

## **Witnessing War In The Digital Age: Journalism, Disinformation, And The Battle For Truth In Gaza**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the transformation of wartime journalism in the digital era, with a focus on the role of social media in mediating conflict narratives, amplifying disinformation, and reshaping the ethics of reportage. Drawing on contemporary scholarship in media studies and political communication, the study analyses how armed conflicts, particularly the current Gaza-Israel war, generate parallel battles over information, visibility and public opinion. It traces the historical evolution of propaganda and disinformation from state-controlled media institutions to decentralized, algorithm-driven platforms, showing how traditional editorial gatekeeping has been replaced by audience-driven visibility logics. Central to the analysis is a case study of Palestinian citizen journalist Bisan Owda, whose firsthand reporting from within the Gaza Strip exemplifies the rise of independent, affective witnessing through social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The article contrasts Owda's narrative framing with that of mainstream institutional media, highlighting divergent ethical orientations, audience engagements and epistemic challenges. It also addresses critiques of citizen journalism, including concerns about verification, emotional amplification and platform moderation. Finally, the study shows that citizen reporting, such as Bisan Owda's, brings immediacy and emotional depth but is often undermined by platform restrictions, verification difficulties, and political pressures. Mainstream outlets, meanwhile, continue to shape the conflict through official sources and geopolitical frames,

which frequently sideline civilian voices. The article argues that future war reporting will need to draw on both approaches—combining grassroots authenticity with professional standards of accountability. By placing digital reporting within wider systems of surveillance, platform governance, and public trust, the study highlights how journalism is being reshaped in ways that both enable and constrain democratic responsibility during war.

**Keywords:** War reporting, disinformation, propaganda, social media, citizen journalism

## **Introduction**

Armed conflict continues to serve as a significant driver of media engagement and profitability, particularly in the digital era where real-time updates and emotionally resonant content fuel user attention and advertising revenue. Journalistic portrayals of war frequently rely on dramatic narratives, heroic symbolism and evocative imagery that attract mass audiences and reinforce dominant ideological frames (Chouliaraki, 2021; Freedman, 2023; Zelizer, 2021).

During periods of armed conflict, media consumption typically surges, with newspaper circulation increasing and television and radio ratings experiencing significant spikes. This dynamic has been especially evident during the most current Gaza - Israel war, where continuous coverage across global and regional outlets has intensified public engagement.

For instance, Al Jazeera's live coverage of Gaza saw a 62% increase in viewership across its digital platforms, while BBC and CNN both reported double-digit growth in Middle East-related video content views on YouTube and Instagram (Oxford Internet Institute, 2024). Similarly, hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack and #CeasefireNow received over 2.1 billion impressions on TikTok and X within a one-week period in October 2023 (Bradshaw et al., 2023).

These statistics underscore the existence of “media wars” - symbolic conflicts conducted through curated narratives, imagery and audiovisual representations that parallel the physical war on the ground.

In the Gaza context, mainstream outlets have often relied on aestheticized footage, emotionally charged framing and binary depictions of victimhood and aggression to attract and retain audiences (Freedman, 2023; Zelizer, 2023). Such coverage frequently constitutes a desensitized portrayal of violence, tailored for mass consumption and structured around the logic of spectacle. While such representations can raise international awareness and mobilize humanitarian concern, they also prompt critical ethical questions. Chief among these is the commodification of Palestinian suffering and the strategic deployment of trauma narratives to serve political or editorial agendas. This instrumentalization of violence is emblematic of broader media economies that prioritize emotional impact and audience engagement over contextual accuracy or journalistic integrity (Chouliaraki, 2021; Al-Rawi, 2024).

This dual nature of media, as both a vehicle for truth and a conduit for propaganda, highlights its role as a double-edged sword in wartime contexts. On one hand, digital platforms allow for real-time, decentralized reporting that can expose human rights violations and bypass traditional gatekeeping. On the other, wartime journalism remains vulnerable to manipulation through military censorship, editorial filtering and public sensitivities regarding taste and decency (Taylor, 2003). These pressures can distort the information landscape, blurring the line between reportage and rhetoric.

Historical precedents reinforce this complexity. For example, during the 2003 Iraq War, the rapid expansion of embedded journalism and real-time broadcasting from the Gulf region led to an unprecedented flood of

information. However, tensions soon emerged between journalists striving for transparency and military authorities intent on controlling strategic narratives.

