underscores the necessity of establishing precise conceptual boundaries when delineating the pedagogical and analytical frameworks that govern the media field. Specifically, a critical debate persists regarding whether “academic education,” “university journalism education,” and “journalism studies” represent distinct epistemological paradigms or mere terminological equivalents. Viewed through the lens of the sociology of professional groups, entry mechanisms and normative boundaries are continuously renegotiated as traditional occupational structures shift toward market-driven environments (Evetts, 2006). Within this broader sociology, “academic education” functions as a macro-level foundation, prioritizing abstract theoretical literacy and critical methodological inquiry over industry-specific competencies. Conversely, “university journalism education” operates as a specialized institutional mechanism explicitly designed to bridge scholarly critique with professional practice. It serves as a primary locus for occupational socialization, constructing resilient professional identities capable of navigating systemic industry disruptions, such as the rise of digital networks (Heinonen, 1999). This targeted educational tier directly interfaces with operational newsroom cultures, where gendered dynamics and institutionalized power structures heavily mediate how professional values are internalised by nascent practitioners (De Bruin & Ross, 2004). Furthermore, as contemporary media ecosystems increasingly demand heightened occupational agility, university-level training faces the complex mandate of producing what macro-labour frameworks define as the ‘flexible

employee’—individuals who must constantly balance multi-skilling imperatives with professional autonomy (Kirpal & Brown, 2007). This intense institutional focus on versatility, however, often complicates the continuity of a stable professional identity during subsequent career transitions and market fluctuations (Raeder & Grote, 2007). Distinct from both the macro-foundations of general education and the vocational socialization of university training, “journalism studies” functions not as a pedagogical tool for practitioners, but as an autonomous, reflexive research paradigm that treats journalism itself as an object of socio-political and empirical critique. Consequently, these terms cannot be treated as equivalent; “academic education” provides the overarching epistemological framework, “university journalism education” manages the complex, professional socialization of flexible actors within specific newsroom cultures, while “journalism studies” maintains the analytical distance required to critically evaluate the institutional field as a whole.

Within this broader context, the Greek media landscape provides a particularly relevant case for examining the relationship between academic education and professional identity. The persistent tension between journalism as an “innate craft” and as an “academic discipline” remains deeply embedded in professional culture. Moreover, the Greek media system presents distinctive characteristics that make it a valuable case study, including the historical relationship between media and political actors, debates regarding journalistic autonomy, limited institutional regulation of the profession, and ongoing concerns regarding professional standards and press freedom. In contrast to media systems where journalism education has become more firmly integrated into professional recruitment processes, the connection between universities and the journalistic labour market in Greece remains contested. Against this background, the Greek case offers an opportunity to examine how journalists themselves perceive the role of university education in shaping professional legitimacy, journalistic competence, and the formation of professional identity.

This study seeks to investigate how Greek journalists perceive the value of university-level education and how these perceptions relate to broader concerns regarding professional standards, press freedom, and the democratic role of journalism.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The study of journalism as both a professional practice and an academic field is deeply rooted in historical, sociological, and normative debates concerning its origins, functions, and role within democratic societies. Understanding journalism’s contemporary identity requires a systematic examination of its historical evolution, its professional characteristics, and the broader theoretical frameworks that define its societal function.

2.1. Historical Emergence of Journalism and the Public Sphere

Any discussion of journalism education cannot precede a discussion of the reasons and conditions under which journalism emerged. The origins of journalism are inherently difficult to define precisely. As early as the seventeenth century, scholars such as Peucer (1690) argued that it was “impossible to determine a specific year” that marked the beginning of journalistic writing in its modern form. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that the development of journalism is closely linked to the evolution of historical narrative and the human need to communicate information (Atwood & Beer, 2001; De Beer et al., 2000), which partly explains the role of the modern journalist, which has not strayed far from its originally conceived role.

According to Schudson (1978), modern journalism emerged in the United States in the 1830s, before gradually spreading to the United Kingdom and continental Europe (Chalaby, 1996). This development coincided with the widespread emergence of the press in the early seventeenth century, as well as with the processes of industrialization and

commercialization that transformed the media landscape in the late nineteenth century. Early forms of newspapers, however, predate this period, often targeting specific audiences such as merchants and landowners. By the mid-seventeenth century, newspapers had already become commonplace in the major cities of Western Europe, with early English-language publications such as the *Corantos* appearing in Amsterdam in 1620.

The question, however, is not simply when journalism began but when and how its vital relationship with society developed, as this understanding can be extremely useful in the quest for the modern role of the journalist and journalism education. Moreover, the transformation of journalism into a mass-oriented institution is closely linked to the development of the public sphere. Habermas (1989) saw newspapers as central to the formation of a space for rational-critical debate, where citizens participate in political deliberation. Within this context, journalism has become a key mechanism for facilitating democratic discourse, contributing to political legitimacy and governance through the circulation of information and the shaping of public opinion (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009). This is what gives particular meaning to the direction that journalism education should take today, especially at the university level, but also to the challenges that it must help journalists to face.

From the outset, the expansion of the press introduced new challenges. The rise of mass audiences led to the emergence of popular and sensational forms of journalism, often associated with “yellow journalism” (Martin et al., 2006). This development raised concerns about the ethical quality of news content and led to efforts to professionalize journalism and establish standards of credibility and responsibility. As Barnhurst and Nerone (2009) note, these developments were closely linked to broader efforts by journalists and publishers to enhance the legitimacy and social standing of the profession. Today, the challenges and demands of contemporary journalism are not far from what Barnhurst and Nerone (2009) describe.

2.2. Journalism as a Profession: Conceptual and Structural Ambiguities

The question of whether journalism constitutes a fully developed profession remains central to the theoretical debate. Classical sociological approaches define professions as occupations characterized by specialized knowledge, autonomy, and a commitment to public service (Flexner, 2001; Freidson, 2001). While journalism fulfils some of these criteria, it lacks formal mechanisms of entry regulation and licensing, which are typically associated with established professions such as law or medicine (Waisbord, 2013).

This structural openness is often justified as essential to the preservation of press freedom (Asp, 2007; Raudsepp, 1989). However, it also weakens professional cohesion and contributes to the classification of journalism as a “semi-profession” (McLeod & Hawley, 1964). The absence of clearly defined boundaries complicates the establishment of a unified professional identity and raises important questions regarding the role of academic education in legitimizing the field. Professional identity in journalism is shaped not only by experience gained within newsrooms but also by educational pathways, professional norms and cultures, and collective understandings of what constitutes legitimate journalistic knowledge (Gioltzidou & Gioltzidou, 2022). As Evetts (2013) argues, professions are increasingly shaped by processes of knowledge institutionalization and formal expertise, making educational institutions important actors in professional identity formation. In this sense, journalism education contributes not merely to the acquisition of practical skills but also to the development of professional identities by exposing future journalists to normative principles, ethical frameworks, and critical reflection on the social role of journalism.

