The architecture of misleading: How journalists spread inaccurate information on digital platforms

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Abstract

Drawing on a semi-systematic review and a qualitative analysis of posts on Facebook and Instagram between November 2023 and March 2025, the article identifies several subtle practices through which news outlets mislead audiences, even when they can reasonably anticipate that these strategies will confuse typical users: (1) digitally manipulated images that fabricate or exaggerate threats; (2) authentic but decontextualised photographs that invite false associations; (3) emotional clickbait pairings of headlines and visuals in which corrective information is relegated to lengthy captions; and (4) ambiguous or omissive headlines that rely on pragmatic implicatures rather than explicit falsehoods. The analysis shows that journalistic disinformation on social media is often produced through editorial choices aligned with platform logics of visibility and engagement. Understanding these practices is key to rethinking media accountability in digital environments where most users engage only with headlines, thumbnails and brief snippets, rather than with full articles.

Keywords: disinformation; misinformation; journalism; social media; visual communication; clickbait; editorial practices

Resum. *L'arquitectura d'allò enganyós: com els periodistes difonen informació inexacta a les plataformes digitals*

A partir d'una revisió semisistemàtica i d'una anàlisi qualitativa de publicacions a Facebook i Instagram entre novembre de 2023 i març de 2025, l'article identifica diverses

pràctiques subtils mitjançant les quals els mitjans informatius enganyen les audiències, tot i que poden anticipar raonablement que aquestes estratègies confondran els usuaris habituals: 1) imatges manipulades digitalment que fabriquen o exageren amenaces; 2) fotografies autèntiques però descontextualitzades que conviden a associacions falses; 3) combinacions emocionals de titulars i imatges en les quals la informació correctiva es relega a peus de foto extensos; i 4) titulars ambigus o amb omissions que depenen d'implicacions pragmàtiques més que no pas de falsedats explícites. L'anàlisi mostra que la desinformació periodística a les xarxes socials sol produir-se a través de decisions editorials alineades amb les lògiques de visibilitat i compromís de les plataformes. Comprendre aquestes pràctiques és clau per replantejar la rendició de comptes dels mitjans en entorns digitals on la majoria dels usuaris només interactuen amb titulars, miniatures i textos breus, i no pas amb els articles complets.

Paraules clau: desinformació; informació errònia; periodisme; xarxes socials; comunicació visual; pescaclics; pràctiques editorials

Resumen. *La arquitectura de lo engañoso: cómo los periodistas difunden información inexacta en las plataformas digitales*

A partir de una revisión semisistemática y de un análisis cualitativo de publicaciones en Facebook e Instagram entre noviembre de 2023 y marzo de 2025, el artículo identifica varias prácticas sutiles mediante las cuales los medios informativos engañan a las audiencias, aun cuando pueden anticipar razonablemente que estas estrategias confundirán a los usuarios habituales: 1) imágenes manipuladas digitalmente que fabrican o exageran amenazas; 2) fotografías auténticas pero descontextualizadas que invitan a asociaciones falsas; 3) combinaciones emocionales de titulares e imágenes en las que la información correctiva se relega a pies de foto extensos; y 4) titulares ambiguos u omisivos que dependen de implicaturas pragmáticas más que de falsedades explícitas. El análisis muestra que la desinformación periodística en redes sociales suele producirse a través de decisiones editoriales alineadas con las lógicas de visibilidad y compromiso de las plataformas. Comprender estas prácticas es clave para replantear la rendición de cuentas de los medios en entornos digitales donde la mayoría de los usuarios solo interactúan con titulares, miniaturas y textos breves, y no con los artículos completos.

Palabras clave: desinformación; información errónea; periodismo; redes sociales; comunicación visual; cebo de clics; prácticas editoriales

1. Introduction

Misleading information has become almost a built-in feature of today's social media environment. The very design of platforms—with their brief, fragmented and highly emotional content—favours the emergence and spread of misleading information, whether unintentional (misinformation) or intentional (disinformation). Not every post is misleading, but avoiding that outcome requires active curation and conscious editorial decisions that are often at odds with the incentives of speed, virality and engagement. News reports, memes, partisan commentary and outright propaganda all circulate in the same feeds, within interfaces optimised for rapid scrolling rather than careful scrutiny (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; García-Marín & Salvat, 2021). Recent

advances in generative artificial intelligence sharpen this problem by enabling the swift production of realistic synthetic images and videos, while at the same time generating widespread doubt about whether what appears on screen is "real" or machine-generated (Aïmeur et al., 2023; Wolff & Taddicken, 2024).

