

## Negotiating the Paradox of Trust: A Metajournalistic Discourse Analysis of Radio Suara Surabaya

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study is based on the emerging contradiction regarding trust in journalism studies. Initially, trust is the primary basis of legitimacy for news media and cannot be compromised. However, this focus has limited the media's ability to expand commercially and support its organizational costs. Local media is a prime example, as it works to build trust in order to maintain its legitimacy.

**Purpose:** This study examines how Radio Suara Surabaya's actors build and negotiate trust using metajournalistic discourse, and explores its effects on journalistic legitimacy and the organization's economic sustainability. **Methods:** This research used a qualitative approach with a discursive case study design, using Radio Suara Surabaya as a reflective case. Data were primarily collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) with editorial and managerial actors, along with historical documents and prior research related to the organization.

**Results:** For actors, trust is built through a long institutional process that guides journalistic ethics. However, stronger public trust also brings higher expectations. When the organization pursues revenue within its monetization limits, these efforts may be perceived as inconsistent with the values that built that trust. This creates a paradox that trust reinforces journalistic legitimacy, but it does not automatically create financial sustainability for a media platform.

**Conclusion:** The study identifies a "paradox of trust" in which trust strengthens the legitimacy of local media while also limiting the forms of monetization considered acceptable. **Implications:** Local media sustainability is shaped not only by business models and technology, but also by ongoing internal and public negotiations. These negotiations determine which journalistic values must be upheld and which organizational changes can be justified.

**Keywords:** journalism; media platformization; metajournalistic discourse; Radio Suara Surabaya; trust

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## INTRODUCTION

The platformization of the media industry has raised new questions about public trust. As digital platforms expand, they reshape news distribution, change competition among media organizations, reduce editorial control for the production and circulation of news, and increase media dependence on algorithms (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). The latest study has shown that dependence on platforms forces the newsroom to use social media as a strategic publication tool to maintain editorial autonomy while remaining visible within the platform ecosystem (Kiberg et al., 2026). Consequently, media institutions (including local media) must face not only economic pressure, but also pressures that erode their professional legitimacy.

Several studies have shown that contemporary journalism is characterized by a crisis of journalistic authority as a professionally valid news institution. This crisis is part of a collective crisis stemming from the mismatch between the traditional business model and platform logic. The transformation of the media ecosystem to digital has changed the media's source of income, making it increasingly dependent on platform logic and audience metrics (Forja-Pena et al., 2024; Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). Several media organizations have adopted platform-like features to maintain their autonomy and reduce their dependence on platforms (Meese & Seipp, 2025). Recently, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has undermined professional legitimacy and journalistic authority, as generative AI has challenged journalists' claims regarding their skills, professional judgment, and symbolic authority (Dodds et al., 2025; Hastuti et al., 2025; van Dalen, 2026).

In fact, in journalistic practice, trust is one of the foundational pillars of legitimacy and professional authority. Journalism obtains its authority from public validation regarding its credibility, professional competence, and journalistic integrity (Carlson, 2017; Vos & Thomas, 2019). In other words, trust is fundamental for the existence and sustainability of the legitimacy of journalistic institutions (Hanitzsch et al., 2018).

The problem is that several studies in various countries reveal a paradox related to this belief. A high rate of public trust does not always correlate positively with economic growth and media sustainability. Although trust in the media is relatively high, it does not automatically translate into revenue stability in the digital ecosystem for media organizations (Fletcher et al., 2025; Newman et al., 2023). Public trust, however, does not always mean willingness to adopt or support digital news financially, despite it being the main source of digital revenue. Kung (2023) notes that journalistic legitimacy and economic sustainability do not always move in the same direction.

This problem raises questions about how industry pressures shape journalists' organizational adjustments while they seek to maintain public trust. The study addresses a gap in research about media trust, which has largely examined it through audience perception (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). Trust is also often viewed as an external phenomenon to the organization (Garusi et al., 2025). As a result, the internal reflections of media workers, particularly in local Indonesian media, on trust as a source of legitimacy are still largely underexplored.

