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Fragmented Narratives and Context Loss in Short-Video News Communication

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Abstract: Short-video platforms have become an important channel for news consumption, but their emphasis on brevity, speed, and visual impact can weaken the coherence of news narratives. This paper examines how short-video news becomes fragmented through narrative compression, selective editing, repeated circulation, and platform-driven distribution. It focuses on three forms of context loss: the separation of events from their temporal and causal background, the weakening of source and evidential information, and the use of emotional framing that encourages rapid judgment. The paper also discusses why later explanations, corrections, and longer follow-up reports do not always restore the missing context, especially when users encounter clips in an incomplete or disordered sequence. It argues that the problem is not shortness itself, but the presentation of partial information as if it were a complete account. To reduce misunderstanding, short-video news should preserve essential timelines, source labels, uncertainty markers, and links between initial reports and later updates. Effective context preservation requires cooperation among news producers, platforms, reposting accounts, and audiences.

Keywords: short-video news; fragmented narratives; context loss; selective editing; emotional framing; news communication

1. Introduction

Short-video platforms have become an important part of everyday news consumption (Liu and Zhang 2108–09). Users often encounter public events through brief clips inserted into entertainment feeds, social discussion, and personalised recommendations. News is no longer received only through complete reports, scheduled broadcasts, or dedicated news pages. It may appear as a thirty-second video, a selected quotation, a dramatic scene, or a short explanation added to reposted footage.

This form of communication has clear advantages. Short videos are easy to access, quick to understand, and well suited to mobile viewing. Visual materials can make distant events feel immediate, while subtitles and narration help users follow a story without reading a long article. Short-video news can also reach people who do not actively search for

news and can bring public attention to events that might otherwise receive limited exposure.

The problem is not simply that short-video news is brief. All news reporting involves selection, and no report can include every detail of an event. The more serious issue appears when compression separates a scene, statement, or conflict from the information needed to understand it. A video may show what happened at one moment while leaving out what happened before, what followed, who recorded the footage, or whether the information has been verified.

Fragmented narratives are produced through both news editing and platform circulation. During production, a complex event may be reduced to a small number of images and claims. After publication, the video may be reposted, shortened again, combined with new subtitles, or placed under a different title. A fragment can therefore move far beyond its original report and acquire a new meaning in each round of circulation.

This process can create context loss. Viewers may receive a visible result without its cause, a reaction without the statement that produced it, or an accusation without the later response. They may also encounter several clips from the same event in an unclear order. Even when each clip contains some correct information, the overall understanding may still be incomplete.

Short-video news can make this incompleteness difficult to recognise. A clear voice-over, strong subtitle, and emotionally direct image can give the impression that the event has already been explained (Chen et al. 422–23). Users may feel confident about who is responsible or what the event means, even when important evidence remains uncertain. The problem is therefore not only misunderstanding, but also the certainty attached to a partial account.

Context loss becomes more serious when emotional framing encourages immediate judgment. Short-video news often depends on conflict, surprise, sympathy, anger, or fear to attract attention. These emotions are not separate from news understanding. They influence which details users notice, how they interpret participants, and whether they remain open to later information. Once a person or event has been placed into a simple moral frame, corrections may have limited effect.

Later reports do not always repair the original misunderstanding. Follow-up videos may reach a smaller audience, appear in a different sequence, or use less dramatic material. A correction may be available, but users who saw the first clip may never encounter it. Adding more information is also not enough when the relationship between different pieces of information remains unclear.

This paper examines how fragmented narratives are formed in short-video news communication and how they affect public understanding. It first discusses narrative compression, selective editing, platform logic, and fragment circulation. It then analyses temporal and causal disconnection, source ambiguity, evidential weakness, and emotional framing. The paper also considers why later explanations often fail to restore context and explores how short-video news can preserve essential background, source information, and uncertainty without losing the accessibility of the format.

2. The Fragmentation of Short-Video News

2.1 Narrative Compression and Selective Editing

Short-video news has very limited time to explain an event. A report that might require several pages of text or a long television segment must often be reduced to less than one minute. Editors have to choose a few images, several sentences, and a simple order of presentation. Much of the original material is left out.

This kind of compression is necessary. No news report can include every fact, document, interview, and response. A short video can still be accurate when it gives viewers the main event, basic background, and the current state of the story. Difficulty arises when the removed material changes the meaning of what remains.

Time is often compressed most heavily. An event that developed over several days may be shown as

if it happened in one continuous moment. Earlier disputes, previous statements, and later responses may disappear. Viewers see the visible result but do not know how the situation reached that point.

The order of events may also become unclear. A video can begin with an angry reaction because that scene is visually strong. The action that caused the reaction may appear later or may not appear at all. A viewer may then treat the reaction as the beginning of the conflict. The facts shown in the video are real, but their order gives them a different meaning.

Quotations are often shortened in a similar way. Interviews and public statements usually contain conditions, explanations, and changes in tone. A short-video report may keep only the sentence that sounds strongest. The words may be quoted correctly, yet the question, qualification, or surrounding explanation is missing.

A speaker may have discussed several possibilities but appear to support only one conclusion. A cautious answer may look firm after words such as "possibly," "at present," or "based on available information" are removed. Shortened quotations are especially risky when the video covers a dispute, because a single sentence can define one side's position for the whole audience.

Visual material can create a stronger sense of certainty than text. Footage seems to show the event directly, but a camera records only one angle and one period of time. What happened outside the frame is not visible. The recording may begin after the conflict started or stop before an important response.

Editors make further choices after the footage is collected. They decide which image opens the video, which scene is repeated, and which details are enlarged or slowed down. A few seconds of shouting, crying, or physical conflict may become the centre of the report even when the full event was longer and less dramatic.

The opening scene matters because many users decide within seconds whether to continue watching. A dramatic image can attract attention, but it also gives viewers an early interpretation. Later background information may be understood through the emotion created at the beginning.

Subtitles add another layer of meaning. Many users watch videos without sound, so a short line of text may guide the entire reading of the scene. Words such as "refused," "lost control," "admitted," or "angered the public" do more than describe an action. They suggest intention and responsibility.

The wording may be brief because the screen is small, but brevity can remove uncertainty. A person who has not yet responded may be described as "silent." An unfinished investigation may be presented as a clear conclusion. A disagreement between several parties may be reduced to a conflict between one victim and one wrongdoer.

Narration can also connect materials that were not originally part of the same moment. A report may combine witness footage, screenshots, official statements, old images, and online comments. When dates and sources are not clearly marked, viewers may assume that all materials come from the same event and directly support the narration.

This issue is common in breaking news. Early information often comes from bystanders, personal accounts, or partial recordings. Editors may need to publish before all sides have responded. The first report therefore depends on limited material. Once the video gives the event a clear shape, later information may be added without fully changing that first version.

A complex event is also easier to present when it has a simple storyline. Short videos often arrange information around a clear conflict, a visible turning point, and a quick ending. This structure helps viewers follow the report, but it can remove uncertainty and reduce the role of background conditions.

Public disputes are especially easy to simplify. One person is presented as the victim, another as the cause, and one scene as proof. Legal procedures, workplace rules, previous communication, or institutional responsibility may receive little attention because they are difficult to show in a short clip.

Some news stories are divided into several videos. One clip introduces the event, another presents a response, and a later one gives an update. This can provide more information, but each part may circulate separately. Viewers who see only the second or third clip may not know the earlier background.

The sequence may also be broken. A later response can appear before the original report, or an old clip can return after new facts have emerged. Even when every individual video contains correct information, the audience may receive the pieces in an order that weakens the overall account.

Selective editing becomes misleading when the video hides the limits of its own material. A short report does not need to contain every detail, but it should show when the timeline is incomplete, when only one side has spoken, or when the footage captures only part of the event. Without these limits, a fragment can appear to be the whole story.

2.2 Platform Logic and Fragment Circulation

Short-video news enters a platform environment shaped by recommendation, viewing time, comments, likes, and shares. A report may have public value, but its visibility often depends on whether users stop scrolling and continue watching. This affects both the way news is produced and the way it later circulates (Hermida and Mellado 867).

The opening seconds carry particular weight. Producers often place the strongest image, sharpest statement, or clearest conflict at the beginning. Background information may appear later, after some viewers have already moved on. The most visible part of the report is therefore not always the part that best explains the event.

Titles and cover images work in the same way. They need to make the topic clear quickly, so they often focus on one person, one action, or one emotional result. This helps the video attract attention, but it may also turn a complex event into a single striking moment.

Recommendation systems further weaken narrative order. Users do not necessarily see the first report before later responses and updates. One person may encounter an accusation, another may see only the reply, and a third may receive a short commentary based on both. The event reaches different users through different fragments.

A news story therefore loses its fixed beginning and sequence. A correction may appear before the report it corrects. An old clip may return after new information has already changed the meaning of the event. Even when each video contains some accurate information, the audience may receive the pieces in an order that produces an incomplete account.

Repeated circulation can also create a false sense of confirmation. The same footage may appear on several news accounts, personal channels, and reposting pages. Users may believe that they have seen several independent reports, although all versions come from one original recording or statement.

Reposting often removes details that were present in the first report. Dates, locations, source labels, and warnings about unverified information may disappear when the video is shortened or reformatted. The visual fragment continues to spread, while the information needed to place it within the event becomes weaker.

New subtitles and narration may also change the meaning of the clip. A question can be rewritten as a statement. An allegation may be presented as a confirmed fact. A person's expression may be described as anger, guilt, or indifference even when the footage alone does not support that judgment.

These changes do not always result from deliberate deception. Many accounts work quickly and reuse material already circulating online. Yet every round of editing adds another layer between the original event and the viewer. After several reposts, it may be difficult to identify where the clip came from or what information first accompanied it.

Platform interaction can keep certain fragments visible for much longer than others. Videos showing conflict, surprise, or strong emotion often receive more comments and shares (Brady et al. 7313–14). A careful update or correction may attract less attention because it is slower, less dramatic, and more uncertain.