The debate over journalism’s professional status is closely linked to the enduring dichotomy between journalism as a craft and journalism as a discipline. The craft-oriented

perspective emphasizes experiential learning, intuition, and practical skills, often suggesting that journalists are “born rather than made” (Cunha, 1941; Gaunt, 1992). This perspective has historically contributed to skepticism toward formal journalism education, as professional competence has often been associated primarily with newsroom experience rather than academic preparation. In contrast, the disciplinary perspective highlights the importance of systematic knowledge, ethical training, and critical thinking, positioning higher education as a fundamental component of professional development (Hallin, 2000; Deuze, 2006).

Journalism education has traditionally occupied a contested space between vocational training and academic study (Nolan, 2008). Although questions have been raised regarding the extent to which journalism can be taught within the university context, scholars have emphasized the contribution of higher education to the development of analytical skills, ethical awareness, and a critical understanding of journalism’s broader social role. In this sense, journalism education should be viewed not simply as the acquisition of practical skills, but as a process through which professional identities and normative orientations are shaped. However, professional identity formation should not be understood as a linear process occurring exclusively within traditional educational or newsroom settings. Wall (2015) highlights that journalism education can also become a space for experimentation and identity negotiation, where students develop new understandings of journalistic practice through alternative learning environments and innovative forms of news production. Her analysis of the Pop-Up Newsroom demonstrates that journalism students’ professional identities are shaped not only by established newsroom routines but also by their engagement with emerging practices, technologies, and collaborative forms of journalism.

2.3. Journalism Education and Professional Formation

Journalism education has historically occupied an ambiguous position between vocational training and academic inquiry. Since the establishment of journalism schools in higher education, debates have emerged regarding whether journalism should be taught primarily as a practical occupation or studied as an academic field requiring theoretical reflection and critical analysis. This debate is closely connected to broader uncertainty regarding journalism’s professional status and the role of formal education in establishing professional legitimacy.

Early approaches to journalism education were largely influenced by a vocational model, focusing on practical skills, newsroom routines, and preparation for immediate employment. However, as journalism programs became increasingly integrated into universities, their scope expanded beyond technical training to include the study of media systems, ethics, public responsibility, and the relationship between journalism and democracy (Deuze, 2006).

From this perspective, journalism education serves a dual role: it prepares students for professional practice while simultaneously encouraging critical reflection on the norms, values, and responsibilities associated with journalism. Universities therefore contribute not only to the development of competencies but also to the construction of professional identities by introducing future journalists to shared ethical principles and broader understandings of the social role of journalism.

The relationship between journalism education and professional identity is particularly relevant because journalism differs from many established professions in that access to the occupation is not usually controlled through formal certification mechanisms. Consequently, educational institutions represent one of the main spaces where professional knowledge and normative expectations are developed and transmitted (Evetts, 2013). The perceptions of journalists themselves regarding the value and purpose of journalism educa-

tion are also central to understanding the relationship between professional practice and academic training. Reardon (2018) demonstrates that journalists' views of education are often shaped by broader discourses about what constitutes legitimate journalistic knowledge, professional competence, and newsroom readiness.

At the same time, the role of journalism education continues to be debated (Mensing, 2019). Critics argue that academic programs may prioritize theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical preparation, reinforcing a persistent theory–practice divide between universities and news organizations (Mensing, 2017). Conversely, supporters of university-based journalism education argue that professional competence cannot be reduced to technical skills alone, particularly in an environment characterized by increasing ethical challenges, technological transformations, and declining public trust in media institutions.

Therefore, contemporary approaches increasingly emphasize the integration of theory and practice rather than their separation. Journalism education is expected to produce professionals who combine practical abilities with analytical thinking, ethical awareness, and an understanding of journalism's democratic function (Frost, 2019).

2.4. Roles, Functions, and Democratic Significance of Journalism

Journalism performs a wide range of functions within modern societies, extending beyond the mere transmission of information. As Zelizer (2009) argues, journalism exists wherever there is a need to share information, while Adam (1993) emphasizes its multifaceted nature, encompassing reporting, interpretation, and critical evaluation.

Christians (2009) identify four central roles of journalism: the monitorial role, which involves the collection and dissemination of information; the facilitative role, which promotes public dialogue and civic engagement; the radical role, which challenges established power structures; and the collaborative role, which reflects alignment with political or economic interests. These roles often overlap and vary across contexts, highlighting the complexity of journalistic practice.

At its core, journalism is intrinsically linked to democracy. Its primary objective is to provide citizens with accurate and meaningful information, enabling informed participation in public life (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; UNESCO, 2007). As Deuze (2006) notes, journalism contributes significantly to the functioning and well-being of society by fostering transparency, accountability, and public debate.

Furthermore, journalism plays a crucial role in shaping collective understanding and social reality. Carey (2000) emphasizes that news narratives construct shared meanings, while Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009) highlight their role in shaping individual and collective identities. Journalism thus operates not only as a source of information but also as a cultural institution that mediates social experience and political engagement.

2.5. Press Freedom, Autonomy, and Ethical Foundations

The democratic function of journalism is closely tied to the principles of press freedom and professional autonomy. Autonomy refers to the ability of journalists to perform their work independently, without interference from political or economic actors (Örnebring, 2009). High levels of autonomy are essential for ensuring that journalism can fulfill its watchdog role and hold power accountable (Scholl & Weischenberg, 1999).

However, maintaining autonomy is increasingly challenging in contemporary media environments, where commercial pressures and political influences can undermine editorial independence (Cronin, 1993; Hampton, 2008). These challenges highlight the importance of ethical standards and professional norms in guiding journalistic practice.

One of the most contested concepts in journalism is that of objectivity. Schudson (2001) describes objectivity as a defining norm of modern journalism, while Tuchman (1972)

identifies it as a strategic ritual that journalists use to legitimize their work. Objectivity is often associated with practices such as balanced reporting, reliance on credible sources, and the separation of fact and opinion (Chalaby, 1998).

Despite its widespread acceptance, objectivity remains a contested ideal. Critics argue that it is both difficult to achieve and potentially misleading, as all forms of reporting are shaped by social and cultural contexts (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002). Nevertheless, the principle continues to play a central role in establishing trust and credibility within journalism. The question in each case is how to achieve a greater degree of independence, freedom and objectivity of the press, and whether university education can help in this direction. Therefore, an important question concerns whether university education can contribute to strengthening journalists' awareness of ethical principles, professional autonomy, and democratic responsibilities. Journalism curricula are expected not only to provide technical competencies but also to encourage reflection on the normative foundations of journalistic practice.

2.6. Skills, Competencies, and Professional Identity

The competencies required of journalists have evolved significantly in response to technological and social changes. Traditional skills such as writing, reporting, and critical analysis remain essential, but they are increasingly complemented by new competencies related to digital media, data analysis, and multimedia storytelling (Blom et al., 2019).

However, journalistic competence cannot be understood solely in terms of technical abilities. It also involves the development of professional values, ethical principles, and shared perceptions of the social responsibilities associated with journalism. In this sense, professional identity is shaped not only by what journalists do, but also by how they understand their role, legitimacy, and contribution to society.

Research by Drok (2013) highlights the importance of core professional values such as credibility, reliability, and analytical ability. Both journalism students and professionals emphasize the significance of these attributes, while placing less importance on entrepreneurial skills and market-oriented competencies. These findings suggest that traditional journalistic values continue to shape professional identity, even in the context of a rapidly changing media landscape.

