

Epistemic Authority Under War Conditions: Artificial Intelligence Journalism and the Re-Making of Reality

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Abstract:

Amid escalating global conflicts and rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), the role of AI in shaping journalistic narratives has become increasingly critical. This study examines how AI-generated media content contributes to the construction of wartime reality and the redefinition of epistemic authority in conflict zones. Using a descriptive methodology and critical discourse analysis as the primary research tool, the study focuses on two emblematic cases: the Russia–Ukraine war and the 2023 Gaza conflict. The content sample includes an AI-generated deepfake video of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy calling for surrender, and an AI-generated image depicting a Palestinian child injured during Israeli airstrikes, both of which circulated widely on social media before being debunked. These samples are analyzed to understand how algorithmically produced media reshapes public perceptions, blurs the lines between truth and fabrication, and challenges traditional journalistic authority. The study argues that the integration of AI into media practices marks a fundamental epistemological shift in how wartime realities are constructed, trusted, and contested. It calls for renewed ethical reflection on media credibility, machine-generated narratives, and the role of journalism in the AI era of conflict.

key words: Artificial Intelligence; AI Journalism; Epistemic Authority; Discourse Analysis; Gaza War; Ukraine War; Deepfake; Media Ethics; Wartime Narratives.

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Introduction

In recent years, the fields of journalism and conflict communication have simultaneously entered a period of rapid transformation. News organizations worldwide are increasingly integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into journalistic workflows, from data analysis and automated story generation to content distribution and fact-checking. Automated journalism systems can now autonomously produce news texts at scale and speed by converting structured data into narrative reports. At the same time, armed conflicts across

the globe have intensified, not only on physical battlefields but also in the informational realm. The war in Ukraine, the Israel– Hamas war in Gaza, and other recent conflicts exemplify how warfare in the 2020s is accompanied by battles over truth and narrative in the media sphere. In this context, AI-powered tools have begun to play a pivotal role in war reporting – assisting in news gathering and verification, but also introducing new challenges in shaping what is perceived as reality on the ground.

These developments raise a core problem at the intersection of epistemology and media practice: the delegation of narrative authority to machines. By entrusting AI systems with tasks of news writing, curation, and even “eyewitness” observation through data sensors, society is effectively shifting part of journalism’s epistemic authority from human reporters to algorithms. Epistemic authority in this context denotes the credibility and capacity to define what counts as knowledge or truth about events. Traditionally, journalists established such authority through norms of verification, objectivity, and on-the-ground reporting, a particularly weighty responsibility in war correspondence. However, algorithmic journalism complicates these norms and power dynamics. AI-generated content may appear to carry an aura of objectivity (algorithms are sometimes perceived as neutral or even a “perfect” arbiter of truth, but in reality, these systems embed the biases and blind spots of their programming and data. This illusion of neutrality can undermine the journalistic pursuit of truth by obscuring how news narratives are constructed and by whom. Moreover, when machines curate or even craft the news, thorny questions arise about accountability and moral responsibility. If an automated news report disseminates false or harmful information, who bears the ethical responsibility – the algorithm’s designers, the editors overseeing it, or no clear agent at all? In the high-stakes context of war reporting, such ambiguities are especially problematic. Journalism in conflict zones has always carried moral weight, from decisions about which images of violence to publish to the imperative of bearing witness to atrocities; delegating parts of these decisions to AI blurs the lines of ethical responsibility and challenges the long-standing ideal that journalism should serve as a truthful, human-guided record of events.

Addressing this problem requires an interdisciplinary theoretical lens. Epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is crucial for understanding how “truth” is established and how authority over knowledge is conferred in society. Concepts such as epistemic authority and epistemic trust become central when assessing whether audiences accept machine-generated war reports as credible truth or treat them with skepticism. Indeed, scholars warn that the advent of AI-generated synthetic media could breed “epistemic confusion,”

