

<https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJLCL/2026/6.2.117121>

# War Testimony in the Platform Era: Witnessing, Authenticity, and Misinformation

Mutoni Uwase N.

Faculty of Business and Management Kampala International University Uganda

## ABSTRACT

This study examines war testimony in the platform era, with particular attention to the interrelated dynamics of witnessing, authenticity, and misinformation within digitally mediated environments. It argues that social media platforms have fundamentally reshaped the conditions under which armed conflicts are observed, narrated, and interpreted by compressing time and space while privileging immediacy, circulation speed, and virality over provenance and verification. In this context, witnessing is no longer confined to physical proximity to conflict zones but is instead distributed across networked infrastructures that enable remote, mediated, and participatory forms of observation. However, this transformation destabilizes traditional epistemic categories, as authenticity becomes increasingly contested and detached from verifiable truth, while misinformation proliferates through fabrication, miscaptioning, contextual fragmentation, and synthetic media such as deepfakes. The paper further explores how platform affordances, algorithmic amplification, and audience dynamics contribute to epistemic uncertainty, shaping how war narratives are produced, consumed, and evaluated. It highlights the role of trust signals, metadata, and provenance tracking as emerging mechanisms for assessing credibility, while also noting their limitations in addressing large-scale information disorder. Drawing on case studies from contemporary conflicts, including Ukraine, Syria, and Gaza, the study demonstrates how platform-mediated witnessing influences public perception, political urgency, and humanitarian response. Ultimately, it contends that war testimony in the digital age operates within a contested informational ecosystem where authenticity, verification, and ethical responsibility remain unresolved but essential concerns. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary frameworks that integrate media studies, information science, and ethics to foster more trustworthy systems of digital witnessing.

**Keywords:** War testimony; Digital witnessing; Authenticity; Misinformation; and Social media platforms.

## INTRODUCTION

War testimony in the platform era amplifies the tension between witnessing, authenticity, and misinformation. Digital platforms allow creators closer to sites of destruction and violence, and more aware of their impacts, to testify [1]. Technology compresses time and space, while design choices favor immediacy over provenance, prioritizing speed and virality [2]. Authenticity becomes contested. Even verifiable, furnished with trust signals and corroborated across sources, narratives provoke disputes over framing, selection, and context. Misinformation emerges through fabrication, miscaptioning, context loss, and deep fakes [3]. Cognitive biases and audience dynamics amplify misleading content, creating echo chambers and toxic environments. Case studies highlight events from Ukraine and Gaza where platform framing shifted public perception and urgency. Filters, reputation

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

systems, and feedback loops enable disruption [1]. Emerging from the conflicts of the late 20th century, mass communications complemented by telecommunications technologies allowed audiences anywhere to witness historical events unfolding anywhere else. Traditional testimony relies on observing events first-hand directly within range of a battlefield [2]. Since the 2010s, the proliferation of social-media platforms and smartphones with internet connectivity has transformed such witnessing into an online and engagement-heavy activity [3]. The term “witnessing” refers to observation in contexts where the witnessed events lie beyond the range of everyone involved. Other designations are witnessing, observation, and calibration [1, 2]

### Conceptualizing Witnessing in Digital Platforms

Understanding war testimony in the current media landscape requires consideration of witnessing, authentication, and the spread of misinformation [5]. The analysis of war testimony must begin with an examination of witnessing itself. Digital platforms offer diverse environments where various formats, genres, styles, and other parameters shape testimony. Each platform's audience and accompanying questions about provenance/circulation further impact the reception of testimony. Such observations indicate that witnessing is not uniformly defined across the media landscape, and several factors must be taken into account [6]. Digital platforms serve as contemporary witnessing environments where people communicate events of significance. Digital infrastructures now influence the understanding of war testimony, so it is critical to assign a definition for the term twenty-five years after the advent of the discipline [6]. The concept acts as an analytical lens through which to comprehend highly mediated accounts of armed conflict. Witnessing incorporates parameters of content and form, distribution, audience contact and engagement, preservation, and textual mobility. The ability of distributed reading infrastructure to limit engagement with source material, content, and contextual information further complicates identification [7]. Avatars and pseudonyms shape audience perceptions according to contextual information that governs the wider environment. Digital witnessing, therefore, demands the specification of witnessing and distinctions between cultural witnessing and witnessing through audiovisual testimony originating at the site of armed conflict [8]. Digital witnessing applies to audiovisual testimony that depicts armed conflict or related categories of violence and testimonies, such as structural or psychological violence. This type of witnessing bypasses the presence of dedicated surveillance systems and mechanisms typical of [1], remapping and extending their logics into previously uncharted domains [8]. Several terms warrant attention: witnessing indicates the communicative practice of reporting observable events of significance to another person; authenticity signifies the indicated condition of content; provenance denotes the emergence and subsequent source-path of testimony; veracity designates the measure of congruence with what is indicated; while misinformation and disinformation differentiate intent and harm [9].

