societies

MDPI

Article

Job Expectations and Professional Role Identity in Gambian Journalists: The Mediation Role of Job Satisfaction

Gabriele Puzzo, Maha Yomn Sbaa, Salvatore Zappalà and Luca Pietrantoni *

Department of Psychology, Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna, 40126 Bologna, Italy
* Correspondence: luca.pietrantoni@unibo.it

Abstract: This study investigates, in a sample of journalists, the relationship between meeting job expectations and professional role identity. Specifically, job expectations concerning career development, remuneration, and relationships with users were examined, while professional role identity was contextualised to the field of journalism. Following Mellado, we conceptualized journalists' role identity as composed by the three dimensions of watchdog, propagandist, and citizen-oriented. An online questionnaire was administered from December 2021 to January 2022 and 74 Gambian journalists living in Gambia and in European countries answered the survey. The results indicated that job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between meeting the expectations of the relationship with users and the citizen-oriented role identity. Additionally, job satisfaction mediated the relationship between met expectations of career development and both citizen-oriented and watchdog professional role identities. These findings suggest that meeting expectations of career development and interaction with citizens is related to journalists' role identities focused on controlling the political and economic establishment and empowering people. The theoretical and practical implications of these results are discussed.

Keywords: job expectations; professional identity; career identity; journalism; job satisfaction

check for updates

Citation: Puzzo, G.; Sbaa, M.Y.; Zappalà, S.; Pietrantoni, L. Job Expectations and Professional Role Identity in Gambian Journalists: The Mediation Role of Job Satisfaction. *Societies* **2023**, *13*, 71. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13030071

Academic Editor: David J. Karjanen

Received: 19 December 2022
Revised: 8 March 2023
Accepted: 13 March 2023
Published: 15 March 2023

Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Professional role identity is an important part of an employee's identity. Research has studied how role identity is constructed and how it changes, as well as the impact it has on employees' attitudes, well-being, motivation, and performance [1–3]. It has been assumed that individuals form their role identity in interaction with their work context and that roles are negotiated interpersonally and constrained by the external environment [3,4]. However, most studies examined the role identity of employees working in traditional organisational settings, with little attention given to the role identity of those in new forms of employment, such as freelancers or the self-employed. These forms of employment differ from traditional ones in many ways. For example, portfolio work can be done in many different locations and is often done by freelancers for multiple clients. Therefore, workers must adapt to changes and reshape their role identities accordingly [5].

The literature on professional role identity is vast but fragmented, and encompasses various theories, terminologies, and disciplines. Scholars in many fields are interested in understanding how workers perceive and identify with their professional roles, particularly in today's dynamic and digitalized age, in which many workers need to revise or create anew their work identity [6,7].

Identity theory posits that individuals' choices about their role identity are interpersonally negotiated and constrained by social context. Role identity concerns the individual's self-concept in relation to the roles they play when interacting with other individuals [8,9]. Once an individual's professional identity is formed, it has to be maintained, strengthened, revised and repaired [10]. Some scholars argue that the way individuals perceive their roles is an ongoing process of constant reconstruction [11,12].

Professional role identity is situated at the interface between the individual and the external environment. Therefore, how individuals see their role identity depends not only on the roles they play (e.g., accountant, teacher, journalist), but also on interpersonally negotiated roles and the associated expectations [9]. The multiplicity of roles and relationships can lead to multiple role identities: for instance, Jain and colleagues [13] found that academics involved in entrepreneurial activities formed the hybrid role identity of an academic entrepreneur. Additionally, Nordhall and colleagues [1] showed that multiple identities related to the different groups and roles to which teachers belong can be inherently connected and coexist simultaneously.

However, most research on role identity has focused on "regular" jobs, defined as permanent contracts of employment five days a week, with taxes and social security payments. There is limited knowledge about role identity and role perception in jobs with atypical work situations. This gap is particularly relevant because in atypical jobs, where there is less occupational and social protection and increased job uncertainty [14], role identity may differ from those in traditional organisational settings. The present study aims to cover this gap by investigating the professional role identity of journalists, an occupation in which many workers experience atypical job situations [5].

The research was carried out in Gambia, a nation that is heavily in debt [15]. After the fall of the dictatorship in 2017, journalists in Gambia gained the freedom to express themselves and have become an integral part of the democratic conversation [16]. The journalists are now able to report on political and social issues without fear of retaliation and are contributing to the formation of public opinion and the promotion of transparency and accountability. In this way, they are helping to build and sustain a healthy democracy in Gambia.

Journalists in Gambia are also involved as content creators and content disseminators in information campaigns about "back-way" migration to Europe, circulating narratives that may be persuasive to Gambian youths who, faced with food insecurity, unemployment, and deteriorating infrastructure, risk their lives on irregular and perilous journeys to Europe in search of "better life conditions" [17].

In this context, the present study investigates whether individuals who achieve their job expectations (in particular, related to career development, compensation, and user relations) are also more satisfied with their jobs, and whether, in turn, such job satisfaction is positively related and reinforces professional role identity, here operationalized following the journalists' role-identity typology proposed by Mellado [18]. In the following sections, we describe the constructs of our model.

1.1. Professional Role Identity and Journalism

Investigating professional role identity in journalists is important for several reasons. First, understanding how journalists perceive their roles and the factors that influence their role identity can provide insight into their motivations, attitudes, and behaviors. This information can be useful for journalism educators and media organisations in developing training and support programs that improve the quality of journalism and enhance journalists' well-being [19–21].