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This creates an imbalance between the first impression and later explanation. The original fragment may continue circulating after the publisher has changed the caption, added new information, or removed the video. Copies remain available, and users may encounter them without knowing that the account has been revised.

Audience response can also influence later production. When one sentence or image receives strong engagement, creators may continue producing videos around that detail. The story becomes narrower as more accounts repeat the same angle. Public discussion grows, but the wider event receives less attention.

Platform circulation does not simply spread short-video news. It separates fragments from their original order, source, and explanation. The report that travels furthest may not be the one that provides the clearest account. A brief and dramatic moment can become more influential than the larger narrative from which it was taken.

3. Context Loss in News Understanding

3.1 Temporal and Causal Disconnection

News events usually develop over time. A public dispute, accident, policy change, or investigation may involve earlier causes, several stages, and later responses. Short-video news often presents only one point in this process. Viewers may see the result of an event without knowing what happened before it or how the situation later changed.

This loss of sequence affects interpretation. A clip may begin with an argument, a protest, or an official response because that moment is visually clear. The earlier actions that led to it may be absent. Viewers can then mistake a reaction for the beginning of the event and assign responsibility on the basis of an incomplete timeline.

A short video may also place materials from different moments close together. An early statement, later footage, and a final response can be edited into one smooth narrative. The report becomes easy to follow, but the time between these moments disappears. Viewers may assume that the events happened directly one after another, even when days or weeks separated them.

This matters because later actions are often shaped by information that was not available at the beginning. An early decision may appear unreasonable when judged through facts discovered later. A cautious official response may seem weak if the video does not explain that an investigation was still incomplete. Without a clear timeline, viewers may judge each action as though all participants had the same knowledge from the start.

Causal explanation is often weakened at the same time. Short-video reports tend to focus on visible actions because they are easier to show. A person argues, a crowd gathers, a company responds, or an authority announces a decision. The wider conditions behind these actions may receive little attention.

A workplace dispute, for example, may be presented as a conflict between an employee and a manager. Rules, earlier communication, workload, or organisational practice may be left outside the frame. A public complaint may appear to result from one person's behaviour, while failures in procedure or communication remain less visible.

This can turn a complex event into a simple story of personal fault. One individual becomes the cause because that person is the most visible part of the video. Structural conditions are harder to present in a short clip and often have no dramatic image. They may therefore disappear even when they are central to the event.

The same problem appears in reports about social issues. A single incident may be used to represent a wider problem, but the connection is not always explained. One case may be presented as proof of a general trend, while information about frequency, background, or comparison is missing. Viewers receive a strong example without knowing how typical it is.

Context loss also occurs when later developments receive less attention than the first report. The first clip may contain conflict, uncertainty, or accusation. Follow-up information is often less dramatic. An investigation may produce a qualified conclusion, or

the people involved may provide explanations that make the original event less clear.

These later details do not always reach the same audience. Some users see only the first widely circulated clip. Others encounter an update without knowing the earlier version. The public understanding of the event becomes divided across different stages of information.

The first narrative often remains influential even after new facts appear (Lewandowsky et al. 114–15). Once viewers have formed a clear idea of who caused the event and what it means, later information may be treated as an addition rather than a reason to reconsider the original judgment. The early fragment gives the event a stable shape that later reports struggle to change.

Temporal disconnection can also make old information appear current. A clip may return to the feed after the situation has changed. If the date is not visible, viewers may react as though the event is still developing. An earlier accusation can circulate after it has been corrected, or an old response may appear beside a new incident.

The result is not always direct factual error. Each fragment may contain true information. The problem lies in how the fragments are connected. Accurate details placed in the wrong order or separated from their causes can still create a misleading account.

A complete short-video report does not need to reproduce every stage of an event. It does, however, need to preserve the basic timeline and show which causes are confirmed, disputed, or still unclear. Without this structure, viewers may understand the most visible moment while misunderstanding the event as a whole.

3.2 Source Ambiguity and Evidential Weakness

Short-video news often combines several types of material within the same clip. Original footage, screenshots, witness recordings, official statements, online comments, and earlier reports may appear together. The final video can look coherent, but the sources behind each part are not always clear.

Viewers may not know who recorded a video, when it was recorded, or whether it shows the event being discussed. A clip may come from a witness, an interested party, or an unrelated account that reposted the material. If the source is missing, viewers have little basis for judging what the footage can prove.

Visual material often appears more reliable than written claims because it seems to show the event directly. Yet a recording captures only one angle and one period of time. It may begin after an important action has already taken place or end before a response is given. People outside the frame remain unseen, and the reason for the recording may also be unknown.

A short clip can therefore provide evidence of one visible moment without explaining the larger situation (Brennen et al. 278–79). It may show that a person raised their voice, but not why the argument began. It may show damaged property, but not who caused the damage. Viewers may treat the image as complete proof when it supports only a limited claim.

Screenshots create similar problems. A message, payment record, or social media post may appear convincing because it contains names, dates, and written text. However, screenshots can be incomplete, edited, or removed from the conversation in which they originally appeared. A single message may look different when earlier and later replies are included.

Short-video reports do not always explain these limits. A screenshot may remain on screen for only a few seconds while the narration gives it a strong meaning. Viewers may not have enough time to read the full text or notice missing information. The narrator's explanation then becomes more influential than the material itself.

The distinction between allegation and verified fact can also become unclear. Early reports often rely on personal accounts posted online. A person may describe an experience, accuse another party, or provide selected evidence. Such material may deserve attention, but it is still one account that requires checking.

In short-video news, this distinction can be weakened by direct and confident wording. Phrases such as "the truth is," "the company refused," or "the person admitted" may appear before the available evidence supports such certainty. When subtitles repeat the same claim, viewers may remember the conclusion but not the uncertainty surrounding it.

Official statements do not remove all uncertainty. They may provide important information, but they also represent the position of a particular institution or party. A company response, police notice, or local authority statement should not automatically be treated as a complete account. It may describe confirmed facts, explain procedure, or defend an organisational position.

The source of the statement therefore matters. Viewers need to know whether a claim comes from a witness, a participant, a news organisation, or an official body. These sources have different access to information and different interests. When they are presented in the same visual style, those differences become harder to notice.

Reposted material creates further ambiguity. An account may copy footage from another platform without keeping the original caption or source label. Later accounts may add new subtitles, crop the image, or remove the date. After several rounds of reposting, the video may still look authentic while its origin becomes difficult to trace (Kalogeropoulos et al. 583–84).

Old footage may also be used in reports about current events. Sometimes it is added as background material, but the video does not clearly mark it as archival. Viewers may assume that every image was recorded during the event now being discussed. This can give a current claim visual support that it does not actually have.

Weak evidence may become more persuasive through repetition. The same recording or screenshot can appear across many accounts. Users may believe that several sources confirm the story, even though all reports rely on the same original material. The number of videos increases, but the evidence does not.

This is especially common when formal reporting is limited. Commentary accounts may repeat information from one early post, while each account presents it in a slightly different form. The story begins to look widely supported because many people are discussing it. In fact, the basic claim may still rest on one unverified source.

Editing can also hide disagreements between sources. A report may mention one person's account, then show an official response, and end with comments from users. These materials may contradict one another, but the video may connect them through a single narration. The result feels settled even when the evidence remains disputed.

Evidence strength is not only a question of whether material is real. It also concerns what the material is capable of showing. A real video may prove that an action occurred, but not the intention behind it. A genuine message may confirm that words were written, but not whether the full conversation has been shown. A verified statement may confirm one party's position, but not the final facts of the case.

Short-video news can reduce these distinctions because it must explain quickly. Complex evidence is often turned into a simple conclusion. Viewers are less likely to see which claims are confirmed, which are disputed, and which remain uncertain.

Clear source labels can reduce some of these problems. A report can identify witness footage, archival images, official statements, and unverified online claims. It can also state when only one side has responded or when the available material shows only part of the event.

Without such information, viewers may judge credibility through appearance rather than evidence. Clear subtitles, confident narration, and familiar visual styles can make weak claims seem reliable. Source ambiguity then becomes part of the news message itself, even when the individual materials are genuine.

The problem is not that short-video news uses mixed sources. Many events can only be reported by combining different forms of evidence. The problem appears when those sources lose their identity and are presented as if they carry the same weight. When

viewers cannot see where information comes from or what it actually proves, a brief report may create certainty without a strong evidential basis.

3.3 Emotional Framing and Rapid Judgment

Short-video news often depends on immediate emotional response. A few seconds of crying, shouting, conflict, fear, or anger can make viewers stop scrolling. These images are easy to understand and require little explanation. They also shape the way the event is read before its background is fully known.

Emotion is not separate from news understanding. It influences which details viewers notice and which explanations seem believable. A person shown crying may be seen as a victim. A person speaking loudly may be treated as aggressive. A silent response may be read as guilt or indifference. These judgments can form from a brief scene, even when the wider situation remains unclear.

Editing strengthens this effect. A report may begin with the most dramatic moment, repeat a facial expression, or slow down a short action. Music, sound effects, subtitles, and voice-over can make the scene appear more serious or more morally clear. The video does not need to make an open accusation. Its tone may already suggest who deserves sympathy and who should be blamed (Entman 52).

Subtitles often carry much of this judgment. Terms such as "cold response," "angry confrontation," "helpless victim," or "shocking behaviour" do not simply identify what appears on screen. They tell viewers how the scene should be understood. Once these labels are accepted, later details are often placed inside the same frame.

This can reduce a complex event to a simple moral conflict. One side appears innocent, while the other appears dishonest, cruel, or irresponsible. Such a structure is easy to follow and easy to share. It is also difficult to correct when later evidence shows that the event involved several causes or that responsibility was not clear.

Rapid judgment is encouraged by the pace of the feed. Users move from one video to another with little time to examine sources, compare accounts, or search for earlier reports. A short clip often asks for an immediate response through questions such as "Who is responsible?" or "Do you support this action?" The comment section then becomes part of the news experience.