A research tradition focusing on metajournalistic discourse is starting to develop in the literature of the Global North, especially in North America and Europe. Conversely, in the Global South, including Indonesia, this discourse remains largely underexplored, despite the distinct characteristics of its local media. For instance, Salamon (2025) illustrates how media workers perceive the local journalism crisis as a consequence of industrial restructuring, challenging working conditions, and shifts in journalistic practice. This shows that the journalism crisis is also discursively shaped and debated by media practitioners in the Global North. Such distinctiveness is evident in the strong social ties media institutions maintain with

their communities, the active citizen journalism, and business and economic structures that differ significantly from those of national media outlets (Apul, 2022; Hanief et al., 2021; Pamuji et al., 2022). From this, questions arise about whether there are pressures forcing journalists to constantly negotiate the media trust they have built and own for the sake of maintaining the economic sustainability of their organization.

This can be placed within the Indonesian context because the nature of local media differs from that of national media and media in the Global North. Geographical and social proximity means that local media also serve as a bridge between citizens and public institutions or spaces for resolving everyday problems, which in this case goes beyond the normative function of media. On the other hand, local media face the challenge of turning their social legitimacy into revenue due to their weak position on digital platforms and a shrinking advertising market. Radio Suara Surabaya (hereafter, Radio SS) provides a relevant context for examining how these dynamics are negotiated by the media actors themselves.

Thus, this study is crucial because it fills gaps in studies of media trust that have always examined trust theoretically from the perspective of audience perception measurement (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). It is also frequently seen as a problem occurring outside the organizations (Garusi et al., 2025). This results in a lack of discussion about internal reflection done by media actors. Within the sociology of journalism, the reflection of Radio SS actors can be explained through the lens of metajournalistic discourse, which tries to understand how journalists, as one of the media actors, talk about themselves. In other words, media actors are involved in forming an understanding of themselves, as well as the authority within their identity and also the professional boundaries, which makes the authority gain legitimate trust (Carlson, 2016). Through the metajournalistic discourse, this practice is seen as a discourse production about legitimate and illegitimate journalism, and is not only seen as news production. Thus, “boundary work” functions as discourse; a system that legitimates the journalistic profession. This has become specifically significant in the digital era because journalists have to negotiate their professional values, as well as commercial logics from platforms and metrics (Perreault et al., 2023).

Radio SS has the distinct characteristics of local media; therefore, it was selected as the subject of this study. Established in 1983, it is a well-established and respected local media company in Surabaya. It lays out a model of citizen and interactive journalism, which pushes public participation as a central element of its journalistic process.

This approach to journalism has made Radio SS a platform for community participation, social solidarity, public deliberation on local issues, and municipal policy. In 1999, the station expanded into the digital space through a website. It provided live streaming, on-demand content, and archived broadcasts that were always accessible to listeners. Together, these services helped establish Suara Surabaya as a convergent media platform (Yudhapramesti, 2023).

Radio SS is well known as a news and talk radio station with a strong journalistic orientation. It is also regarded as an Indonesian radio station that adapted early to digital change. While many traditional outlets, particularly print and terrestrial radio, have struggled to remain viable, Radio SS has tried to maintain its relevance through multiple outlet channels and a parallel management model across them (Yudhapramesti, 2023). Managing these channels, Radio SS needs distinct organizational capabilities and strategic coordination.

Radio SS therefore provides a useful case for examining the relationship between public legitimacy and the economic pressures faced by local media. Public proximity and trust can function simultaneously as a source of credibility and a constraint within the commercialization

strategies implemented by the station (Huda & Rachmanda, 2025). At this point, how the relationship between trust and commercial constraints is interpreted by the actors within Radio SS themselves remains significantly underexplored.

This media outlet has also played an important role in the history of Indonesian radio, especially in Surabaya. During the New Order era, radio functioned as a tool to legitimize the regime's political agenda. However, it also provided an alternative platform for counter-discourse and various forms of local interaction. During this period, radio contributed significantly to defining regional identity, and Radio SS pioneered citizen journalism. It transformed its listeners into active participants in the information process.