Second, studying the role identity of journalists can shed light on the role of the media in society and the impact of journalism on public opinion and policy. For example, research on role identity can help to identify the different values and beliefs that drive journalists' reporting, as well as the ways in which journalists' roles are perceived by the public and other stakeholders. This knowledge can inform discussions about the ethical and social responsibilities of journalists and the role of journalism in promoting democracy and social justice [20,22].

Third, examining the professional role identity of journalists is relevant in the context of the rapid changes and challenges that the media industry is facing. The rise of digital technologies and social media, the fragmentation of the media market, and the increasing economic and political pressures on journalists have a profound impact on how journalism

is practiced and the roles that journalists play. Investigating the professional role identity of journalists can help understand how these changes are affecting journalists' work and how journalists are adapting to the new environment.

Journalists' value orientations, rather than the perceptions of their actual performance, seem to explain how journalists understand their work and social function in different cultures and media systems [20]. In this sense, Weaver and Willnat [23] identified a range of different journalists' professional values and role perceptions, drawing on studies conducted using various approaches and a sample of 29,000 journalists from 31 different countries and territories.

One significant study was conducted by Mellado [18], outlining five role identities: (a) watchdog, which is related to the monitoring role of journalists who keep a constant watch on the government and political and economic powers; (b) propagandist, whose aim is to project a positive image of the country's leaders through the media, defending economic and social progress and supporting public policies; (c) citizen-oriented, which views readers as citizens rather than consumers and delivers what the public "should know" by educating people, motivating them to participate politically, and promoting just causes; (d) consumer-oriented, which focuses on everyday life and consumption and aims to reach the widest possible audience by emphasizing what the public "wants to know"; and (e) disseminative, which includes aspects typical of Western journalism cultures, such as being a passive observer who describes reality neutrally without interfering. More recently, Mellado and Hermida [21] reflected on journalists' role identity expression and theorized a spectrum ranging from professional role identity to personal role identity, intersecting with constraints stemming from publisher and product needs.

Recently, the mass media and mass communication industry have been affected by many changes, with decreasing opportunities for employment and increasing numbers of atypical workers in the sector, such as freelance journalists [24]. Journalists struggle to balance traditional journalism practices with social media norms to increase their digital visibility and gain symbolic and cultural power [21]. They deal with a range of issues including maintaining objectivity as a normative standard and preserving editorial independence, with studies indicating a slight increase in their editorial work on social media [20,21]. Therefore, journalists, like other workers on atypical contracts, face insecurity and lower protection, while being expected to be flexible and adaptable to the work context [25]. As technological innovations (e.g., radio, TV, social media) are changing much of the work of journalism, some journalists feel that social media threatens their jobs, while others see it as a great opportunity [26]. Moreover, journalists' required presence on social media can lead to an intersection of identities, with studies suggesting that they develop multiple digital selves as professionals and personas. As previously mentioned, this study aims to fill these gaps by examining journalists' professional role identity, considering that they may construct multiple identities simultaneously, depending on the political, physical, and digital space they interact with.

1.2. Job Expectations

The job expectations approach assumes that employees enter an organisation with expectations about various aspects of their job, such as salary, job autonomy, opportunities for promotion, workload, or colleagues [27–29]. These expectations are fed by various sources, such as previous work experiences and social norms, as well as the needs and desires of the individual. When employees' expectations are met, employees experience high job satisfaction, high organisational commitment, and low turnover intentions [30,31]. Because potential employees are thought to have unrealistically high expectations for a job, organisations tend to adopt procedures that provide for lower or more realistic expectations. When more realistic expectations are set, employees are more likely to achieve these expectations and avoid the various negative attitudes and behaviours associated with unmet expectations—such as low job satisfaction [32].

Previous research has shown that the discrepancy between expected and fulfilled work expectations is an important predictor of employee reactions and attitudes [33]. For example, Moreno-Jiménez et al. [34] created a pool of items to assess how much initial expectations about the work environment are met. They assessed fulfilled expectations on three dimensions: (1) career development, which measures aspects such as the tasks performed, the variety and relevance of the activities carried out, the autonomy with which activities are carried out and the feedback resulting from the task; (2) relations with users, which measures contact, recognition, communication and feedback between the journalist and clients or service users; and (3) remuneration, which measures the possibility of promotion and economic and professional stability.

In summary, fulfilled expectations have important effects on employees' job satisfaction and commitment to their own jobs and companies. Moreover, some approaches suggest that expectations serve as a comparative measure of past job characteristics and may also be linked to perceptions of present characteristics [35]. Expectations guide the interpretation of information, especially in the case of objectively ambiguous information, such as the complex interweaving of goals, values, beliefs, norms, and time horizons that constitute role identity [36]. This is in line with a more recent integrative literature review conducted by Rasmussen and colleagues [37], who investigated factors influencing perceptions of role identity and found that job expectations can lead to a reconstruction of role identity.

1.3. Met Expectations and Professional Role Identities

Fulfilled expectations may be significantly related to perceptions of role identity, especially in atypical work contexts. Building on the previous findings, we argue that journalists meeting their job expectations have a clearer idea of their role identity. Therefore, when job expectations are met, individuals are more likely to change their view of their role identity accordingly.

Failure to meet job expectations may hinder the formation of role identity. A case study of school psychologists working under atypical conditions (i.e., part-time contracts with multiple jobs to compensate for low salaries) suggests that these conditions threaten career development, posing challenges to role identity formation [38].