Comments can strengthen the first emotional reading. Early users may provide labels, assumptions, or personal stories that guide later viewers. A person who opens the comments before watching the full clip may already know which side is being supported. Repeated judgments create the impression that the meaning of the event is settled.

The number of likes and comments can also affect credibility. A highly discussed video may appear important and widely accepted. Strong public reaction can be mistaken for strong evidence. Users may feel less need to question the report when thousands of others have already expressed the same anger or sympathy.

Personal experience often enters this process. A viewer may connect one short incident with earlier experiences of workplace unfairness, consumer disputes, family conflict, or public misconduct. This connection can make the report feel familiar and convincing. The individual case then becomes proof of a wider belief, even when the available information is limited.

Emotional framing is especially strong when a news story contains a clear individual face. Institutional problems are harder to show, but a person can quickly become the centre of blame or support. Viewers may focus on tone, clothing, facial expression, or a few words rather than on rules, procedures, and conditions behind the event.

This personal focus can produce online pressure before facts are settled. Names, workplaces, and social media accounts may be identified and circulated. Users may demand punishment, apology, dismissal, or public explanation. Such reactions can develop faster than formal investigation or professional reporting.

Later information often has less emotional force. A correction may explain that the footage was incomplete, the date was wrong, or another party

has provided evidence. These details are usually presented in a calmer form. They may not contain the strong image that made the first clip popular.

The first emotional impression can therefore remain even after the factual account changes. Viewers may remember the face, action, or label from the original video but forget the later explanation. Some may treat the correction as an excuse because it conflicts with the judgment they have already made.

This does not mean that emotional reporting is always improper. News often concerns pain, conflict, loss, and injustice. Removing emotion completely would make many reports distant and incomplete. The problem appears when emotion replaces explanation or gives uncertain information a fixed moral meaning.

A short report can show emotional scenes without presenting them as final proof. It can avoid labels that assign intention, distinguish public reaction from confirmed facts, and state when the event remains under investigation. Such limits do not weaken the report. They prevent one visible moment from deciding the meaning of the whole event.

Emotional framing becomes most harmful when speed, repetition, and moral certainty work together. A striking fragment attracts attention, a simple label gives it meaning, and public reaction confirms that meaning. Judgment then forms before the event has been fully explained. Later context may still appear, but it enters a discussion whose direction has already been set.

4. The Limits of Contextual Repair

When a short-video report leaves out important background, later information may seem able to correct the problem. News accounts can publish an update, add a longer explanation, revise the caption, or remove an inaccurate clip. In practice, these actions do not always reach the people who saw the first version, and they do not always change the judgment already formed.

The first obstacle is unequal circulation. An early report often appears when public interest is highest. It may contain conflict, accusation, or uncertainty, all of which attract attention. A later update usually arrives after the event has lost some of its novelty. It may be more accurate, but it is often less dramatic and receives fewer views, comments, and shares.

The audiences for the two reports may also be different. Recommendation systems do not guarantee that users who watched the first clip will see the correction. A person may receive the original accusation but never encounter the response. Another may see a later update without knowing what earlier claim it is correcting. Contextual repair remains incomplete when information is distributed across separate groups.

Reposted copies make the problem harder to control. The original publisher may change a title, add a note, or delete the video, but copied versions can remain on other accounts. These copies may keep the old subtitles and narration. Users who encounter them later have no reason to know that the information has been revised.

A correction can also lose meaning when it appears as an isolated clip. Statements such as “the earlier information was incomplete” or “new evidence has emerged” require knowledge of the earlier report. Without a clear connection between the two versions, users may not understand what has changed or why the change matters.

Simply adding more details does not always restore context. A series of new videos may provide responses, documents, and later findings, but the audience still has to connect the pieces. If the videos appear in an unclear order, the added information can produce confusion rather than a fuller account.

The structure of the first report also matters. A strong early narrative gives the event a clear shape. It identifies a victim, a responsible party, and an apparent cause. Once this structure is accepted, later facts are often fitted into it. Information that supports the original view is treated as confirmation, while conflicting information may be dismissed as an excuse or public-relations response.

Emotional memory strengthens this effect. Viewers may forget exact wording but continue to remember a striking face, an angry voice, or a disturbing image. A later text-based notice or calm explanation

has less visual force. It may correct a factual point without replacing the emotional impression created by the first clip.

Public judgment can become harder to change after it has been expressed. Users who have already commented, shared the video, or criticised a person may feel less willing to revise their position. Accepting the correction may also require admitting that an earlier judgment was made too quickly. Online discussion can therefore continue around the first interpretation even after the evidence has changed.

Corrections themselves may be too narrow. A publisher may change one date, name, or factual claim while leaving the original frame untouched. For example, a report may admit that a video was recorded earlier than stated but continue to present the same person as responsible. The factual error is addressed, yet the larger meaning of the story remains unchanged.

Some updates rely on vague wording. Phrases such as "the situation has changed," "further information is available," or "the report has been adjusted" do not clearly identify the earlier error. Such language may protect the publisher from direct admission, but it gives viewers little help in rebuilding the event.

The speed of news production also limits repair. New details often emerge gradually, and each update may correct only part of the earlier account. A second report may itself become outdated when more evidence appears. The public receives several temporary versions rather than one stable explanation.

Official conclusions do not always close the gap. They may arrive after public attention has moved elsewhere, or they may use formal language that is difficult to fit into a short video. A detailed investigation can be reduced to a few lines, leaving out the reasoning behind the conclusion. The final report may then look like another unsupported claim rather than the result of a longer process.

Contextual repair is further weakened when the correction appears less visible than the original mistake. A revised caption, pinned comment, or small source note may be technically available, but many users will not notice it. Repair cannot depend only on the presence of correct information. Its placement and connection to the earlier report also affect whether it is understood.

There are also cases in which complete repair is impossible. A person may already have faced abuse, workplace pressure, or damage to reputation. Even when the later report clears up the event, screenshots and copied clips may continue to circulate. The information can be corrected, but the social effects of the first narrative may remain.

The limits of repair show why context should not be treated as something that can always be added later. Once a fragment has circulated widely and gained a fixed meaning, later explanation enters a discussion already shaped by attention, emotion, and public judgment. Correction remains necessary, but it cannot fully replace the care that should have been taken in the first report.

5. Context Preservation in Short-Video News

Short-video news cannot include every detail of an event, nor does it need to reproduce the length of a full report. Context preservation does not mean adding large amounts of background information to every video. It means keeping the basic elements that allow viewers to understand what the fragment shows, where it comes from, and what remains uncertain.

A clear timeline is one of the most useful forms of context. When an event develops over several stages, the video should identify the date of the footage and its position within the wider process. Brief phrases such as "recorded before the official response" or "this footage shows the second day of the incident" can prevent users from treating separate moments as one continuous event.

When materials from different times are edited together, the change should be visible. Dates, short time labels, or simple transitions can show that a statement and a piece of footage do not belong to the same moment. These details take little screen space but help viewers understand the order of events.

Causal claims require similar care. A video may show that one event followed another, but this does not always prove that one caused the other. News producers should avoid using visual order alone to suggest a causal link. When the cause remains disputed, the narration should state this directly rather than filling the gap with a simple explanation.

Source labels should remain visible throughout the report. Footage provided by a witness, a participant, an official body, or another media account should not appear as if it came from the same source. Labels such as "witness video," "company statement," "archival footage," or "unverified online post" give viewers a basic way to judge the material.

These labels need to be clear enough to notice during normal viewing. Placing a source in small text for one second may satisfy a formal requirement, but it does little to improve understanding. Source information should remain on screen long enough to be read and should be repeated when the video moves to a different type of evidence.

News accounts should also state what the material can and cannot prove. A video may confirm that an argument occurred, but it may not explain how it began. A screenshot may show one message, but not the full conversation. A public statement may confirm one party's position, but not the final outcome of an investigation. Brief limits of this kind can reduce the certainty created by visual evidence.

Uncertainty does not need to make the report vague. It can be expressed through simple wording. Phrases such as "according to the current statement," "the cause has not been confirmed," or "the other party has not yet responded" tell viewers which parts of the story remain open. This is more accurate than presenting an early account as a finished conclusion.

Headlines and subtitles should follow the same standard. Strong words may attract attention, but labels such as "lies," "admits," "loses control," or "refuses to respond" often make claims about intention. More direct descriptions of visible actions can leave less room for unsupported judgment. A person may "leave the scene" without having "escaped," and an organisation may "not yet issue a response" without having "remained silent."

The connection between reports also needs improvement. When a story is divided into several videos, later parts should not rely on viewers having seen the first one. Each clip should contain a brief account of the earlier stage and show where the current update fits. Numbered reports, linked collections, and fixed timelines can help keep separate videos within one narrative.

Corrections should be connected directly to the original report. A new video should state which earlier claim has changed and why. The original video should also carry a visible notice directing users to the update. Deleting the first report without explanation may remove one source of error, but it does not help users understand what was wrong.

Platforms can support this process through design. Related reports from the same event can be grouped by date rather than only by popularity. Updated information can be shown beside earlier clips. When a widely circulated report is corrected, users who watched or shared it can be directed to the new version.

Reposted content also needs stronger source protection. Original dates, source names, and correction notices should remain attached when a video is copied or reused. Platforms can make these details harder to remove and can mark footage that has appeared in older reports. This would reduce the reuse of old material as if it were current.

News organisations have a larger responsibility because their reports often become the source for later commentary and reposting. A small omission in the first version may become much larger after repeated circulation. Editorial review should therefore include questions about timeline, source, evidence, and uncertainty, even when the video must be published quickly.

Speed does not remove the need for caution. During breaking news, the available information may be incomplete, but that incompleteness can be made visible. A short report can say what is known at the time, identify the source, and avoid assigning responsibility before further evidence appears.