Consequently, Radio SS was chosen as a case study to investigate how practitioners themselves understand trust. Also, how they discuss the relationships between trust, journalism, and economic sustainability. Radio SS serves as a discursive sphere where actors and practitioners reflect on the relationship between public trust, journalistic values, and economic sustainability amid platform logic. This study fills a gap in understanding media trust and metajournalistic discourse in local Indonesian media.

Several prior studies have used Radio SS as a research subject (Huda & Rachmanda, 2025; Yudhaprimesti, 2023). However, these mainly focused on journalism practices such as community engagement, participatory journalism, media-citizen interactions, the role of local radio in social trust, or local media business models. Radio SS has often been studied as a model of media practice. Less attention, however, has been paid to the discursive arena where media actors negotiate the meaning of trust, journalism, and media economics under platform pressures. Examining this reflective discourse can make the issue of journalistic and economic logics clearer.

This study analyzes how Radio SS actors construct and negotiate meanings of trust. It also considers the implications of these negotiations for journalistic legitimacy and the organization's economic sustainability. The research question is: How do media actors at Radio SS interpret and negotiate trust within their reflective discourse on journalism and economic sustainability amid the commercial pressures of platformization?

The study connects research on media trust with metajournalistic discourse analysis in the context of local media. The discourse examines how journalists understand their work and how journalism is publicly defined. Although still underused in Indonesian journalism research, this framework treats journalists as important participants in defining legitimate and illegitimate journalistic norms and practices through the discourses they produce (Carlson, 2016). This premise was subsequently extended by Ferrucci and Rossi (2022) to analyze how the US journalism industry explained economic crises and their impacts on local news quality. Furthermore, metajournalistic discourse is used to comprehend the dynamics of how journalists establish professional boundaries and norms (Johnson et al., 2021), how they discursively construct professional roles, promises, and anxieties surrounding AI in journalism (Moran & Shaikh, 2022), and how they narrate their own field practices and shape the journalistic world they inhabit (Perreault et al., 2022).

As journalism is a socially constructed profession, one critical approach to understanding its definitions, practices, and ethics is to examine the discourse published by its actors regarding their own industry. Operating as the 'primary arbiters of journalism,' journalists create metajournalistic discourse to explain normative practices to audiences both within and outside the journalistic field (Carlson, 2016). This discussion shows that journalists' approaches to their work under different pressures are closely connected to their views of what journalism is. Furthermore, these perspectives shape the broader understanding and practice of the field. On



one hand, in the study of trust, journalism is mostly seen as a psychological condition. This dimension refers to people's willingness to accept information from media sources they consider credible (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Such acceptance may also be based on perceptions of journalists' professional competence and editorial transparency (Moon et al., 2025).

Trust has become more crucial to study, especially with the rise of hoaxes in the digital media ecosystem (Christofolletti, 2024). Several studies show that trust is heavily linked to individual or public perception of the professionalism, independence, and integrity of media institutions (Du & Xu, 2026; Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Kohring & Matthes, 2007). On the other hand, some studies show that trust does not always come hand in hand with media economic sustainability. Studies from some other countries reveal that a high level of trust does not always guarantee the economic sustainability of that media. This is caused by global digital platform pressure or the shift in the advertising market (Myllylahti, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020; Pickard, 2020). It can be said that in platform-based media, trust cannot be converted into economic capital.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a discursive case study design, with Radio SS. It is positioned as a reflective case to generate an in-depth understanding and analysis of the discussed topic, specifically to show how media actors reflect upon their position within the media industry structure (Carlson, 2016). This design provided conceptual insights through an in-depth analysis of the discourse produced within a specific organization.

The data source of this study is from a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted on 25 August 2025 at the Radio SS office in Surabaya. This involved six key roles in that radio, both from editorial and management. This process was carried out over four hours. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) involvement in editorial or managerial decision-making and implementation; (2) experience with digital transformation and changes in business models; and (3) the ability to reflect on the relationship between trust, legitimacy, and organizational sustainability. The participants included four editorial staff members (i.e., an editor-in-chief, editors, and journalist-broadcasters) and two managerial staff members responsible for business development and human resources.