Social interaction is another factor that activates and validates specific parts of role identity and provides opportunities for social validation of the new or adapted identity [36]. Collinson [39] showed that interaction with colleagues and research supervisors validates the identity of research assistants on fixed-term contracts. Considering that journalists constantly interact with other individuals, especially their readers, it is reasonable to assume that journalists who have fulfilled their expectations for interacting with their readers and representing their needs or ideas perceive themselves as competent and effective journalists, reinforcing their role identity [40].

1.4. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to the overall evaluation that an individual has of his or her own job; that is, job satisfaction is the evaluation of the advantageousness of a job, typically arranged along a continuum from positive to negative evaluation [41]. Job satisfaction occurs when working conditions match an individual's needs for growth, development and meaning. Consistent with this conceptualisation, we argue that workers, including journalists, who achieve their expectations for career development, compensation and relationships with co-workers will also experience job satisfaction.

Chung-Yan [42] found in a study of 259 workers that autonomy at work was positively related to job satisfaction. Similarly, daily social interactions in the work context and the quality and quantity of feedback from supervisors and customers correlate positively with job satisfaction [43]. In addition, Lambert and colleagues [44] found that job satisfaction increases due to fulfilled expectations when reward-related promises are kept. The expectancy approach assumes that employees report high job satisfaction and organisational

commitment when employee expectations are met. In addition, studies show positive correlations between job satisfaction and role identity [32].

As mentioned above, professional identity is constrained by social context and depends on the expectations associated with it. A satisfying work context that meets expectations may be related to the positive perception of role identity, such that a positive evaluation of a job consolidates that identity while a negative evaluation forces role identity to undergo greater judgment, discussion, and interpersonal negotiation. Although less studied, evidence points to this idea: some authors show that life satisfaction is positively associated with strong and self-chosen identities [45]. Therefore, we hypothesize that individuals who achieve their job expectations are more satisfied with their job, which is related to their perception of role identity. In other words, we assume that job satisfaction is mediating in the relationship between fulfilled expectations and perceptions of role identity.

Building on previous findings, our study examines the relationship between fulfilled expectations, job satisfaction, and role identity in an atypical profession such as journalism. We hypothesize that met job expectations positively correlate with professional role identity and that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between met job expectations and professional role identity. According to our hypothesized model, met job expectations have both a direct and indirect effect on professional role identity. We thus hypothesize that:

H1. *Fulfilled expectations for career development, compensation, and user relations positively correlate with job satisfaction.*

H2. *Job satisfaction positively correlates with watchdog, citizen-oriented, and propagandist professional role identities.*

H3. *Job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between fulfilled expectations and professional role identity, so that each dimension of fulfilled expectations has a direct and indirect effect on the three dimensions of professional identity.*

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Participants in the study were 74 Gambian journalists, living in either the Gambia (N = 40) or some European and non-European countries (N = 34). Males were 58% of the sample (N = 43) and females were 42% (N = 30); respondents' ages were 18 to 24 years old (17%; N = 12), 25 to 34 years old (21%; N = 15), 35 to 44 years old (46%; N = 34), 45 to 54 years old (10%; N = 7), and older than 54 years old (6%; N = 4).

2.2. Procedure

The study was proposed to an association of Gambian journalists which, after agreeing to participate, informed its members and circulated the link to an online questionnaire. The association also includes a certain number of members living in European and non-European countries. Members of the association were also encouraged to send the link to other colleagues who did not belong to the association. A consent form explained the study and the rights of the participants (e.g., that participation was voluntary and confidential and could be discontinued at any time). After agreeing to participate, participants filled in the questionnaire at their own discretion, with the freedom to stop at any time and continue later. The online survey was available from 7 December 2021 to 27 January 2022. The questionnaire link reached 86 journalists, 74 of whom completed the entire questionnaire. The study was part of a larger project and received a positive evaluation on Ethics and Data Protection by the European Commission in the European project PERCEPTIONS.

2.3. Measures

In addition to sociodemographic variables (age, gender, level of education), the questionnaire included measures of met expectations, job satisfaction, and professional role identity.

Met Expectations. Nine items from the Job Expectations Questionnaire by Villa-George and colleagues [46] were used. Items measured met expectations for career development,

user relations, and compensation. Participants were asked to rate to what extent their current job met various expectations on a scale from 2 to 5, ranging from 2 (not met at all) to 5 (fully met). Participants also had the ability to select 1 (never had this expectation) as a response option. Item examples for career development, compensation, and user relations are, respectively: "I hoped for fair treatment within the work team," "I assumed that my profession would facilitate a rapid increase of my spending power," and "I expected to feel comfortable in the interaction with the citizens."

Professional Role Identity. Professional Role Identity as a journalist was assessed with nine items used by Mellado [18,19] in the study on journalist identity. Participants were asked to rate their importance on various journalistic roles on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important). Items measured the "Watchdog Role" (e.g., "act as a watchdog of political parties"), "Citizen-Oriented Role" (e.g., "provide citizens with the information they need to make political decisions"), and "Propagandist Role" (e.g., "cultivate nationalism or patriotism").

Job Satisfaction. Job Satisfaction was measured using a single comprehensive item: "On a scale from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 10 (extremely satisfied), how much are you satisfied with your job?" This choice was made to prevent questionnaire fatigue and is supported by the literature [47].