### Authenticity as a Contested Metric

Contemporary war testimony on participatory platforms draws attention to authenticity as a key metric, a contested and multifaceted issue affecting the sharing and reception of first-person accounts [5]. Many participants articulate their uncertainty regarding the accuracy of contextual elements, such as date, time, location, or events shown [6]. Others emphasize the difference between content they consider authentic, described as on-the-ground footage depicting events directly experienced, and that regarded as more distant or secondary, encompassing user-generated content and third-party verification [3, 7]. Additional trust signals and contextual information subsequently become critical to navigating the platform ecosystem: metadata such as timestamps, location tags, and other annotations tied to content or the creator; the nature and history of the creator's account; and the provenance of onward sharing with respect to who, when, and how [8]. The relationship between authenticity and truth remains complex and uncertain. Authenticity may exist without verification, and verified content may still not be authentic [9]. Misinformation can also emerge through unintentional misrepresentation or the cognitive biases that arise from pre-existing beliefs. The phenomenon is compounded further by the large scale and rapid pace of information circulation among audiences, which fosters social amplification and the emergence of topic-driven echo chambers [1]. Various creators voluntarily highlight the importance of sharing credible content, indicating awareness of the challenges of veracity and provenance within the broader environment [10]. Their emphasis on checking and corroborating information, on the veracity of the content itself as opposed to the testimony of an individual, and on attempting to depict “the most truthful story” underscores the problematic status of verification resources and conventions [9].

### Mechanisms of Misinformation in War Testimony

Today's wars are increasingly fought with words rather than conventional weapons. The contemporary information environment has turned armed conflict into non-linear, fluid, and multi-dimensional scenarios [5]. Conflicts are now taking place in various domains or arenas, including military, diplomatic, economic, social, and informatics [6]. War and survival also depend on how information is leveraged. Despite being central to contemporary warfare, the issue of misinformation has attracted little scholarly attention [4, 7]. In an

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

information-centric world, humans exchange information through digital platforms such as social media and cable news channels. These platforms have given rise to hybrid warfare, the terrible tactics that Russia employed against Ukraine [7]. Nowadays, anyone with a device such as a smartphone can disseminate information to vast audiences spread throughout the globe [8]. Such platforms have lifted the restrictions on who conveys news to the public. Nevertheless, information leaks through these platforms constantly remain unverified and, in most cases, fall outside direct personal experience. The dominant source of the misinformation supposedly flows freely through them [5].

### Case Studies: Platform-Mediated Narratives in Contemporary Conflicts

A notable quantity of platform-mediated witnessing narratives can be observed in ongoing conflicts such as Syria (2011), Ukraine (2014), and Yemen (2014) [4]. Accounts of bombings, atrocities, and massacres have circulated for extended periods alongside documentation of chemical attacks, missile strikes, and troop mobilizations. During the Russia–Ukraine war, events such as the Near-Yalivshchyna train station massacre, the Bucha civilian killings, and the Kramatorsk railway station strike have attracted wide attention [5]. In addition to the established role of journalism and media organizations, alternative routes and actors now shape the circulation and reception of testimony [1, 6]. Witnessing processes on different platforms hinge on their reconfiguration of the technical, social, and spatial conditions surrounding narrations [7].

