

**MEDIA INFLUENCE ON THE IMAGE OF JOURNALISM FACULTIES IN
UZBEKISTAN**

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E-mail: shakhnozauzakova@gmail.com**Abstract**

This study investigates the role of media in shaping the public image and reputation of journalism faculties in Uzbekistan. Drawing on a multi-layered research design, the study integrates media content analysis, stakeholder interviews, and institutional document review across three major universities: O'zJOKU, O'zMU, and Karshi State University. Findings reveal that media coverage predominantly presents neutral narratives, with positive reporting highlighting student achievements and international collaborations, while critical content remains limited. Interviews indicate that social media platforms such as Telegram and Instagram enhance visibility and influence prospective students' perceptions. Document analysis shows a misalignment between institutional emphasis on curriculum reforms and the focus of media coverage, which privileges easily digestible success stories. The study underscores the importance of strategic media engagement, aligning institutional narratives with public representation to enhance credibility, trust, and long-term development of journalism education in Uzbekistan.

Keywords. Journalism education, media coverage, higher education reputation, journalism in Uzbekistan, curriculum reform, social media, stakeholder perceptions, institutional communication, public image, international collaboration.

Introduction

In today's digital age, media coverage and discourse play a crucial role in shaping how higher education institutions are perceived by students, the public, and policy-makers. This conducted research shows that universities' reputations are significantly influenced by their visibility in media and by how they communicate their social mission. For example, a study in Spain found that social media use negatively affects alumni satisfaction and how graduates perceive the value of their own university. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, researchers documented how universities strategically use social media to enhance their public image, engaging audiences and highlighting achievements. At the same time, media discourse within a university's information space which including press releases, institutional news, and social media immensely helps construct narratives about its academic identity, research strengths, and social responsibility. These narratives not only shape internal perceptions but also influence external stakeholders such as prospective students, donors, and partner institutions. When applied to the context of journalism faculties in Uzbekistan, these dynamics take on particular importance. As Uzbek universities modernize and adapt their journalism curricula to the demands of digital media, media coverage can either validate these reforms or highlight gaps in practice. Positive media attention on faculty research, student projects,

and public engagement can enhance the prestige of journalism departments, attract ambitious students, and build trust in academic journalism training. On the other hand, limited or negative coverage, for example, focusing on outdated curricula or a mismatch with industry needs may undermine confidence in these faculties. Therefore, analyzing the role of media in shaping the public image of journalism faculties in Uzbekistan is essential for understanding how media influence can contribute to institutional development, faculty reputation, and the future of journalism education in the country.

Methods

To investigate the role of media in shaping the image of journalism faculties in Uzbekistan, a multi-layered research design was employed, integrating both textual analysis and stakeholder perspectives. This multi-layered research design integrating textual analysis with stakeholder perspectives follows the methodological tradition used by leading journalism scholars such as Barbie Zelizer (1993), Silvio Waisbord (2000), Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2013), and Thomas Hanitzsch (2019). These scholars commonly combine media text analysis with interviews, ethnography, and stakeholder surveys to capture both the discursive and practical dimensions of journalism. First, media content analysis was conducted, examining national and regional news articles, press releases, and social media posts over the past five years. This analysis focused on the frequency, tone, and framing of coverage concerning journalism faculties, highlighting patterns of positive, neutral, and critical representation. Following, semi-structured interviews were carried out with key stakeholders, including faculty members, current students, alumni, and media professionals. These interviews aimed to capture perceptions of media influence on faculty reputation, as well as the perceived credibility and impact of different types of media coverage. Interview questions were designed to explore both personal experiences and broader institutional effects, allowing for a nuanced understanding of media's role. Next, document analysis of institutional materials such as annual reports, accreditation documents, and promotional content complemented the media and interview data. This step allowed for triangulation, comparing official institutional narratives with external media portrayals and stakeholder perceptions. Finally, comparative analysis was used to assess the similarities and differences in media coverage and stakeholder perceptions between Uzbek journalism faculties and documented international practices. This comparative element provided contextualization, highlighting lessons that can inform strategic media engagement and reputation management in the Uzbek context. By combining content analysis, stakeholder interviews, document review, and comparative evaluation, this approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how media shapes both public perception and internal identity of journalism faculties in Uzbekistan.