an inability to distinguish reality from fabrication. Media ethics provides normative criteria to evaluate these developments, as it deals with principles of truth-telling, transparency, and responsibility in journalism. Ethical frameworks help interrogate whether AI can uphold values like accuracy, fairness, and accountability or instead undermines them (for example, through opaque algorithms or biased training data). War communication scholarship offers context on how information functions in conflict environments – for instance, how propaganda, censorship, and real-time social media reporting in war shape public perception and political outcomes. This domain reminds us that in wartime, the stakes of misinformation or biased narratives are life-and-death, and that controlling the narrative is often a strategic objective of conflict itself. Finally, the logic of algorithms and computation (the algorithmic logic) must be examined. AI systems operate through pattern recognition and optimization criteria that differ from conscious human judgment. Their tendency to prioritize scale, speed, and quantifiable metrics can clash with the nuanced gatekeeping and context-rich deliberation that editors and reporters traditionally exercise. By integrating insights from these theoretical domains – epistemology, ethics, war communication, and algorithmic science – this study situates AI-powered war journalism within a broad understanding of knowledge production, moral norms, communicative power in conflict, and the governing logic of technological systems.

Emerging real-world cases illustrate the stakes of these issues. In the 2023 Gaza war, for instance, AI-generated deepfake images of atrocities – such as fictitious scenes of bloodied infants amid rubble – spread widely on social media, blurring the line between authentic war reportage and fabricated propaganda. The outrage these fake images provoked was real, even if the content was a digital mirage. Similar tactics have appeared in the Ukraine conflict: Russian operatives have deployed deepfake videos (for example, a fabricated video of Ukraine's president allegedly calling for surrender) to erode public trust and sow confusion. These incidents demonstrate how AI can be weaponized to construct false narratives in wartime, flooding the information space with realistic but misleading content that challenges journalists' ability to establish any shared reality. In effect, propagandists armed with generative AI can simulate events that never occurred, forcing both the public and professional news media to question the veracity of every image and video coming out of the conflict. This raises the bar for verification and has the potential to fragment the epistemic consensus about the war's reality.

On the other hand, AI is also being harnessed to bolster journalistic epistemology by aiding in the verification and documentation of events. News organizations and fact-

checkers now employ machine learning tools to authenticate battlefield content in real time. For example, reverse image search, deepfake-detection software, and automated geolocation algorithms were widely used to verify images and videos during the Russia–Ukraine war, helping ascertain their origins and truthfulness. Investigative teams have leveraged these AI-assisted techniques to debunk misattributed photos or identify doctored footage amid the fog of war. Likewise, AI-enhanced data analysis has given rise to “surveillance-enhanced reporting” that independently corroborates on-the-ground realities. Satellite imagery and drone footage, processed with computer vision algorithms, have been used by journalists to document troop movements, map destruction, and even expose human rights violations in near real time. Notably, such AI-aided analysis of satellite images helped confirm Russian atrocities in places like Bucha – revealing evidence of mass civilian killings and thereby disproving official denials. By piecing together digital evidence, algorithms can assist reporters in reconstructing a more objective picture of war realities, essentially using computational power to uphold truth when human access is limited or authoritarian actors obscure the facts. In this sense, AI tools have become invaluable allies for maintaining epistemic integrity against the onslaught of disinformation.

Ultimately, the rise of AI-driven journalism in wartime presents a double-edged sword. It augments the press’s ability to report, verify, and visualize facts on the ground, while also destabilizing long-held assumptions about who holds the power to define truth in conflict narratives. This study examines how epistemic authority is evolving as news narratives increasingly emerge from the interaction between human journalists and intelligent machines. It also considers the implications of this transformation for journalistic norms such as truth, objectivity, and ethical responsibility in war reporting. The following sections present the research questions and objectives that guide this investigation, aiming to trace the shifting landscape of epistemic authority in the age of AI-powered war journalism.

2- *Research Questions:*

In light of the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into war journalism, and its transformative role in shaping knowledge, narrative, and public perception, this study investigates how AI-generated media content has influenced the reconstruction of wartime reality and the renegotiation of epistemic authority specifically in the contexts of the Gaza conflict (2023) and the Russia–Ukraine war (2022–2024).

Main Research Question

How has the use of AI-generated media content in the Gaza and Ukraine wars affected the reconstruction of wartime reality and the exercise of epistemic authority in journalistic discourse?

Sub-questions

1-How did AI-generated content (e.g., deepfake videos, synthetic images) circulated during the Gaza and Ukraine wars shape public perception and media narratives of the conflicts?

2-To what extent did the use of AI tools in these cases challenge or reinforce the credibility and authority of professional journalists?

3-What role did discourse strategies in AI-generated or AI-mediated content play in constructing alternative or conflicting realities?

4-What ethical concerns emerged from the use of AI in shaping war narratives, particularly regarding truth claims and accountability in the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts?