Emotional images should also be used with restraint. They may be necessary to show the seriousness of an event, but repetition, slow motion, and suggestive music can turn evidence into judgment. When an image is already powerful, additional emotional editing may reduce rather than improve public understanding.

Audience participation can support context preservation as well. Comment sections can include pinned source notes, timelines, and later updates instead of only questions designed to increase interaction. Accounts can respond to factual confusion before it becomes the dominant reading of the video.

Short-video news works best when brevity is treated as a limit to be managed rather than a reason to remove explanation. A video may remain concise while still showing its date, source, evidential limits, and place within a developing event. These small forms of context make it easier for viewers to recognise a fragment as a fragment, rather than mistake it for the whole story.

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The Boundaries of News Headline Expression Under Traffic Pressure

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Abstract: News headlines are a key part of online news communication. They shape readers' first understanding of an event and often decide whether an article receives attention. Under traffic pressure, headline writing may give more weight to clicks, shares, comments, and platform exposure. This can lead to emotional wording, exaggerated conflict, incomplete information, vague claims, and strong moral labels. These methods may increase short-term attention, but they can also weaken factual accuracy, remove important context, guide public emotion, and harm personal rights. This paper discusses the main boundaries of headline expression from four aspects: accuracy, context, emotional guidance, and personal rights. It also examines why these boundaries become unclear, including traffic-based evaluation, platform recommendation, fast publication, imitation among news organisations, and divided editorial responsibility. The paper argues that headline control should not depend only on the judgment of individual reporters. News organisations need clearer editorial rules, broader quality standards, stronger consistency between headlines and articles, and more visible correction practices. Platforms should also reduce rewards for misleading and highly emotional headlines. Attention remains necessary in news communication, but it should come from clear facts and public value rather than distortion.

Keywords: news headlines; traffic pressure; factual accuracy; platform recommendation

1. Introduction

A news headline is often the first part of a report that readers see. Many readers decide whether to open an article after reading only a few words. Some may not read the full report at all. Their understanding of an event may come mainly from the headline. For this reason, a headline is not only a brief description of news content. It also affects how readers understand the people, facts, and conflicts involved. News organisations now pay close attention to views, clicks, shares, comments, and reading time (Tandoc; Welbers et al.). These figures are often used to measure the influence of a report. They may also

affect content selection, staff evaluation, and advertising income. Under this pressure, headline writing is no longer guided only by accuracy and clarity. It is also expected to attract attention quickly and compete with other information on the same page.

This change has produced many eye-catching headline styles. Some headlines use words such as "shocking," "unexpected," "exposed," or "complete reversal." Some highlight anger, conflict, or personal blame. Others hide key facts and leave readers with an unanswered question. These methods can increase curiosity, but they may also change the meaning of the report. A possible result may be written as a confirmed fact. A small dispute may be presented as a serious conflict. A personal statement may appear to represent the full truth of an event.

The problem does not lie in attracting readers. A headline needs to be clear, brief, and interesting. A report that receives no attention cannot perform its public role. The problem appears when the effort to gain attention weakens factual accuracy. It also appears when emotional words guide readers toward a judgment that the report itself cannot support. At that point, the headline stops being a useful guide to the news and becomes a tool for creating reaction.

Headline expression also involves the rights of the people mentioned in a report. A few strong words may damage a person's reputation before the facts are clear. Labels such as "bad parent," "dishonest employee," or "violent customer" can turn a complex event into a simple moral judgment. Even when the article later gives more details, many readers may remember only the headline. Corrections and updates often receive less attention than the original report.

Traffic pressure is a real part of news production, but it cannot remove the basic duties of journalism. Headline writers still need to respect facts, context, personal dignity, and the reader's right to receive clear information. The key issue is not whether headlines should attract attention. It is how far they may go before vivid expression becomes exaggeration, selective presentation, or deliberate misdirection. This essay examines the common problems found in traffic-driven headlines, the reasons these problems continue, and the limits that should guide headline writing.

2. Traffic Pressure and Changes in Headline Writing

Traffic data now plays a direct role in news production (Tandoc). News platforms record how many people open an article, how long they stay on the page, whether they share it, and whether they leave a comment. These figures can be seen soon after a report is published. Editors can quickly compare the performance of different stories and headlines. A headline with more clicks may be treated as successful even when the report itself offers little useful information (Kuiken et al.; Welbers et al.).

This way of judging news changes the position of the headline. In traditional news writing, the headline is expected to state the main fact in a short and clear form. It helps readers understand what happened and decide whether the report is relevant to them. Under traffic pressure, the headline is also asked to compete for attention. It must stand out among many messages, images, videos, and advertisements. Clear description may seem too plain when other content uses strong emotion, suspense, and conflict.

Editors and reporters may feel this pressure in their daily work. The traffic of each report can be counted and ranked. Articles with weak performance may receive less space on the platform. Writers whose stories gain more views may be seen as more productive. In some newsrooms, traffic results can affect work evaluation, future assignments, and income. These conditions encourage writers to treat the headline as a tool for gaining clicks rather than a simple summary of the report.

The change can be seen in the choice of words. Neutral words are often replaced by stronger ones. A disagreement may be called a "fierce conflict." A normal response may be described as a "public counterattack." A new detail may be presented as a

"complete reversal." These words create a stronger sense of drama, but they may not match the facts in the article. The headline becomes more emotional than the event itself.

Some headlines use incomplete sentences or hide key information. (Blom and Reinecke Hansen) They may ask a question without giving the answer, leave out the identity of the person involved, or mention an unusual result without explaining its cause. This type of writing creates an information gap. Readers are expected to open the article to find the missing part. The method can raise clicks, but it reduces the headline's basic information value. Readers may spend time on a report that does not contain the important content suggested by the headline.

Conflict is also given more space. Stories about public issues may contain many facts, causes, and different views, yet the headline may focus only on who blamed whom or who "won" the argument. A policy issue can be reduced to a personal dispute. A social problem can be written as a clash between two groups. This treatment is easy to understand and easy to spread, but it removes the background that gives the event its real meaning.

Traffic pressure also affects the selection of news. Events that can produce striking headlines may receive more attention than events that are important but less dramatic. Daily public issues often need careful explanation, yet they may not create immediate emotional reactions. Personal disputes, accidents, unusual behaviour, and sudden reversals are easier to package into attractive headlines. News value may then be measured by the ability to create curiosity rather than by public importance.

Platform recommendation adds to this pressure. Content that receives quick reactions is more likely to be shown to more users. A headline that creates anger, fear, or surprise may gain comments and shares in a short time. Once the report enters a wider recommendation cycle, its traffic can rise quickly. Editors can see this result and may copy the same style in later reports. Similar words, sentence patterns, and emotional labels then appear across different news topics.

The speed of online publishing leaves little time for careful headline revision. Reporters may need to publish soon after an event occurs. Information may still be incomplete, but the headline must be written at once. Editors may choose the strongest available detail to gain early attention. When new facts appear, the article can be updated, but the original headline may already have shaped public opinion. Screenshots and reposts can continue to circulate even after the headline has been changed.

Immediate traffic data can also hide long-term harm. An exaggerated headline may produce high views on the day of publication. It may also cause readers to feel misled after opening the article. This loss of trust is difficult to measure through a single traffic figure. Clicks show that readers entered the page, but they do not show whether readers found the headline fair, accurate, or useful. A high number may reflect interest, anger, doubt, or criticism.

The problem is not caused by traffic data alone. Such data can help news organisations understand audience needs and improve content delivery. The risk appears when traffic becomes the main standard for judging headline quality. Under this standard, accuracy may seem less important than visibility, and clear expression may give way to emotional attraction. The headline is then written for the moment of clicking, while its effect on public understanding receives less attention.

3. Common Problems in Traffic-Driven Headlines

3.1 Emotional Words

Emotional words are common in traffic-driven headlines (Molek-Kozakowska; Robertson et al.). They can create anger, fear, surprise, sadness, or sympathy in a very short time. Words such as "shocking," "terrifying," "heartbreaking," and "outrageous" tell readers how they should feel before they know what happened. These words make the headline more visible, but they also affect the way readers understand the event.

A news headline should give readers basic information. When emotional judgment enters the headline, fact and opinion become difficult to

separate. A report may describe an ordinary disagreement, but the headline calls it an "angry confrontation." A person may question a decision, but the headline says that the person "furiously attacked" it. The action described in the article may be calm. The emotional word creates a different image.

Strong emotional words often appear in reports about accidents, family disputes, consumer complaints, public conflicts, and personal behaviour. These topics already contain tension. A dramatic headline can make the event look even more serious. Readers may expect violence, major loss, or clear wrongdoing. After opening the article, they may find that the event is less serious than the headline suggests.

Fear is also used to attract attention. A small safety risk may be described as a hidden danger that "everyone must know." An isolated health event may be written as a threat to a large group. Some headlines use words such as "warning," "danger," and "never do this" without explaining how common the risk is. Readers may change their behaviour based on a headline even when the report does not provide enough evidence.

Words that create anger can spread quickly because they invite readers to choose a side. (Brady et al.) A headline may describe a person as "cold-hearted," "selfish," or "arrogant." These labels turn a report into a moral judgment. Readers may enter the comment section with a fixed view and repeat the same label. The facts of the event receive less attention than the emotion created by the headline.

Sympathy can also be used in a selective way. A headline may describe one person as "helpless" or "innocent" before the full facts are known. This wording encourages readers to support that person and doubt anyone who gives a different account. Later information may show that the event is more complex, but the early emotional image is difficult to remove.

The effect of emotional wording is stronger when readers only see the headline. On social platforms, many people read headlines in recommendation pages, search results, or reposted screenshots. They may not open the full article. The emotional judgment then becomes the main message. A short phrase can shape discussion even when the article gives a more careful account.

Emotional language is not always improper. A report about a serious disaster or clear abuse may need words that show the weight of the event. The wording still needs support from the facts. The level of emotion should match the level of harm. When strong words are used only to raise traffic, the headline can make a limited event appear extreme and push readers toward a judgment that has not been fully proved.