The development of professional identity is closely related to the ways in which journalists acquire, interpret, and apply professional knowledge. Although practical experience in newsrooms remains a crucial element of professional socialization, journalism education offers a structured environment in which future journalists are exposed to theoretical approaches, ethical considerations, and critical perspectives on the role and practice of journalism.

At the same time, journalists are expected to navigate increasingly complex informational environments. As Bardoel (1996) argues, the role of journalists as intermediaries is more important than ever, as they help citizens make sense of vast amounts of information. This function is essential for enabling informed decision-making and maintaining democratic accountability. Here comes the discussion about the usefulness of training journalists, so that they can be properly equipped and subsequently be able to educate citizens for personal and collective benefit.

2.7. Contemporary Challenges and the Theory–Practice Gap

Despite the recognized importance of journalism education, a persistent gap remains between theoretical knowledge and professional practice. This “theory–practice gap” reflects broader tensions between academic and professional perspectives, as well as structural differences between educational institutions and media organizations.

The existence of this gap does not necessarily indicate a conflict between academic knowledge and professional practice. Rather, it reflects the ongoing negotiation regarding what forms of knowledge, skills, and competencies are considered essential for contemporary journalism. While news organizations often emphasize immediate practical abilities and newsroom readiness, universities traditionally focus on critical understanding, ethical reflection, and a broader awareness of journalism's social role.

In Southern Europe, this gap is often exacerbated by an emphasis on theoretical training at the expense of practical skills (Papathanassopoulos, 2010). In the Greek context, this debate is particularly relevant, as journalism programs have historically faced questions regarding their relationship with the professional field and their ability to prepare graduates for the realities of newsroom environments. At the same time, the increasing complexity of journalistic work requires a combination of technical expertise, critical thinking, and ethical awareness, highlighting the need for more integrated educational approaches. However, the theory–practice debate remains contested. While some scholars highlight the need for stronger practical components in journalism education, others argue that an excessive emphasis on industry skills may come at the expense of critical thinking, analytical reflection, and journalism's broader democratic role (Mensing, 2010; Frost, 2019).

International frameworks such as UNESCO's Model Curricula (2007) advocate for a balanced approach that combines theoretical knowledge with practical training. Such models aim to produce journalists who are both technically competent and critically informed, capable of adapting to changing professional environments while maintaining a commitment to democratic values (Gioltzidou et al., 2024).

Further analyzing the challenges that universities and more specifically journalism schools are expected to face, Foote and Wao (2017) report that the big issue will be ensuring and maintaining quality, while journalism schools will have to convince others of their value and necessity, in an environment that views the usefulness of studies for a journalist with caution. Skinner et al. (2001, p. 341) argue that the biggest divide is between those who support a focus on professional training and those who would like journalism students to follow a much broader curriculum. Purdey's (2000, p. 350) point is that the famous divide between academic and practical fields is a false dichotomy, as journalism studies should not choose between the two fields but combine them in the most harmonious way.

Therefore, contemporary discussions on journalism education have gradually moved beyond the traditional question of whether universities should emphasize theory or practice. Instead, the central challenge concerns how journalism programs can successfully integrate practical competencies, theoretical knowledge, ethical reasoning, and critical awareness in order to prepare journalists for a rapidly changing media environment.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Methodology and Sampling

This study adopts a quantitative research design to investigate journalists' perceptions of academic education and its role in shaping professional identity within the Greek media context. The exploratory nature of the study reflects its aim to identify patterns in journalists' perceptions and attitudes rather than to produce statistically representative estimates of the entire journalistic population in Greece.

The target population consisted of professional journalists registered as members of the Journalists' Union of Macedonia and Thrace (ESIEMTH). Membership in the union was used as an inclusion criterion because it provided access to professionally recognized journalists who were actively engaged in journalistic practice.

The main research question of this study examines the extent to which professional journalists in Greece perceive journalism education as a meaningful component of their pro-

professional identity formation, and how these perceptions relate to broader understandings of journalism as either a practice grounded in experience and craft or as an academically structured discipline. In this study, professional identity is understood not as a fixed characteristic of journalists, but as a dynamic process through which professionals construct meanings regarding their role, competencies, values, and legitimacy within the field. Accordingly, the study examines journalists' perceptions of the relationship between formal education, professional experience, and journalistic practice as dimensions contributing to professional identity formation (Gioltzidou & Gioltzidou, 2022).

Greece was selected as the empirical setting because the relationship between journalism education and professional practice remains particularly contested. Although journalism has become increasingly institutionalized within higher education, professional traditions continue to emphasize experiential learning and newsroom socialization. This tension provides an appropriate context for examining how journalists negotiate different understandings of professional knowledge, competence, and legitimacy.

To address this research question, the empirical analysis is based on a structured, self-administered survey distributed electronically among professional journalists in Greece between 24 April 2026 and 8 May 2026. Data were collected through a questionnaire composed primarily of closed-ended items measured on Likert-type scales, specifically designed to capture attitudes toward journalism education, the perceived relationship between theory and practice, the value of university-level education, the relationship between journalism as craft and journalism as a profession, professional autonomy, press freedom, and broader ethical challenges within the contemporary Greek media environment. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, following established principles of research ethics, including informed consent and strict confidentiality.

A purposive non-probability sampling approach was employed due to practical limitations regarding access to the target population. Given the exploratory aim of the research and its explicit focus on professional perceptions within a specific journalistic community, this approach was considered methodologically appropriate.

Participants were recruited through the Journalists' Union of Macedonia and Thrace (ESIEMTH), an officially recognized professional organization. To ensure strict ethical compliance and protect participant anonymity, the questionnaire was distributed directly by the union administration to all 931 registered members via their official mailing list; consequently, no personal contact or identifying information was disclosed to the researchers. All registered members who were considered active professionals at the time of data collection were eligible to participate. Within a designated five-day data collection window, a final sample of 115 completed questionnaires was retrieved from this active pool of professionals working across print, broadcast, and digital media, yielding a response rate of 12.35%. Although only 6.1% of respondents held a university degree in Journalism and/or Media Studies, their evaluations of journalism education extend beyond personal formal backgrounds. Given the importance of internships and newsroom-based practical training in the transition from journalism education to professional practice in Greece, established practitioners are frequently exposed to the skills, preparedness, and working practices of students and recent graduates. Such professional interactions may provide respondents with a practical basis for evaluating the skills, preparedness, and workplace adaptation of new entrants to journalism. While a response rate of 12.35% requires cautious interpretation regarding demographic generalizability, the sample provides valuable insights into the perceptions of unionized journalists within a clearly defined professional community. Given the specific institutional context of ESIEMTH membership, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting the experiences and perceptions of this professional group rather than the broader population of journalists in Greece.

The questionnaire consisted primarily of closed-ended questions organized around four main thematic areas: (1) perceptions of journalism education and its usefulness, (2) orientations toward journalism as craft or profession, (3) evaluations of the relationship between theory and practice in journalism training, and (4) perceptions of press freedom and ethical standards within the Greek media system. The development of the questionnaire was informed by relevant literature in journalism studies and professional identity research. The instrument was designed to operationalize key theoretical dimensions discussed in the literature, including the relationship between formal education and professional legitimacy, the role of practical experience, and journalists' perceptions of normative aspects of the profession. Additional items addressed perceptions of press freedom and journalistic ethics in Greece.