3. Results

We performed a confirmatory factor analysis to test the factorial validity of the measures, using Mplus7 software [48]. Two CFAs were conducted comparing the multidimensional structure of two scales, Met Expectations (3 factors) and Professional Role Identity (3 factors), with an alternative one-dimensional model, in which all items of each scale were organized under a single factor. The goodness of fit was assessed with the Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (x^2/df), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). The three-factor model of Professional Role Identity and the three-factor model of Met Expectations both had a better fit than the single factor models.

Table 1 displays bivariate correlations among the seven variables of interest and the descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients. Overall, reliability was satisfactory, with most scales equal to or above 0.70 and only two (career development and citizen-oriented) close to 0.70. On average, participants feel that their expectations for user relations and career development have been met; they also assign more value to the citizen-oriented and watchdog roles than the propagandist one. Job expectations for compensation seem to be only partially met. Finally, journalists show slightly positive job satisfaction.

Table 1. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables (N = 54).

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Met Expectations (Career Development)	4.09	0.71	(0.64)	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Met Expectations (Compensation)	2.75	0.73	0.23	(0.70)	-	-	-	-	-
3. Met Expectations (User Relations)	4.22	0.69	0.44 **	−0.13	(0.81)	-	-	-	-
4. Job Satisfaction	6.74	2.20	0.69 **	0.26	0.49 **	-	-	-	-
5. Role Identity (Citizen-Oriented)	4.42	0.59	0.19	−0.11	0.36 **	0.41 **	(0.68)	-	-
6. Role Identity (Propagandist)	2.83	0.94	−0.06	−0.12	0.01	−0.03	0.17	(0.74)	-
7. Role Identity (Watchdog)	4.46	0.69	0.19	−0.28	0.39 **	0.44 **	0.74 **	0.09	(0.73)

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's α) are provided in brackets.

Met expectations for user relations were positively correlated with professional role identity, namely citizen-oriented (r = 0.36; $p < 0.01$) and watchdog roles (r = 0.39; $p < 0.01$). Met expectations for career development and compensation did not relate with any role identity dimensions. On the other hand, met expectations for career development, compen-

sation, and user relations significantly correlated with job satisfaction (respectively r = 0.69, r = 0.48, r = 0.49), which, in turn, was positively associated with citizen-oriented (r = 0.41) and watchdog (r = 0.44) role identities. Propagandist role identity was the only dimension not related to any other variable.

We also performed t-tests and ANOVAs to investigate differences for Met Expectations, Job Satisfaction, and Professional Identity across gender and age. The results showed age differences for Met Expectations for Career Development ($F(3) = 3.28$, $p < 0.05$), showing that older journalists felt that their expectations for career development had been fulfilled more than younger ones did. There was no other significant difference across age or gender for any dimension of Professional Identity, Met Expectations or Job Satisfaction.

We tested the direct and indirect effects using the PROCESS macro for SPSS [49]. PROCESS is an observed variable OLS and logistic regression path analysis modeling for estimating direct and indirect effects. A total number of nine mediation models were run. We performed bootstrapping (N = 5000) for each mediation analysis. Table 2 shows the direct and indirect effects of Met Expectations on Professional Role Identities.

Table 2. Direct and Indirect effects of Met Expectations on Professional Role Identities.

	PRI "Watchdog"	PRI "Citizen-Oriented"	PRI "Propagandist"
Met expectations (Career Development)			
Job Satisfaction	0.18 **	0.15 **	−0.01
Met Expectations	−0.21	−0.15	−0.06
Indirect effect	0.39 *	0.32 *	−0.02
	$R^2 = 0.21$	$R^2 = 0.18$	$R^2 = 0.00$
Met expectations (Compensation)			
Job Satisfaction	0.19 **	0.14 **	−0.04
Met Expectations	−0.39 **	−0.18	−0.11
Indirect effect	0.13	0.10	−0.03
	$R^2 = 0.36$	$R^2 = 0.24$	$R^2 = 0.02$
Met expectations (User Relations)			
Job Satisfaction	0.10 *	0.08 *	−0.02
Met Expectations	0.23	0.18	0.05
Indirect effect	0.16	0.13 *	−0.04
	$R^2 = 0.23$	$R^2 = 0.20$	$R^2 = 0.00$

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; unstandardized regression coefficients are shown; PRI = Professional Role Identity; R^2 = Explained Variance; Job Satisfaction is the mediator variable.

Journalists whose career development expectations are realised are more satisfied with their jobs, and as a result, they are more likely to function professionally as watchdogs of political parties and to give citizens the knowledge they require to make political decisions. Met expectations for career development are not related to the propagandist role identity.

Journalists whose compensation expectations are realised are less likely to function professionally as watchdogs of political parties. Met expectations for compensation are not related to the citizen-oriented and propagandist role identity.

Journalists whose expectations are met for relations with users/citizens are more satisfied with their job, and as a result, they are more likely to function professionally as watchdogs of political parties and to give citizens with the knowledge they require to make political decisions. Met expectations for relations with users/citizens are not related to the propagandist role identity.

4. Discussion

The present study had two aims: one, to investigate whether the three dimensions of Met Expectations (Career Development, Compensation, and User Relations) are as-

sociated with the three dimensions of journalists' Professional Role Identity (Watchdog, Citizen-oriented, Propagandist) and, two, whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between met job expectations and journalists' role identity. In addition, we tested these relationships in a sample of Gambian journalists because after the collapse of the dictatorship regime, these practitioners are experiencing freedom of expression more fully and expanding their role identity as, for instance, informants of the population on national problems or the risks of leaving the country through irregular migration to Europe.