This research describes the FGD as a "metajournalistic discourse space," where media professionals collaborate to create and negotiate shared understandings about trust, journalism, and the sustainability of the industry. This approach is aligned with metajournalistic discourse research, which understands such discourse is shaped through interaction among actors rather than as a phenomenon for an individual. The FGD made participants to reflect on trust in journalism, the relationship between trust and economic pressures, and media sustainability. The discussion was audio-recorded and transcribed for discursive analysis.

Following the metajournalistic discourse tradition, the unit of analysis was participants' reflective statements, since language and narrative are central aspects for meaning-making (Carlson, 2017). The analysis examined: (1) how participants defined acceptable and unacceptable journalistic practices or called boundary work; (2) their accounts of the ideal relationship between journalism and business; (3) narratives used to negotiate professional values and commercial imperatives; and (4) narratives used to justify ethical choices (legitimacy strategies).

Data analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the FGD transcript was read repeatedly to understand its all context, conversational flow, and interactions. The purpose was to create a clear understanding of how issues of trust and industrial crisis manifested within the discourse

of the Radio SS actors. Second, the transcript was coded based on the concepts of trust, boundary work, and strategy of legitimacy. Third, the coding resulted in specific discourse themes. Fourth, those discursive themes were theoretically interpreted using literature reviews about metajournalistic discourse and media trust.

The identities of the FGD participants were made anonymous due to ethical considerations. Another reason was to protect them from potential risks, since it might have been seen as criticism of the media industry. This study treats FGD as a discursive domain. This means the reflections should not be seen as an individual response, but as the media actors' collective discourse. The researchers maintained the credibility of the data by conducting perspective triangulation through a comparison of the reflections of editorial and managerial actors who held different positions and responsibilities. In addition, the FGD transcripts were double-checked to ensure the accuracy of the quotations. Meanwhile, the researchers discussed discursive themes and interpretations to minimize individual interpretive bias.

The study also used secondary materials, including historical documents, Radio SS's official profiles, media coverage, and academic publications about the station. These materials gave contexts about participants' statements, particularly in relation to the organization's history, platform development, and public role.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Trust and Moral Legitimacy in Journalism

This section discusses how participants' reflections reveal a paradox of trust. Their accounts put trust as a legitimate foundation for journalism. They also describe it as a source of pressure and a limit on some business decisions. Trust, therefore, cannot be treated simply as an economic resource that may be freely converted into revenue. As one participant explained: "If people trust us, it is not because of a single news piece. That trust is born out of a long, cumulative process. This is precisely why Radio SS cannot make careless decisions" (Participant 3).

This statement connects trust to the station's long history and to the consistency of its journalistic practice over time. In metajournalistic terms, the account functions as boundary work, in which participants define the standards that Radio SS considers acceptable. Also, it helps distinguish its journalism from practices they view as more opportunistic or market-driven.

Another participant thought of public trust as an ethical responsibility: "If the media suffers financial losses and is forced to close, the entire business loses its foundation... and at that point, an ethical problem emerges" (Participant 6). This frames trust as a normative principle that supports the existence of the media. It is not limited to audience relations, but it is also understood as a moral obligation. From this perspective, sustaining the media organization becomes a responsibility to the public as well as an economic concern.

Participants also described trust through Radio SS's role as an accessible space for public engagement. They said: "We are not merely a news media. People come to us because they trust us. They feel like they are heard" (Participant 4). Another participant also stated that the public sees Radio SS as a trustworthy news channel: "From a trust perspective, we are glad. But honestly, not really... Why are they reporting to us? They have to report to the police" (Participant 5). This reflection is linked to the phenomenon where the public often reports incidents (e.g., theft, fire, robbery, traffic congestion, and public protest), instead of reporting these to the authorities, such as the police or local government.