Following data collection, responses were coded and analyzed using quantitative methods. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to identify general response patterns. Cross-tabulation analysis was additionally conducted to explore relationships between key variables, particularly those related to journalism education and professional identity orientations along the craft–profession continuum.

The analytical framework was guided by theoretical distinctions in journalism studies, particularly the conceptual separation between craft-based and institutionally professionalized understandings of journalism. In this study, journalists are not treated as a uniform group, but as professionals whose perceptions may be shaped by factors such as experience, organizational context, and exposure to academic training. The selection and grouping of variables were guided by the theoretical framework and research objectives, allowing the analysis to examine recurring patterns in respondents' evaluations of journalism education, professional identity, and newsroom practice.

3.2. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of a non-probability sampling strategy and the recruitment of participants exclusively through the Journalists' Union of Macedonia and Thrace (ESIEMTH) limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the broader population of journalists in Greece. The study should therefore be understood as an exploratory investigation of the perceptions of participating professionals rather than as a representative assessment of the entire Greek journalistic field.

Specifically, recruiting participants through an established professional journalists' union may introduce self-selection and coverage biases. Union members may represent a segment of the profession that is more closely connected to established professional structures and may hold different views regarding professional legitimacy, career pathways, and the role of formal education compared with freelance, digital-only, or non-unionized journalists. This limitation directly affects the interpretation of the findings in relation to the research question, as the conclusions primarily reflect the perspectives of the organized professional segment of Greek journalism. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as representing the views of the entire journalistic workforce in Greece, but rather as providing insight into how established professionals perceive the role of university education in professional identity formation.

Second, the study relies on self-reported data, which reflect participants' perceptions and evaluations rather than objective measures of journalistic competence, educational quality, or professional performance. Since the primary focus of the research is the way journalists perceive the role of education in professional identity formation, these subjective evaluations constitute relevant empirical material; nevertheless, future research

combining survey data with qualitative interviews, observational approaches, or comparative designs could provide further insight into the relationship between education and professional practice.

Third, the cross-sectional design captures journalists' perceptions at a specific point in time and does not allow conclusions regarding changes over time or causal relationships between educational experiences and professional attitudes. Longitudinal and comparative studies could further explore how journalism education interacts with broader transformations in professional identity and media systems. Finally, although the study identifies patterns in journalists' perceptions, larger and more representative samples would allow future research to employ more advanced statistical techniques and examine these issues in greater depth.

4. Results

4.1. Perceptions of Journalism Education and Its Usefulness

Before examining respondents' perceptions regarding the role of university education and its relationship with journalistic practice, it is important to provide an overview of the demographic and professional characteristics of the sample (Table 1). The study included 115 professional journalists, with men representing 59.1% of participants and women 40.9%. The sample was characterized by extensive professional experience, as 56.5% of respondents had more than 25 years of experience in journalism, while 32.2% had between 16 and 25 years of professional experience. Regarding age distribution, 66.6% of participants were over 50 years old, indicating that the sample consisted predominantly of experienced journalists with long-term engagement in the profession.

Table 1. Demographic and professional characteristics of respondents.

Variable	Category	%
Gender	Male	59.1
	Female	40.9
Age	22–30 years	3.5
	31–40 years	6.1
	41–50 years	23.7
	51–60 years	52.6
	61+ years	14.0
Years of professional experience in journalism	Up to 5 years	6.1
	6–15 years	5.2
	16–25 years	32.2
	More than 25 years	56.5
Main field of professional activity	Television	35.4
	Online media	23.0
	Radio	18.6
	Newspaper/Magazine	11.5
	Press office	8.8
	Other	2.7
Educational background	University degree in Journalism and/or Media Studies	6.1
	University degree in another field	51.3
	Postgraduate degree	13.0
	Doctoral degree	3.5
	Post-secondary vocational journalism training (IEK/journalism school)	27.8
	No degree	15.7

Regarding educational background, only 6.1% of respondents held a university degree in Journalism and/or Media Studies, while a larger proportion had completed university studies in other academic fields (51.3%). Additionally, 27.8% had graduated from a journalism school or IEK programme. These characteristics are important for interpreting the findings, as respondents' evaluations of journalism education and professional identity are shaped by substantial professional experience, while only a limited proportion have received formal university-level training specifically in journalism.

In order to better understand how media professionals evaluate the role of higher education in journalism, it is necessary to examine respondents' perceptions regarding the usefulness of university studies, professional preparation, and the broader value of journalism degrees within the contemporary media environment. The following figures present the main attitudes recorded in the survey. To ensure maximum methodological transparency, it should be clarified that the titles of the subsequent figures replicate the exact wording of the original questionnaire items. While certain items were purposefully formulated to mirror ongoing, explicit debates within the journalistic field—such as the perceived tension between formal education and practical apprenticeship—any potential response bias was systematically mitigated by the instrument design. All items were evaluated using balanced, symmetrical Likert-type scales that explicitly provided neutral anchors alongside opposing poles (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'). This structure ensured that respondents were not guided toward a predetermined conclusion but were instead presented with an unconstrained framework to fully express their disagreement or alignment with each institutional proposition.

The findings according to Figure 1 demonstrate a particularly strong endorsement of higher education among media professionals. More specifically, the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that university studies substantially enhance journalists' professional skills, while only a very small percentage expressed negative views. This finding suggests that journalism education is perceived not simply as a formal qualification, but as a central component of professional competence and preparedness. Building on this perception of academic usefulness, the Figure 2 examines whether respondents also consider journalism studies necessary for entering the profession itself.

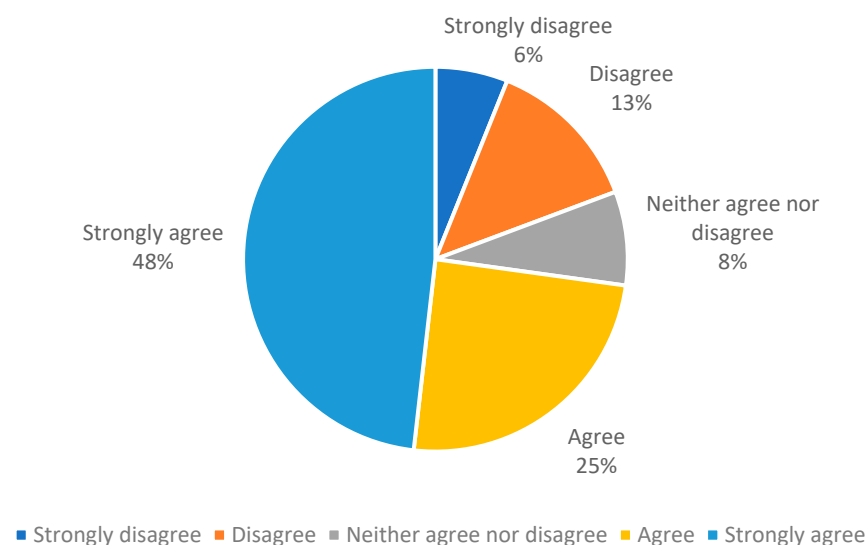


Figure 1. University studies enhance journalists' skills.