Our descriptive results seem to confirm the economic and social situation of the country, with journalists reporting that their expectations for compensation are only partially met while stating that they consider their roles as propagandists much less important than the other two roles, more politically and socially oriented, of watchdog and citizen-oriented.

Our results provide evidence for age differences in fulfilled expectations for career development. Showing that older journalists achieve their expectations for career development more than younger ones, our research supports previous research findings on entrepreneurial atypical jobs [50]. This finding is in line with the theory of Social Capital applied to career development [51], which argues that older people tend to have greater network positions, social resources, and information, ultimately facilitating career success and fulfilling job expectations.

The results partially support our hypotheses, with three out of the nine assumed mediation models found to be significant. The first significant mediation model shows that job satisfaction totally mediates the relationship between user relations expectations and the citizen-oriented role identity. The second significant mediation model highlights that job satisfaction totally mediates the relationship between met expectations for career development and the watchdog role identity. The same relationship applies to the third model, which shows job satisfaction mediating between career development expectations and the citizen-oriented role identity. In contrast, met expectations for compensation do not indirectly affect role identity variables, but show a direct and negative effect on the watchdog role identity. In line with previous studies, these results suggest that journalists show a proclivity to build their role identities based on values like career development and empowering the people, and less on monetary rewards [19].

Our findings extend the expectations approach and point to the idea that fulfilled expectations not only influence work attitudes but are also indirectly related to perceptions of professional identity. Similarly, these findings fit with previous research showing that fulfilled expectations and positive evaluation of work context are associated with stronger perceptions of role identity [2,3,12]. Satisfying needs for professional career and interaction with citizens seem to play an indirect role in influencing journalists' perceptions of a role identity more focused on controlling the political and economic establishment (watchdog) and empowering people (citizen-oriented), and these relationships seem to be explained by job satisfaction. This implies that the extent to which certain job expectations are met positively influences job satisfaction, which in turn strengthens perceptions of one's role. This result is consistent with other studies examining role identity in atypical contexts such as academic and school contexts [5,35].

Job satisfaction, connected with the idea of making an important contribution to one's own development and to the work of others, slightly reinforces the importance of some types of role identities. In fact, we found that fulfilling expectations for career development (i.e., professional autonomy and receiving feedback from others) appears to strengthen job satisfaction, which in turn reinforces journalists' perceptions of their watchdog and citizen-oriented professional identities [52,53]. The more satisfied journalists are with their career development, in the context of being autonomous in their jobs and receiving feedback, the more important they perceive the watchdog functions and tasks (i.e., supervising government and institutions) to be in defining their own roles. Similarly, tasks that define the citizen-oriented role (i.e., promoting just causes or motivating citizens by telling them what "they should know") become more important to one's role identity the more journalists believe they are developing professionally from this point of view. We

argue that these findings support the idea that journalists enjoy the flexibility and autonomy that their job affords [54,55]. This aspect makes them feel more satisfied with their jobs, and becomes an important aspect on which their professional identity is constructed. In summary, fulfilled expectations in terms of career development contribute to strengthening the role of watchdog and citizen-oriented through job satisfaction. However, there is reason to believe that other variables may also influence perceptions of these role identities, especially considering that the variance explained by our models is low.

Moreover, the results suggest that fulfilled expectations of relationships with users, which may involve contact, recognition, communication and feedback between journalists and with citizens, indirectly strengthen perceptions of the citizen-oriented role identity through job satisfaction. This finding suggests that journalists rely heavily on social interactions with users and citizens to validate their role identity, especially in less developed cultural contexts [20]. Indeed, the literature shows that professional identity in such countries revolves around audience education and advocacy for social change [56–58].

This becomes particularly relevant when we consider the emergence of digitisation in journalistic practice, as the rise of online social media platforms (e.g., Twitter) provides a novel space for journalists to reach audiences and contribute to news gathering and processing, interactivity, and democracy [21,59]. The recent need of journalism to be massively visible in the digital space to gain symbolic and cultural power has changed journalists' interaction with citizens and audiences' expectations. Studies show that audiences expect journalists to endorse traditional journalistic values, while they have expectations of authenticity, transparency, engagement, and quality content for influencers and content creators. Moreover, the switch from publisher to product needs in journalistic practice, together with its consequent increased market orientation, is perceived as lowering journalists' connection and credibility, blurring the distinction between traditional journalism and content creation [59,60].

Our findings show that the dimensions of fulfilled expectations have relationships with specific role identities. While fulfilled expectations related to relationships with users strengthen citizen-centred role identities, the dimension of compensation is not significantly related to the dimensions of job satisfaction or role identity. Our findings suggest that journalists are motivated by strong values and goals that depend on the extent to which they can develop as professionals and contribute to community empowerment, rather than on monetary rewards. This is in line with a recent study by Mammadov [55], in which the author reported that journalists from Azerbaijan showed a strong commitment to their profession and cared less about monetary remuneration, even when they were not doing well financially. Rather, their understanding of their role was reflected in how they could bring a contribution that benefited society and citizens, regardless of all the problems associated with economic challenges and political polarisation.