3.2 Conflict and Opposition

Conflict attracts attention because it gives a report a clear and simple structure. Two people, groups, or views can be placed against each other. Readers can quickly see who is involved and may feel invited to decide who is right. Under traffic pressure, this structure is often used even when the event cannot be explained through direct opposition.

A disagreement may involve rules, past events, unclear duties, or failed communication. The headline may remove these details and focus on personal confrontation. Phrases such as "publicly attacks," "hits back," "refuses to give in," and "faces off" make the event look like a contest. The report becomes a story about victory and defeat rather than a description of facts.

This pattern is common in reports about public disputes. One person makes a statement, and another person gives a different account. The headline may describe the second statement as a "counterattack" or "reversal." Such wording suggests that the two sides are fighting for public support. Their statements may contain useful facts, but readers are encouraged to treat them as weapons in a conflict.

Headlines may also create opposition between social groups. An event involving one customer and one business can be presented as a conflict between consumers and companies. A dispute involving a student and a teacher may be written as a conflict between young people and authority. A single case

cannot always represent a whole group, yet the headline may use broad labels because they attract more discussion.

Group labels make it easier for readers to connect the event with their own experiences. They can also increase anger between people who identify with different sides. Comments then move away from the event itself. Readers discuss age, occupation, income, gender, region, or social position. The people involved become examples used to support wider prejudice.

Conflict-based headlines often give blame before responsibility has been established. A question such as "Who should be responsible?" may be changed into a statement that already names the person at fault. The article may contain incomplete records or different accounts, but the headline leaves little room for doubt. Readers may believe that the matter has already been settled.

Personal blame is attractive because it gives a social problem a clear target. A service failure may involve poor rules, weak training, limited resources, and communication problems. A headline may place all responsibility on one employee. This makes the story easier to read, but it hides the conditions that produced the problem. The individual receives public pressure while the wider cause remains outside the discussion.

Conflict wording also changes the tone of later reporting. Once an event has been described as a battle, each new statement is treated as another move in that battle. An explanation becomes a "defence." A correction becomes an "admission." Silence becomes a "refusal to respond." The words used in the first headline limit how later information is understood.

News reports need to show disagreement when disagreement is part of the event. The problem appears when the headline creates a stronger conflict than the facts support. It also appears when the headline removes causes, rules, and background so that the event can fit a simple opposition. This form may gain attention quickly, but it gives readers fewer tools to understand why the conflict occurred.

3.3 Incomplete Information

A headline cannot include every detail in a report. It must select the most important fact and express it in a limited space. Selection becomes misleading when key conditions are removed or when a minor detail is presented as the main meaning of the event.

Traffic-driven headlines often choose the most unusual part of a story. A short argument, a large number, an emotional sentence, or a surprising result may be placed in the headline. The article may later explain that the detail occurred under special conditions. Readers who only see the headline do not receive those conditions.

Time is often left unclear. A headline may report that a person "has been banned," but the action may last only a few days. It may say that a rule "has changed," while the change is only a proposal. An old event may be posted again without a clear date and appear to be recent. Missing time details can change how readers judge the importance of the news.

Place also affects meaning. A rule used by one organisation may be presented as if it applies to an entire industry. A local event may be written in broad terms that suggest a common problem. The article may name the specific place, but the headline uses words such as "schools," "hospitals," or "companies" without a clear limit. Readers may believe that the same situation exists everywhere.

Numbers can create a similar problem. A headline may use a large total without explaining the time period, group size, or method of calculation. A percentage may look serious, but the number of cases may be small. A price may be shown without stating the service, location, or special condition connected to it. Numbers appear precise, so readers may trust them even when the needed background is missing.

Some headlines remove the source of a claim. They may say that a product "causes harm" when the article only reports one user's experience. They may state that a person "broke a rule" when the claim comes from an unnamed post. Words such as "reported," "claimed," "suspected," and "according to" are sometimes removed to make the headline

shorter and stronger. A claim then appears to be a confirmed fact.

Question headlines can also hide missing evidence. (Janét et al.) A headline may ask whether a common food is dangerous or whether a person has committed wrongdoing. The question form protects the writer from making a direct statement, but it still connects the subject with danger or misconduct. Readers may remember the connection even when the article answers the question with "no" or "there is not enough evidence."

Some headlines reveal only part of a quotation. A sentence taken from an interview may lose its original meaning after several words are removed. A cautious statement can become a firm judgment. A reply to a specific question can appear to be a general position. Quotation marks give the wording a sense of accuracy, but the missing context may make the quotation unfair.

Incomplete headlines are especially harmful during the early stage of a public event. Facts are often limited, and different accounts may not have been checked. A headline based on the most dramatic available detail can quickly shape public opinion. Later reports may add records, explanations, or official findings. Many readers may not see those updates. Their judgment remains tied to the earlier headline.

The duty of a headline is not to include every part of the report. It needs to keep the details that decide the meaning of the main fact. These may include time, place, source, degree of certainty, or an important condition. Removing such information does more than shorten the headline. It changes what readers believe has happened.

4. The Limits of Headline Expression

4.1 The Limit of Factual Accuracy

Factual accuracy is the basic limit of headline writing. A headline is short, but every statement in it should be supported by the article. It should not introduce unchecked facts or make an event appear more serious, more certain, or more unusual than it really is.

The main fact in the headline should match the main fact in the report (Molyneux and Coddington). A minor detail may attract attention, but it should not be used in a way that changes the meaning of the whole event. For example, an argument that lasted a few minutes should not be described as a long-term conflict. A temporary decision should not be presented as a final result. A personal reaction should not be treated as the position of an entire group.

The degree of certainty must remain clear. News reports often deal with facts that are still being verified. At this stage, words such as "may," "possibly," "suspected," and "according to the person involved" carry important meaning. Removing these words can turn an uncertain claim into a confirmed statement. A headline saying that a product "may cause a problem" is different from one saying that the product "causes a problem." The second form makes a stronger claim and requires stronger evidence.

Predictions should not be presented as facts. Reports about markets, weather, health, public policy, and social events may include expert views about what could happen. These views are useful, but they remain predictions. A headline should not say that an event "will happen" when the article only discusses a possible outcome. Words such as "could," "likely," and "expected" should be retained when they reflect the real level of certainty.

Opinion must also be separated from fact. A person involved in an event may make a strong accusation, or a commentator may offer a clear judgment. These statements can appear in the headline when their source is identified. Without a source, readers may assume the statement reflects the news organisation's conclusion. "A resident says the rule is unfair" is different from "The rule is unfair." The first reports a view; the second expresses a judgment.

Rumours and online claims require particular caution. A widely shared post does not become reliable simply because many people have seen it. When the source cannot be confirmed, the headline should not repeat the claim in a direct and certain

form. Even a question headline can spread the claim. Asking whether a person has committed wrongdoing still links that person with the accusation. The article may later reject the claim, but the headline may already have created doubt.

Quotations in headlines should preserve the speaker's original meaning. Removing words from a quotation may make a cautious answer sound definite. A statement made in a specific situation may appear to express a general view. Quotation marks do not guarantee accuracy if the original context is lost. The selected words should fairly represent the speaker's position.

Accuracy also applies to numbers. A large figure can mislead when the headline omits the time period, sample size, location, or method of calculation. Percentages require a clear base. Price changes require a clear product and time frame. A headline should not use a number simply because it appears striking. Readers should be able to understand what the number refers to.

4.2 The Limit of Context

A fact can be correct on its own and still mislead when its context is missing. Headline writing must preserve the conditions that determine what the fact means. These conditions may include time, place, identity, cause, source, and the stage of the event.

Time is often essential. A decision may be temporary, a rule may not yet be in force, or a statement may have been made years earlier. Leaving out the date can make old information appear new or make a short-term action seem permanent. When time affects meaning, the headline should state it clearly.

Place can also limit meaning. A policy used in one city, school, hospital, or company does not necessarily apply elsewhere. Broad wording may create the impression that the same rule is used everywhere. A local case may be important, but its scope should not be expanded simply to make the headline more attractive.

Identity requires careful treatment. A person may appear in a report as a witness, family member, customer, employee, or online user. These roles are not the same. A headline that assigns the wrong role may change how readers judge the person's words. An individual statement should not be presented as the view of an organisation unless that person is authorised to speak for it.

The cause of an event should not be simplified without sufficient evidence. A report may describe several possible reasons, yet the headline may highlight only one. Readers may then believe that the cause has been proven. This is common in reports about accidents, illness, school incidents, and workplace disputes. Early information is often incomplete, so the headline should leave room for later findings.

The stage of an event also matters. An investigation, accusation, court decision, appeal, and final result are different stages. A person under investigation has not necessarily been found responsible. A case accepted by a court has not necessarily reached a judgment. Headlines should use language that reflects the current stage rather than suggesting a final conclusion.

Short headlines cannot include every detail, but they must retain the information that prevents misunderstanding. A headline may omit background details that do not affect the main fact, but it should not remove conditions that change the reader's basic understanding. Brevity is a formal limit, not a reason to alter meaning.

Context should also remain clear when a report is reposted. A headline may appear in social media posts, search results, notifications, or short-video captions, where the article's background may be missing. Key limitations should be included in the headline when readers need them to understand the event correctly.

4.3 The Limit of Emotional Guidance

A headline does not need to be completely neutral in tone. Clear and vivid language can help readers notice important news. However, the limit is crossed when emotional wording replaces factual description or pushes readers toward anger, fear, sympathy, or blame before the facts are clear.

The emotional tone of a headline should match the seriousness of the event. A major disaster, clear act of violence, or significant public risk may justify strong language. A minor dispute or uncertain claim does not. Words such as "terrifying," "cruel," "outrageous," and "heartbreaking" should not be used merely to attract attention.