Crucially, however, misleading information are no longer confined to coordinated campaigns run by identifiable groups. They are increasingly embedded in the very dynamics of social platforms. The rapid, immediate circulation of content entails a high ethical responsibility: seemingly minor editorial choices about how to package and promote information can easily slip into patterns that mislead (García-Serrano et al., 2019; Iosifidis & Nicoli, 2020). Digital news outlets, in particular, often contribute to this environment through some forms of clickbait and engagement-driven strategies, fuelled by intense competition and the need to survive in the crowded cybersphere (Rogers & Niederer, 2020; Wu et al., 2019).

On one side, there are sophisticated disinformation operations supported by bots, dedicated websites and polarising narratives that are barely detectable for users with limited critical and digital skills (Kuo & Marwick, 2021; Uyheng et al., 2021). On the other, there is a subtler kind of misleading communication produced by those who are supposed to inform: journalists and news organisations (Ecker et al., 2014). In this latter case, misleading content arises not from fully fabricated stories, but from minimal edits, framing choices and dissemination tactics applied to otherwise real material by supposedly trustworthy actors such as digital news media. These practices can be conceptualised as a form of journalistic disinformation that is implicit rather than explicit, hard to detect for users, and easy for its authors to defend—since each individual element can be presented as technically accurate—while still having significant impact because audiences tend to attribute credibility to journalistic sources (Ecker et al., 2014; Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

Over the last decade, research on misinformation and disinformation has expanded rapidly in journalism and communication studies (García-Marín & Salvat, 2021; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Uyheng et al., 2021). Much of this work has focused on the activities of political actors, trolls, bots or fringe communities, as well as on the design of fact-checking initiatives and platform governance (Aïmeur et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2023; Iosifidis & Nicoli, 2020; Rogers & Niederer, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2019; Caled & Silva, 2022). In these accounts, professional news organisations are often treated as potential correctives to falsehoods or as targets of manipulation. Their own contribution to disinformation—especially through editorial decisions tailored to social media—has received, by comparison, much less systematic and theory-driven attention aimed at identifying the intentionally misleading strategies they employ.

This blind spot, in which there has been little clear theorisation and systematisation of when an informer misleads intentionally, as opposed to unin-

tentionally misinforming, is important to address if we consider the continuing centrality of news brands in users' feeds (Allen et al., 2024). Despite a sustained crisis of trust in the media, fuelled by perceptions of partisanship, economic precariousness and past failures in accountability (Barredo-Ibáñez et al., 2022; Barredo-Ibáñez et al., 2024; Díaz-Cerveró et al., 2024; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023), journalistic outlets remain key reference points for public debate and policy agendas (Hakhverdian, 2012; Wetts, 2020). Their posts carry an institutional authority that anonymous accounts lack. When they adopt misleading strategies, the resulting disinformation may therefore be especially influential.

In social media environments, disinformation does not always appear as straightforward lies or fabricated stories. It often operates through subtle manipulations of salience and context. These manipulations are particularly compatible with platform logics that reward novelty, emotion and conflict (Rogers & Niederer, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2020). Thus, disinformation can be seen not only as the product of malicious outsiders, but also as a side-effect of routine editorial practices adapted to the attention economy.

Starting from this premise, the present article explores how journalists mislead on digital platforms even when they work with real material. It approaches disinformation as an implicit outcome of specific framing strategies in social media news flows and asks: Through which concrete editorial and visual strategies do professional outlets produce misleading interpretations on Facebook and Instagram?

To address this question, the article combines a semi-systematic review of work on mis- and disinformation and visual communication with a qualitative analysis of selected posts published between November 2023 and March 2025. Instead of developing a full typology, it focuses on describing and illustrating several recurring practices: digital manipulation of images, decontextualised photographs, ambiguous or omissive headlines, and emotional clickbait with buried corrections. By focusing on detailed case studies, it seeks to advance debates on journalistic responsibility in platformed environments and to provide a basis for further empirical research.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory design whose aim is to identify and describe subtle journalistic practices on social media that have disinformative effects. It combines a semi-systematic literature review with a case-based analysis of posts published on Facebook and Instagram.

