

Information disorder in news language: a semantic analysis and journalistic ethics discussion

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Abstract: The dissemination of false information has significantly transformed the role of journalism in democratic societies. This paper examines journalism's impact on headline framing, contextualization, and reporting practices, all of which contribute to public confusion and mistrust. Through a series of case studies—including inaccurate health reporting, disinformation in war zones, and fact-based narratives lacking proper context—this analysis highlights how credibility gaps, driven by journalistic missteps, undermine media trust. The paper argues that journalistic ethics must go beyond accuracy and verification to encompass contextual clarity, political accountability, and social responsibility. Drawing on recent interdisciplinary literature and institutional responses, the study offers policy recommendations on algorithmic transparency, platform accessibility, and comprehensive media literacy initiatives. These efforts are crucial to preserving democratic discourse and mitigating the harms of unchecked digital information flows.

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving digital environment, the boundaries of professional journalism are increasingly blurred. The rise of social media platforms has enabled individuals without formal training to influence public discourse at scale, challenging the gatekeeping functions traditionally held by journalists. The media competence is no longer confined to professionals; rather, it has become a core civic literacy in an age of algorithmic curation and fragmented audiences [1].

This transformation has exposed critical vulnerabilities in both media institutions and democratic societies. The lack of regulatory frameworks allows for the proliferation of informal news influencers, many of whom prioritize engagement over accuracy. Consequently, ethical journalism is increasingly marginalized, while sensationalist and polarizing content dominates online spaces. These dynamics weaken the foundations of democratic participation and foster an environment ripe for manipulation and disinformation.

Algorithm-driven platforms systematically amplify hyperpartisan narratives and emotional appeals, undermining factual journalism and distorting public understanding [2]. In this context, promoting digital media literacy and reinforcing ethical journalistic standards are no longer peripheral educational goals—they are central to safeguarding democratic discourse. This paper examines the role of semantic distortion in perpetuating information disorder and argues for a reconceptualization of journalistic ethics in light of these challenges.

2. Concept and types of information disorder

Disinformation, mal-information, Disinformation, mal-information, and misinformation represent three distinct yet interrelated forms of information disorder. Misinformation refers to the unintentional dissemination of inaccurate content, often resulting from misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Disinformation, by contrast, involves the deliberate fabrication or distortion of information intended to mislead. Mal-information, meanwhile, refers to the harmful use of truthful information—often through selective context or privacy violations such as doxxing [3].

Disinformation in particular capitalizes on the algorithmic logic of digital platforms. Social media algorithms prioritize engagement and amplification, thereby increasing the visibility of polarizing

and manipulative content [4]. Mal-information, despite being based on factual material, can cause harm by violating personal boundaries or distorting context. Social media serves as a provide access to vast amounts of news and information. As such, these platforms can offer discursive spaces where people take part in rational public discussions akin to the public sphere.[5] In addition to fueling conspiracy theories and partisan rhetoric, pseudo-media ecosystems contribute fundamentally to the entrenchment of these disorders [6]. The increasing reliance on social media for news consumption has not only altered traditional information pathways but also contributed to the fragmentation of public discourse. The increasing reliance on social media for news consumption also implies negative effects on a shared national identity as citizens increasingly obtain important information concerning public life via digital echo chambers [7]. This phenomenon exacerbates the risk of polarization and erodes the foundations of social cohesion and democratic consensus. Research conducted on social media platforms reveals that information spread among similarly situated individuals and tapping into identity-related grievances can intensify outlooks and that in turn, creates a reinforcing cycle pushing the group deeper into extremism.

The expansion of misinformation networks is tightly bound to increased digital access. While the internet amplifies marginalized voices, it also facilitates the viral spread of unverified claims. This dynamic is further complicated by the massive spread of misinformation, particularly on platforms like X (formerly Twitter).Through machine learning and deep learning analysis, the COVID-19 infodemic illustrates how false narratives can proliferate rapidly in the absence of effective content regulation [8]. Such findings underscore the urgent need for robust detection mechanisms and preventive strategies that can mitigate the harmful effects of misinformation in real time. With social media becoming the dominant platform of the current era, the situation of COVID 19 has gotten drastic.

Social media serves as a helpful tool in sharing emotional motivational content about COVID-19, further extracting statistics and guidance to serve the general public - which seems to have caught the eyes of potential influencers.

Social media plays an important role in providing the world with ease like never before'énergie, however, its detrimental impacts have now gotten people talking. Some of the ethically problematic conduct within social networking technologies is made worse by some major actors still putting out video content showing patients in critical condition. We should stop taking “show” for a “tell”s in the form of social media cameras by simply reinforcing pre-existing narratives, but instead address the underlying issues within these technologies.