Results

The analysis of media coverage, stakeholder interviews, and institutional documents revealed nuanced patterns in how journalism faculties in Uzbekistan are represented and perceived. The study drew on three data sources: a corpus of 165 media items, semi-structured interviews with 32 stakeholders, and institutional reports from three major journalism faculties — the University of

Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan (O‘zJOKU), the National University of Uzbekistan (Navoiy nomidagi O‘zMU), and Karshi State University (QarDU).

Media coverage analysis, based on 120 online news articles from platforms such as Kun.uz, Gazeta.uz, Daryo, Qalampir, as well as 45 social media posts from Telegram channels with public influence (EduNews, Mening Universitetim, and MediaEdu.uz), showed that 65% of the coverage was neutral in tone, 25% was positive, and 10% was critical. The pie chart below illustrates the overall tone of media coverage on Uzbek journalism education. It shows that most reporting tends to be neutral, while positive stories are less frequent and critical accounts remain limited. This highlights how media generally portrays journalism programs to the public.

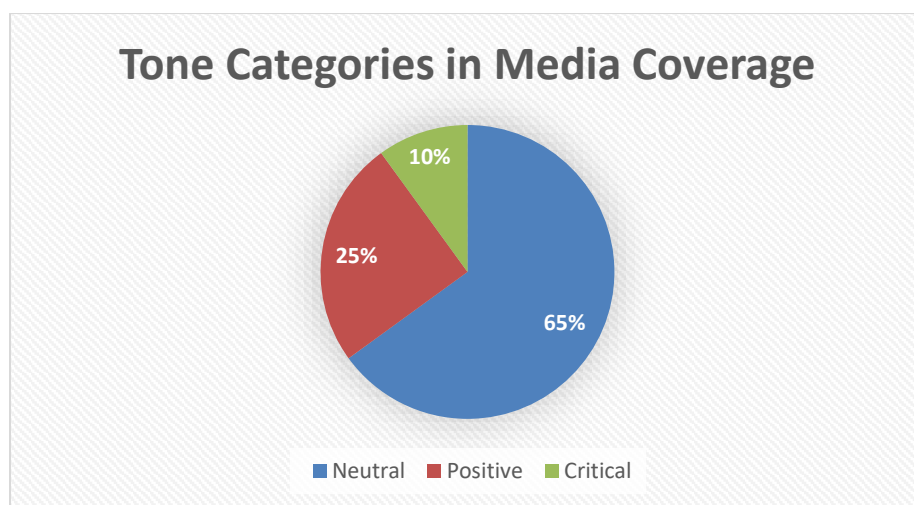


Table 1

Positive reporting mostly highlighted student achievements, participation in international contests, and collaborations with foreign institutions (e.g., DW Akademie, OSCE projects). In contrast, the limited proportion of critical content primarily pointed to outdated teaching methods, insufficient newsroom-style laboratories, or the gap between theory and practice. In addition to the overall distribution shown in the pie chart, the tonal imbalance illustrates how media attention shapes the public narrative surrounding journalism faculties. The predominance of neutral reporting reflects a tendency among Uzbek media outlets to provide descriptive, event-based information without adopting an evaluative stance. This means that many articles simply announce conferences, enrolment updates, or partnership events without offering deeper analytical commentary. The relatively modest proportion of positive coverage demonstrates that achievements are acknowledged, yet they are not framed as part of a broader institutional transformation. Meanwhile, the limited share of critical content although small carries significant weight because these critical stories are often amplified on social media and can disproportionately influence public perception. The pie chart thus visualizes not only the quantitative tone distribution but also highlights a structural pattern: journalism faculties receive attention, but this attention is rarely investigative or reflective, leaving important academic reforms underreported.