2.1. Semi-systematic literature review

The first stage consisted of a semi-systematic review of the literature (Snyder, 2019). This approach is particularly suited to research fields that are fragmented and interdisciplinary—such as the study of misleading information

in digital journalism—because it allows for a structured yet flexible mapping of concepts, debates and findings across different domains.

The review focused on three main strands:

1. Definitions of misinformation and disinformation and their relevance for journalism, including work on intent, harm and corrective interventions (Fallis, 2015; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Treen et al., 2020; Kim & Gil de Zúñiga, 2020; van der Linden, 2022).
2. Research on digital journalism and platform logics, such news consumption via social media and clickbait practices (Ireton & Posetti, 2018; Biyani et al., 2016; García-Serrano et al., 2019; Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018; Ju et al., 2014; Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019).
3. Studies on visual communication and manipulation in news contexts, particularly the use of images in misleading or decontextualised ways (Ecker et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2024; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Dan et al., 2021; Hameleers et al., 2022; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023; Allen et al., 2024).

Searches were carried out mainly in Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar and Dialnet, prioritising publications in English and Spanish from 2010 onwards. In total, 48 publications were selected for in-depth analysis. After screening titles and abstracts, relevant full texts were examined to extract recurring concepts and mechanisms related to journalistic mis- and disinformation on social media.

2.2. Qualitative analysis of social media posts

The empirical component consists of a purposive sample of posts published on Facebook and Instagram by established news outlets between November 2023 and March 2025. The selection focused on posts that:

— sparked public controversy or debate about their accuracy or fairness;
— were discussed in fact-checking reports or other media coverage; or
— clearly illustrated strategies identified in the literature (e.g., ambiguous headlines, decontextualised images, emotional clickbait).

The core set of cases includes:

— A Facebook post by *La Razón* (Spain) about clashes between Colombian fans and Uruguayan players after the Copa América match of 11 July 2024.
— An Instagram card by *El Economista* (Spain) announcing an amnesty agreement between PSOE and Junts, accompanied by a photograph of Pedro Sánchez and Carles Puigdemont.

— An Instagram post by *El Tiempo* (Colombia) on a police intervention in Winter Haven, Florida, involving a woman and her three-year-old daughter (El Tiempo, 2025).
— Additional examples discussed in the literature, such as the *Chicago Tribune* headline about a doctor's death following COVID-19 vaccination (van der Linden, 2022; Allen et al., 2024) and a Spanish clickbait headline about a Madrid hospital allowing children's dogs (García-Serrano et al., 2019).

Each case was examined in context: the visual composition, headline and caption as displayed on the platform; the full article where available; and, when relevant, subsequent clarifications or corrections. The goal is not statistical generalisation but analytical illustration—showing how specific combinations of text and image can lead to disinformative interpretations.

3. Conceptual background: Disinformation, misinformation and platform logics

3.1. Misinformation and disinformation

Research on digital mis- and disinformation is often complicated by conceptual ambiguity. In journalistic contexts, the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, which obscures important ethical and analytical distinctions (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Allen et al., 2024; van der Linden, 2022).

Following Fallis (2015), disinformation is understood here as representational content—true or false—that is created and disseminated with the intention to mislead. It is harmful because it is "likely to lead to false beliefs" (p. 406) and because it is designed to distort audiences' understanding of reality. Misinformation, by contrast, refers to inaccurate or misleading content that circulates without such intent, often as a result of error, negligence or insufficient verification (Treen et al., 2020).

Kim and Gil de Zúñiga (2020) propose the broader category of *pseudoinformation* to capture both phenomena, given that, in practice, audiences may experience similar harms regardless of intent. Yet the distinction remains crucial in journalism, where professional norms and accountability are at stake. Unintentional mistakes can in principle be corrected and prevented through better routines; deliberate disinformation involves a conscious violation of journalistic duties.

On social media, discerning intent is especially challenging. However, when outlets adopt strategies that they can reasonably expect to mislead typical users—such as pairing a sensational headline with a decontextualised photo and burying key clarifications deep in the text—it is plausible to treat these decisions as disinformative practices, even if individual journalists might insist on the technical accuracy of each element.