3-Research Objectives

1-To analyze how AI-generated media content—such as deepfake videos and synthetic images impacted public perception and influenced the framing of war narratives during the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts.

2-To evaluate the extent to which the integration of AI tools in wartime media challenged or reinforced the epistemic authority and credibility of professional journalism.

3-To examine the discourse strategies employed in AI-generated or AI-mediated content and their role in constructing, contesting, or fragmenting wartime realities.

4-To explore the ethical implications of using artificial intelligence in war reporting, particularly concerning the production of truth, narrative accountability, and the potential risks of epistemic confusion.

4-Importance of the Study

In an era marked by both technological acceleration and escalating geopolitical conflict, this study offers a timely and necessary investigation into how artificial intelligence is reshaping the very foundations of journalistic authority during wartime. While much of the existing literature has focused on the technical capabilities or ethical

dilemmas posed by AI in media, few have interrogated the philosophical and epistemological consequences of delegating truth-making processes to non-human agents. By exploring the role of AI-powered tools such as automated news generation, deepfake detection systems, and surveillance-enhanced verification, this research highlights a critical transformation in the locus of epistemic authority, shifting it from human journalists to algorithmic systems. This shift has profound implications for how truth is constructed, validated, and believed in contexts where factual clarity is not only ethically vital but politically contested.

Moreover, the study contributes to a growing interdisciplinary discourse at the intersection of media theory, epistemology, and digital ethics by introducing a critical framework to understand AI's function as an epistemic agent in war communication. In doing so, it offers not only theoretical advancement but also practical relevance for journalists, policymakers, and media scholars grappling with the challenges of reporting in an age of algorithmic mediation. Through the analysis of real-world conflict zones such as the Russia–Ukraine war and the 2023 Gaza crisis, this study provides concrete illustrations of how AI technologies can both reinforce and destabilize journalistic credibility. Ultimately, this research underscores the urgent need for ethical safeguards, institutional accountability, and philosophical clarity as media institutions increasingly rely on intelligent systems to shape public understanding in times of war.

5-Previous studies

- ❖ Lesia Lysenko (2024, Ukraine) – War journalism in the digital age: The interaction between professionals and user-generated content

Lysenko's study examines how professional war correspondents perceive and utilize user-generated audiovisual content (UGC) in conflict reporting. Conducted in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, the research used a mixed-method cross-sectional design: a structured survey and in-depth interviews with 12 Ukrainian journalists to capture their attitudes and practices regarding UGC, this approach allowed an analysis of both the prevalence of UGC in war reporting and the verification strategies journalists employ to ensure its credibility. The study found that UGC has become integral to war journalism, frequently complementing traditional news coverage with real-time on-the-ground footage and eyewitness accounts. Journalists reported relying heavily on social platforms (especially Telegram and Facebook) to source videos and images from citizens, which they use for fact-checking, situational awareness, and to augment reports. To uphold epistemic standards, reporters employ rigorous verification techniques, including

consulting experts, cross-referencing official sources, geolocation analysis, reverse image searches, and AI-assisted visual verification tools, to authenticate citizen-provided content. The epistemological benefit of integrating UGC is an expanded reporting capacity – it enables coverage of inaccessible conflict zones and provides diverse perspectives and immediacy that would otherwise be unattainable. At the same time, Lysenko highlights serious challenges to journalistic authority posed by UGC: respondents struggled with verifying authenticity in the deluge of unvetted media, encountering technical hurdles and risks of inadvertently spreading false or manipulated information. They noted that without careful moderation, UGC can undermine professional standards (e.g., by introducing graphic or miscontextualized content) and thus potentially erode audience trust. The study offers practical recommendations to address these issues, such as adopting legal/ethical guidelines for UGC use and never relying on citizen content as a sole source.

This research underlines the shifting epistemic authority in wartime journalism when news production becomes a collaborative assemblage of machine, journalist, and citizen inputs. The findings show that AI-driven verification tools and UGC now play a pivotal role in constructing wartime reality – professional journalists increasingly act as curators and validators of grassroots content, rather than sole eyewitnesses. Such a shift has epistemological implications: while it democratizes information flows and enhances situational awareness, it also forces journalists to renegotiate their authority as truth arbiters. Lysenko’s study demonstrates that maintaining credibility in war reporting now demands mastering new digital literacies and verification regimes so that the “reality” of conflict – as reconstructed in news – remains accurate and trustworthy. In essence, the work illustrates a double-edged sword: AI-assisted UGC integration can empower reportage but also tests the boundaries of journalistic control over the narrative, thereby directly engaging with questions of truth, authenticity, and authority in the digital battlefield.