This is where the ambivalence becomes clear. That reflection shows how high the public level of trust in Radio SS as the local media is. Meanwhile, this also indicates a shift in

institutional function, as Radio SS takes on a role beyond its journalistic mission. Participants also see trust as the foundation of the relationship between media and public. One of the participants described this relationship as important to the media ecosystem: “Trust is like oxygen for us... The public has become our partner” (Participant 3)

### **Burden of Legitimacy**

A second finding presents trust as a legitimate burden. Increased public trust raises audience expectations. Yet, these expectations may be beyond the institution’s financial capacity. As one participant noted: “The more we are trusted, the more people expect us to achieve. However, accomplishing these things requires substantial costs, time, and effort” (Participant 2).

For Radio SS staff, trust has expanded more than just the organization’s journalistic role. The station is expected not only to provide information, but also to mediate community concerns that appear daily. These responsibilities place additional demands on the organization without providing any additional resources. One participant explained: “Even if the public trust and societal impact increase, I don’t think there is a significant financial benefit we get from this” (Participant 1). Another one similarly stated: “We have become more influential, but there is no real impact for the business sector” (Participant 6).

This discourse also shaped how participants discussed innovation. They expressed hesitation about experiments that might undermine public trust: “The innovation we usually talk about does have its consequences, and trust should not be sacrificed for any type of experiments and innovations” (Participant 2). The statement identifies limits on what Radio SS considers an innovation that is acceptable in journalism.

In other words, the paradox of trust is viewed as a constantly negotiated condition. This includes continuously balancing journalistic logic with the economic sustainability of the media itself. Trust is no longer seen merely as a symbolic capital but as a responsibility for media workers to resolve public affairs that are far beyond their structural capacity as a media organization. Within the context of metajournalistic discourse, this condition forces media practitioners to navigate the line between institutional social responsibilities and organizational limitations. It also places them within a dynamic context on the discursive map when an inconsistency occurs between public expectations, as the source of their legitimacy, and their capacity to fulfill them.

### **Resisting the Commodification of Trust**

The third finding of this study shows resistance to the commodification of trust. Participants consistently rejected innovation strategies that they believed could undermine public trust. This was one of the strongest themes in the FGDs. It is about media workers emphasizing that financial considerations should not override journalistic principles. As one participant stated: “If our trust is being exploited any further, our media will be banished. That’s what we always avoid.”

In metajournalistic discourse, this statement illustrates how Radio SS practitioners define and defend a distinctive journalistic identity. For these practitioners, trust is treated as a value to be protected, not a resource to be exploited. This is consistent with Carlson’s (2016) view that the discourse helps maintain journalistic boundaries against the trap of market logic. Participants expressed a similar opinion when discussing relationships with advertisers. In advertorial formats, including live broadcasts, they maintained that clients could still be criticized when needed: “We have a disclaimer that the client has to accept criticism of the products if there is a problem. So, even after they pay us, they are not immune to criticism” (Participant 5).

This statement from Participant 4 frames monetization as subject to editorial independence rather than as a replacement for it. Commercial arrangements are negotiated within principles intended to preserve public trust. Participants also expressed caution about social-media business strategies, as they said: “We have to be extremely careful in using social media because digital footprint can be stored and reproduced, even discussed non-stop” (Participant 4).

The statement highlights that digital environments can increase and extend the impact of reputational risks to trust. It also highlights the importance of managing monetization on social media, given the permanent and viral nature of digital platforms. Trust should be maintained through careful business principles. However, ambivalence also emerges in this discourse. Monetization of trust cannot be avoided. The FGD indicated an implicit strategy to convert trust into economic value using a technological approach: “We need to build our own trust-based system, so that trust can be monetized safely” (Participant 1).

Interestingly, this digital ambition was instantly balanced by statements that recognized its limitations and potential risks. It was acknowledged by the participant that these monetization efforts often do not justify the costs and risks involved. The participant noted: “To build such a system, the cost could reach hundreds of millions [of rupiah]. We might not be able to achieve it, so naturally, we won’t make it” (Participant 2).

This shows how media actors create counter-discourses when facing external and commercial pressures. Using these discursive strategies, they reinforce journalistic legitimacy and perform essential “boundary work” within their professional practices (Carlson, 2016). Empirical research in Indonesia shows that journalists often employ moral narratives to symbolically resist economic pressures, particularly by reaffirming fundamental professional values like independence and integrity (Krisdinanto, 2024b).