3.2. Journalism, platform logics and framing

Classical theories of agenda-setting emphasise how news outlets influence which issues are perceived as salient by the public (McCombs, 2006). In the platform era, this power is partly reconfigured by algorithmic ranking and by users' own sharing practices, but professional media organisations continue to play a central role in producing and legitimising information (Bolsen et al., 2014; Ireton & Posetti, 2018; Kreiss, 2021).

Social media introduce at least three relevant constraints for journalistic communication:

1. Fragmentation of texts. Articles are typically promoted through short posts that combine an image, a headline and, at most, a brief caption. Many users decide whether to click based solely on this fragment, and a large proportion never read the full article (Ecker et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2024).
2. Metrics and engagement. Visibility is determined partly by interactions such as likes, comments and shares. Content that triggers strong emotions—indignation, fear, admiration—tends to perform better, creating pressure to adopt more dramatic framings (Rogers & Niederer, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2020).
3. Visual primacy. Images and thumbnails function as attention hooks. They are processed rapidly and can powerfully shape interpretation before any text is read (Dan et al., 2021; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023).

To understand how these dynamics can lead to misleading outcomes, it is useful to draw on framing theory. Entman (1993) defines framing as the process of selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in a text to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation. Frames shape which cognitive schemas are activated and how events are interpreted: Vincent-Price and Powers (1997) show that framing effects arise when message structure and content activate particular considerations, while Cacciatore et al. (2015) emphasise that news not only conveys facts but also triggers pre-existing knowledge structures. Under social media logics, these frames can be strategically selective in ways that are likely to mislead—for example, when headlines and images magnify dramatic elements, when archive photos are reused without context, or when key qualifications are relegated to places where few users will see them (Ecker et al., 2014; Pinto-Garzón, 2025). Within this environment, editorial decisions about cropping, colour, layout, wording and placement acquire heightened importance. The next section examines how these decisions materialise in specific cases of journalistic disinformation on Facebook and Instagram.

4. Subtle journalistic disinformation practices on social media

4.1. Fabricated visual details

In July 2024, the Spanish newspaper *La Razón* published a Facebook post about the confrontation between Uruguayan players and Colombian fans following a Copa América match. The headline referred to a "brutal brawl with knives," and the accompanying image showed a Colombian supporter in a yellow national-team jersey apparently raising a knife above his head in a threatening gesture (Figure 1).

Figure 1. False news report from *La Razón*

Source: *La Razón* [Facebook post], July 11, 2024.

Later, alternative versions of the same photograph circulated, revealing that the knife had been digitally added: in the original, the fan's raised hand was empty (Figure 2). The manipulated image thus introduced a weapon that was never present in the scene. The alteration visually supported the textual claim that fans were armed with knives, escalating the perceived gravity of the confrontation and reinforcing stereotypes about violent supporters (La Razón, 2024; Verdezoto, 2024).

Figure 2. Unedited Photograph

Source: Verdezoto (2024).

From a disinformation perspective, this case is straightforward: a fabricated visual element transforms the meaning of an otherwise real event. While there were indeed clashes in the stadium, the addition of a knife shifts the story from spontaneous scuffles to an armed attack. For many users, the doctored photograph—encountered quickly while scrolling—may become the primary memory of what happened.

The ethical problem is deeper than a technical breach of photojournalistic norms. It lies in the deliberate choice to publish an image that radically intensifies the narrative of violence in a way that aligns with a sensational headline and with engagement-driven platform incentives. In social media environments where corrections, if they occur, rarely reach all those exposed to the original post, such manipulations have lasting disinformative effects.

4.2. Decontextualised archive images: El Economista*'s amnesty card*

Not all visual disinformation involves altering pixels. Authentic photographs can become misleading when they are reused without adequate context. On 9 November 2023, *El Economista*, a Spanish economic newspaper, posted an Instagram card announcing that PSOE and Junts had reached an agreement on the amnesty law and unlocked Pedro Sánchez's investiture. The visual featured a large block of text alongside a photograph of Pedro Sánchez shaking hands with Carles Puigdemont, leader of Junts per Catalunya (El Economista, 2023) (Figure 3).

At the time, however, no recent in-person meeting between the two politicians had been reported. The image was an archive photo taken in 2016. Some users, confused by the apparently "too perfect" picture, speculated in

Figure 3. Instagram Post by *El Economista*

Source: *El Economista* [Instagram post], November 9, 2023.

the comments that it had been generated by AI. In a reply, the outlet clarified that the photograph was real but old. Neither the Instagram post nor the linked article mentioned the date or explained the origin of the image, and the article itself did not reproduce the photo (Julbe, 2023).