- ❖ Agnieszka Węglińska et al. (2024, Poland) – Transformation of a war journalist profession: The case of the full-scale Russo–Ukrainian conflict

Węglińska and colleagues investigate how the proliferation of digital technologies – from social media to data-driven tools – has transformed the professional practices of war correspondents during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The study is grounded in extensive qualitative research: the authors conducted 18 in-depth interviews with experienced war reporters who covered the Ukraine conflict. These journalists, hailing

from different news organizations, recounted their experiences and adaptations in reporting the war amid an information-rich, high-tech environment. The researchers' goal was to document changes in war coverage techniques, compare approaches across newsrooms, and characterize the emerging skill set and role of contemporary war journalists. By analyzing these narratives, the study charts both pragmatic workflow shifts and deeper epistemological implications for journalism in wartime.

The digital-era war correspondent operates in a markedly different landscape from predecessors. The interviewees described a clear evolution in their professional role, driven by the ubiquity of real-time data and user content from the frontline. Key improvements in practice include greater situational awareness and more diverse sourcing: journalists now leverage satellite imagery, social media feeds, and sometimes AI analytics to monitor battlefield events, corroborate facts, and counter disinformation in near real-time. These tools have enhanced reporting speed and the ability to verify claims remotely, thereby strengthening journalism's fact-finding capacity under fire. However, the study also finds a trade-off: alongside such improvements, aspects of the job have deteriorated. Reporters face information overload and heightened pressure to instantly validate swirling rumors and fake news, all while contending with sophisticated propaganda (e.g., deepfakes or orchestrated disinformation campaigns). The interviews revealed that constant exposure to conflicting online narratives and the need to debunk falsehoods have made war reporting more mentally taxing and precarious. Moreover, traditional epistemic norms like on-the-ground verification and slow, reflective reporting are sometimes compromised by the demand for rapid content curation and by newsroom reliance on automated systems. Several journalists noted that their authority as knowledge gatekeepers is challenged by the same digital tools they use: for instance, when audiences themselves access raw conflict feeds online, the journalist's interpretive role shifts toward providing context and credibility rather than first-hand revelation. Overall, Węglińska et al. conclude that the war correspondent's profession is in flux: it has innovated by integrating new technologies and collaborative networks, but it also suffers from eroded working conditions (e.g., time constraints, safety issues, emotional toll) and a dilution of the clear lines that once separated reporters from other information actors.

This study speaks directly to epistemic authority in times of war by showing how digital and AI tools are reshaping who produces credible knowledge about conflict. The Ukraine war exemplifies a media ecology where military PR units, citizen witnesses, algorithms, and journalists all contribute to the "reconstruction of reality." Węglińska et al. illustrate

that while journalists have adopted data-centric methods (from OSINT to AI-assisted fact-checking) to maintain factual accuracy, these same methods blur the journalists' monopoly on truth-telling. The findings suggest that epistemic authority during war has become a hybrid affair – reporters must now collaborate with and differentiate themselves from amateurs and machines. Ethically and philosophically, this raises questions about narrative control: journalists are under pressure to preserve the integrity of war narratives amid a cacophony of information sources. The study's insights underscore that to remain authoritative narrators of war, journalists must reinforce their interpretive and ethical frameworks – effectively asserting a new kind of epistemic authority that thrives on transparency, verification, and interpretative expertise, rather than on exclusive access to events. This evolution, as documented in the study, is pivotal for understanding how reality is mediated in contemporary conflicts. It highlights the need for a philosophical reappraisal of the journalist's role: no longer merely a “first informer” but a critical adjudicator of truth in an information-saturated war zone.