Similarly, the dimension of the propagandist role identity was not influenced by job satisfaction or any other dimension of fulfilled expectations. This finding suggests that the mechanisms that shape the propagandist role identity are different from those that construct other roles, and therefore do not depend on the degree of fulfillment of expectations. We thus argue that job satisfaction and fulfilling job expectations do not shape role identity when the latter merely focuses on defending leaders' public reputation. As a matter of fact, the propagandist role identity might be constructed by interactions with the leaders themselves (i.e., publishers, political representatives), who, for over a century, have placed limitations and constraints on journalists from their position of power. Therefore, the feeling of being more satisfied when one's expectations for work are met does not seem to be related to the specific values that characterize the propagandist role. The aim of this role is to convey a positive image of the country's leaders through the media, defending economic and social progress and supporting public policies that contribute to the country's development.

This study has some limitations. First, in terms of sample size: despite the association's and our efforts to distribute the questionnaire to Gambian journalists living in

the country and abroad, the sample size is small. Nevertheless, given that we accessed a very restricted population dispersed across multiple countries, we deem the sample size acceptable. To increase the statistical power of our results, we decided to increase the effect size as much as possible by performing 5000 bootstrap repetitions when conducting the mediational analyses.

Second, we used a direct retrospective measure to assess fulfilled expectations in their relationship to job satisfaction and role identity. These measures of expectancy discrepancy have come under criticism for leading to potentially inaccurate interpretation of results. Nevertheless, researchers continue to use direct retrospective assessments of the discrepancy between expectations and reality as an important predictor of various constructs [52,53]. Given this consideration, we felt sufficiently confident to rely on an instrument that assesses the retrospective values of fulfilled expectations; nevertheless, future research may aim to use alternative approaches and measurement instruments to examine the role of fulfilled expectations in the formation of atypical workers' role identity.

Third, the cross-sectional design does not allow for confirmation of the direction of causality between variables. Some authors argue that it would be preferable to obtain evidence of mediation through randomised experimental design [61,62]. We have endeavoured to avoid making unwarranted claims about causation in this study.

5. Conclusions

The study results partially supported the hypothesis that there is a relationship between journalists' fulfilled expectations and their perceptions of their role identity, with job satisfaction serving as a mediator. The analysis validated three of the nine models of mediation. The findings indicated that when journalists' expectations of having relationships with their audience are met, this results in a greater sense of a citizen-centered role identity via the indirect effect of job satisfaction. Similarly, satisfying career development expectations was discovered to have a positive indirect effect on the watchdog and citizen-oriented role identities, again via the mediation of job satisfaction. However, meeting compensation expectations had a negative effect on the role identity of the watchdog.

It is important to note that the degree to which the job expectations of Gambian journalists are satisfied has direct and indirect effects on their professional role identities, but only under certain conditions.

In addition, it is essential to stress the significance of investigating journalist identities and practises in West Africa. Understanding the factors that shape the professional identities of journalists can provide valuable insights into the challenges they face, and can inform the development of policies and programmes that support ethical and effective journalism in the region.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, G.P., L.P. and M.Y.S.; methodology, G.P. and M.Y.S.; validation, G.P., M.Y.S. and S.Z.; resources, L.P.; data curation, S.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, G.P., L.P. and M.Y.S.; writing—review and editing, L.P., G.P. and S.Z.; supervision, L.P. and S.Z.; project administration, L.P.; funding acquisition, L.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, project title PERCEPTIONS (Grant Agreement No. 833870).