This is a clear instance of decontextualisation. The photograph is technically accurate, yet its combination with the headline on a card strongly implies a recent handshake sealing the amnesty deal. For users unfamiliar with the political timeline, the most natural inference is that Sánchez and Puigdemont had just met to finalise the agreement.

The problem here is not merely an oversight. In a design culture where images are carefully chosen to reinforce textual messages, omitting the date of an archive photo is a meaningful choice. It allows the outlet to capitalise on the symbolic power of a handshake image while preserving the ability to claim, if challenged, that nothing "untrue" was said. On a platform like Instagram, where the card may circulate independently from the full article, this strategy effectively functions as disinformation by association[1].

1. The reference list includes the links to the cases discussed. Some of these were previously presented at the *International Conference on Communication and Applied Technologies* (ICOMTA) 2025.

4.3. Ambiguous headlines and omission-based clickbait

Another recurrent pattern in journalistic disinformation on social media concerns the use of headlines that rely on implicatures and omissions rather than explicit false statements. These formulations are particularly potent on platforms where headlines often appear alone in previews or cards. A widely discussed example is the *Chicago Tribune* headline analysed by van der Linden (2022) and Allen et al. (2024): "Healthy doctor dies two weeks after getting COVID vaccine; CDC investigating why." The sentence is factually correct: the doctor did die, and the CDC did investigate. Yet the temporal juxtaposition invites readers to infer a causal link between the vaccination and the death, despite the lack of evidence. On platforms where the headline circulates independently of the full article, this implication can fuel vaccine hesitancy even if the body text contains disclaimers.

García-Serrano et al. (2019) offer another illustration from Spanish journalism: a headline proclaiming that a "Madrid hospital opens its doors to children's dogs." The phrase suggests that dogs are now generally allowed inside the hospital. Only within the article does the outlet specify that visits are tightly restricted to one hour per week, under strict safety and hygiene conditions. According to Biyani et al. (2016), such formulations fit within omissive or erroneous clickbait, where key contextual details are left out of the headline even though they fundamentally alter the story.

These examples resonate with classical pragmatics: readers assume, under the cooperative principle (Grice, 1991), that journalists choose the most relevant and informative wording. When essential constraints (such as "under strict conditions" or "no causal link has been established") are omitted, the default inference is that the event occurred in a strong, unqualified form.

On social media, where users often encounter only the headline or share articles without reading them, these omissions effectively produce disinformation. The mechanism is especially insidious because, from a legalistic standpoint, the outlet can argue that the wording is not strictly false—only "incomplete." For audiences, however, the practical outcome is the formation of inaccurate beliefs.

4.4. Emotional clickbait and buried clarifications: El Tiempo*'s police post*

A further pattern involves the pairing of emotionally charged headlines and visuals with partial explanations that are placed where few users will see them. An Instagram post by *El Tiempo*, a major Colombian newspaper, illustrates this mechanism (El Tiempo, 2025). The post shows a capture from a surveillance-style video recorded in Winter Haven, Florida: a police officer stands next to a small child lying on the pavement, which is encircled by a prominent red graphic (Figure 4). That frame is used as the main image of the post. The overlay text states: "Policía en EE. UU. mantuvo a niña de tres años en el suelo mientras requisaba a su mamá" ('Police officer in the U.S. kept a three-year-old girl on the ground while searching her mother').

Figure 4. Instagram Post by *El Tiempo*

Source: *El Tiempo* (2025).

The framing suggests a scenario of explicit police abuse: an officer forcing a toddler to lie on the ground during a search. However, the long caption that accompanies the post on Instagram introduces an important nuance. In the sixth paragraph of eight, *El Tiempo* notes that, according to the official version, the child was not ordered to lie down; she simply imitated her mother's position during the arrest.

Several features make this composition disinformative:

— The headline is categorical and attributes agency to the officer ("kept the girl on the ground"), without indicating that this is contested.

— The captured frame is edited with a red circle around the girl, reinforcing the implication of coercion and heightening the emotional impact.
— The clarification appears only mid-way through a long block of text, accessible after clicking "see more"—a step many users will never take.