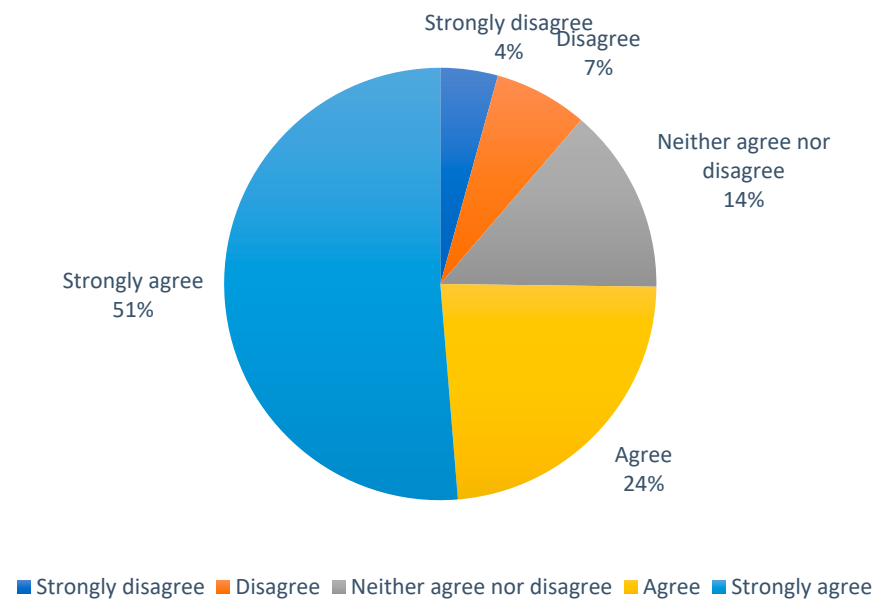


Figure 2. A journalism degree is an essential qualification for entering the profession today.

Figure 2 illustrates respondents' views on whether a journalism degree constitutes an essential qualification for entering the profession today. The results indicate that most participants consider academic credentials increasingly important for professional entry into journalism. This suggests that respondents associate formal education with professional entry requirements.

However, despite the positive evaluations recorded so far, respondents appear considerably more hesitant when reflecting on journalism as a future career choice for younger generations.

Figure 3 presents respondents' willingness to recommend journalism studies to younger generations. Although respondents expressed highly positive attitudes toward journalism education overall, the findings reveal a more cautious position regarding journalism as a career path. Negative responses appear significantly higher in this question, suggesting that concerns related to employment instability, low salaries, and professional insecurity shape perceptions of the future of journalism in Greece.

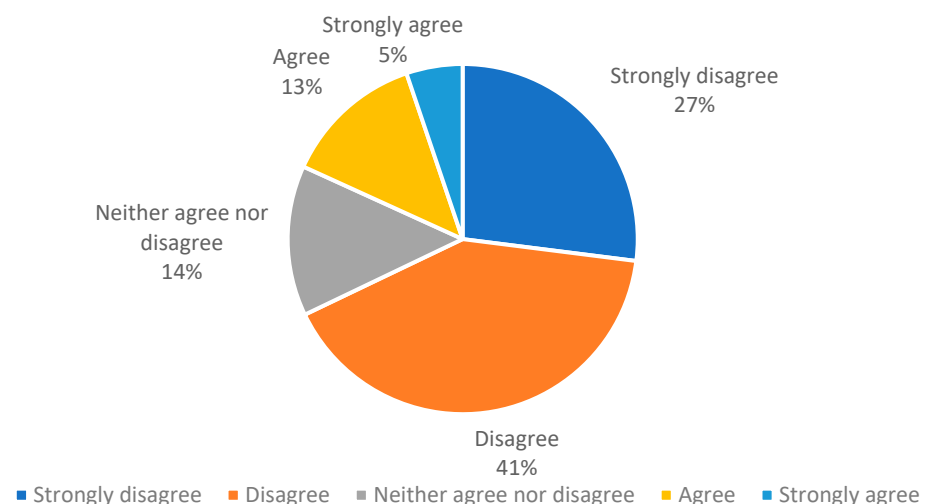


Figure 3. I would recommend that a young person study journalism instead of another academic discipline.

4.2. Orientations Toward Journalism as Craft or Profession

To further explore how respondents conceptualize journalism, it is important to examine whether journalism is primarily understood as a profession requiring formal education or as a craft based mainly on practical experience.

Figure 4 presents respondents' attitudes toward the statement that practical abilities are more important than university education in journalism. The findings reveal a strong rejection of the perception that journalism can rely exclusively on practical skills. The majority of respondents disagreed with the idea that university education is unnecessary, indicating that journalism is increasingly viewed as a profession requiring systematic academic preparation and institutional legitimacy.

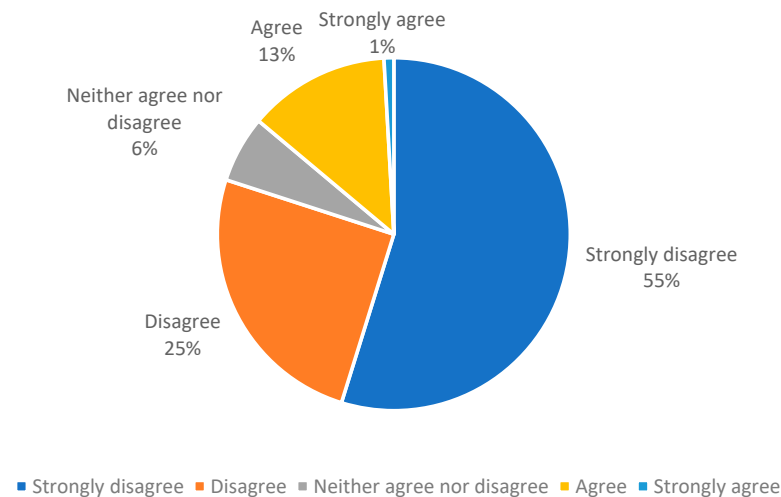


Figure 4. A journalist does not need to hold a university degree, because practical skills are more important.

At the same time, rejecting purely experience-based journalism does not imply a diminished importance of practical training. On the contrary, respondents strongly emphasized the need for applied skills within university curricula. Figure 5 illustrates respondents' evaluations regarding the importance of practical training within journalism curricula. As shown in the figure, respondents overwhelmingly supported the strengthening of practice-oriented education. This result demonstrates that professionalization and practical competence are not perceived as contradictory dimensions. On the contrary, participants appear to support a hybrid educational model combining theoretical knowledge with newsroom-oriented training.

