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The Impact of the Digital Intelligence Era and the Revaluation of Journalism and Communication Employment Value—— A "Light" Quantitative Study Based on 206 Journalism and Communication Students from "Y University", a Frontier Ethnic Minority Institution

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the digital intelligence era, journalism and communication education faces unprecedented opportunities and challenges. This study focuses on 206 first-year students majoring in Network and New Media and Advertising at "Y University", a frontier ethnic minority institution. Through a quantitative analysis of their written responses to the "College Student Career Planning" course regarding employment concerns, reasons for choosing their major, and future plans, this research aims to reveal the employment cognition, career motivation, and action tendencies of this specific group amidst the wave of digital intelligence. The findings indicate that students generally experience anxiety and confusion regarding their employment prospects. Core issues revolve around "employment difficulties" "AI substitution" "devaluation of degrees" and "industry cycles". Their motivations for choosing their major exhibit a mixed pattern of "interest-driven" "pragmatic compromise" and "alignment with the times". Regarding employment planning, a predominant "risk-averse" tendency emerges, prioritizing "postgraduate entrance exams" and "civil service/ public institution exams". "Direct entry into the industry" and "self-employment" although secondary choices, demonstrate stronger initiative and personalization. The study concludes that journalism and communication students at frontier ethnic minority institutions are undergoing a profound shift from "idealism" to "realism" in their career choices. Their "risk-averse" tendency is not only a rational response to macro-level employment pressures but also reflects deep reflection on professional prospects and personal paths. This research provides an empirical perspective from frontier ethnic minority institutions for understanding the transformation of journalism and communication education and guiding student employment in the digital intelligence era.

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Keywords:
Digital Intelligence Era, Journalism and Communication, Employment, Frontier Ethnic Minority Institutions, "Light" Quantitative Study

1Introduction

With the deep penetration of digital intelligence technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing, the journalism and communication industry is undergoing unprecedented structural changes. Traditional media boundaries are increasingly blurred, and content production models, information distribution channels, and even user reception habits are being reshaped by digital intelligence technologies. This transformation directly pushes the employment prospects of journalism and communication students to a historical crossroads. On one hand, the emergence of new media positions offers vast career imagination. On the other hand, social discourses such as "the theory of AI substitution" and "the uselessness of liberal arts" impose significant psychological pressure and career anxiety on enrolled students.

Current academic research on the employment issues of journalism and communication students often focuses on industry transformation and talent cultivation models, or surveys graduates from top-tier universities and first-tier cities. However, there is a lack of systematic attention to the employment cognition, choices, and anxieties of journalism and communication students at frontier ethnic minority institutions, where educational resources are relatively scarce and information flow exhibits structural disparities. Y University, as a typical frontier ethnic minority institution, provides a microcosm of the employment tendencies of its journalism and communication students. These tendencies are not only micro-level decisions of personal career planning but also a micro-level reflection of regional and structural issues of educational equity and employment under the wave of the digital intelligence era.

This study, based on the latest written responses of 206 first-year students majoring in Network and New Media and Advertising at Y University to three open-ended questions—"Employment Issues" "Reasons for Choosing the Major" and "Employment Plans"—aims to systematically outline the employment cognition and action tendencies of this group in the digital intelligence era through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. It provides empirical evidence from the frontier for policy formulation and talent cultivation model optimization.

2Data Sources and Methodology

2.1Research Subjects and Data Sources

The data for this study originates from a written questionnaire administered during the "College Student Career Planning" course to 215 first-year students (Class of 2025) majoring in Network and New Media (including the Intelligent Communication Special Class) and Advertising at Y University. After excluding invalid or severely incomplete samples, 206 valid samples were obtained. Among them, 151 students were from the Network and New Media major (73.3% of the total sample), and 55 were from the Advertising major

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(26.7% of the total sample). Notably, the sample included 9 international students from the Network and New Media major and 2 international students from the Advertising major, imparting a certain multicultural characteristic to the collected data and texts. The data collection took place in September 2025, during the initial stage of students' professional cognitive development after enrollment.