The discussion from the FGDs shows a result that public trust is a significant normative boundary that should never be commodified. This ethical stance is supported by several protective measures, such as creating venues for critical assessment within advertorials, being cautious with digital monetization, and rigorously controlling the misuse of trust disguised as innovation. In other words, the actors at Radio SS are aware of the necessity to prioritize long-term journalistic legitimacy over short-term economic gains.

### **Platforms and “External Factors” Crisis**

The next finding relates to the participants’ reflection on the media industry crisis. In the FGD, this crisis is viewed as external economic pressure, which derives from digital platformization and the advertising ecosystem. The crisis is seen as a result of a structural shift in the media that comes from beyond editorial control and is not viewed as a consequence of organizational failure. A participant stated as follows: “Today, the media is no longer the main player. We are merely a tiny fragment of a much larger system whose rules we did not create” (Participant 3).

This statement clearly shows how Radio SS media workers strategically externalize the root causes of the industry’s problem from internal to external organizational failures. Within the framework of metajournalistic discourse, this change serves as a strategy to safeguard internal legitimacy. This also indicates that the crisis does not come from a failure of journalistic values. This idea is strengthened by another participant who pointed out the misalignment of values within the current media landscape: “It is the platforms that reap the benefits, even though we are the ones producing the content. Yet, the economic value never returns to us” (Participant 6). This statement clearly places the subordinate role of media organizations, with digital platforms are shown as the dominant actors controlling the flow of economic value.



A recent study shows that newsrooms are frequently forced to defend their editorial autonomy amid dependency on systemic platforms (Kiberg et al., 2026). Distinct ambivalence emerges in the case of Radio SS. The participants try to adapt to the platform. However, they also want to build existing trust. This ambivalence strategy shows how media appear to adopt platform logics to get their autonomy back

The implication is that crisis can be easily viewed as inequality in the structure of the media industry, instead of residing in journalistic quality. A participant connected media with the information ecosystem: “I think the financial gain we earned is not equivalent to the high level of trust we got, or to how big the influence of this media is” (Participant 1). This strengthens the discourse that an external factor is causing the crisis, rather than one that comes from Radio SS journalistic practice itself. This also suggests that economic value does not control the media, even when the media has a very strong legitimacy.

This discursive strategy shows that Radio SS actors try to defend their professional legitimacy by differentiating between the quality of journalistic practice and the economic condition of the organization. In metajournalistic discourse, describing a crisis because of external factors can help media actors defend the symbolic boundary between journalistic values and structural pressures in the industry (Carlson, 2016). At the same time, this discourse may limit the space for discussing possible internal adaptations.

### **Trust, Discursive Artifacts, and Audience Perceptions**

The findings show that all participants see trust as central to Radio SS’s continued existence. Even though in the discussion, editorial and managerial actors emphasized different aspects of it. Editorial participants primarily framed trust as a moral and professional commitment, which they linked to public service, independence, transparency, and relationships with audiences. Managerial participants more often discussed profit margins, including operational costs, investment risk, monetization opportunities, and organizational sustainability. From their perspectives, trust was also understood as an economic condition for the organization’s survival. Both groups agreed that a breach of trust could threaten journalistic legitimacy and also affect financial stability.

The paradox of trust emerged not only as an organizational condition but also as a discursive process shaped by participants during the FGDs. Greater public trust increased the organization’s moral and social value, but did not necessarily improve its financial sustainability. In some cases, participants described high trust as limiting innovation. They also described it as becoming a barrier to monetization strategies that Radio SS could legitimately pursue. The main findings about discursive themes are summarized in the table 1.

Table 1 presents four findings that are interconnected. First, the “trust as legitimacy” theme shows how Radio SS actors draw on trust as a source of journalistic authority. They believe that innovation and problem-solving must remain within normative limits. They believe that trust helps define which practices are acceptable and unacceptable. Then, the “trust as burden” theme captures the paradoxical consequences of high public expectations, while “resisting the commodification of trust” describes participants’ boundary work. Finally, “crisis as an external factor” refers to how they see crises as external factors due to platforms, advertising systems, and the broader structure of the media industry.