### Methods for Evaluating Veracity and Provenance

Contemporary scholarship offers diverse conceptualizations of veracity, accuracy, provenance, and authenticity 6. Empirical findings suggest a burgeoning interest in subjectively perceived accuracy among many media consumers, with probing into the multifaceted contributors to such perceptions [4]. The proliferation of war testimony disseminated through social media and similar audio-visual channels have intensified curiosity about the mechanisms and indicators through which audience members assess testimony reliability [5]. Research points to the provisionality of witness footage's evidentiary status, fostering aspirations towards more nuanced intelligence-gathering workflows [6, 7]. Such workflows would support provenance-based analyses by scrutinising the overt and subtle mediation imposed upon testimony and the overarching behaviours accordingly engaged with the evolving exchange [8]. J. Kevin Feng et al., Zubiaga and Ji, and other established works within media studies, forensics, information science, and journalism constellate an array of models, indicators, and methodologies for establishing audiovisual, digital, and network provenance [9]. Designated frameworks afford critical routes towards assessment of both provenance and claimed accuracy. Verification of social media testimony disseminated via networked channels often entails a suite of distinct yet complementary approaches [10]. Fundamental steps centre on the identification of the initial source, corroboration against counter-evidence or affirmation through independent accounts, topical analysis to ascertain ongoing relevance during multi-day distributions, appraisal of embedded or accompanying metadata, and delineation of the expertise reflected within each new analogue re-introduction of the source [7]. Meticulous tracking of the knowledge trajectory thus becomes paramount to the full and explicit characterisation of the claim's provenance [8].

### Ethical Considerations for Platforms, Creators, and Audiences

The ethical responsibility for factuality, transparency, and minimization of harm among platforms, creators, and audiences is of paramount importance in the consideration of how to navigate the rhetoric of war testimony disseminated in the platform era [3]. The situation is complicated by a lack of consensus on what constitutes veracity. Central issues that merit deliberation include the question of consent to access and utilize certain content to investigate claims regarding ongoing atrocities, the urgency of protecting the identity and privacy of witnesses and survivors, and the production of evidence that is politically sensitive from a geopolitical point of view, which involves the analysis of images or visual material from actors in conflict zones [4]. Platform affordances make creators and audiences highly inclined to post and interact with footage, particularly when ephemeral stories or posts are available, yet knowledge gaps persist among platforms concerning the contents of media and the intentions of those interfacing with its user interface [5]. Audiences that engage with the material may well continue operating on a low-information basis despite such circumventions [8].

### Strategies to Foster Trustworthy War Testimony

Digital platforms can support the posting and sharing of messages and information about ongoing conflicts, which allows the dissemination and curating of war-related audio-visual narratives [5]. However, the platform-mediated articulation of war testimony often generates epistemic uncertainty around witnessing, authenticity, provenance, and verification [6]. Epistemic uncertainty and concerns about misleading narratives can undermine the amplification and dissemination of such material from ongoing wars or conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Ethiopia, and elsewhere [7]. By grounding analysis in emerging scholarly works that conceptualize witnessing broadly, observing that authenticity remains a contested metric subject to differing criteria and indicators, outlining a general framework for understanding how misinformation circulates in platform-mediated war testimony, and

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

exploring practices for evaluating the veracity and provenance of such narratives, it is possible to equip users and audiences with tools and guidelines to foster trustworthy content [8]. Implementing design features that promote the provision and display of provenance heuristics, as well as the use of model-generated labels depicting the likelihood of a given post containing portrayal, instead of deception, can help counter negative dynamics that exacerbate misinformation around conflict, war, and violence [9]. War testimony is typically understood as accounts emanating from persons positioned in physical proximity to the unfolding conflict, such as eyewitnesses, casualties, survivors, and first responders [10]. Source type continues to constitute an essential criterion for assessing the authenticity of such accounts, mainly that on-the-ground footage, user-generated content captured in the war zone, third-party verification, or official state publications [10]. The specific nature of war testimony and the types of content addressed play a fundamental role in both advocacy for witnessing as an epistemic and ethical norm in digital space and the democratic function of countering misinformation and disinformation to strengthen facticity and honesty worldwide, as well as protecting the community required for humanitarian work [8].