2.2Research Questions and Coding

The study focused on coding and analyzing responses to three core open-ended questions:

A. Employment Issues: "Write down the employment questions you want to know about".

B. Reasons for Choosing the Major: "Write down the reasons why you chose this major".

C.Employment Plans:"Write down your future employment plans—postgraduate exams/civil service or public institution exams/entry into the industry".

The coding process employed a combination of "thematic analysis" and "keyword frequency statistics". After repeatedly reading the original texts, representative sub-themes were identified and summarized. Subsequently, the frequency of each theme was statistically quantified, and its proportion in the total sample was calculated. For example, for "Employment Issues", high-frequency themes such as "employment difficulties and competition" "degree devaluation" "AI substitution" "salary and benefits" and "internship experience" were extracted. For "Employment Plans", responses were categorized into "postgraduate studies" "civil service/public institution exams" "entry into the industry" "self-employment/social media" and "multiple preparations" followed by cross-analysis.

2.3Key Research Findings

2.3.1 Employment Cognition: Pervasive Anxiety, Directionless Confusion

Thematic summarization of the employment issues raised by 206 students reveals a high degree of concentration and anxiety in the employment cognition of Y University's journalism and communication students in the digital intelligence era.

Table 1. Distribution of Key Employment Concerns Among Students

Concern Theme	Frequency	% of Sample	Representative Quotes (Extracts) (W=Network and New Media; G=Advertising)
Employment Difficulties & Competition Pressure	135	65.5	"College graduates face unemployment upon graduation, where should they go?" (G); "Is the competition for employment in Network and New Media high?" (W1)
Artificial Intelligence (AI) Impact	68	33.0	"With the rapid development of AI, does a bachelor's degree mean unemployment upon graduation?" (W2); "How should we face the current rapid development of AI?" (G)

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Concern Theme	Frequency	% of Sample	Representative Quotes (Extracts) (W=Network and New Media; G=Advertising)
Degree Devaluation & Necessity of Postgraduate Study	112	54.4	"Degree devaluation is severe... Are undergraduates no longer accepted?" (W3); "Nowadays, there are many undergraduates; has postgraduate study become a must?" (W1)
Salary & Return on Investment	55	26.7	"What is the salary level after graduating in Advertising?" (G); "What is the average salary for Network and New Media?" (W3)
Internship Experience & Pathways	41	19.9	"What channels should college students use to find internships during their studies?" (G); "How to find internships and what are the basic skills required?" (W2)
Major Mismatch & Career Change	36	17.5	"I can't find a connection between my major and future career." (G); "What industries can I switch to for postgraduate studies in Advertising?" (G)
Civil Service/ Public Institution Exams	38	18.4	"Are the civil service exams for Network and New Media majors difficult?" (W1); "Can Advertising majors take the civil service exam?" (G)

The study found that students' most pressing employment concerns focus on three main areas:

1."Employment difficulties" constitute the overwhelming core anxiety. Over 65% of students directly expressed concerns about "difficulty finding a job" and "high competition", which aligns closely with the macro-level context of significant youth employment pressure in society. Students generally feel confused and lack clear future plans, for example, stating "I don't understand the major well and am unclear about its employment trends."

2."Degree devaluation" and "AI substitution" form a dual pressure. Data shows that 54.4% and 33% of students are worried about "degree devaluation" and "AI substitution", respectively, making them the two heaviest burdens on students' minds. Many students analyze that "a bachelor's degree is useless; I must pursue a master's", while also fearing that "AI will replace jobs in copywriting, design, etc.", reflecting deep-seated fear of technological iteration in the digital intelligence era.