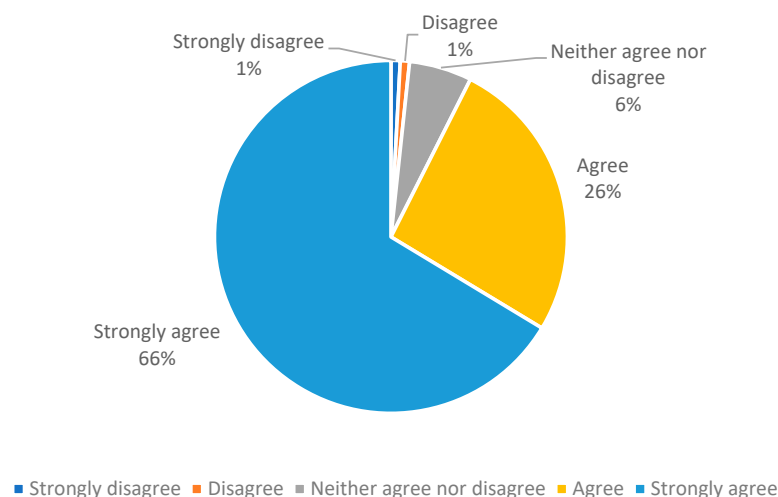


Figure 5. Journalism degree programs should place emphasis on practical skills.

This broader perception of journalism as a distinct professional field is also reflected in respondents' views regarding the structure of journalism-related university degrees. Figure 6 presents respondents' preferences regarding the structure of journalism-related university degrees. The preference for distinct journalism degrees suggests that respondents perceive journalism as an autonomous professional and academic field with a specific democratic and ethical role that differs from strategic communication and public relations.

- Integrated degree: Journalism, Communication, and Public Relations are interrelated fields and should be taught together as a broad academic discipline.
- Separate degrees: Journalism has a different purpose and ethical framework from Public Relations; therefore, it should be an independent degree program.
- Common core and specialization: There should be a shared foundational curriculum in the early stages, followed by full separation into specialized tracks in the later years.

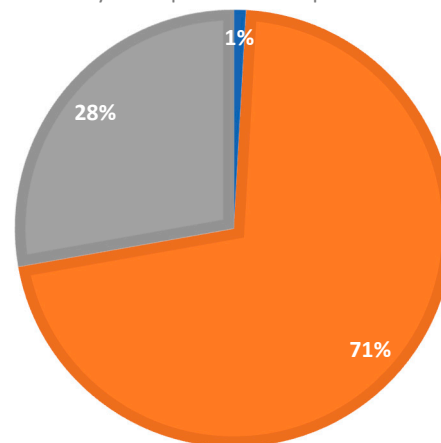


Figure 6. Which of the following statements best reflects your view on the structure of university studies in the fields of Journalism, Communication, and Public Relations?

4.3. Evaluations of the Theory–Practice Relationship in Journalism Training

A central objective of this study is to investigate whether journalism education successfully connects academic knowledge with the practical realities of media work. For this reason, respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of university programs in preparing students for professional newsroom conditions.

Figure 7 presents respondents' evaluations regarding the extent to which journalism programs realistically simulate newsroom environments.

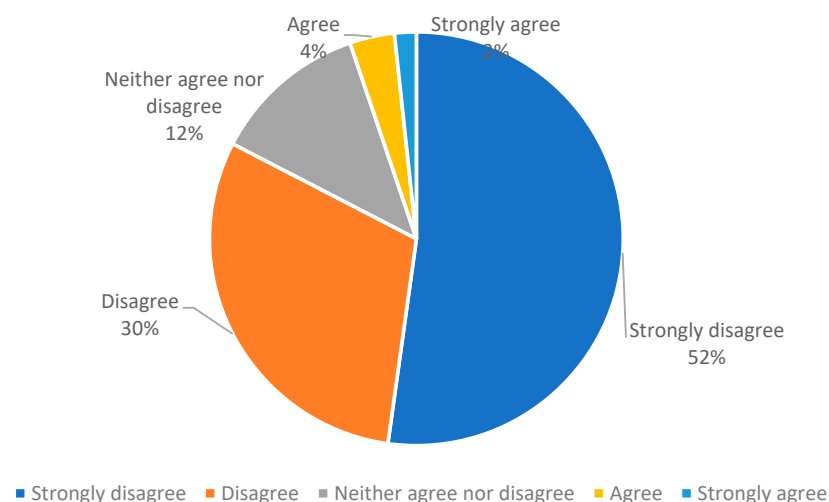


Figure 7. University journalism programs provide a realistic simulation of working conditions in the profession.

The findings indicate considerable dissatisfaction with the practical dimension of journalism education. Most respondents disagreed that university programs adequately reproduce real newsroom conditions, suggesting a perceived gap between academic instruction and professional reality. This critical assessment becomes even more apparent in evaluations related to the demanding conditions of live reporting and deadline pressure. Figure 8 illustrates respondents' views on whether journalism studies sufficiently prepare students for live reporting and deadline pressure.

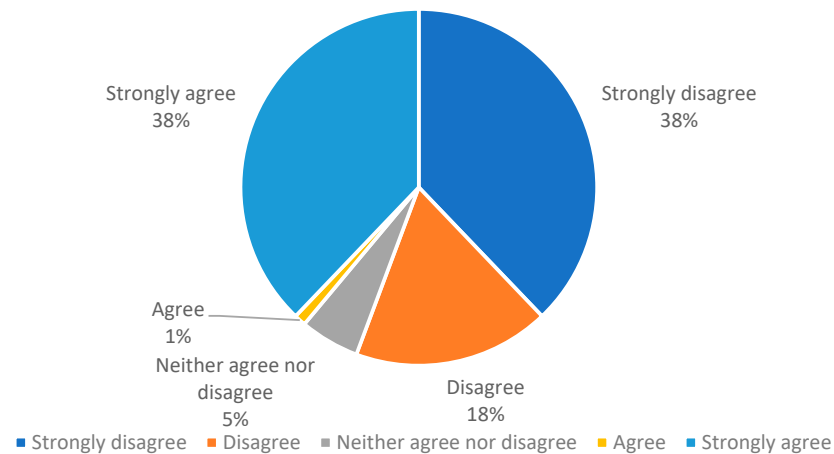


Figure 8. University studies adequately prepare students for the time pressure of live reporting.

Negative evaluations dominate this item, highlighting concerns regarding the limited exposure of students to the time-sensitive demands of contemporary journalism. Participants appear to recognize that practical newsroom experience remains difficult to replicate within academic settings. Beyond newsroom simulation itself, respondents also reflected on the broader challenge of translating academic knowledge into professional practice.

Figure 9 presents respondents' attitudes toward the statement that students struggle to apply theory in everyday journalistic practice. The findings demonstrate a persistent tension between theoretical instruction and professional implementation. Respondents appear to recognize the importance of theory while simultaneously questioning its practical applicability within newsroom routines. Given these concerns, participants were also asked to evaluate possible ways of reducing the perceived gap between academia and professional journalism.