More recent research extends this view by treating trust not only as an attitude toward news content, but also as an assessment of the actors, institutions, and processes involved in producing it (Hanitzsch et al., 2018).

Research about journalism and trust consistently identifies public trust as a foundation or basis of institutional media legitimacy (Garusi et al., 2025). Earlier studies link trust to

**Table 1.** Discursive Themes of Radio SS Actors

| No | Discursive Themes                      | Framing Method                                       | Example Statements                                    | Discursive Function               |
|----|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1  | Trust as a legitimacy                  | Trust as a long process and core value of journalism | "If people trust, it's because of a long process..."  | Claim to professional authority   |
| 2  | Trust as a burden                      | Trust gives rise to costly social demands            | "The more trusted you are, the more people expect..." | The normalization of crisis       |
| 3  | Resisting the commodification of trust | Trust must not be "exploited" economically           | "If we milk that trust..."                            | The ethics of boundary work       |
| 4  | The crisis as an external factor       | Platforms and industrial systems as the cause        | "We didn't make the rules..."                         | Protection of internal legitimacy |

Source: Researchers' analysis, 2026

audiences' perceptions of informational credibility, institutional integrity, and professional standards (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Added by Hanitzsch et al. (2018), more recent research extends this view by treating trust not only as an attitude toward news content. Trust is also an assessment of the actors, institutions, and processes involved in producing it.

Research on metajournalistic discourse, on the other hand, shows that journalistic legitimacy is established through discursive practice. Journalists articulate, defend, and negotiate professional boundaries in a digital media environment that is rapidly changing (Carlson, 2016; Nygaard, 2020). Yet platformization, characterized by the growing power of digital platforms and intensified efforts to monetize news, creates a paradox: high public trust does not necessarily secure the economic sustainability of media organizations (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018; Pickard, 2020).

A key finding of this study is that participants shaped trust discursively rather than treating it only as an audience's psychological state, as is common in survey-based research about media trust (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). The FGD data reveal consistency among Radio SS practitioners in discussing trust as an asset that is 'constructed through a lengthy process,' 'deeply embedded within daily practices,' and 'impossible to establish instantly.' This finding strongly confirms the framework of metajournalistic discourse, which puts journalists as the 'definitive arbiters of journalism' (Carlson, 2016). It shows how practitioners describe their own field practices to actively shape the broader journalistic landscape (Perreault et al., 2022) and how they discursively build and enforce their professional norms and boundaries (Johnson et al., 2021).

This finding strengthens the argument that journalism practice goes hand in hand with journalists' imagination about journalism itself. Trust is seen as a moral foundation in the Radio SS case. This finding enriches the literature by Fawzi et al. (2021) stating that trust is related to the internal reflection of media practitioners. Thus, it is not only linked to the relationship with the audience. This study shows how reflection manifests through narration about process, ethics, and social responsibility that is continuously reproduced within interaction between media practitioners.

### Trust and the Discursive Boundary-Making of Journalism

Defining what is viewed as legitimate journalism and boundary work is one function of metajournalistic discourse (Johnson et al., 2021). The finding shows, for instance, how editorial decisions cannot be made lightly because they involve trust. This shows how trust is

used as a criterion to evaluate journalistic practice, a moral classification tool that distinguishes acceptable from unacceptable practices.

This also aligns with recent studies showing how journalism responds to technological and professional hindrances by reinforcing journalistic boundaries (Moran & Shaikh, 2022; van Dalen, 2026). In the Radio SS case, this boundary confirmation opposes the over-commodification of trust into economic value.