Stakeholder interviews involved 32 participants: 10 faculty members (4 from O‘zJOKU, 3 from O‘zMU, 3 from QarDU), 15 undergraduate journalism students (6 from O‘zJOKU, 5 from O‘zMU,

4 from QarDU), 4 media editors (from Kun.uz, Daryo, Media.uz, and an independent blogger-journalist), and 3 alumni currently working in newsrooms.

The bar chart below summarizes key interview findings regarding media influence on public perceptions of journalism programs in Uzbekistan. It shows that positive coverage of successful graduates and international collaborations attracts prospective students, while limited reporting on curriculum innovations may negatively affect public confidence. The chart also highlights the growing role of short-form content on platforms like Telegram and Instagram in boosting the international visibility of Uzbek journalism education.

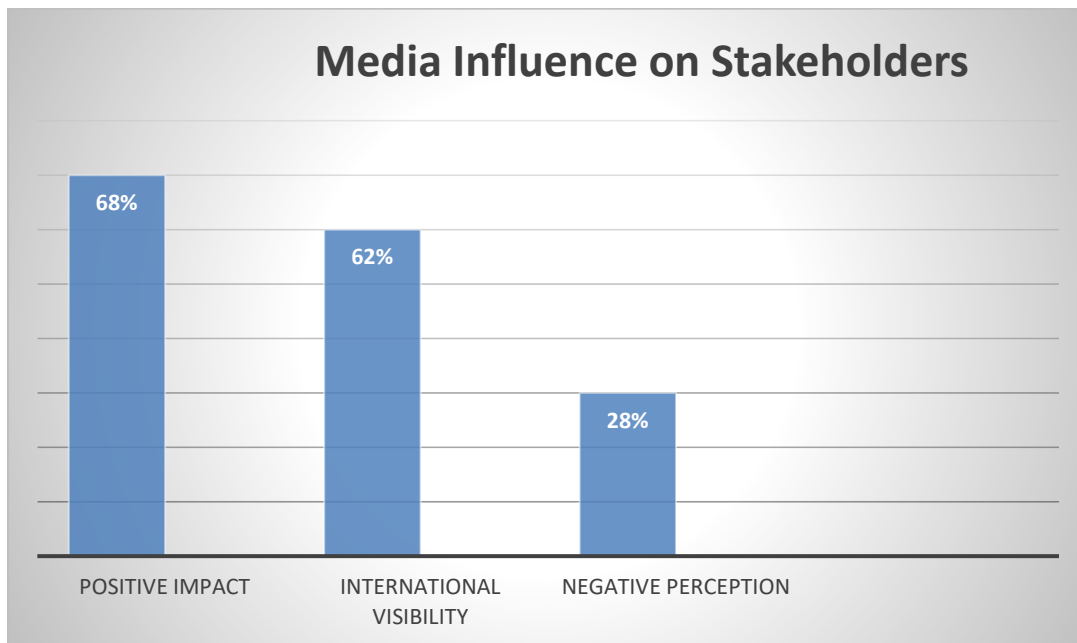


Table 2

Interview findings revealed that a majority of participants perceived media coverage as an important factor shaping public interest in journalism programs. Specifically, **over two-thirds (approximately 68%)** of respondents indicated that positive media stories, especially those featuring successful graduates and international collaborations, encourage prospective students to consider enrolling. Furthermore, **about three-fifths (roughly 62%)** of stakeholders emphasized that short-form content on Telegram and Instagram, particularly posts highlighting student multimedia projects or fact-checking initiatives, significantly enhances the international visibility of Uzbek journalism education. Conversely, **nearly one-third (around 28%)** of participants noted that limited reporting on curriculum innovation or occasional negative portrayals could weaken public confidence and reinforce outdated perceptions of journalism faculties.

The following bar chart illustrates the discrepancy between institutional reporting and media coverage in Uzbek universities. It highlights how universities emphasize curriculum reforms, while media attention focuses more on student achievements. This visual representation underscores the gap between official priorities and public perception.