The resulting information oversaturation combined with deliberate obfuscation made it increasingly difficult for the public to discern truth from distortion, foreshadowing the information disorders seen in later conflicts, including Gaza.

### **Social Media's Role in Contemporary War Reporting**

The proliferation of social media platforms such as TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) has significantly increased the volume of information available to individuals on a daily basis. Recent studies indicate that adolescents increasingly rely on these platforms as their primary source of news, rather than traditional media such as newspapers or television broadcasts (Smith & Anderson, 2023; Ofcom, 2022). Conversely, social media platforms also enable the widespread dissemination of information that is not mediated by traditional editorial gatekeeping, potentially allowing for more diverse and alternative perspectives to reach broad audiences.

The democratization of social media has blurred the boundaries between professional journalism and user-generated content, enabling individuals to act as content creators and informal news disseminators. Unlike digital content creators, professional journalists frequently operate within institutional structures that may constrain their editorial independence. These constraints often stem from the interests of media organizations, advertisers, and ownership entities, which can shape newsroom priorities and influence content decisions (Pickard, 2020; Napoli, 2019). Media consolidation has intensified these dynamics, with conglomerate ownership sometimes prioritizing market-driven imperatives over public interest journalism (Flew & Wilding, 2022).

The reliance on advertising revenue can also result in soft censorship, where coverage critical of sponsors or politically sensitive topics is subtly avoided or deprioritized (McChesney & Nichols, 2016; Benson et al., 2018).

In contrast, content creators on social media and video platforms operate with relatively fewer editorial constraints, which allows for more flexible content creation and faster audience engagement (Abidin, 2021; Duffy, 2020). However, structural pressures such as platform algorithms, monetization policies and audience metrics still exert considerable influence over the visibility and nature of the content produced (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020; Cunningham & Craig, 2019). Thus, while journalists face institutional accountability mechanisms and industry norms, content creators navigate a different, though still constrained, media ecology.

This convergence of war, profit-driven media coverage, and audience spectacle lays the groundwork for an environment in which propaganda and misinformation can flourish. In wartime especially, the demand for compelling content intersects with nationalistic sentiment, military censorship and political agendas, often resulting in strategic communication efforts designed to shape public perception (Freedman, 2023; Russell & Wall, 2022). Media narratives may become vehicles for legitimizing military action, demonizing adversaries, or silencing dissent, whether intentionally through state influence or unintentionally through editorial framing.

As the line between information and entertainment blurs, so too does the boundary between news and propaganda. This risk is amplified in the digital age, where social media platform, despite their democratizing potential, enable the viral spread of disinformation,

synthetic media, and emotionally charged yet misleading narratives, often without rigorous fact-checking or editorial oversight (Cinelli et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2021; Neudert & Howard, 2020).

### **The Evolution of Propaganda**

The concept of propaganda has deep historical roots, originating from religious institutions as a tool for doctrinal dissemination. The term itself can be traced to the Catholic Church's *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, established in 1622 to promote Catholic doctrine in response to the Reformation and the rising influence of Protestantism across Europe (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2023). Over time, the term "propaganda" came to denote not only the institutional spread of ideologies but also the strategic methods used to influence public perception.

The modern connotation of propaganda is heavily shaped by its use in the 20th century, particularly by authoritarian regimes. Nazi Germany institutionalized propaganda through the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda under Joseph Goebbels, employing mass media to craft persuasive and emotionally manipulative narratives aligned with state ideology (Rieger, 2022).

Similarly, scholars note that the Soviet Union's Department D, operating under the KGB, developed systematic practices of disinformation (*dezinformatsiya*). These included the use of forged documents, misattributed quotations, and fabricated events as tools to influence political opponents and shape public opinion both domestically and internationally (Rid, 2020).

However, propaganda was not limited to totalitarian regimes. Democratic nations also engaged in strategic information control during wartime. The United Kingdom's Ministry of Information and the United States' Office of War Information played key roles in mobilizing national morale and shaping foreign perceptions during

World War II. In both democratic and authoritarian contexts, propaganda was used not only to inform but also to influence, often through selective truth, emotional appeal and repetition (Corner, 2020).

While propaganda typically uses distorted or selectively framed facts to provoke emotional reactions or promote ideological agendas, disinformation is more explicitly deceptive. It involves the intentional creation and dissemination of false, misleading and/or incomplete information, often for political or strategic gain (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Bradshaw et al., 2023). Disinformation campaigns frequently exploit the public's cognitive biases, short memory span and reliance on emotionally charged content - characteristics that make such campaigns particularly effective during crises and conflicts (Guess et al., 2020).