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board of University of Bologna (October 2020). More information is available on Deliverable WP9 of the H2020 Project PERCEPTIONS on Ethics and POPD.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank Alagie Jinkang and the Gambian Press Union for facilitating research activities.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Nordhall, O.; Knez, I.; Saboonchi, F.; Willander, J. Teachers' personal and collective work-identity predicts exhaustion and work motivation: Mediating roles of psychological job demands and resources. *Front. Psychol.* **2020**, *11*, 1538. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
2. Van Dick, R.; Boxall, P. Role identity and work outcomes: A review and synthesis of the literature. *J. Manag.* **2008**, *34*, 393–416.
3. Van Dick, R.; Crawshaw, J.R.; Karpf, S.; Schuh, S.C.; Zhang, X. Identity, importance, and their roles in how corporate social responsibility affects workplace attitudes and behavior. *J. Bus. Psychol.* **2020**, *35*, 159–169. [CrossRef]
4. Lucas, K. Blue-collar discourses of workplace dignity: Using outgroup comparisons to construct positive identities. *Manag. Commun. Q.* **2011**, *25*, 353–374. [CrossRef]
5. Selenko, E.; Berkers, H.; Carter, A.; Woods, S.A.; Otto, K.; Urbach, T.; De Witte, H. On the dynamics of work identity in atypical employment: Setting out a research agenda. *Eur. J. Work Organ. Psychol.* **2018**, *27*, 324–334. [CrossRef]
6. Caza, B.B.; Moss, S.; Vough, H. From synchronizing to harmonizing: The process of authenticating multiple work identities. *Adm. Sci. Q.* **2017**, *63*, 703–745. [CrossRef]
7. Caza, B.B.; Vough, H.; Puranik, H. Identity work in organizations and occupations: Definitions, theories, and pathways forward. *J. Organ. Behav.* **2018**, *39*, 889–910. [CrossRef]
8. Stryker, S. Identity theory: Developments and extensions. In *Self and Identity: Psychosocial Perspectives*; Yardley, K., Honess, T., Eds.; John Wiley & Sons: New York, NY, USA, 1987; pp. 89–103.
9. Stryker, S.; Burke, P.J. The past, present, and future of an identity theory. *Soc. Psychol. Q.* **2000**, *63*, 284–297. [CrossRef]
10. Sveningsson, S.; Alvesson, M. Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse, and identity struggle. *Hum. Relat.* **2003**, *56*, 1163–1193. [CrossRef]
11. Fachin, F.F.; Davel, E. Reconciling contradictory paths: Identity play and work in a career transition. *J. Organ. Chang. Manag.* **2015**, *28*, 369–392. [CrossRef]
12. Raskovic, M.; Takacs-Haynes, K. (Re)discovering social identity theory: An agenda for multinational enterprise internalization theory. *Multinatl. Bus. Rev.* **2020**, *29*, 145–165. [CrossRef]
13. Jain, S.; George, G.; Maltarich, M. Academics or entrepreneurs? Investigating role identity modification of university scientists involved in commercialization activity. *Res. Policy* **2009**, *38*, 922–935. [CrossRef]
14. Eurofound. Atypical Work. Available online: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/atypical-work (accessed on 1 January 2022).
15. UNDP. Human Development Report 2019. In *Beyond Income, beyond Averages, beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*; UN Plaza: New York, NY, USA, 2019; Available online: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2019_overview_-_english.pdf (accessed on 1 January 2022).
16. Senghore, A.A. Press freedom and democratic governance in The Gambia: A rights-based approach. *Afr. Hum. Rights Law J.* **2012**, *12*, 508–538.
17. Jinkang, A.; Cappi, V.; Musarò, P. Back Way Migration to Europe: The Role of Journalists in Disseminating Information Campaigns in the Gambia. *J. Borderl. Stud.* **2022**, 1–18. [CrossRef]
18. Mellado, C. Role perceptions and role identities of journalists: A comparative study. *J. Mass Commun. Q.* **2012**, *89*, 255–275.
19. Mellado, C.; Van Dalen, A. Between rhetoric and practice: Explaining the gap between role conception and performance in journalism. *J. Stud.* **2014**, *15*, 859–878. [CrossRef]
20. Mellado, C.; Hermida, A. A Conceptual Framework for Journalistic Identity on Social Media: How the Personal and Professional Contribute to Power and Profit. *Digit. J.* **2021**, *10*, 284–299. [CrossRef]
21. Mellado, C.; Hermida, A. The promoter, celebrity, and joker roles in journalists' social media performance. *Soc. Media Soc.* **2021**, *7*, 1–11. [CrossRef]
22. Mammadov, R. Role perception of journalists in different cultures and media systems. In *The Routledge Companion to Journalism Studies*; Hermida, A., Mellado, C., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 173–183.
23. Weaver, D.H.; Willnat, L. *The Global Journalist in the Twenty-First Century*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2012.
24. Edstrom, M.; Ladendorf, M. Freelance journalists as a flexible workforce in media industries. *J. Pract.* **2012**, *6*, 711–721. [CrossRef]
25. Spreitzer, G.M.; Cameron, L.; Garrett, L. Alternative work arrangements: Two images of the new world of work. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.* **2017**, *4*, 473–499. [CrossRef]
26. Grubenmann, S.; Meckel, M. Journalists' Professional Identity: A resource to cope with change in the industry? *J. Stud.* **2017**, *18*, 732–748. [CrossRef]
27. Wanous, J.P.; Poland, T.D.; Premack, S.L.; Davis, K.S. The effects of met expectations on newcomer attitudes and behaviors: A review and meta-analysis. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **1992**, *77*, 288–297. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
28. Irving, P.G.; Meyer, J.P. Re-examination of the met-expectations hypothesis: A longitudinal analysis. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **1994**, *79*, 937–949. [CrossRef]