3.High practical concern for salary and internships. Over a quarter of students explicitly inquired about salary, indicating an economic rationality regarding the return on investment in their education. Nearly one-fifth of students were concerned about internship channels, suggesting that students view "accumulating practical experience" as a key strategy to cope with employment pressure, yet they lack relevant information and pathways.

2.3.2 Motivation for Choosing the Major: The "Triple Mix" of Interest, Reality, and the Times

Analyzing the reasons students chose to major in Network and New Media or Advertising is crucial for understanding their employment tendencies. The study found that the motivations of Y University students are

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not singular but a mixture of "idealism", "realism", and "conformity to the times".

Table 2.Distribution of Main Reasons for Choosing the Major

Reason for Choosing Major	Frequency	% of Sample	Representative Quotes (Extracts) (W=Network and New Media; G=Advertising)
Personal Interest & Hobby	98	47.6	"I have a strong interest in advertising design, photography, editing, etc." (G); "I really like journalism and want to explore the truth behind events." (W1)
Score/Admission Rate/ Placement	85	41.3	"My score wasn't high enough; I was placed here." (G); "I couldn't get into my preferred major; the admission rate for Advertising was higher." (G)
Aligning with the Times/Development Prospects	112	54.4	"Aligning with the development trend of the digital age." (W3); "The internet is developed now; I think Network and New Media has good development prospects." (W2)
No Need to Study Advanced Math/Weak in Sciences	20	9.7	"I don't like learning math." (W2); "I was a science student but didn't like science." (G)
Wide Employment Scope/Good Job Prospects	60	29.1	"The employment scope is broad; it's relatively easier to find a job compared to other liberal arts majors." (G); "Network and New Media is a new major; it should be easy to find a job." (W1)
Family/Others' Recommendation	80	3.9	"My family recommended it, saying the major has prospects." (W3); "My sister also graduated in Network and New Media." (W1)

The study found that the main reasons for choosing the major were:

1.Interest is a starting point, but practical factors are more prominent. While 47.6% of students cited "personal interest" as the primary reason, including a passion for photography, editing, news writing, and creative planning, the proportion of students who were "placed" or "compromised due to scores" was also high, reaching 41.3%. This indicates that many students made their choice by balancing ideal and reality. A typical statement is: "Although it wasn't my first choice, I can accept it."

2."Trend of the times" is the biggest attraction for choosing the major. 54.4% of students chose the major because it "aligns with the development of the times". They believe that "the internet is the future trend" and that this major can "capitalize on the era's dividends". This judgment of future trends is their core motivation to overcome anxiety and "take a gamble", explaining why many students worry about employment while simultaneously believing in their major's potential.

3.A simple expectation of "easy" employment. 29.1% of students were directly motivated by the belief that the major "offers good job prospects". This relatively simple, and potentially unrealistic, expectation is highly susceptible to turning into anxiety and a sense of disparity when confronted with real-world university education and employment information. It also reflects the relatively shallow understanding of the relationship

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between major and market among these first-year university students.

2.3.3 Employment Planning: "Risk-Averse" Predominance, Multi-Path Progress

In response to the question "What are your future employment plans?", students' answers reveal a clear "risk-averse" characteristic, prioritizing lower-risk "further education" and "stable" paths.

Table 3.Cross-Analysis of Employment Planning Preferences by Major

Employment Planning Type	Network and New Media (n=151)	Advertising (n=55)
Postgraduate Studies	57 (37.7%)	16 (29.0%)
Civil Service/Public Institution Exams	34 (22.5%)	14 (25.5%)
Direct Entry into the Industry	27 (17.9%)	15 (27.3%)
Self-Employment/Social Media	14 (9.3%)	1 (1.8%)
Multiple Preparations/Undecided	19 (12.6%)	9 (16.4%)