Psychological research on headline effects suggests that initial interpretations formed from titles and images tend to persist despite later corrections (Ecker et al., 2014). In this case, even readers who reach the paragraph about the official version may still retain the impression of deliberate abuse. For those who only see the image and headline, the story is unequivocal: a police officer forced a three-year-old to lie on the ground.

This strategy exploits the emotional charge of the scene and the high engagement potential of stories about police misconduct while maintaining a form of plausible deniability: the outlet can point to the buried paragraph as evidence that it presented multiple sides. In practice, however, the design of the post ensures that the disinformative framing is far more visible than the nuance.

5. Discussion

The cases analysed in this article, together with previous literature, point to several common features that help conceptualise disinformation as an implicit outcome of news framing on social media. First, disinformation often arises from the interaction between editorial intentions and platform architectures. Journalistic outlets seek visibility in algorithmically curated feeds where attention is scarce. Under these conditions, emotionally charged stories, dramatic images and simplified narratives are more likely to achieve reach and engagement. The resulting incentives favour strategies such as sensational cropping, archive photos without dates, categorical headlines and visually highlighted victims or perpetrators. Even if individual journalists do not explicitly aim to deceive, the cumulative effect of these practices is to produce systematically misleading impressions.

Second, the line between accurate reporting and disinformation is frequently drawn at the level of context rather than of isolated facts. In the *La Razón* case, a single fabricated detail—the knife—completely changes the meaning of the scene. In the *El Economista* and *Chicago Tribune* examples, the images and headlines are technically correct but stripped of crucial temporal or causal information. The *El Tiempo* post demonstrates how sequencing and placement (headline and thumbnail versus buried clarification) shape interpretation. These patterns suggest that disinformation can be understood as a function not only of what is said or shown, but of how and where it is presented within the architecture of the platform.

Third, generative AI intensifies, but does not create, the underlying vulnerabilities. The possibility of effortless synthetic imagery makes it easier to fabricate scenes like the knife-wielding fan. At the same time, it contributes

to a more general epistemic instability, where audiences doubt the authenticity of even genuine photographs. Yet the core disinformative mechanisms analysed here—decontextualisation, omission, emotional framing—are independent of AI and were already present in pre-AI digital journalism.

Finally, these findings have implications for debates on media accountability. Traditional models of journalistic responsibility focus on accuracy at the article level and on mechanisms such as corrections or ombudsman columns. On social media, however, much of the impact occurs at the level of posts that may be consumed without access to later clarifications. This suggests the need to rethink standards so that they explicitly address platform-specific practices: for instance, requiring that key contextual information (date, location, contested status of claims) appear in the visible part of headlines and captions, and enforcing clear labelling of archive images, illustrative montages and AI-generated content.

6. Conclusions

This article has argued that disinformation from digital news media should be understood not only as the work of fringe actors or fully fabricated stories, but also as an implicit outcome of routine, platform-oriented journalistic practices. The analysis of selected Facebook and Instagram posts by established outlets shows how editorial choices about images, headlines and captions can systematically mislead audiences even when the underlying material is real.

Across the cases, four recurring practices stand out: digitally manipulated images that fabricate or exaggerate threats; the reuse of authentic but decontextualised photographs that invite false associations; ambiguous or omissive headlines that rely on implicatures rather than explicit falsehoods; and emotional clickbait pairings of headlines and visuals in which key clarifications are buried in long captions. Together, these patterns illustrate how professional outlets can contribute to disinformation without inventing entire stories, by deploying framing strategies that exploit platform dynamics and user habits—rapid scrolling, headline-only reading and visual primacy—while preserving a surface of technical accuracy.

The study is limited by its small, purposive sample and by its focus on publicly visible posts, which prevents generalisations about prevalence and does not empirically assess audience effects. Future research could build on this work by developing coding schemes for large-scale analyses of news posts, by testing experimentally how different framings shape users' interpretations and trust, and by examining newsroom decision-making around social media strategies.

Despite these limitations, the analysis underscores the need to incorporate journalistic social media practices into any serious account of contemporary disinformation. As long as news outlets remain central actors in the digital public sphere, their responsibility cannot end with avoiding outright falsehoods; it must also include scrutinising how their choices about images,

headlines and captions may turn real events into misleading stories for platform audiences.

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