The persistence of propaganda and disinformation is especially apparent in wartime contexts, where narrative control becomes a critical element of military strategy. Contemporary conflicts such as the ongoing Gaza-Israel war have demonstrated how governments and other groups leverage social media platforms to distribute misinformation, restrict press access and flood the information ecosystem with competing narratives (Freedman, 2023; Marouf, 2024). These strategies are no longer covert; rather, information manipulation is now institutionalized as part of official communications policy, often justified as a national security imperative.

Despite its effectiveness in the short term, propaganda's long-term sustainability is limited. As audiences gain access to alternative information channels, including independent journalism and open-source intelligence, many propaganda narratives eventually unravel (Tufekci, 2023). However, disinformation can

continue to circulate long after it has been debunked, especially when algorithmic amplification on platforms like X, TikTok, and Facebook prioritizes engagement over accuracy (Cinelli et al., 2021; Bradshaw et al., 2023).

### **Ethical Dilemmas and Disinformation Pressures**

The ethical dilemma surrounding the withholding or distortion of information remains highly contentious in contemporary conflicts. For example, the Israeli government has defended selective disclosure during the current Gaza invasion as a necessary measure to protect national security and operational effectiveness. However, critics argue that such practices risk undermining democratic accountability, especially when they are used to manufacture consent, limit press freedom, or suppress dissenting narratives (Russell & Wall, 2022; Freedman, 2023).

In democratic societies, journalists are expected to function as independent mediators of information who verify facts, contextualize events within their historical and political frameworks and represent a diversity of perspectives (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2023; Napoli, 2019).

However, under the pressures of wartime reporting, these normative expectations are often compromised. Journalists may become conduits for disinformation, whether through institutional pressure, ideological alignment, restricted access, or embedded reporting protocols. Such complicity can erode public trust and amplify polarized or militarized narratives, with long-term consequences for civic discourse and democratic institutions (Bradshaw et al., 2023; Tufekci, 2023).

A particularly controversial practice is embedded journalism, wherein reporters are attached to military units and must adhere to strict operational guidelines. These include limitations on movement, pre-approved

interviews and content censorship in the name of operational security (Jensen, 2021; Hallin & Mancini, 2020).

While embedding grants journalists frontline access, it also risks curating the war narrative through a militarized lens, narrowing critical distance and compromising editorial independence. The Iraq War (2003–2011) offers a prominent example, where the vast majority of televised and print coverage was produced by embedded journalists operating under these constraints (Pfau et al., 2020).

This environment of controlled reporting discourages dissenting perspectives. Critical journalism may be portrayed as unpatriotic, especially when it challenges government policy or military conduct. In some contexts, this extends beyond media to academia and civil society, where scholars and activists face reputational, professional, or legal consequences for questioning dominant war narratives (Chomsky & Achcar, 2021; Ahmed, 2022). While national security concerns are often cited to justify these limitations, they raise serious questions about freedom of expression, press autonomy, and the public's right to know during times of war.

### **Legal Repression of Dissent Post-9/11**

In the post-9/11 era, governments across the Global North, particularly the United States and United Kingdom, have expanded their security apparatuses in ways that significantly constrain political dissent and civil liberties. The enactment of the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001 and proposed expansions such as the Domestic Security Enhancement Act (also known as the Patriot Act II) granted the U.S. government sweeping powers of surveillance, extrajudicial detention, wiretapping and secret prosecutions (Ackerman, 2022; Ghoshray, 2021).

These measures marked a profound shift in the balance between civil rights and national security, often framing dissent as a potential security threat.

Such legal frameworks diminished traditional judicial safeguards, allowing law enforcement agencies to infiltrate political groups without prior court approval and detain individuals without publicly disclosing charges or evidence (Greenwald, 2021). Dissenting voices, from anti-war activists to civil rights organizations, found themselves subject to surveillance, blacklisting and prosecution under broad anti-terrorism provisions (Morozov, 2023). In academic institutions, outspoken scholars' risk reputational damage, funding cuts or termination for criticizing foreign or domestic security policies (Ahmed, 2022).

Despite these repressive conditions, resistance continues to grow. From conscientious objectors within the military to grassroots protests and strategic litigation, a diverse array of actors have challenged state overreach (Freedman, 2023). Social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram have become crucial tools for mobilizing public dissent, documenting state abuses, and circumventing traditional gatekeeping in mainstream media.