Table 4. Distribution of Student Employment Planning Types

Employment Planning Type	Frequency	% of Sample	Representative Quotes (Extracts) (W=Network and New Media; G=Advertising)
Postgraduate Studies	73	35.4	"My current idea is to work hard for postgraduate studies." (W2); "I plan to take the postgraduate entrance exam to enhance my education and competitiveness." (G)
Civil Service/ Public Institution Exams	48	23.3	"My primary goal is to take the civil service exam for a stable job." (W1); "I plan to take the exam for public institutions and enter the system." (G)
Direct Entry into the Industry	42	20.4	"I plan to enter the industry directly to gain experience." (W3); "I will find a job directly after graduation." (G)
Self-Employment/ Social Media	15	7.3	"I want to create my own account and become a social media content creator." (W1); "I want to start a business and open a studio." (G)
Multiple Preparations/ Undecided	28	13.6	"I am considering postgraduate exams, civil service exams, and entering the industry." (W3); "I'm still confused and don't have specific plans." (W2)

The combined proportion of "postgraduate studies" and "civil service exams" reaches 58.7%, which is highly consistent with the previously identified concerns about "degree devaluation" and "high employment pressure". Most students view the pursuit of academic capital and political capital as a "safety net" against the uncertainties of the job market. A typical logical chain is: "I can't find a job with a bachelor's degree, so I must pursue a master's; to find a stable job, I must take the civil service exam". This "risk-averse" mentality is a rational choice for individuals facing complex social risks.

"Direct entry into the industry" as a secondary option displays different characteristics: 20.4% of students chose direct employment. Compared to students pursuing postgraduate or civil service exams, this group tends to be more "pragmatic" "proactive" and "confident". Their reasons often include: "Practice leads to true knowledge" "I want to gain experience as early as possible to get ahead of my peers" and "I don't want to

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spend more time studying; I want to achieve financial independence as soon as possible". For example, Network and New Media student LY explicitly stated, "I will look for a job directly after graduation."

"Self-employment/social media" is a minority group but represents a future direction: 7.3% of students have clear plans for entrepreneurship or social media. These students exhibit a more "adventurous spirit", recognizing new opportunities in the industry, such as "building a personal IP" "becoming a short video blogger" "helping sell hometown products" or "starting a gaming studio". Although few in number, they represent a glimmer of journalism and communication students moving away from traditional employment models and exploring new career paths in the digital intelligence era.

Furthermore, significant differences were observed between Network and New Media and Advertising majors in their employment planning preferences. Cross-analysis shows that Network and New Media students have a higher tendency for "postgraduate studies" (37.7%) than Advertising students (29.0%), while Advertising students are more inclined to "enter the industry directly" (27.3%) compared to Network and New Media students (17.9%). This may be related to the curriculum and perception of the two majors: Advertising is often more "practical" and "project-oriented" while Network and New Media, as an "emerging interdisciplinary field" may have a stronger association with the "high-education" label. Additionally, Network and New Media students show a significantly higher willingness for "self-employment" (9.3%) than Advertising students (1.8%), likely due to the natural affinity of the Network and New Media major with "internet entrepreneurship".

3 Employment Choices and Value Revaluation of Journalism and Communication Students at Frontier Ethnic Minority Institutions

The quantitative data presented above outlines the "risk-averse" employment landscape of journalism and communication students at Y University. However, this tendency is not simple conformity; it is a strategic choice formed by students through profound cognitive negotiation and value collision under the triple structure of the digital intelligence era, frontier geography, and ethnic identity.

3.1The Emotional Conflict Between Anxiety Over Technological Substitution and Professional Value Identity

The study shows that 33% of students explicitly expressed concerns about "artificial intelligence (AI)" substitution, a proportion likely to be higher in in-depth interviews. As one student stated, "With the rapid development of AI, does a bachelor's degree mean unemployment upon graduation?" This anxiety directly echoes the core argument of the "uselessness of liberal arts" at the technical level: when large language models can efficiently complete literature reviews, text analysis, and even standard writing, the irreplaceability of traditional journalism and communication education is fundamentally shaken.