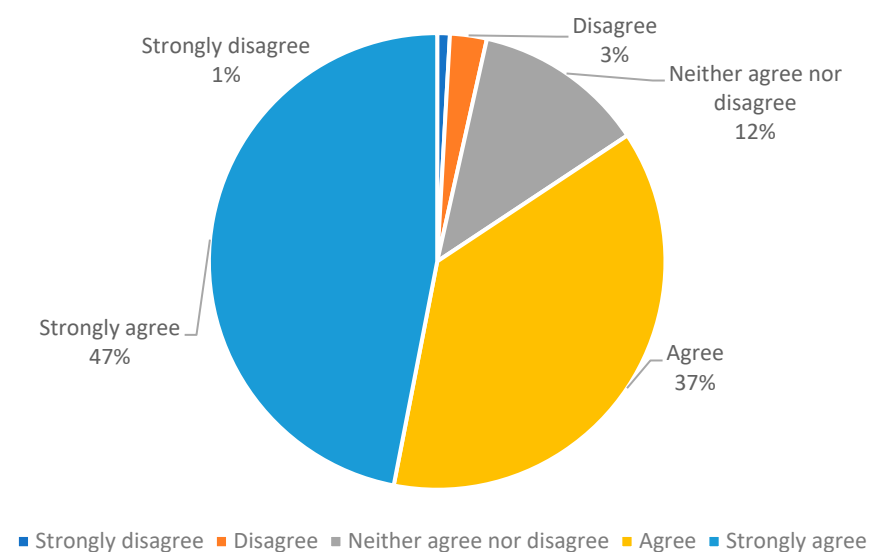


Figure 9. Journalism students struggle to apply theory in everyday practice.

Figure 10 presents respondents' attitudes toward the involvement of professional journalists in university teaching. The near-universal agreement recorded in this question demonstrates strong support for closer collaboration between academia and media professionals. Respondents appear to consider professional participation in teaching as a potential mechanism for reducing the theory–practice divide.

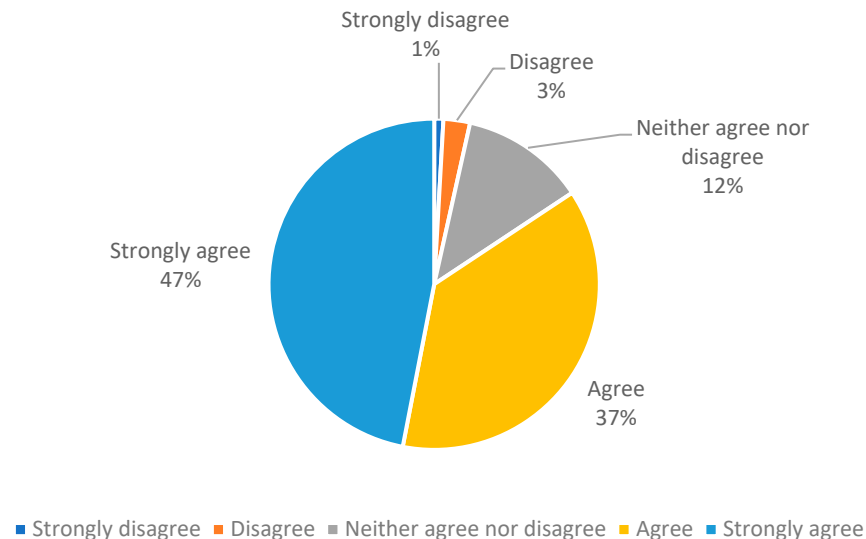


Figure 10. The presence of more experienced professional journalists in teaching would help reduce the gap between university education and professional reality.

4.4. Perceptions of Press Freedom and Ethical Standards in the Greek Media System

The final thematic area examines how respondents perceive the relationship between journalism education, professional ethics, and the broader media environment in Greece.

Figure 11 presents respondents' views regarding the role of university education in protecting journalists from manipulation and external influence. The findings suggest that respondents strongly associate academic education with professional autonomy and ethical awareness. Higher education appears to be perceived as an important safeguard against political and economic pressures within the media system.

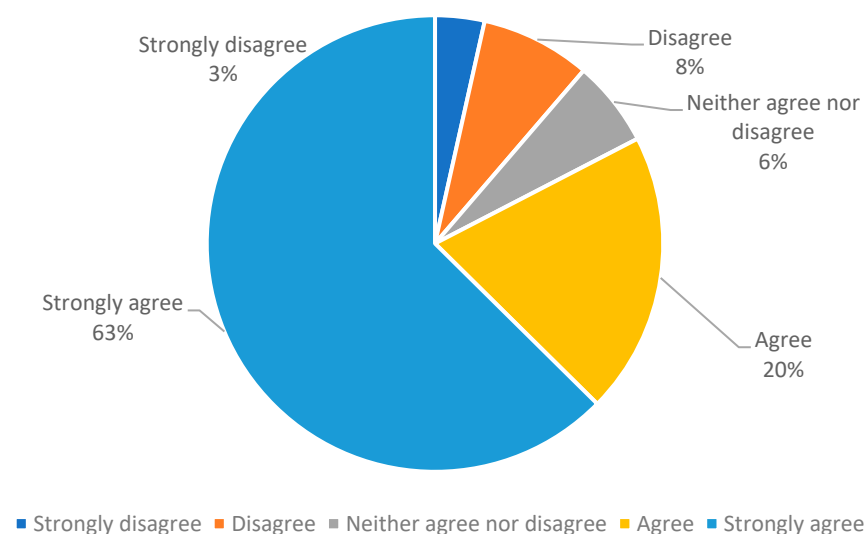


Figure 11. University education equips journalists to resist manipulation.

At the same time, respondents expressed considerably more negative evaluations when assessing the broader institutional environment within which journalism operates

in Greece. Figure 12 illustrates respondents' evaluations of press freedom in Greece. As shown in the figure, negative evaluations clearly dominate. Most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of press freedom in Greece, reflecting broader concerns regarding political influence, media concentration, and declining trust in journalistic institutions. These concerns become even more evident in responses related to political interference and journalistic ethics.

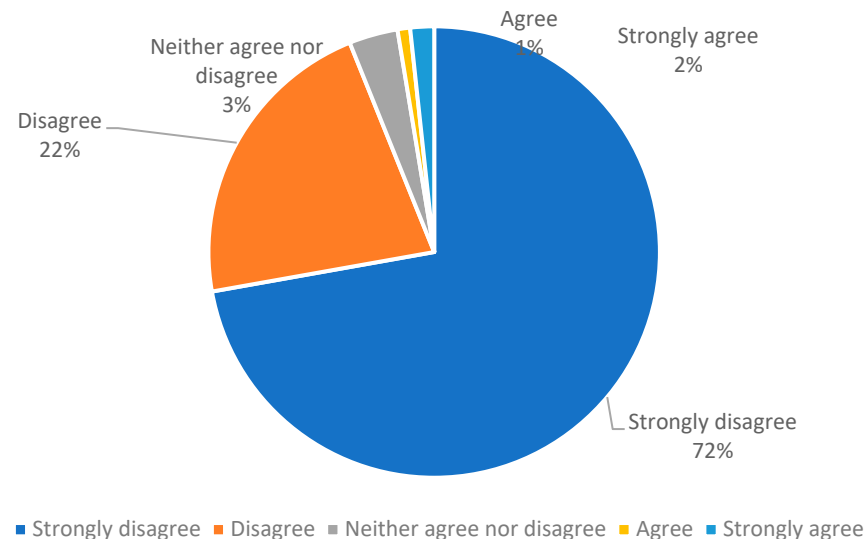


Figure 12. I am satisfied with the level of press freedom in Greece.

Figure 13 presents respondents' views on whether close relationships between journalists and political actors constitute a major ethical challenge. The strong consensus observed in this item indicates that respondents perceive political parallelism as one of the most significant structural problems affecting journalism in Greece. Ethical concerns therefore appear closely connected not only to individual professional conduct but also to the broader organization of the media system.