### Implications for Journalism, Policy, and Education

Testimonies of war in the digital age are being mediated through platform architecture and affordances. The proliferation of eyewitness media has implications for journalism, policy, and education [5]. Notably, the widespread availability of citizen-generated images complicates the verification of authenticity and poses challenges for the evidential status of photographs [6]. Ubiquitous access to powerful programs such as Adobe Photoshop has called into question previously taken-for-granted truths and normative underpinnings of visual journalism [7]. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have become major sites for alternative journalism, sometimes referred to as 'witnessing', enabling users to share on-the-ground footage and first-hand accounts in real time [8]. Increasingly, the audience is also invited to become active producers and witnesses of information, transforming the nature of networked communication and the relationship between the individual and the collective. Such changes stretch the limits and question the foundations of traditional journalism and demand new considerations in terms of authenticity, ethics, and power dynamics [8]. Particular attention should be paid to epistemological and social implications as the proliferation of citizen-generated images of war poses critical challenges at the intersection of crisis reporting and contemporary mediatization [9]. Platform mediation and amateur participation further blur the boundary between user-generated and professional content and call for a broader conceptualization of the media environment and the critical lenses through which information is mediated and understood [10]. The dissemination of war testimony through digital platforms implicates creators, audiences, and policymakers in safeguarding basic commitments to accurate representation and public accountability. The production, circulation, and consumption of such materials occur within a social web structured by platform architecture and augmented by the shifting conditions of contemporary global crises [9]. Users encounter war narratives mediated through platforms characterized by political uncertainty, institutional decline, and diminishing trust in diverse fields [8]. Given these circumstances, the shifts in war testimony merit analysis from distinct but interrelated perspectives, witnessing, authenticity, and misinformation that account for contemporary conditions of availability, circulation, verification, and the visible disjunction between sender and receiver [9]. Emphasis on witnessing recognizes the ongoing transformation in the temporal and spatial dimensions of war narratives and the materials available for their construction [8]. The rise of social media and smartphone-based content creation has altered the modalities of crisis reporting, which now includes the installation of distributed witnessing within media-organizational systems and the enablement of user participation as a societal act [9]. Misinformation in such testimony emerges through entangled processes of fabrication, miscaptioning, and context loss [10].

### CONCLUSION

War testimony in the platform era reflects a profound transformation in how conflict is observed, recorded, and interpreted. While digital platforms have expanded access to real-time, on-the-ground accounts of violence, they have also introduced significant epistemic instability. The convergence of user-generated content, algorithmic distribution, and participatory engagement has redefined witnessing as a decentralized and highly mediated practice, where proximity no longer guarantees credibility and visibility does not necessarily equate to truth. Authenticity in this environment remains inherently contested, shaped by competing interpretations of context, intent, and provenance. At the same time, misinformation, whether intentional or accidental emerges as a structural feature of platform communication, amplified by speed-driven design logics and fragmented information flows. These dynamics challenge traditional verification practices and place new burdens on audiences, journalists, and platform designers alike. Addressing these challenges requires more than technical fixes; it demands a broader reconceptualization of digital witnessing that integrates ethical responsibility, provenance awareness, and critical media literacy. Strengthening transparency mechanisms, improving contextual metadata systems, and developing interdisciplinary verification frameworks are essential steps toward mitigating informational harm. Ultimately, fostering trustworthy war testimony in the platform era depends on balancing openness with accountability, ensuring that the amplification of voices from conflict zones does not come at the expense of truth, context, and ethical responsibility.

### REFERENCES

1. Al-Ghazzi O. Extreme speech: An archetypal digital witness: The child figure and the media conflict over Syria. *Int J Commun.* 2019;13:19.
2. McLelland AK. *Emergency cinema in Syria: (Re)envisioning documentary-as-witness* [dissertation/thesis]. 2014.
3. Schulz GW. *Street cred: Are media consumers craving more authenticity in the digital age?* 2018.
4. Horowitz MA. Disinformation as warfare in the digital age: Dimensions, dilemmas, and solutions. *J Vincentian Soc Action.* 2019;4(2):5.
5. Caled D, Silva MJ. Digital media and misinformation: An outlook on multidisciplinary strategies against manipulation. *J Comput Soc Sci.* 2022;5(1):123-159.
6. Feng KK, Ritchie N, Blumenthal P, Parsons A, Zhang AX. Examining the impact of provenance-enabled media on trust and accuracy perceptions. *Proc ACM Hum Comput Interact.* 2023;7(CSCW2):1-42.
7. Zubiaga A, Ji H. Tweet, but verify: Epistemic study of information verification on Twitter. *Soc Netw Anal Min.* 2014;4(1):163.
8. Rogers R. Marginalizing the mainstream: How social media privilege political information. *Front Big Data.* 2021;4:689036.
9. Hänska M, Bode M. How the ubiquity of eyewitness media changes the mediation and visibility of protests in the news. In: *Screening Protest*. London: Routledge; 2018. p. 98-119.
10. Ekström M, Westlund O. The dislocation of news journalism: A conceptual framework for the study of epistemologies of digital journalism. *Media Commun.* 2019;7(1):259-270.

**CITE AS: Mutoni Uwase N. (2026). War Testimony in the Platform Era: Witnessing, Authenticity, and Misinformation. NEWPORT INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW, COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGES, 6(2):117-121**  
<https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJLCL/2026/6.2.117121>