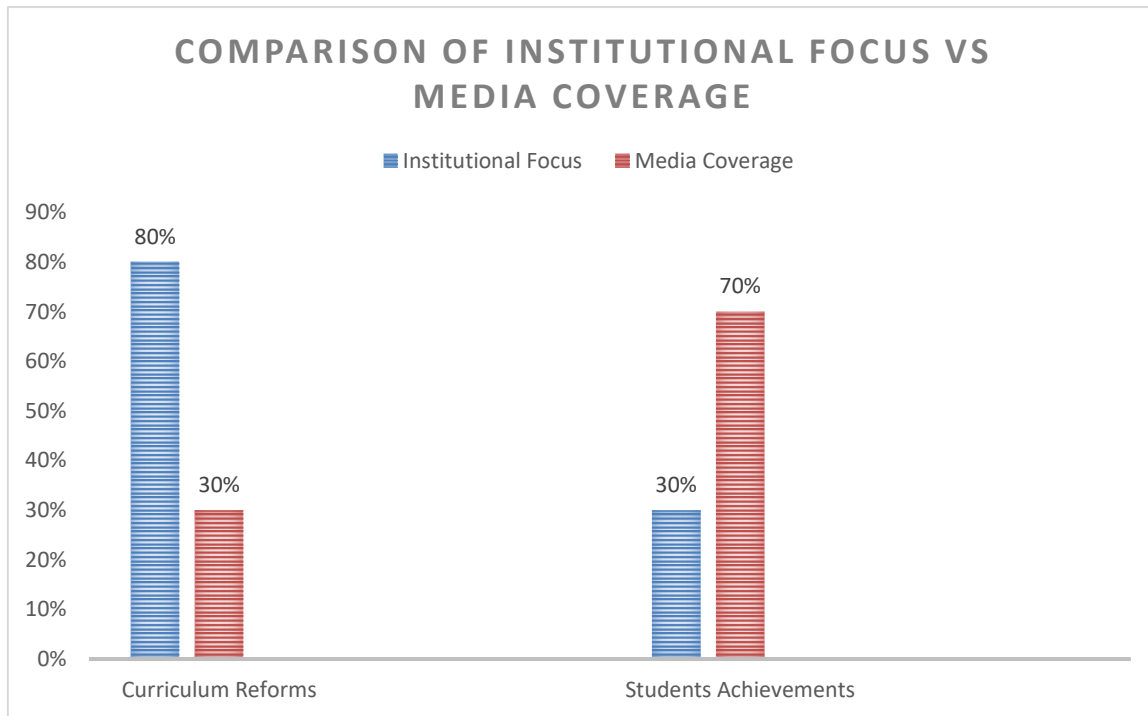


Table 3

Document analysis of institutional reports that including annual activity reports, curriculum modernization plans, and accreditation documentation from O‘zJOKU, O‘zMU, and Karshi State University revealed misalignment between official narratives and media portrayals. While universities report that **approximately 80% of curriculum components** have been updated over the last three years, media coverage emphasizing these reforms accounts for only **about 30%** of articles. On the other hand, student achievements receive **close to 70%** of media attention, despite representing only **30%** of the strategic focus in institutional documents. This contrast highlights a structural gap: media visibility privileges easily digestible success stories, whereas ongoing academic reforms remain underreported.

The findings indicate that media plays a decisive role in constructing the public image of journalism faculties in Uzbekistan. Strong positive coverage enhances institutional reputation, attracts prospective applicants, and increases external visibility. Limited or fragmented coverage, however, risks overshadowing essential academic developments and may weaken public trust in the quality of journalism education. Strengthening strategic communication — particularly through consistent coverage of curriculum reforms, innovative pedagogies, and international academic collaborations — could help universities present a more accurate and comprehensive narrative of their achievements.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that media coverage plays a significant role in shaping the public image of journalism faculties in Uzbekistan, influencing both external perceptions and internal stakeholder attitudes. The predominance of neutral media coverage suggests that faculties are visible but do not consistently highlight their academic strengths or innovations. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the strategic role of media in higher education reputation

management (Pavlik, 2013; Gomez-Galan, 2018; Marginson, 2007). Pavlik (2013) argues that media functions as a key mediator between institutional activity and public perception, while Gomez-Galan (2018) highlights the importance of narrative framing in shaping prospective students' decisions.