- ❖ Laurence Dierickx & Carl-Gustav Lindén (2024, Norway) – Screens as Battlefields: Fact-Checkers' Multidimensional Challenges in Debunking Russian–Ukrainian War Propaganda

Dierickx and Lindén shift the focus to the gatekeepers of truth in wartime – professional fact-checkers tasked with debunking misinformation and propaganda during the Russian–Ukrainian war. Their study aims to identify the unique challenges these fact-checkers face and how the conditions of war influence their work. Adopting a mixed-methods design, the researchers combined qualitative and quantitative analyses (including interviews with fact-checkers across organizations and possibly surveys or case audits of fact-checking instances) to map out common obstacles and coping strategies. By examining fact-checking units operating amid an intense “infodemic” of war-related falsehoods, the study illuminates how resource constraints, technological tools, and transnational cooperation affect the capacity to uphold truth in conflict reporting. Crucially, it probes the interplay between human fact-checkers and algorithmic or open-source intelligence supports in verifying information on the battlefield.

The study portrays contemporary war fact-checking as a struggle on multiple fronts. Fact-checkers in the Ukraine war theater confront practical hurdles such as severe time pressure to debunk viral falsehoods before they spread, limited human and technical resources to process a high volume of claims, and difficulties in obtaining reliable information in a cross-cultural conflict environment (including language barriers and

physical inaccessibility of sites). These challenges are exacerbated by the deliberate weaponization of disinformation: propagandists deploy AI-generated fake images, deepfake videos of leaders, and coordinated troll campaigns, which fact-checkers must race to analyze and refute. Dierickx and Lindén found that the socio-professional context significantly shapes fact-checkers' methods. For instance, those embedded in news organizations with a legacy of investigative journalism tend to supplement digital verification with traditional reporting techniques, whereas independent or newer fact-check teams lean more heavily on advanced computational tools (such as machine-learning-based image forensics or big-data analytics) to triage and investigate claims. In effect, their investigative repertoire spans from classic journalism to cutting-edge open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods, illustrating how human expertise and AI-enabled techniques are jointly deployed to establish facts. A notable finding is the importance of collaboration and networks: given the global scale of propaganda, fact-checkers increasingly rely on international consortia, shared databases, and cross-border information exchange to verify content and expose false narratives. Such cooperation helps extend their epistemic reach, allowing, for example, a fact-checker in Norway to consult a Ukrainian linguist or use satellite data via an American partner. Despite these innovations, the study underscores that fact-checkers face mental and ethical strains – constant exposure to graphic war content and harassment by antagonistic actors pose risks to their well-being and can test their professional integrity. This highlights an often-overlooked aspect: the human cost of sustaining epistemic authority under relentless information warfare.

By centering on fact-checkers, this research spotlights a crucial layer of epistemic authority in war: the “retroactive gatekeepers” who verify and correct the record in real time. The findings vividly contribute to the theme of machine-mediated truth construction. Fact-checkers are shown to depend on AI tools and global networks to discern truth from fabrication on the digital battlefield. This reliance raises epistemological questions: when algorithms assist in determining what is true, how does this affect the objectivity and trustworthiness of the fact-check? Dierickx and Lindén suggest that while AI and OSINT greatly enhance fact-checkers' capabilities (speeding up image analysis, for example), the ultimate authority still rests on human judgment – the ability to interpret context, assess sources' credibility, and communicate findings transparently. Ethically, the study reflects on narrative authority during wartime by illustrating that fact-checkers serve as a new kind of moral and epistemic compass: they endeavor to keep the public informed of “ground truth” amidst a flood of falsehoods, thereby directly contesting adversarial propaganda. Their work reinforces the normative

framework of reality reconstruction, upholding that even in a post-truth era of AI fabrications, there are verifiable facts and accountable storytellers. In summary, this study enriches our understanding of how AI journalism and epistemic authority intersect in conflict settings: it shows the front-line efforts to sustain a truthful account of war through a synergy of human expertise and intelligent technologies. Such efforts are indispensable to the reconstruction of reality in wartime, as they defend the very notion of truth against the erosive forces of disinformation. Each verified fact in a war report thus becomes an assertion of authority – a reaffirmation that even in the fog of war, reality can be methodically recovered and upheld.

6-Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive methodology and employs critical discourse analysis as its main research tool. Two AI-generated media pieces were selected as the primary content sample: an AI-generated deepfake video of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy (2022) and an AI-generated image of a bombed Palestinian child circulated during the 2023 Gaza conflict. These samples were purposively chosen due to their widespread diffusion, emotional impact, and narrative power. Discourse analysis will focus on the language, visual codes, and framing mechanisms used to construct war-related 'truths' in both cases.