However, these platforms also pose risks including algorithmic suppression of dissenting content, account suspensions, and state-sponsored disinformation campaigns (Tufekci, 2023; Bradshaw et al., 2023).

### **Journalism's Struggle Against Digital Disinformation**

Journalism plays a critical role in mediating public understanding during conflict and crisis, yet it has become increasingly vulnerable to disinformation ecosystems and institutional capture. The post-9/11 securitization of information has rendered many journalists overly reliant on official sources, selective

leaks, and embedded reporting - practices that compromise critical distance and journalistic autonomy (Waisbord, 2020; Pickard, 2021). The normalization of these practices, especially during wartime, has turned many reporters into passive conveyors of government narratives.

This dependence is further complicated by the rise of social media platforms as parallel information infrastructures. While these platforms democratize content creation and allow independent journalists and citizen reporters to share on-the-ground realities, they also enable the rapid dissemination of propaganda, doctored imagery and unverified claims (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Guess et al., 2020). Real-time reporting on TikTok and Telegram often outpace verification protocols, raising concerns about both truth and trust in digital journalism (Bradshaw et al., 2023; Freedman, 2023).

The erosion of editorial independence has fostered what Walter Karp once called the “servility of access journalism”, in which proximity to power replaces investigative rigour. This trend is especially problematic in conflict zones, where embedded journalists must often submit their reporting to military review and agree not to independently verify claims (Jensen, 2021). In such cases, critical journalism is not only discouraged but is systematically excluded from public discourse.

To counter these dynamics, it is imperative to cultivate both assertive investigative reporting and robust media literacy among the public. Journalists must recommit to the principles of verification, independence and transparency, while audiences must be equipped to discern bias, manipulation and omission. The role of journalism, in this context, is not merely to inform but to challenge dominant narratives, expose abuses of power, and maintain democratic accountability.

## **Bisan Owda and the Rise of Grassroots War Reporting**

The current Gaza - Israel war has exemplified the critical role of independent social media reporting in conflict zones, particularly where international media access is limited or restricted. One of the most prominent figures to emerge during this war is Bisan Owda, a 25-year-old Palestinian filmmaker, humanitarian worker and citizen journalist who gained global recognition for her firsthand reporting from inside the besieged Gaza Strip.

This article approaches Owda's reporting as a case study, drawing on her publicly available Instagram and TikTok posts between October and December 2023. The analysis focuses on three interrelated areas: (1) narrative framing and use of first-person testimony; (2) visual strategies and modes of affective witnessing; and (3) the challenges of visibility, including algorithmic suppression and platform moderation. These focal points were selected to highlight how grassroots reporting both complements and diverges from institutional war coverage, and to situate Owda's work within broader debates on media ethics, disinformation, and epistemic justice.

While power outages and telecommunications failures isolated much of the Strip, Owda used platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to document the realities of war in real time, often under life-threatening conditions. Her videos, often recorded amid the destruction of residential neighbourhoods, hospitals and refugee camps, were widely circulated and picked up by international news outlets, human rights organizations and advocacy groups. Her reporting reached millions globally, despite the near-total collapse of conventional media channels and telecommunications infrastructure inside Gaza (Al-Rawi, 2024; Freedman, 2023).

*“If I die, remember me. I’m not a number. I’m a human who loved life and wanted peace.”*

— @wizard\_bisan1, Instagram Story, October 27, 2023 (Al Jazeera, 2023)

This message, widely circulated across social platforms and international news outlets, encapsulates the humanitarian dimension of citizen journalism in wartime. It also contrasts sharply with the often sanitized or distant framing seen in Israeli media reports. Owda's storytelling is characterized by emotive directness and narrative intimacy, resonating with global audiences in ways that bypass formal editorial conventions (Chouliaraki, 2021; Freedman, 2023).

Owda's work reflects a broader shift toward networked witnessing, where civilians serve as real-time observers of war, often without institutional backing or protection (Chouliaraki, 2021). While traditional war correspondents are embedded within military units or bound by governmental access limitations, social media reporters like Owda operate outside institutional journalism, offering raw, emotive and unfiltered accounts that challenge sanitized official narratives. In doing so, they not only humanize the conflict but also disrupt the asymmetry of global media coverage, which often centres the perspectives of state actors or Western correspondents (Tufekci, 2023; Russell & Wall, 2022).