This imbalance, threatens public trust and weakens institutional credibility [9]. Addressing these challenges requires a segmented approach that includes improved media literacy, algorithmic transparency, and enforceable ethical standards for digital content dissemination.

3. Case studies: semantics and ethical implications of information disorder

3.1 Misleading Headlines and Sensationalism

A headline stating “If you snore, you could be three times more likely to die of coronavirus” exemplifies sensationalist framing and illustrates the adverse effects journalistic practices can have on public opinion and social welfare. The danger of COVID-19-related hoaxes and such alarming headlines may contribute to public panic, distort risk perception, and erode trust in media institutions. The tragic killing of journalists in Afghanistan demonstrates how irresponsibly crafted narratives can undermine the need for safe, accurate reporting that protects journalists while ensuring their objectives are achieved. Furthermore, examining reporting bias in relation to clicks and the creation of echo chambers can foster critical thinking, supported by media literacy, to reduce division and stimulate healthy discourse. Indeed, within our contemporary media landscape, ethical journalism—based on truth, balance, and responsibility—remains essential. Practicing it in robust democracies helps citizens better understand their environment and deepens their trust in institutions.

3.2 Deliberate Disinformation in Conflict Reporting

The bombing in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, by ISIL in March 2023, which resulted in the deaths of journalists Sayed Hussain Naderi and Akmal Tabian, showcases the drastic use of disinformation to attack press freedom. While UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay publicly condemned the attack and advocated for investigations, representing institutional efforts to combat impunity, the systemic coverage gaps of the attack reveal enduring structural weaknesses. Digital media offers numerous opportunities to incite terror and suppress analytically essential voices through violent means. Still, balance is achieved through the focus on UNESCO initiatives, such as the training of 600 journalists in conflict-sensitive reporting and safe reporting protocols[10]. A nuanced approach to ethics in journalism requires framing the violence within a geopolitical context—without crossing into sensationalism that would further endanger journalists or contribute to the normalization of such attacks.

3.3 Accurate but Contextually Harmful Reporting

According to GLAAD’s Social Media Safety Index (2023), Facebook, Instagram, and Threads earned “F” marks for their failure to protect LGBTQ users due to inadequate content moderation policies and enforcement. TikTok’s marginally better performance (D+) still indicates some progress due to improvements in anti-discrimination policies, but it risks causing unintended harm through the public dissemination of such findings[11]. By citing platforms’ negligence as contributing factors to violence and anti-LGBTQ legislation, the article—while credible—may unintentionally distress users and discourage digital participation among marginalized communities. Social media data is being applied the most in conservation science in understanding human – nature interactions. The contents created by users on social media, such as photographs, videos, text, and even sound clips, can be utilized alongside their respective metadata to evaluate such interactions. Free access to sociable content is available on a number of social media sites. However, as is the case with any research involving individuals, social media based scientific research comes with the highest ethical responsibility in terms of data privacy and data protection, even if information is publicly accessible[12]. There is considerable risk to individual users regarding their, or their private personal information and wellbeing is at risk. These include inadvertently or intentionally inappropriate social media data usage in research that could result in psychological or physical harm to the identifiable person.

This raises a critical ethical dilemma: how can platforms uphold transparency without exacerbating psychological harm? In claiming Threads received its first “F” for failure to implement meaningful protections, there is a balancing act between identifying systemic shortcomings and disincentivizing engagement with emerging platforms. Ethical dilemmas arise from the tension between transparency and unintended psychological trauma: accountability advocacy must reconcile exposing corporate negligence with the risk of user disillusionment, promoting accountability without being misleading.

3.4 Synthesis

The range of information disorder is represented in these examples: oversimplified headlines constitute misinformation, the violent suppression of truth qualifies as disinformation, and accurate yet harmful context is categorized as mal-information. Each case underscores the media’s responsibility to report the truth while minimizing unintended harm. Recent studies, such as emphasize the ethical considerations associated with AI in cybersecurity, focusing on the importance of transparency and accountability to build trust in AI-driven systems. The transparent AI systems can enhance cybersecurity by making the underlying decision-making processes understandable and verifiable, thus fostering trust among users.[13] Effective action requires multidisciplinary approaches—such as algorithmic transparency to reduce sensationalism, protective provisions for journalists, and collaborative policymaking that aligns platform governance with community safety.