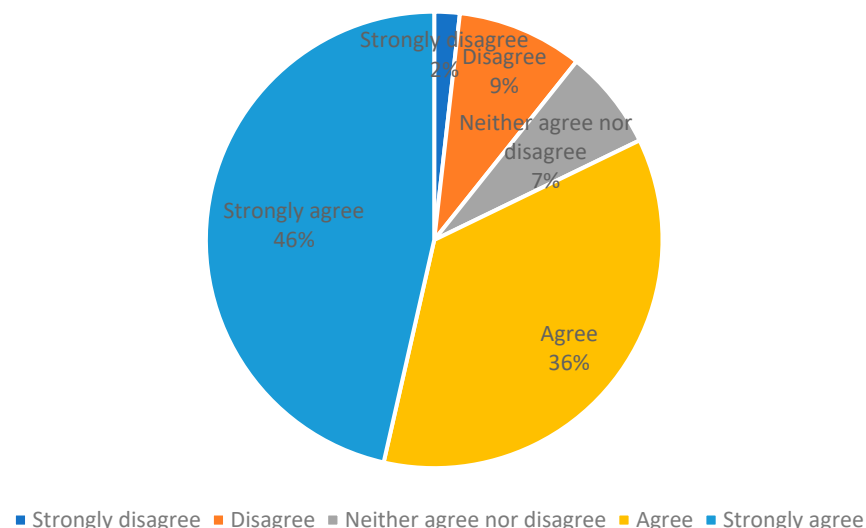


Figure 13. Close relationships between journalists and political figures constitute the greatest challenge to maintaining journalistic ethics in Greece.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to ongoing scholarly debates on journalism education by illustrating the coexistence of different professional perceptions regarding the

role of academic knowledge and practical experience within the Greek media landscape. The findings indicate that, although only 6.1% of respondents hold a university degree specifically in journalism, a large majority of participants consider academic education relevant for professional entry into journalism. Concurrently, the sample rejects the notion that practical skills supersede formal university training. These findings suggest a shift among the participating journalists away from an exclusively craft-based understanding of journalism and toward a more hybrid perception combining formal education and professional experience. Furthermore, 73% of participants indicated that journalism graduates receive stronger preparation in ethical issues, while 82.6% perceived higher education as contributing to journalists' ability to resist manipulation and external pressures. These perceptions highlight the importance that respondents attribute to academic socialization, aligning with Hallin's (2000) conceptualization of higher education as an institutional protective mechanism against external, non-journalistic pressures.

A substantial proportion of respondents associated concerns regarding journalistic quality in Greece with perceived weaknesses in journalism education and professional preparation. Contextualized within the Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2026) World Press Freedom Index 2026, which ranked Greece 89th out of 180 countries, these findings highlight broader concerns regarding press freedom and journalistic autonomy. This perceived relationship between press freedom challenges and journalism education reflects broader concerns regarding the conditions under which professional standards and journalistic autonomy are maintained. Consequently, these findings corroborate the theoretical frameworks of Deuze (2006) and Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), who posit that journalism education is paramount in fostering ethical standards and consolidating the profession's public service orientation. Moreover, the results resonate with Papathanasopoulos (2010), who delineates the structural vulnerabilities inherent in Southern European media systems, particularly the chronic tensions between normative professional ideals and institutional constraints.

Finally, the study provides insights into journalists' evaluations of the strengths and limitations of university journalism curricula. Although the professional cohort broadly acknowledges the utility and necessity of tertiary journalistic education—notwithstanding their own limited formal training in the discipline—they identify critical pedagogical lacunae among recent graduates. Specifically, 82.6% of seasoned practitioners contend that existing respondents perceived existing curricula as insufficiently connected to professional working conditions. Furthermore, exceeding 90% of respondents advocate for a curriculum heavily anchored in media law and journalistic ethics, viewing these domains as intrinsically linked to editorial autonomy and press freedom. Accordingly, the empirical data are consistent with UNESCO's (2007) emphasis on the importance of integrating theoretical knowledge, practical competencies, and ethical awareness within journalism education, while affirming Szot's (2009) thesis that the absence of a well-defined epistemological core in journalism education exacerbates inconsistencies in professional standards, thereby widening the persistent "theory-practice gap" documented in the literature.

6. Conclusions

The present study explored the perceptions of participating professional journalists regarding the role of university education in shaping professional competence, ethical awareness, and professional identity within the contemporary Greek media environment. The findings indicate that respondents generally attribute substantial value to journalism education, recognizing its contribution to the development of professional skills, ethical understanding, and awareness of journalistic responsibilities. In this respect, university education

is perceived not merely as a formal academic qualification, but also as an important element in the ongoing process of professionalization and identity formation within journalism.

At the same time, the findings reveal nuanced and sometimes conflicting perceptions among respondents. Although participants strongly supported the value of journalism education, they expressed greater hesitation when considering journalism as a career path for younger generations. This tension appears to reflect broader concerns reported by participants regarding employment insecurity, working conditions, economic pressures, and uncertainty surrounding the future sustainability of journalism in Greece.

The study also suggests that respondents do not perceive theoretical education and practical training as mutually exclusive dimensions. On the contrary, participants strongly emphasized the need for journalism curricula that combine academic knowledge with applied newsroom experience. The widespread dissatisfaction regarding the limited simulation of professional conditions within university programs suggests that the perceived theory–practice gap remains an important challenge identified by the participating journalists regarding the relationship between university education and professional practice. In this context, the strong support for the participation of active media professionals in university teaching reflects respondents' preference for closer collaboration between academia and the journalism industry.

Equally important are the findings concerning perceptions of press freedom and journalistic ethics in Greece. Respondents perceived higher education as contributing to greater preparedness in addressing challenges related to manipulation and external influence. Nevertheless, the overwhelmingly negative evaluations regarding the state of press freedom in Greece indicate significant concerns among participants regarding the institutional and political conditions under which journalism currently operates in Greece. Concerns regarding close relationships between journalists and political actors further underline the perception that structural factors continue to affect journalistic credibility and autonomy.

Overall, the findings suggest that journalism education holds substantial symbolic and professional value among the journalists participating in this study. However, they also indicate that strengthening the practical dimension of journalism training and improving the broader professional environment are perceived by respondents as necessary conditions for reinforcing the quality and social legitimacy of journalism in Greece.

Future research should further investigate the relationship between journalism education and professional practice through larger samples, comparative approaches, and qualitative methods. In particular, interviews with journalists, educators, and journalism students could provide deeper insights into how professional identity is constructed and negotiated across different stages of journalistic socialization.

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that research projects conducted within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or research centers comply with applicable legislation and accepted ethical standards. As this study was conducted independently and not within or funded by any HEI or research institution, it does not fall under the jurisdiction of any REDC. Also, currently, there is no competent national authority in Greece responsible for granting ethical approval for such independent research projects. Thus, Ethics Committee or Institutional Review Board approval is not required. Nevertheless, the research was conducted in full compliance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013 revision), including: Informed consent obtained from all participants prior to their involvement; Voluntary participation; Full anonymity and confidentiality; No collection or processing of sensitive personal data.

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