Emotional words often carry judgment. Calling a response "arrogant" or an action "cold-hearted" tells readers how to interpret the situation. The article may present facts that allow multiple interpretations, but the headline may close that space and impose a single view. Readers who only see the headline may accept that judgment without reading further.

Anger is particularly easy to provoke through headline wording. A person may be described as refusing to apologise, ignoring public concern, or attacking another party. However, the same action may have a less dramatic explanation. The person may not yet have received the question, may be waiting for verified information, or may have responded in a way not reflected in the headline. A headline should not turn limited information into proof of a negative attitude.

Fear also requires careful handling. Reports about health, food, safety, and technology can influence daily behaviour. Words such as "danger," "warning," and "hidden threat" may lead readers to believe that a rare risk is common. Headlines should provide a sense of scale. A single case should not be presented as a general danger without broader evidence.

Sympathy can also distort reporting. A headline may present one party as weak, helpless, or innocent before all facts are known. This framing may make later information appear unfair or hostile. News writing can show human suffering without deciding in advance who is right or wrong.

Punctuation and sentence structure can also guide emotion. Repeated question marks, exclamation marks, and incomplete questions can create tension. Phrases such as "the truth is shocking" or "the result no one expected" encourage emotional reactions before presenting information. These forms may increase curiosity but add little informational value. A fair headline allows readers space to form their own judgment. It can indicate that an event is serious, unusual, or disputed, but it should do so through facts rather than emotional cues. The writer's aim should be to describe what happened, not to provoke the strongest possible reaction.

4.4 The Limit of Personal Rights

Headline expression can affect the people named or shown in a report (Society of Professional Journalists). A short label may damage reputation, expose private information, or lead to online harassment. These effects may continue even after corrections are made. Personal rights therefore form an important limit on headline writing.

Names and identifying details should be used only when necessary for the public value of the report. A person's full name, workplace, school, home area, photograph, or family relationship may allow readers to identify them. In reports involving private disputes, health conditions, family matters, or minors, such details require special care.

Public interest should not be confused with public curiosity. Readers may want to know the identity of a person involved in an unusual event, but this alone does not justify naming them in a headline. Writers should consider whether identifying the person helps readers understand an issue of broader importance. When identity adds little, it may cause harm without providing useful information.

Accusations must be handled carefully. A person accused of misconduct should not be labelled as guilty before facts are established. Words such as "fraudster," "abuser," "thief," or "liar" carry direct judgment. When legal or formal findings are incomplete, the headline should clearly indicate the status of the claim.

Occupation and social identity should not be used to increase shame. A headline may include terms such as "teacher," "doctor," "student," "mother," or "delivery worker" even when the role is unrelated to the event. This can turn an individual case into a

judgment about a wider group and may cause others in the same occupation to face suspicion.

Minors require stronger protection. Their names, schools, family information, photographs, and online accounts should not be exposed in headlines. Even when parents share information publicly, news reports should consider the child's long-term interests. Online records can remain accessible for many years.

Victims and family members also face risks from careless wording. A headline may repeat private details about injury, illness, death, relationships, or personal history. Such details can cause further distress and attract unwanted attention. Reporting the event does not require revealing every sensitive detail.

Labels can remain attached to a person long after an event. Someone may be described as an "unfilial child," "problem student," or "angry customer" based on a single report. These labels reduce a person to one incident. Search engines and reposts may keep such labels visible even after the situation has been clarified.

Corrections cannot always remove this harm. The original headline may already have been copied, saved, and discussed, while later corrections receive less attention. For this reason, personal rights should be considered before publication, not only after complaints arise. Careful wording at the outset is more effective than attempting to repair damage later.

5. Why the Boundaries Become Unclear

The boundary of headline expression is not always easy to keep. Most reporters and editors know that headlines should be accurate. They also know that private rights and public understanding need protection. Yet these basic rules may lose force when traffic, speed, and competition enter daily news work. The problem often comes from the way news is produced and evaluated, not only from the choice made by one writer.

Traffic indicators have a direct effect on editorial judgment. Views, clicks, comments, shares, and reading time can be seen soon after a report is published. These numbers give news organisations a simple way to compare different reports. A headline that receives many clicks may be treated as successful. A headline that receives little attention may be viewed as weak, even when it is accurate and useful.

Numbers appear clear and objective. They are easier to record than public trust, factual value, or social effect. An editor can see how many people opened an article, but it is harder to know whether readers understood the event correctly. It is also difficult to measure whether a headline increased prejudice or harmed a person's reputation. The results that are easy to count often receive more attention than the results that are hard to count.

This can change how headlines are judged before publication. Editors may ask whether a headline is attractive enough rather than whether it expresses the fact in the best way. A clear headline may be changed because it appears too plain. Stronger verbs, emotional labels, or incomplete questions may be added. Each change seems small, but the final headline may be more dramatic than the report.

Traffic results can also affect the work of reporters. Reports with high views may receive more resources and wider display. Writers who often produce popular content may gain better assignments or stronger recognition. Those whose reports receive less traffic may feel pressure to copy successful headline styles. The choice of wording then becomes linked with work evaluation and professional opportunity.

Platform recommendation systems make this pressure stronger. Many users no longer find news by visiting the home page of a news organisation. They receive reports through recommendation pages, search results, social feeds, notifications, and short-video platforms. In these spaces, a headline must compete with many other pieces of content. The decision to click may be made in only a few seconds.

Recommendation systems often give more space to content that receives quick reactions. A headline that causes anger, surprise, fear, or curiosity may gain

comments and shares soon after publication. The system may then show the report to more users. More exposure brings more reactions, and the report enters a larger circulation cycle.

A calm and complete headline may not produce the same early reaction. It may explain the event correctly but fail to create a strong reason for immediate clicking. The system does not judge the headline in the same way as a professional editor. It mainly records user behaviour. Content that attracts attention can receive wider display even when that attention comes from misunderstanding or anger.

This creates a gap between editorial standards and platform results. A headline may be considered improper from the view of news accuracy, yet successful from the view of traffic. When the same type of headline repeatedly receives more exposure, writers may begin to treat platform performance as proof that the wording is acceptable.

Strong reactions can also hide negative reader experience. Some users click because the headline appears surprising. After reading the article, they may feel that the wording was misleading. Their click is still recorded as traffic. Even an angry comment can increase interaction data. The system may read dissatisfaction as interest and continue to recommend similar content.

Fast publishing is another reason that headline limits become unclear. (Harro-Loit and Josephi) Online news work often requires reports to be published soon after an event occurs. The organisation that publishes earlier may receive more traffic and become the main source quoted by other accounts. This makes speed part of competition.

Early information is often incomplete. Reporters may have only a short statement, a video clip, a screenshot, or the account of one person. The cause of the event may not be clear. The identity of the people involved may not be confirmed. Even so, a headline must be written before the report can be published.

Under this pressure, the most striking available detail may become the headline. There may be no time to check whether the detail represents the whole event. Words that show uncertainty may be removed because they make the headline longer and less direct. A claim may then look like a fact, and a temporary result may look final.

Editors also have less time to test how different readers may understand the wording. A headline can be accurate in a narrow sense but still create a false impression. Finding this problem requires careful reading. The editor needs to compare the headline with the full report, check the source, and consider what information has been left out. Fast publication reduces the time available for this work.

News organisations may update the report after more facts become available. The headline can also be changed. Yet the early version may already have spread through screenshots, reposts, and notifications. Some readers may never see the later correction. The pressure to publish quickly places the highest risk at the stage when the least information is available.

Competition between news organisations encourages imitation. Editors can easily see which headlines receive high traffic. Certain sentence patterns may become popular after one report performs well. Other accounts may use similar wording in reports about unrelated events.

Words such as “reversal,” “response,” “exposure,” and “truth” may appear repeatedly because they create suspense. Headlines may use the same structure: a person did something, public opinion changed, and a surprising detail appeared. This pattern gives readers a familiar emotional path. It also makes different events look more similar than they really are.

Imitation reduces the role of the individual editor’s judgment. A headline style may be accepted because it is widely used, not because it is accurate in the present case. Writers may believe that common wording is safe wording. Yet the repeated use of a phrase does not remove its misleading effect.

Competition also creates fear of losing attention. When other organisations use stronger headlines, a careful headline may receive less traffic. Editors may feel that keeping a neutral tone means giving readers to competitors. The standard of expression then moves step by step. A word that once seemed

exaggerated becomes normal after frequent use. Writers need an even stronger word to create the same effect.

The division of responsibility makes the problem harder to control. A headline may pass through several people before publication. A reporter writes the original report. An editor revises the headline. A platform worker may change it for recommendation. A social media account may create another title for reposting. The final wording seen by readers may not be the wording approved at the start.

When a headline causes harm, each party may point to another part of the process. The reporter may say that the editor changed the title. The editor may say that traffic pressure came from management. The news organisation may say that the platform selected and displayed the report. The platform may say that the content was provided by the news organisation.

This divided process weakens clear responsibility. If no person or department is fully responsible for the final headline, careful review becomes difficult. A correction may also be delayed because the parties need to decide who should act. During this time, the headline can continue to circulate.

Internal rules may exist, but they are not always clear enough for new forms of headline writing. A rule against false information is easy to understand. It is harder to judge a headline that uses true words but removes an important condition. Emotional labels, question forms, short quotations, and unclear subjects may not contain a direct falsehood. Their misleading effect comes from the impression they create.

Editors may then make different decisions in similar cases. One editor may remove a strong word, while another may allow it. A headline may be changed after a complaint but accepted before publication in another report. Without clear and stable standards, the boundary depends too much on personal experience and immediate pressure.

Management goals also affect whether rules are enforced. A news organisation may ask editors to protect accuracy while also setting strict traffic targets. These goals can conflict in daily work. When traffic results are checked every day but headline accuracy is reviewed only after a complaint, staff members receive a clear message about which goal matters more.

Responsibility needs to exist before publication. Reporters should know which facts can enter a headline. Editors should have enough time and authority to reject misleading wording. News organisations should not reward traffic results without checking how those results were gained. Platforms should also examine whether their recommendation rules repeatedly give more exposure to exaggerated and emotional headlines.