However, in stark contrast to the external technological shock, 47.6% of students chose their major based on "personal interest", and 54.4% chose it because it "aligns with the times". This constitutes the first value conflict: on one hand, students firmly believe their chosen major is "contemporary" and "innovative", representing the "vanguard" of social development. On the other hand, they fear being the very objects "eliminat-

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ed" by this vanguard. This emotional conflict reflects a dual understanding of "technology" among students—it is both an "enabler" that creates new jobs and a "disruptor" that devalues old ones. This "value obscuration" in their cognition causes their technological anxiety to remain largely at the level of "fear of skill replacement", rather than evolving into a reflection on and construction of a new subjective position of "human-machine symbiosis".

3.2"Remedial Further Education" and "Delayed Employment" Under Degree Inflation

The survey shows that 35.4% of students prioritize "postgraduate studies" and 23.3% target "civil service/public institution exams" Their combined 58.7% forms an overwhelming "risk-averse" mainstream. This forms a closed loop with the previously mentioned anxiety about "degree devaluation". Students generally hold a linear logic: a bachelor's degree is no longer sufficient for a good job, so a master's degree is necessary; after obtaining a master's, taking the civil service exam is the optimal path.

This reveals the second value conflict: most students pursue further education not out of a deep passion for academic research or a dedicated exploration of a specific field, but as a passive "remedial" action. Textual analysis of the questionnaires reveals frequent expressions like "Because degrees are devalued, only a master's can enhance competitiveness" and "I don't know what to do, so I'll just go for postgraduate studies first". These confirm the "instrumental rationality" permeating this choice. Here, postgraduate studies serve as a form of "delayed employment" or "anxious secondary investment", which risks deepening the dilemma of "knowledge value generalization": when academic credentials become a currency to combat anxiety, their own value is also subject to devaluation. Concurrently, students' understanding of "civil service exams" is also narrowing. High-frequency words like "stability" "iron rice bowl" and "landing ashore" reveal a deep aversion to social risk. This avoidance of high-risk, high-reward frontier fields (e.g.emerging media entrepreneurship, data visualization) reflects a severe low-risk preference among students.

3.3The Degradation of Value Pursuit from "Ideals" to "Meal Tickets"

From a motivational analysis, 47.6% of students chose their major based on interest, a considerable proportion. Yet, it is noteworthy that the initial "idealism" quickly fades under the pressure of harsh employment realities and social discourse. Students' career planning increasingly moves away from values like "I want to become an excellent investigative journalist" or "I want to create soul-stirring advertisements", converging instead towards material and functional indicators such as "stability" "high salary" "close to home" and "low pressure". For example, one student answered, "Take the civil service exam, get a stable job close to home", while another mentioned, "I hope to find a job with decent pay and a relaxed work environment".

This constitutes the third value conflict: when "knowledge" is repeatedly endowed with the grand narrative of "changing one's destiny" through disciplinary education, students, in their actual career choices, exhibit an intense craving for a "meal ticket". To some extent, this reflects the "value chaos" described by Yoshimi Shunya: students confuse the "utilitarian" and "transcendent" co-existing natures of education. On one hand, they aspire to leverage education for social mobility and personal value realization. On the other hand, when confronted with market pressure, they quickly default to a "means-to-an-end" disciplinary utilitarianism, suppressing their "value-creating" essential power. This degradation of value rationality to instrumental rationality undoubtedly narrows the scope of students' imagination regarding their own career development. The core

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functions of liberal arts, such as foundational thinking, value balancing, and innovation catalysis, are severely "rendered void" in students' career planning—they are more concerned with "whether I can find a job" than "what kind of social value I want to work for".