However, Owda's experience also illustrates the dangers of hyper-visibility in digital warzones. In interviews and follow-up posts, she reported algorithmic suppression of her content and shadow bans, as well as the emotional exhaustion of being both a victim and a documentarian of war (Marouf, 2024; Tufekci, 2023). Palestinian journalists and influencers also face targeted cyberattacks aimed at silencing dissenting or critical voices (Bradshaw et al., 2023; Marouf, 2024).

Major platforms like Instagram and TikTok have also been criticized for inconsistent enforcement

of content moderation, particularly around Palestinian reporting, raising questions about platform bias, content governance and digital colonialism (Al-Rawi, 2024; Bradshaw et al., 2023).

Bisan Owda's case thus epitomizes the dual role of social media as both a liberating tool for narrative agency and a contested terrain of information control. Her reporting underscores the urgent need for rethinking journalistic ethics, safety protocols and platform accountability in the era of decentralized, citizen-led wartime journalism.

### **Human vs. Strategic Narrative**

While Bisan Owda's firsthand reporting from the Gaza Strip offered emotionally grounded, unfiltered accounts of life under bombardment, institutional media outlets such as CNN, BBC, and *The New York Times* often framed the conflict within strategic or geopolitical paradigms, prioritizing state perspectives and military developments.

This contrast in narrative style and emphasis was examined by looking closely at three aspects of the reporting. First, we considered perspective and voice, asking whether the coverage was grounded in personal testimony or mediated through institutional commentary. Second, we looked at the main themes, noting whether the focus was on the everyday experiences of civilians or on military and diplomatic developments. Third, we paid attention to the framing devices used — for example, whether stories relied on direct, unedited footage and first-person appeals, or on carefully edited visuals and official statements. Taken together, these categories allowed us to compare Owda's citizen reporting with the work of outlets such as CNN, BBC, and *The New York Times*, showing how citizen and institutional journalism reflect very different orientations to the conflict.

Owda's content frequently centred around human suffering, community resilience and the emotional toll of war. Her videos often used first-person perspective, directly addressing the viewer, creating an intimate sense of proximity to the events. For example, in a video posted on October 27, 2023, she said:

*“There is no safe place here. We are not numbers. We are not headlines. We are people.”*  
— @wizard\_bisan1, Instagram

This framing emphasizes personal identity and humanity over abstract policy analysis, directly contesting the depersonalized language that frequently appears in mainstream war coverage.

By contrast, coverage by outlets like the BBC during the same period featured headlines such as:

*“Israel says Hamas command centres located beneath Gaza hospitals”*  
— (BBC News, November 2023)

Or from The New York Times:

*“Israeli Forces Advance in Gaza Strip as International Calls for Ceasefire Grow”*  
— (NYT, November 3, 2023)

Such reporting, while nominally balanced, often foregrounded military operations and state statements and used language such as “Israel says,” “according to IDF,” or “Hamis claims” - thus structuring the story around official sources. Palestinian civilians, when mentioned, were often framed as passive victims whose voices were rarely presented in extended, subjective detail (Freedman, 2023; Al-Rawi, 2024).

This phenomenon reflects what scholars call the “strategic ritual of objectivity” (Tuchman, 1972), whereby journalists attempt to appear neutral by quoting both sides, yet in doing so, often default to hegemonic state narratives, especially when one party is stateless or lacks formal representation in global institutions (Waisbord, 2020; Chouliaraki, 2021).

Analytic Category	Bisan Owda (Citizen Journalism / Social Media)	Institutional Media (CNN, BBC, NYT)
Perspective & Voice	First-person, testimonial, emotionally direct; often addresses viewers directly (“we are not numbers”)	Third-person, mediated, often detached; authority rests on quoting officials or institutional actors
Thematic Focus	Civilian suffering, resilience, community survival under siege	Military operations, ceasefire negotiations, geopolitical strategy
Framing Devices	Raw footage, mobile-shot videos, affective proximity, humanitarian appeals	Professional visuals, edited clips, reliance on official statements (“Israel says...”, “IDF claims...”)
Source Base	Eyewitness accounts, community networks, lived experience	Government officials, military spokespeople, international institutions

Tone	Urgent, emotive, intimate	Cautious, strategic, often sanitized
Audience Effect	Fosters empathy, solidarity, and affective proximity	Reinforces neutrality rituals but privileges state-centric narratives

Table 1: Comparative Framing of Citizen and Institutional War Reporting

These framing differences have major implications for public perception, policy discourse, and media trust. Owda's reporting fostered empathy and solidarity through what Chouliaraki (2021) calls "affective proximity", allowing global audiences to emotionally identify with Palestinian civilians. Institutional media, by contrast, often failed to provide epistemic justice, that is, the right of marginalized people to be heard in their own voice and terms (Fricker, 2007; Russell & Wall, 2022).