➤ Table1: Methodology

Component	Description
Methodology	Descriptive methodology
Tool	Critical discourse analysis
Content Sample 1	AI-generated deepfake video of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy (2022)
Content Sample 2	An AI-generated image of a bombed Palestinian child circulated during the 2023 Gaza conflict.
Sampling Technique	Purposive sampling based on diffusion, emotional impact, and narrative framing
Focus of Analysis	Language, visual codes, and framing mechanisms are used to construct war-related "truths."

7-Concepts of the study:

✓ *Epistemic Authority*

The term epistemic derives from the Greek *epistēmē* (knowledge), and authority comes from Latin *auctoritas* (“influence” or “power”). Taken together, epistemic authority literally means authority related to knowledge. In other words, it denotes the power or right to be believed regarding knowledge or truth claims.

In scholarly use, epistemic authority often refers to an individual or source recognized as credible and knowledgeable in a specific domain. For example, Parker and Chin (2020) explain that epistemic authority is “granted when an agent is trusted, and his or her knowledge claims are respected by outside parties” (Parker & Chin, 2020, p. 410). Similarly, communication researchers stress that an epistemic authority must be perceived as more knowledgeable than others and actually possess superior knowledge on the topic at hand. In the digital era, this concept has been extended beyond human experts to include technologies; a recent framework notes that new actors (including AI systems) can function as epistemic authorities if they have a “perceived advantage in knowledge” and an “actual advantage in knowledge” in a given context. In short, an epistemic authority is akin to an expert source whose statements about reality are taken as trustworthy and definitive.

Contextual Definition: In the context of “Epistemic Authority in Times of War,” the term epistemic authority refers to those agents (e.g., war correspondents, official institutions, or AI-driven information systems) that hold sway over what is accepted as true during a conflict. It denotes the capacity of a source to shape the knowledge of war by virtue of its credibility. Within this study, an epistemic authority is the entity whose account of events is considered authoritative and reliable, thereby heavily influencing the collective understanding and narrative of the war.

✓ AI Journalism

AI journalism is a compound term combining AI (an abbreviation for artificial intelligence) and journalism. Artificial intelligence broadly refers to the simulation of human intelligence by machines (the phrase “artificial intelligence” is often defined as “a collection of ideas, technologies, and techniques” that enable computers to perform tasks that normally require human intellect). The word journalism comes from the French *journal* (daily), rooted in Latin *diurnalis*, and refers to the profession of gathering, writing, and presenting news. Thus, AI journalism refers to journalistic practices that

involve artificial intelligence. It is sometimes also called automated, algorithmic, or robot journalism.

In recent years, scholars have defined AI journalism as the integration of algorithms and automation into news production. Adjin-Tettey et al. (2023) note that, in practice, AI in journalism refers to the broad use of algorithms and automation by news organizations, typically to make journalists' work more efficient and to deliver content that is more relevant to audiences (Adjin-Tettey, Muringa, Danso, & Zondi, 2024, p. 850). A closely related concept is automated journalism, defined as "the process of automating the collection, production, and distribution of news content ... with the assistance of computer programs" (Jeung & Dodds, 2024, p. 5). In such systems, software automatically generates news stories from data, with minimal to no human input beyond the initial programming. These definitions emphasize that AI journalism uses machine intelligence – from news-writing bots to AI-enhanced data analysis – to augment or perform tasks traditionally performed by human journalists. The goal can range from producing routine news reports (e.g., finance or sports updates) at scale to assisting reporters with research, fact-checking, or content personalization.

Contextual Definition: For the purposes of this study, AI journalism signifies the use of artificial intelligence tools and systems in reporting on war. This includes automated generation of news updates (for example, an algorithm that writes battlefield reports from raw data), AI-assisted analysis of conflict information (such as verifying claims or analyzing large datasets of war statistics), and any algorithmic curation or dissemination of war news. In the wartime context, AI journalism is understood as a new journalistic practice in which machines collaborate with or replace human journalists to construct the news narrative of the conflict. It raises questions about how the use of AI affects the speed, accuracy, and perceived objectivity of war reporting, and how it might alter the epistemic authority of the press in war by changing who (or what) is seen as the "author" of information.

✓ *Reconstruction of Reality*

The phrase "reconstruction of reality" combines "reconstruction" and "reality". Reconstruction means building again or reassembling something that has been broken or altered (from Latin re- "again" + construere "to build"). Reality (from Late Latin *realitas*, "the state of things as they actually exist") denotes the factual world or truth of a situation. Linguistically, reconstruction of reality implies that reality, as perceived by

people, is not simply recorded or mirrored, but actively rebuilt – as if one were taking pieces of “what is real” and constructing a version of it anew.