These findings further align with the arguments of Perreault et al. (2022), who argue that journalists' narratives about their practices are performative, helping shape the journalistic field itself. At Radio SS, trust is heavily narrated as the result of an institutional process, rejecting instant practices or overly commercialized practices. Trust is not merely an instrument to secure audience trust, but it is a tool to define journalism. The discursive themes of "trust as a burden" and "resisting the commodification of trust" reveal that trust functions simultaneously as a source of legitimacy and institutional pressure. This is where the tension of the paradox of trust materializes. Furthermore, several studies show that trust does not always correlate directly with economic sustainability (Myllylahti, 2020; Myllylahti & Meese, 2024; Nielsen et al., 2020).

The contribution of this study is in showing how this non-linear relationship is continuously interpreted and negotiated by media actors themselves. For example, Radio SS illustrates this paradox in participants' discussion that "trust amplifies our public influence and expectations... yet it fails to earn proportional financial returns." This tension reflects the gap identified in the literature between normative legitimacy and economic logic (Du & Xu, 2026; Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). However, within the discourse of Radio SS actors, this paradox is framed as a consequence of their commitment to journalistic values, rather than a failure.

Meanwhile, the discursive theme of "resisting the commodification of trust" shows how Radio SS consistently tries to control the conversion of trust into economic value. This effort shows an act of boundary work against the infiltration of market logic into newsroom practices. Conceptually, trust is heavily linked to credibility, integrity, and professionalism (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). This study shows how Radio SS practitioners believe that the audience expects these dimensions to serve as internal moral compasses for both business and editorial decision-making. Therefore, practitioners consciously limit innovations or monetization models if they pose a threat to public trust. This finding supports the argument that trust combines competence, transparency, and interaction by introducing a vital dimension (Moon et al., 2025). Institutional trust must be generated through corporate self-restraint.

Finally, the discursive theme of "crisis as an external factor" shows that Radio SS actors tend to see the economic crisis as a consequence of industrial structures (platformization) rather than internal managerial failures. This can be interpreted as a calculated strategy to maintain professional legitimacy, proving that digital platforms have shifted economic value from media to technology corporations (Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). By framing the crisis as an external factor, Radio SS actors can be seen as the defensive stakeholders of journalism's integrity.

These findings adds to the growing body of research on metajournalistic discourse in Indonesia (Krisdinanto, 2024b, 2024a). They show how local media professionals use reflective discourse to negotiate autonomy, ethics, and professional sustainability under political and economic pressure. The discourse of Radio SS staff suggests that the crisis confronting local media has symbolic and structural dimensions. Trust indeed helps protect media organizations from prioritizing short-term market returns. However, it must be sustained through continued commitment to journalistic principles.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that trust is viewed as the foundation for deciding the boundaries and limitations within the journalistic, business, and economic aspects. The findings show that trust at Radio Suara Surabaya serves as the basis for moral legitimacy used to determine which editorial and commercial practices are considered acceptable and which are not. However, this is where the paradox of trust arises, because trust cannot automatically be converted into revenue that supports the organization's sustainability. On the one hand, high levels of trust give Radio SS legitimacy in the eyes of its audience and the public. However, it also limits efforts at conversion or monetization that might be feared to undermine that legitimacy.

This study identifies the paradox of trust as a condition in which strong public trust does not come with the media's ability to sustain itself economically. However, this study also shows how that contradiction is negotiated through the discourse of media actors. This suggests that future media strategies should prioritize developing trust-based monetization models. The findings of this study may have implications for how the crisis in journalism is understood. At some point, the crisis within journalism cannot be viewed solely as an economic or technological problem, but it must also be viewed as a discursive issue. The way media actors produce or develop specific journalistic discourses reflects how journalistic practices are negotiated amid the economic pressures of platformization.

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**Artificial Intelligence Declaration:** The authors utilized limited assistance from ChatGPT and Perplexity to track references (which were verified manually one by one). Substantive analysis and categorization remain the researchers' own work. Ultimately, the conceptual framework, narrative flow, perspectives, final interpretations, and the composition of the article are the authors' own work, based on the focus group discussion (FGD) transcripts.

**Ethical Approval:** This research involved human participants in the form of FGDs with media professionals. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, and the use of anonymized quotes in the manuscript. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. No sensitive personal data is disclosed in this article.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality restrictions involving human participants. However, the data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with permission from the relevant stakeholders.

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