Moreover, algorithmic amplification on social media allowed Owda's videos to reach millions directly, bypassing editorial gatekeeping - but not without cost. Her content was subject to platform moderation biases and threats of censorship, issues less commonly faced by established outlets with institutional protections (Bradshaw et al., 2023; Tufekci, 2023).

### **The Risks of Raw Witnessing: Ethical and Epistemic Challenges of Citizen Journalism**

While citizen journalism has emerged as a vital alternative to mainstream media, particularly in contexts of state censorship or humanitarian crisis, it is not without its critics. Scholars and media professionals have raised important concerns regarding the verifiability, accuracy, and editorial standards of content produced by non-

professional reporters (Allan & Tumber, 2022; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Unlike institutional journalists who undergo professional training and ethical oversight, citizen journalists often lack access to fact-checking resources, editorial review and legal protections. This raises questions about reliability, especially in fast-moving conflict zones where visual evidence can be mis-contextualized, selectively edited or emotionally amplified (Marouf, 2024; Bradshaw et al., 2023). Even well-intentioned posts may accidentally propagate misinformation, contributing to confusion rather than clarity.

Critics also note that the hyper-personalized and affective nature of citizen journalism can skew audience perception. Videos like those shared by Bisan Owda, while powerful, are often deeply subjective and risk prioritizing emotional resonance over analytical depth (Chouliaraki, 2021). This can create narrative imbalance, especially when content circulates without context, or when audiences fail to interrogate source credibility.

Furthermore, platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X that host citizen journalism are not neutral arenas. Their algorithms reward sensationalism and virality, meaning content is often shaped by what will generate attention, not necessarily what is accurate or representative (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020; Tufekci, 2023). This raises the risk of platform-amplified polarization, where emotionally compelling but unverified stories drown out measured or critical reporting.

Legal and ethical vulnerability is another concern. Citizen journalists like Owda operate without institutional protection, making them targets for digital harassment, censorship or physical danger. The absence of journalistic accreditation can leave them exposed to surveillance,

platform bans or even wartime reprisals, especially in authoritarian or militarized environments (Russell & Wall, 2022; Ahmed, 2022).

Lastly, some media critics argue that the fetishization of raw footage and emotional storytelling risks turning suffering into spectacle, potentially reinforcing voyeurism rather than sustained political action (Chouliaraki, 2021; Zelizer, 2023). While such content can raise awareness, it can also lead to “compassion fatigue” or passive consumption of trauma.

Despite these limitations, citizen journalism remains a crucial epistemological intervention, especially in cases where institutional media fails to represent marginalized perspectives. However, its ethical use requires audience literacy, platform accountability and a hybrid model where independent voices are complemented by robust verification and context.

### **Conclusion: Toward a Hybrid Ethics of Conflict Reporting**

The case of Bisan Owda exemplifies a transformative moment in war reporting, one in which citizen journalists, operating with limited resources but powerful platforms, are reshaping how global audiences engage with conflict. As traditional media struggle with institutional biases, limited access and declining public trust, social media-based reporting introduces new possibilities for narrative plurality, affective engagement and decentralized witnessing.

However, this shift also presents challenges that have been widely discussed in the literature: reduced editorial oversight in fast-paced digital reporting (Waisbord, 2020), the ways platforms can be manipulated through disinformation campaigns (Bradshaw et al., 2023), and the

ethical questions raised by sharing traumatic images at scale (Chouliaraki, 2021; Zelizer, 2023). The future of war reporting may require hybrid approaches that bring together the immediacy of citizen journalism with the verification standards of professional media.

Issues of epistemic justice in wartime communication involve not only making space for marginalised voices but also considering how institutional and algorithmic infrastructures shape what is heard (Fricker, 2007; Al-Rawi, 2024). As conflicts continue to play out in heavily mediatized and polarised environments, the task of documenting, verifying and contextualising the human impact of war is best understood as a shared responsibility across different media platforms, supported by both technological literacy and journalistic accountability.

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