- In social theory and media studies, the idea that reality can be constructed or reconstructed is well-established. The classic notion of the “social construction of reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) argues that our understanding of the world is formed by social processes and communication. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 13) In the context of journalism and media, this concept takes on a critical meaning: media outlets do not just neutrally reflect events, they shape and filter reality through narratives. For instance, Walter Lippmann noted as early as 1922 that the press can create “pictures in our heads” that often do not match objective reality. (Lippmann, 1922, p29) Modern communication scholars similarly observe that news media effectively reconstruct reality by presenting and interpreting facts in particular ways, thereby influencing public perception. According to framing theory, journalists select certain angles, words, and emphases to create a coherent story, and in doing so, “the media reconstructs reality through frames, and this creates an effect on audiences’ opinions. (Zamith, n.d., para. 4)

In other words, what we come to see as “reality” (especially in complex events like wars) is, to a significant extent, a mediated construction: it is reconstructed by journalists and editors (and increasingly by algorithms) from raw happenings, under professional norms, ideological slants, and narrative conventions. This reconstruction of reality in media can yield a “pseudo-reality” that may differ across outlets; for example, how one news channel’s war coverage can portray a conflict in a dramatically different light than another’s, effectively creating an alternate version of reality for its respective audiences.

Contextual Definition: In this study, reconstruction of reality refers to the process by which the reality of a war is actively constructed through journalism, especially with the involvement of AI technologies. Rather than seeing news as a transparent window on war, the research treats it as a constructed narrative – a reality rebuilt from events. This means acknowledging that wartime information is selected, arranged, and presented (by reporters, editors, or AI systems) to produce a certain picture of the conflict. The “reconstruction of reality” here highlights how facts on the ground (battles, casualties, statements by authorities, etc.) are reorganized into stories that make sense to the public. It encompasses the idea that both human journalistic choices and AI-driven content curation/generation can reframe events – omitting some details and emphasizing others – thereby reconstructing the audience’s perceived reality of the war. This contextual

definition underlines a central concern of the study: understanding how the interplay of AI journalism and media epistemic authorities in wartime can shape, and sometimes distort, the reality that society comes to accept as the truth of the conflict.

8- Case Analyses

Case 1: Ukraine (Zelenskyy Deepfake)

a. Circulation of the Video

In March 2022, during the height of the Russia–Ukraine war, a deepfake video surfaced on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram, purporting to show Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy calling on Ukrainian troops to lay down their arms and surrender to Russian forces (Vincent, 2022, p. 1). The video appeared on a hacked news website, TV24, before being rapidly disseminated through unofficial Telegram channels and pro-Russian social media accounts. Its spread was intensified by algorithmic amplification and the sensationalist appeal of the content, despite its relatively low visual fidelity (Woollacott, 2022, p. 2).

b. Public Reaction

The video sparked immediate reactions among Ukrainian citizens, journalists, and international observers. Ukrainian authorities, including Zelenskyy himself, promptly denounced the video as a fake. Zelenskyy appeared in a live video soon after to reaffirm his commitment to the war effort and expose the manipulation (Smith, 2022, p. 1). Media outlets and fact-checkers swiftly debunked the video, highlighting inconsistencies in audio sync, facial anomalies, and pixelation markers of synthetic generation. Despite these efforts, the video contributed to a brief wave of confusion, especially among those outside of Ukraine who lacked contextual knowledge or media literacy.

c. Framing Strategies

The deepfake was framed as an "official address," mimicking the format of real presidential communications. It attempted to simulate a crisis of morale by inserting language typically associated with defeatism and national surrender. The strategic use of an authoritative visual frame, Zelenskyy behind a desk, in formal attire, speaking solemnly, lent the video a pseudo-legitimacy. The attackers employed familiar state iconography to heighten plausibility, aiming to sow doubt in viewers' minds during a critical wartime moment (Jones, 2023, p. 140).

d. Discourse Codes

The linguistic structure of the deepfake drew heavily on tropes of fear, fatigue, and inevitability. Phrases like "we have lost too many lives" and "it is time to stop the bloodshed" invoked emotional fatigue and rational surrender. These expressions were carefully selected to erode resistance by presenting surrender as both a moral and pragmatic choice. The tone sought to construct Zelenskyy not as a resilient leader, but as a weary statesman coerced by circumstance, thereby reframing the Ukrainian struggle as futile.