6. Practical Ways to Control Headline Expression

6.1 Build Clear Editorial Rules

News organisations need clear rules for headline writing. General demands such as “be accurate” or “avoid exaggeration” are not enough. Editors and reporters also need to know which words, sentence forms, and editing methods may mislead readers. Clear rules can reduce the effect of personal judgment and make headline review more stable.

The rules should explain what counts as an exaggerated headline. A headline should not enlarge the scale of an event, raise the level of conflict, or turn a limited problem into a general crisis. Words such as “shocking,” “complete reversal,” “public anger,” and “the truth” should not be banned in every case, but the writer should be able to show why the facts support them. When the article does not contain enough evidence, these words should be removed.

Misleading question headlines also need clear limits. A question can create an accusation even when the article does not give a clear answer. A headline such as “Did the company hide the truth?” places the company under suspicion before the facts are checked. The question form should not be used to spread a claim that cannot be written as a direct statement.

Editorial rules should also cover incomplete quotations. A short quotation may look attractive,

but removing part of the sentence can change the speaker's meaning. Editors should check the full statement, the question that led to it, and the situation in which it was made. A quotation should not be selected only because one phrase sounds angry or unusual.

Headline review should consider possible misunderstanding, not only direct falsehood. Some headlines use facts that are technically correct but still give readers a wrong impression. A temporary measure may be written as a permanent rule. A local case may look like a common practice. A statement from one person may appear to represent a whole organisation. Editors should ask what an ordinary reader is likely to understand after seeing only the headline.

The review process can use a few direct questions. Does the headline state the main fact of the article? Does it keep the real level of certainty? Does it name the source of an accusation or opinion? Has any key condition been removed? Could the wording cause readers to reach a conclusion that the article does not support? These questions are simple enough to use during daily editing.

Some topics need stricter review because a misleading headline may cause serious harm. Reports involving crime, health, accidents, minors, private disputes, public safety, and legal cases often contain incomplete or sensitive information. A strong headline in these areas can damage reputation, create fear, or affect later investigation.

High-risk headlines should be checked by more than one editor when time allows. The review should include the article, source material, quotation records, and the latest known facts. When the information is still unclear, the headline should keep words that show uncertainty. Publishing a careful headline is better than correcting a harmful one after it has spread.

Editorial rules also need regular case review. Newsrooms can collect headlines that caused complaints, corrections, or public misunderstanding. Staff members can discuss where the wording went wrong and how it could have been written more clearly. Real cases are often more useful than broad principles because they show how small changes can alter meaning.

6.2 Reduce Dependence on Click Data

Traffic data can show whether a report has reached readers, but it cannot fully show whether the headline is good. A click only means that a person opened the article. It does not show whether the reader found the headline accurate, clear, or fair. It may even show that the reader was misled by an exaggerated title.

News organisations should not use clicks as the main measure of headline quality. Other standards should also be included in content evaluation. These may cover factual accuracy, headline and article consistency, correction frequency, complaint records, reading completion, and reader trust.

A report with fewer clicks may still provide important public information. Some topics do not contain strong conflict or emotion, but they affect daily life. Public services, policy explanations, legal changes, and community issues often need calm and detailed reporting. Judging these reports only by traffic may push editors to add drama that does not belong to the subject.

Correction records can show problems that traffic figures hide. A headline that often needs revision may have gained attention at the cost of accuracy. News organisations can record why a headline was changed. The reason may involve a factual mistake, missing context, an unfair label, or a claim that was not confirmed. These records can be used in staff evaluation and editorial training.

Reader complaints should also be examined carefully. Not every complaint means that a headline is wrong, but repeated complaints about the same wording pattern may show a real problem. Complaints about unclear sources, exaggerated emotion, or headline–article mismatch can help editors find weak points in their normal practice.

Long-term reader trust matters more than the traffic of one article. Readers who often feel misled may stop opening reports from the same source. Some may continue to click but treat the content as entertainment rather than reliable news. This loss is

difficult to repair because it affects the name of the whole organisation, not only one report.

Editors need enough authority to reject a headline that may gain traffic but does not meet basic standards. They should not be punished for choosing accurate wording over a more dramatic title. If management sets strict traffic goals without giving editors this space, internal rules will have little effect.

Work evaluation should not reward only the highest-viewed reports. It can also recognise careful correction, useful public reporting, accurate updates, and clear explanation. These standards give reporters and editors a reason to protect headline quality even when a stronger title may produce more immediate attention.

Traffic data can still be used to improve communication. Editors may study which clear headlines help readers understand difficult topics or which forms make public information easier to find. The aim should be to learn how readers receive news, not how to create the strongest possible reaction.

6.3 Improve Headline and Article Consistency

A headline should represent the main content of the article. It should not take a small detail from the middle of the report and present it as the central fact. This problem often appears when one unusual sentence, number, or reaction is more attractive than the event itself.

Editors should identify the main fact before writing the headline. The main fact usually answers basic questions about what happened, who was involved, and what the present result is. Background details can help explain the event, but they should not replace the main fact only because they create curiosity.

Every important statement in the headline should be supported by clear content in the article. If the headline says that a rule has changed, the article should explain what changed, when it takes effect, and who it applies to. If the headline says that a person has responded, the article should include the response and its source. If it reports a number, the article should explain where that number came from.

The strength of the headline should also match the strength of the evidence. A single interview cannot always support a broad claim. An online post may show one person's experience but not a common situation. Early reports may describe what is known at the time, but they should not give a final judgment before the needed evidence appears.

Headline and article consistency includes tone. A calm article should not carry an angry headline. A report that presents several possible causes should not use a headline that chooses one cause as certain. A story that includes different views should not use a headline that clearly supports one side unless the evidence justifies that choice.

Editors can compare the headline with the opening paragraphs before publication. If the reader cannot find support for the headline near the beginning of the article, the title may be based on a minor detail. This does not mean that every word must appear in the first paragraph. The main meaning should still be clear without requiring the reader to search through the whole report.

Updates are necessary when later information changes the meaning of the event. The article and headline should be revised together. Changing the body while leaving the original headline can continue the earlier misunderstanding. The update should show what has changed, especially when the first report contained uncertain information.

A correction should be clear. Quietly replacing one word may remove the error from the page, but it does not tell earlier readers that the report has changed. When the original headline created a serious false impression, the correction should state the nature of the change. The new headline should not continue to use the same emotional frame.

News organisations should also check the titles used on different channels. The headline on the main website may be accurate, while the social media caption or push notification uses stronger wording. Readers may only see the shorter version. The same basic standards should apply to website headlines,

mobile notifications, search titles, social posts, and short-video captions.

6.4 Strengthen Platform Responsibility

Platforms influence which headlines readers see and how widely those headlines spread. Their role is not limited to carrying content. Recommendation rules, ranking systems, notification tools, and trending lists decide which reports receive more attention. These choices affect the writing methods used by news organisations.

A system that rewards quick reaction may give more exposure to emotional and misleading headlines. Anger, fear, and surprise can produce fast clicks and comments. The platform may treat these actions as signs of value even when users are reacting to a false impression. Recommendation should not depend only on the amount of interaction.

Platforms can include content quality signals in recommendation. These signals may cover correction history, source reliability, repeated complaints, headline–article mismatch, and the use of unclear or unsupported claims. A report should not receive wider display only because its headline creates strong emotion.

Accounts that repeatedly use misleading headlines should face lower recommendation or other limits. The platform should look at patterns, not only single cases. One weak headline may result from an editing mistake. Frequent use of the same misleading method may show that traffic is being gained through deliberate distortion.

Platforms can also improve the way users report headline problems. Current complaint tools often focus on false information, illegal content, or personal attacks. Users may find it difficult to report a headline that is technically true but removes key context. More specific options can cover exaggerated wording, unclear sources, incomplete quotations, and mismatch between the title and the article.

Correction notices need enough visibility. When an inaccurate headline has already reached a large audience, a small change on the original page may not reach those readers. Platforms can send the corrected version to users who saw, opened, shared, or commented on the earlier report. The correction should not receive much less exposure than the original mistake.

Reposted screenshots and copied headlines create another problem. The original article may be corrected, but old versions can continue to circulate. Platforms can add notices when an attached link has been updated or corrected. Users who try to share an old headline can be shown the latest version before posting.

Clear platform rules can also reduce uncertainty for news organisations. Publishers should know which headline practices may lower recommendation or lead to a warning. These rules should give examples and explain how decisions are made. Vague demands may cause platforms to apply standards unevenly.

Platform responsibility does not mean that every strong or emotional headline should be removed. News can involve serious harm, conflict, and public anger. The key question is whether the wording is supported by the report. Recommendation systems should not give an extra reward to headlines that gain attention by hiding facts, enlarging conflict, or guiding readers toward an unsupported judgment.

7. Balancing Attention and Public Responsibility

News headlines need attention to reach readers. A headline that is too vague or dull may fail to show why a report matters. Readers face a large amount of information every day and often decide within seconds whether to open an article. News organisations cannot ignore this reading habit. The need to attract readers is part of news communication, but it does not give writers the right to change the meaning of an event.

Attention can come from the news value of the fact itself. A clear change, an important decision, an unusual event, or a result that affects many people already gives readers a reason to continue. The headline should find the most useful part of the report and express it in direct language. It does not need to add anger, fear, or suspense when the event already contains important information.

A brief headline can still be specific. It can name the subject, action, time, and present result without explaining every detail. The writer needs to decide which facts control the meaning of the event. When the result is not final, the headline should keep that limit. When a statement comes from one person, the source should remain visible. When a measure applies only to a certain place or group, the range should not be enlarged.

Clear wording does not mean flat wording. Strong verbs can make a headline easier to read, but the verb should describe what actually happened. "Rejects," "questions," "confirms," and "changes" give readers useful information when the report supports them. Words such as "attacks," "destroys," "shocks," and "enrages" often contain stronger judgment. They should not replace ordinary descriptions only to make the event look more dramatic.