4. Discussion of journalistic ethics

For journalists, one of the most important aspects that define them is journalistic ethics, a critical duty when it comes to delivering trustworthy media. Before the advent of digital media, journalism was primarily disseminated through traditional platforms such as print, radio, and television. This pre-digital era was marked by a more centralized and regulated flow of information, in which a limited number of media institutions functioned as gatekeepers, thereby ensuring a higher degree of editorial control. Within this context, the historical development of media ethics reflects a long-standing commitment to core principles such as accuracy, fairness, and accountability. From the era of the penny press to the rise of formalized editorial standards, these ethical foundations played a crucial role in maintaining the credibility of the press and sustaining public trust in journalism. The contemporary fight against fake news in the digital era further reinforces the necessity of upholding these ethical principles to preserve journalistic integrity in an increasingly fragmented information landscape [14]. Similarly, emphasize that “traditionally anchored in principles like objectivity, autonomy, and independence, journalists’ professional values have long defined the core identity of the profession” [15]. These values are operationalized through standards such as the Code of Journalistic Conduct, which continues to serve as a regulatory framework for ethical news production in both legacy and digital media environments. This highlights the ethical issues in journalism. For instance, misleading headlines like the one from *The Sun* about the correlation between snoring and COVID-19 mortality can cause undue panic and misinform the public. Journalists tend to describe their epistemic authority as being self-evident and similar to a mirror, journalism is always embedded in social structures and invested in upholding them. This, however, is rarely admitted by journalists, Tuchman found, causing continuous tensions whenever journalists try to describe exactly how they convert their ideals into day-to-day practices [16]. Ethical consideration in journalism is crucial for enabling the media to communicate messages to the masses with minimal harm, while preserving trust. “At the heart of journalistic ethics lies the commitment to truth and accuracy in reporting. Journalists strive to provide reliable information, verify sources rigorously, and corroborate facts to ensure the integrity of their reporting” [17].

Upholding ethics is paramount not only for the safety of journalists in war zones but also for the digital safety of minority and marginalized groups. Due to the limitations that traditional media face in conflict areas, UGAVC is increasingly needed for documenting real-time events. The content shared by those involved or affected directly by the conflict is rich with the reality of human suffering and the hardships of war. Understanding how this content interacts with professional journalism fosters comprehension of media studies relating to the use of citizen journalists, media scholars, and ethics journalism during conflicts. UGAVC and journalism construct and shape the understanding of conflicts, which is likely to change global political conversations [18]. The case of the monitoring of LGBTQ individuals, as highlighted by *The Hill*, demonstrates the need for protective principles within journalism to prevent damaging reporting. Recent research has explored how digital social networks (DSNs) are increasingly integrated into journalistic practices, particularly in terms of public engagement, interactions with institutional and political sources, and their growing role as algorithmic gatekeepers in the news selection process. However, scholarship often overemphasizes the positive contributions of DSNs while neglecting their potentially detrimental effects on the journalism profession [19]. Social media content, particularly tweets, is often evaluated more for its topical appeal than its alignment with traditional news values such as credibility and context. When viral potential becomes a determining factor in editorial decisions, it risks privileging what is popular over what is genuinely in the public interest [19]. *The Hill* has highlighted the dangers of injurious reporting, which demands protective measures within the profession. In short, journalists must adhere to ethical standards not only for self-preservation but also for the sustenance of democracy and citizenship in society.

5. Conclusion

The grotesque murders of Considering all these cases, I notice the detrimental effects of journalism

on public perception and societal welfare. The COVID-related myths with terrifying headlines, like the one about the dangers posed by snoring, reflect a shocking level of sensationalism coupled with unnecessary hysteria. The socially shared misinformation and rumors on Twitter and YouTube added to the escalation of panic buying during COVID-19. Their study indicated that such misinformation fostered an environment where individuals perceived threats psychologically, physically, and socially, resulting in consuming resources more than self-sustaining necessities in an attempt to safeguard themselves. Furthermore, inconsistencies between political leave assurances that everything is under control and social media footage of waiting lines and bare minimum stock levels of crucial items illustrated the escalating desperation. The postings, especially with social approval, spread the desperation even more across different nations [20].

The grotesque murders of journalists in Afghanistan mark the death of safe, truthful reporting encapsulated within the protective narratives that sought to enable such reporting. Further examining biases related to clicks and the formation of echo chambers can help nurture critical thinking through the lens of media literacy, mitigate polarization, and enable productive discourse. It remains undisputed that, in the realm of modern media, a space for ethical journalism that is rooted in truth, objectivity, and responsibility still exists. Such societies facilitate ethical journalism where citizenship is deeply rooted as it assists the citizens in comprehending their surroundings as well as enhancing their participation towards citizenship. Ethical journalism contextualizes and documents events with accuracy which enables people to make principled decisions, nurtures independent thought, and encourages dialogue among different social groups. It also contributes toward the informed scrutiny of exercised power, encourages transparency of institutions, and the development of critical public empowered to identify and challenge manipulation and misinformation. On the other hand, the polemic engagement driven algorithms, content tailored to attract clicks, and partisan reporting have overrun the digital public space with overwhelming disregard of the public good. Thus, the preservation of ethical journalism is important not only for the sake of ideals, but also as a practical requirement for democratic civilization that participations in a democracy in the digital era.

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