3.4 The Spatiotemporal Dislocation Between "Frontier Reality" and "Contemporariness"

As a frontier ethnic minority institution, Y University's students face a unique "structural dilemma". The regional economy where the university is located is relatively underdeveloped, with a sparse distribution of high-quality emerging media industries and enterprises. This creates a significant "industry differential" compared to first-tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou. Data shows that many students express a desire to "develop in big cities but worry about insufficient competitiveness," while others fear "returning home (e.g.prefectures in Yunnan) and failing to find a matching job". For instance, a student explicitly asked, "Is it difficult to develop in this major in Yunnan?" Another expressed, "I want to return to my hometown to develop, but I don't know what I can do there with a Network and New Media degree."

This reveals the fourth value conflict: students are enrolled in a "cutting-edge" major that closely follows the zeitgeist, yet the job market they face exhibits significant "developmental lag" in spatial terms. The abundance of online, mobile, and cross-regional new media positions stands in stark contrast to the reality of frontier counties, which are dominated by traditional media and system-based propaganda roles. This spatiotemporal disconnect between "contemporariness" and "frontier reality" further reinforces the students' "risk-averse" tendency. Unable to find creative, high-growth, and well-paid positions in their hometowns, they naturally view "civil service/public institution exams" as the optimal solution to overcoming "developmental lag" and "information poverty". This is not a fault of individual student choice but a consequence of structural geographical imbalance.

4Conclusion

This study, through an empirical analysis of 206 journalism and communication students at Y University, outlines the complex landscape of employment cognition and action among students in frontier ethnic minority institutions in the digital intelligence era. The findings are not merely a "plain description" of individual student choices but a micro-level representation of the interactive outcomes of macro-social structures, technological waves, and educational systems.

The employment value tendencies of students exhibit a pronounced "conservatism" and "sequencing" with a priority order of: Postgraduate Studies → Civil Service Exams → Entry into the Industry → Entrepreneurship. This sequence is a passive stress response to external pressures (degree depreciation, technological substitution, saturated job market) rather than a proactive strategic plan based on personal aspirations.

Furthermore, students are trapped in a deep fracture between "liberal arts value" and "job-seeking needs". Despite entering university with interest and ideals, under the pressure of reality, they rapidly adopt an "instrumental rationality" standard, failing to cultivate effective value rationality to leverage their learned skills. The core functions of liberal arts education—"value balancing" and "innovation catalysis"—fail to form ef-

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fective career anchors in students' minds.

Additionally, "frontier geography" exacerbates "era anxiety". Situated in a frontier region where the digital economy is not yet fully developed, journalism and communication students can acutely perceive the intense impact of technological iteration through the internet but must simultaneously revert to localized, system-based, and non-digital employment choices. This spatiotemporal dissonance constitutes their unique psychological pressure.

In response to these issues, ethnic minority institutions in frontier regions should first break the "information cocoon" surrounding students' employment problems by constructing a professional ecosystem network that links "local" and "national" elements. For frontier ethnic universities, it is crucial to actively build an "online + offline" ecosystem network involving industry associations, leading enterprises, and high-quality alumni. Through initiatives like "Digital Cloud Internship" projects, cross-regional project-based collaborations, and online co-creation spaces, the spatiotemporal gap between students and the frontier market can be bridged, allowing them to participate in national-level projects and experience "frontier" content from "frontier" locations. Additionally, cross-disciplinary studios focusing on digital cultural tourism, rural revitalization media, etc., can be established to guide students in combining their professional skills with the unique advantages of the frontier region, achieving "localized innovation" rather than mere "localized employment".

Furthermore, schools should not simply dismiss students' "risk-averse" tendencies. Instead, they should guide them from a passive "seek no fault, seek no merit" avoidance to an "aware of risks, proactively construct" strategic planning. For students aspiring to postgraduate studies, guidance should focus on accurately selecting a research direction rather than blindly following trends. For students aiming for civil service exams, they should be guided to view government positions as a platform for practicing their professional ideals in journalism, not merely for securing a "stable job".

In conclusion, journalism and communication education in the digital intelligence era, especially in frontier ethnic minority institutions, faces the arduous task of transforming the external pressure of "technological change" into internal value anchors and creative forces for students.

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