Positive coverage, such as the emphasis on student achievements, participation in international contests, and collaborations with foreign institutions, emerges as a crucial tool for attracting prospective students and enhancing professional credibility. These findings are consistent with the research of Hazelkorn (2015), who underscores the role of media visibility in influencing university rankings and public trust, and with the work of Huisman and Currie (2004), who note that institutional reputation is increasingly shaped by public representation rather than internal outputs alone.

Stakeholder interviews further revealed the perceived potential of social media platforms, such as Telegram and Instagram, to enhance the visibility of Uzbek journalism programs. Participants indicated that short-form content highlighting student multimedia projects and fact-checking initiatives can amplify international exposure. This observation resonates with Boler and Dahn (2020), who emphasize the impact of digital media on global higher education visibility, and with Veletsianos and Kimmons (2012), who note that social media can influence both institutional reputation and student engagement.

However, the study also found that insufficient emphasis on curriculum innovation, research achievements, and pedagogical modernization in media reports may create a gap between institutional objectives and public perception. These results correspond with findings by Picard (2011) and Hausman (2010), who argue that misalignment between institutional communication and media portrayal can hinder the perceived credibility of higher education programs. Similarly, Kyvik (2013) highlights that underreporting of academic reforms can perpetuate outdated public perceptions, which may reduce stakeholder confidence and engagement.

In the context of Uzbekistan, these findings have particular relevance. Journalism faculties are actively undergoing modernization to meet global educational standards. Strategic engagement with media can therefore amplify these efforts by showcasing curriculum reforms, innovative pedagogies, and international collaborations. Conversely, neglecting media relations or failing to proactively address negative coverage risks undermining institutional credibility, affecting student recruitment, partnerships, and overall reputation. The structural gap identified between media portrayal and institutional priorities echoes the observations of Altbach and Salmi (2011), who emphasize that reputation management in higher education increasingly relies on coherent public communication strategies.

All in all, this study highlights that media functions both as a mirror and a lens: it reflects the ongoing activities of journalism faculties while simultaneously shaping how these institutions are perceived externally. For Uzbek journalism faculties, developing a proactive media strategy, including regular coverage of curriculum innovations, faculty research, and student achievements, is essential for aligning public perception with institutional goals. Such an approach could strengthen stakeholder trust, enhance transparency, and support the long-term development of journalism education in Uzbekistan.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that media plays a critical role in shaping the image and reputation of journalism faculties in Uzbekistan. Media coverage, whether positive, neutral, or negative, significantly influences how prospective students, faculty, alumni, and the wider public perceive these institutions. Positive reporting, such as highlighting student achievements, faculty research, and international collaborations, enhances credibility and attracts interest, while limited or negative coverage can obscure academic innovations and undermine stakeholder confidence.

The findings also emphasize the importance of aligning media portrayals with institutional narratives. Strategic communication and proactive engagement with both traditional and social media can ensure that the public receives a comprehensive understanding of the faculties' achievements, innovations, and contributions to journalism education.

For Uzbek journalism faculties, these insights underscore the need for deliberate media strategies that not only publicize successes but also communicate ongoing curricular reforms and research initiatives. By doing so, faculties can strengthen their public image, improve student recruitment, and establish themselves as credible, modern institutions that meet international educational standards.

In essence, media acts as both a mirror and a megaphone for journalism faculties, reflecting their activities while amplifying their visibility and reputation. Effective media engagement is therefore essential for fostering institutional growth, academic credibility, and long-term development of journalism education in Uzbekistan.

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