29. Irving, P.G.; Montes, S.D. Met expectations: The effects of expected and delivered inducements on employee satisfaction. *J. Occup. Organ. Psychol.* **2009**, *82*, 431–451. [CrossRef]
30. Iverson, R.D.; Roy, P. A causal model of behavioral commitment: Evidence from a study of Australian blue-collar employees. *J. Manag.* **1994**, *20*, 15–41. [CrossRef]
31. Mueller, C.W.; Price, J.L. Economic, psychological, and sociological determinants of voluntary turnover. *J. Behav. Econ.* **1990**, *19*, 321–335. [CrossRef]
32. Perugini, C.; Vladisavljević, M. Gender inequality and the gender-job satisfaction paradox in Europe. *Labour Econ.* **2019**, *60*, 129–147. [CrossRef]
33. Caligiuri, P.; Phillips, J.; Lazarova, M.; Tarique, I.; Burgi, P. The theory of met expectations applied to expatriate adjustment: The role of cross-cultural training. *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manag.* **2001**, *12*, 357–372. [CrossRef]
34. Moreno-Jiménez, B.; Gálvez Herrer, G.; Rodríguez-Carvajal, R. *Análisis de la Relación Entre los Ajustes de Expectativas Laborales y Burnout en médicos [Analysis of the Relationship between Met Job Expectations and Burnout in Medicals]*; Universidad Autònoma de Madrid: Madrid, Spain, 2003; *Unpublished manuscript*.
35. Olson, J.M.; Roese, N.J.; Zanna, M.P. Expectancies. In *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*; Higgins, E.A., Ed.; The Guilford Press: New York, NY, USA, 1996; pp. 211–238.
36. Ashforth, B.E.; Schinoff, B.S. Identity under construction: How individuals come to define themselves in organizations. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.* **2016**, *3*, 111–137. [CrossRef]
37. Rasmussen, P.; Henderson, A.; Andrew, N.; Conroy, T. Factors influencing registered nurses' perceptions of their professional identity: An integrative literature review. *J. Contin. Educ. Nurs.* **2018**, *49*, 225–232. [CrossRef]
38. Kohavi, H.; Roded, A.D.; Raviv, A. Continuity and change in role definitions and training models of school psychologists in Israel. *J. Psychol.* **2020**, *154*, 545–567. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
39. Collinson, J.A. Occupational identity on the edge: Social science contract researchers in higher education. *Sociology* **2004**, *38*, 313–329. [CrossRef]
40. Hanitzsch, T. *Professional identity and roles of journalists, In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2017.
41. Judge, T.A.; Weiss, H.M.; Kammeyer-Mueller, J.D.; Hulin, C.L. Job attitudes, job satisfaction, and job affect: A century of continuity and of change. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **2017**, *102*, 356–374. [CrossRef]
42. Chung-Yan, G.A. The nonlinear effects of job complexity and autonomy on job satisfaction, turnover, and psychological well-being. *J. Occup. Health Psychol.* **2010**, *15*, 237–251. [CrossRef]
43. Lin, I.Y.; Kwantes, C.T. Potential job facilitation benefits of "water cooler" conversations: The importance of social interactions in the workplace. *J. Psychol.* **2015**, *149*, 239–262. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
44. Lambert, L.S.; Edwards, J.R.; Cable, D.M. Breach and fulfillment of the psychological contract: A comparison of traditional and expanded views. *Pers. Psychol.* **2003**, *56*, 895–934. [CrossRef]
45. Christiansen, C.H. Defining lives: Occupational identity. An essay on competence, coherence, and the creation of meaning. *Am. J. Occup. Ther.* **1999**, *53*, 547–558. [CrossRef]
46. Villa-George, F.I.; Moreno-Jiménez, B.; Rodríguez-Muñoz, A.; Villalpando Uribe, J. Factorial validity of the Job Expectations Questionnaire in a sample of Mexican workers. *Span. J. Psychol.* **2011**, *14*, 1010–1017. [CrossRef]
47. Dolbier, C.L.; Webster, J.A.; McCalister, K.T.; Mallon, M.W.; Steinhardt, M.A. Reliability and validity of a single-item measure of job satisfaction. *Am. J. Health Promot.* **2005**, *19*, 194–198. [CrossRef]
48. Muthen, B.O.; Muthen, L.K. *Mplus, version 7*; Muthen & Muthen: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2012.
49. Hayes, A.F.; Montoya, A.K.; Rockwood, N.J. The analysis of mechanisms and their contingencies: PROCESS versus structural equation modeling. *Australas. Mark. J. (AMJ)* **2017**, *25*, 76–81. [CrossRef]
50. Zhao, H.; O'Connor, G.; Wu, J.; Lumpkin, G.T. Age and entrepreneurial career success: A review and a meta-analysis. *J. Bus. Ventur.* **2021**, *36*, 106007. [CrossRef]
51. Seibert, S.; Kraimer, M.; Liden, R. A social capital theory of career success. *Acad. Manag. J.* **2001**, *44*, 219–237. [CrossRef]
52. Moser, K. Recruitment sources and post-hire outcomes: The mediating role of unmet expectations. *Int. J. Sel. Assess.* **2005**, *13*, 188–197. [CrossRef]
53. Taris, T.W.; Feij, J.A.; Capel, S. Great expectations–and what comes of it: The effects of unmet expectations on work motivation and outcomes among newcomers. *Int. J. Sel. Assess.* **2006**, *14*, 256–268. [CrossRef]
54. Banjac, S.; Hanusch, F. A question of perspective: Exploring audiences' views of journalistic boundaries. *N. Media Soc.* **2020**, *24*, 705–723. [CrossRef]
55. Mammadov, R. Political activist, citizen's helper, and entertainer: A study of professional role perception of journalists in Azerbaijan. *J. Pract.* **2021**, *15*, 911–936. [CrossRef]
56. Hanusch, F.; Uppal, C. Combining detached watchdog journalism with development ideals: An exploration of Fijian journalism culture. *Int. Commun. Gaz.* **2015**, *77*, 557–576. [CrossRef]
57. O'sullivan, J.; Heinonen, A. Old values, new media: Journalism role perceptions in a changing world. *J. Pract.* **2008**, *2*, 357–371. [CrossRef]
58. Josephi, B. Journalists for a young democracy. *J. Stud.* **2017**, *18*, 495–510. [CrossRef]

59. Molyneux, L.; Avery, H.; Seth, L. How Journalists Engage in Branding on Twitter: Individual, Organizational, and Institutional Levels. *Inf. Commun. Soc.* **2018**, *21*, 1386–1401. [CrossRef]
60. Mellado, C.; Amaranta, A. Journalists, Platforms and Their Digital Selves. *Digit. J.* **2020**, *8*, 1258–1279. [CrossRef]
61. Maxwell, S.E.; Cole, D.A.; Mitchell, M.A. Bias in cross-sectional analyses of longitudinal mediation: Partial and complete mediation under an autoregressive model. *Multivar. Behav. Res.* **2011**, *46*, 816–841. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
62. O'Laughlin, K.D.; Martin, M.J.; Ferrer, E. Cross-sectional analysis of longitudinal mediation processes. *Multivar. Behav. Res.* **2018**, *53*, 375–402. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.