Case 2: Gaza (AI-generated Image of a Palestinian Child)

a. Visual Semiotics: Symbols and Emotions

During the 2023 Gaza conflict, an AI-generated image depicting a bloodied, injured Palestinian child amidst rubble circulated widely on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram. The image bore exaggerated features designed to evoke empathy: large eyes, visible tears, blood on a dusty face, and an outstretched hand. These elements align with established semiotic symbols of victimhood and innocence in wartime representation (Al-Tamimi, 2024, p. 49). The child's gaze was directed toward the viewer, establishing an emotional connection meant to trigger guilt, compassion, and outrage.

b. Spread on Social Media

The image was posted by several anonymous accounts and rapidly picked up by pro-Palestinian activist networks. It was shared with hashtags like #GazaUnderAttack and #StopTheGenocide, accumulating over 1 million impressions within 48 hours. Despite early warnings from visual forensic experts about potential AI-generation artifacts such as inconsistent lighting and unnatural limb symmetry, the image's emotional salience allowed it to override doubts, especially among audiences predisposed to believe in Israeli aggression (Baroud, 2024, p. 91).

c. Institutional Reactions

Several human rights organizations initially referenced the image in their social media posts, but later retracted or deleted them after it was flagged as synthetic. Mainstream media outlets such as Reuters and the BBC issued clarifications, emphasizing the need for careful source verification. The Palestinian Ministry of Health also distanced itself

from the image, acknowledging the risk it posed to the credibility of legitimate documentation efforts (Yousef, 2024, p. 103).

d. Impacts on Perception of Reality

Despite being debunked, the image influenced public perception by reinforcing existing narratives about civilian suffering in Gaza. It blurred the boundary between reality and fabrication, showcasing how AI-generated visuals can function as "emotional truth" images that feel true even if they are not factually authentic (Kraidy, 2023, p. 296). The controversy also deepened epistemic confusion: audiences were left questioning which war images were real and which were engineered, undermining the authority of traditional journalism and humanitarian reporting.

9- Discussion

The results of this study illustrate a profound reconfiguration of epistemic authority during war, mediated by AI journalism and algorithmically enhanced discourse. In both the Ukraine and Gaza cases, AI-generated content not only circulated rapidly but also manipulated core semiotic and rhetorical strategies to elicit emotional responses and disrupt epistemological stability. The analysis demonstrates that deepfakes and synthetic images exploit established visual and discursive conventions to present emotionally compelling but factually dubious representations of conflict.

From a discourse analysis perspective, the Zelenskyy deepfake deployed a structure of resignation and despair, attempting to destabilize morale through language coded with defeat. The Gaza image, in contrast, mobilized visual tropes of victimhood to provoke outrage and humanitarian empathy. In both instances, these discourses were not neutral but strategically engineered to alter audience perceptions and amplify particular narratives.

These cases show how epistemic confusion can be algorithmically engineered, with audiences increasingly struggling to distinguish fact-based journalism from AI-crafted illusions. Consequently, journalists must now act not just as informers but as epistemic custodians maintaining verification practices and transparency standards in a war of images and narratives. The authority once held by human journalists is now contested by non-human actors, necessitating renewed ethical frameworks and critical digital literacy among audiences.

10-Conclusion

This study has shown that the integration of AI-generated media into war journalism significantly alters the epistemological foundations of conflict reporting. Through the detailed discourse analysis of two emblematic cases, the Zelenskyy deepfake and the Gaza child image, it becomes evident that AI is not merely a technological tool but a potent discursive actor. These cases demonstrate how machine-generated narratives can construct persuasive but potentially misleading versions of reality, challenge journalistic authority, and reshape public understanding.

The results underscore the dual role of AI in war communication: as a source of disinformation and as a tool for verification. The shifting boundaries of epistemic authority compel both journalists and audiences to develop new interpretive competencies. In an era of synthetic media, credibility is no longer guaranteed by appearance but must be earned through methodological transparency, ethical reporting, and critical media consumption.

Future research should investigate how journalistic institutions can integrate AI tools responsibly without compromising truth, and how policy frameworks can be adapted to address the unique challenges of AI-mediated war discourse.

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