Details can also attract attention without creating a false impression. A useful number, a clear result, or a meaningful difference may make the headline more concrete. The detail needs enough context to remain fair. A percentage should have a clear group or time period. A price should be linked to the right product or service. A quotation should keep the speaker's real meaning. The most striking detail is not always the most suitable detail.

The line between legitimate expression and misleading expression often appears in the gap between the headline and the article. A headline may use every word correctly but still lead readers toward an idea that the report does not support. It may place too much weight on a small fact, hide a key condition, or make an uncertain claim look final. The writer should judge the whole impression created by the headline, not only whether each word can be defended separately.

This judgment should include readers who do not open the article. Many headlines appear in push notifications, search results, recommendation pages, screenshots, and reposts. In these settings, the headline may become the full news message. The writer cannot assume that the article will later correct an unclear impression. Important limits need to appear in the headline when leaving them out would change the basic meaning.

The need for caution becomes stronger in reports that can harm a person or cause public fear. Crime reports, health information, legal disputes, accidents, family conflicts, and stories involving minors often attract high traffic. They also carry a higher risk of lasting damage. A headline that wrongly connects a person with crime or misconduct may remain visible in search results for years. A headline that enlarges a health risk may affect the choices of many readers before reliable information is available.

Public responsibility does not require news writers to avoid difficult or sensitive topics. It requires them to present such topics without using uncertainty as a source of excitement. When facts are incomplete, the headline should show that the event is still being checked. When several accounts conflict, it should not quietly choose one as the truth. When later evidence changes the report, the correction should be visible and direct.

Traffic should be treated as information about audience behaviour, not as proof of editorial quality. (Molyneux and Coddington; Welbers et al.) A high number of clicks may show that a headline attracted attention. It does not show why people clicked or whether the report helped them understand the event. The traffic may come from curiosity created by missing information. It may come from anger caused by an unfair label. It may also come from readers checking whether an extreme headline is true.

News organisations need to distinguish reach from trust. Reach can rise quickly after one popular report. Trust is built through repeated contact. Readers remember when headlines often promise more than articles provide. They also notice when a news source updates information openly and uses careful words during uncertain events. A title that gains fewer clicks but gives a fair account may have more value than one that performs well for a few hours and leaves readers feeling misled.

The pressure for traffic cannot be placed only on individual reporters and editors. Headline choices

are shaped by work targets, platform display, publication speed, and internal reward systems. Staff members may understand the proper boundary but find it difficult to keep when their work is judged mainly through views and shares. News organisations need to make accuracy part of daily evaluation, not only a rule mentioned after a complaint.

Editors also need room to make careful decisions. A writer may produce a clear headline, but it can be changed later by another editor, a platform account, or a social media worker. Every version should follow the same factual standard. A more dramatic title should not be created only for a push notification or repost. Readers may never see the careful version used on the original page.

Public responsibility is also connected with correction. Mistakes can occur in fast news work, especially when information is changing. The response to a mistake shows whether traffic or factual duty has greater weight. Quietly changing the headline may protect the appearance of the news organisation, but it does little for readers who saw the earlier version. A clear correction gives readers a chance to revise their judgment.

Attracting attention and protecting factual standards are not opposing goals. A headline can be clear, specific, brief, and readable without turning a claim into a fact or a disagreement into a battle. The writer can use the importance of the event, the direct effect on readers, or a clear new fact as the point of interest. This kind of attention comes from information rather than distortion.

Traffic remains part of the working environment of online news. It affects topic selection, publication timing, headline testing, and platform exposure. It should not decide whether an unconfirmed accusation can be written as fact, whether a private person can be publicly labelled, or whether key context can be removed. Those decisions belong to the basic standards of news work and should not change with the expected number of clicks.

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Emotional Framing in the Naming of Weibo Hot Search Topics

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Abstract: Weibo hot search topic names often serve as the first point of contact between users and public events. These names do more than identify what happened. Through word choice, sentence structure, and the selection of details, they can guide users toward anger, sympathy, fear, blame, or moral judgment. This paper examines the naming logic of Weibo hot search topics and focuses on several common forms of emotional framing, including conflict-oriented naming, moralized naming, and sympathy-oriented naming. It also discusses how these forms affect early judgment, remove context, strengthen group emotion, and create lasting labels for the people involved. The paper argues that emotional expression is not always improper, but it becomes problematic when emotion replaces facts, hides uncertainty, or assigns responsibility too early. Hot search topic names should keep the main action, source, time, and level of certainty clear. Stronger editorial review and timely correction are also needed when the wording may mislead users or cause harm.

Keywords: Weibo hot search; topic naming; emotional framing

1. Introduction

Weibo hot search topics have become a common entry point for people to learn about public events. Many users notice the topic name before they read a news report, watch a video, or check the original source. A short phrase on the ranking list may decide whether they open the topic and how they understand it. For this reason, the naming of a hot search topic is not a simple act of shortening information. It is also a process of selecting facts, arranging emphasis, and setting the tone of discussion(Entman 52).

A hot search topic name usually contains only a few words. It cannot include the full background, the source of the information, or every change in the event. The person who creates the name must choose which detail to keep. This may be a conflict, an unusual action, a painful experience, a strong response, or an unexpected result. The selected detail often becomes the main label of the event. Other facts may receive less attention because they do not appear in the topic name.

Emotional wording is often used to make a topic more visible. Words that suggest anger, fear, sympathy, surprise, regret, or blame can quickly attract users. A neutral statement may only explain

what happened, while an emotional statement can create an immediate feeling. This feeling may appear before the user knows whether the information is complete or reliable. Topic names such as "a heartbreaking scene," "an angry response," or "a shocking act" do not only report an event. They also tell users how the event may be felt and judged.

Emotional framing does not always depend on clear emotional adjectives. It may also appear through the choice of verbs, sentence structure, or selected details. A topic name that stresses "refusal," "exposure," "confrontation," or "collapse" may create a sense of conflict or danger. A question may create suspense even when the answer is already known. A personal detail may turn a general issue into a story of suffering. These choices make the topic easier to notice, but they can also narrow the way users understand it.

The influence of a topic name can continue after users enter the topic page. People often read later information through the impression created by the title. A conflict-oriented name may lead them to search for the person at fault. A sympathy-oriented name may lead them to support one side without checking other accounts. A moralized name may turn an unclear dispute into a simple question of right and wrong. Comments and reposts then repeat the same emotional language, which gives the original framing greater force.

This issue is closely linked to the position of hot search topics in public communication. The ranking list brings together news reports, personal posts, entertainment events, social disputes, and public emergencies. These topics differ greatly in seriousness and reliability, but they are often presented in the same short form. When emotional naming is used in cases involving accidents, legal disputes, personal reputation, or incomplete evidence, the effects may go beyond attracting attention. It may influence public judgment, increase pressure on the people involved, and make later correction more difficult.

This paper examines emotional framing in the naming of Weibo hot search topics. It focuses on the naming logic behind short topic labels, the common forms of emotional expression, and the effects of these names on public understanding. It also discusses the limits of emotional wording and the need to keep factual information, uncertainty, and source context visible in topic naming.

2. The Naming Logic of Weibo Hot Search Topics

2.1 Information Compression

A Weibo hot search topic name must present an event in a very limited space. It usually cannot explain the full background or show every part of the event. The name needs to be short enough to fit the ranking list and clear enough to be understood at a glance. This basic limit makes information selection unavoidable.

An event may involve several people, a long period of time, different accounts, and unclear responsibility. The topic name can only keep a small part of this information. The chosen part is often the most unusual action, the strongest statement, or the most visible result. A long dispute may be reduced to one person's angry reply. A social issue may be presented through a single personal experience. An event that is still being investigated may be named through an early claim. The selected detail then becomes the main way users identify the event.

This form of compression is not the same as neutral shortening. Shortening only reduces the number of words, while compression also changes the order and weight of information. A detail placed in the topic name gains more importance. Facts left outside the name become less visible. Users may enter the topic with the belief that the selected detail is the central fact, even when it is only one part of a larger event.

The choice of subject also affects the meaning of a topic name. A name may focus on a person, an institution, an action, or a result. These choices create different impressions. A person-centred name may turn a public issue into an individual story. An action-centred name may make one moment appear more important than the events before and after it. A result-centred name may hide the process that

produced the result. The event itself has not changed, but its public image changes through the selected focus.

Verbs play a strong role in this process. Words such as "claims," "questions," "refuses," "admits," "exposes," and "responds" carry different levels of force. "Responds" suggests that a dispute already exists. "Exposes" suggests that hidden wrongdoing has been found. "Admits" may imply guilt even when the person has only confirmed a small fact. A single verb can give a topic a direction that a longer and more careful description might not support.

Time is often removed from hot search topic names. Users may not know whether an event happened that day, several months earlier, or over a long period. This can make old information appear new or make separate events appear closely connected. Changes in the event may also disappear. A topic name based on an early report can remain in use after later facts have altered the situation.

Sources are also difficult to show in a short name. A personal post, a media report, an official statement, and an anonymous claim may appear in a similar form on the ranking list. The topic name may not tell users where the information came from or how reliable it is. A claim can then look like a confirmed fact. When the source is missing, users may judge the content by the strength of the wording rather than by the quality of the evidence.

Uncertainty is another part of information that is easily removed. Events involving disputes, accidents, legal questions, or personal accusations often contain facts that have not yet been checked. Careful reporting may use words such as "alleged," "reported," or "under investigation." These words make a title longer and less direct, so they may be left out of a hot search name. The result is a cleaner phrase, but it may give more certainty than the available information allows.

A hot search name is often repeated in posts, comments, screenshots, and news titles. After repeated use, the compressed phrase may replace the full event in public discussion. Users no longer need to explain what happened. They only need to repeat the topic label. This makes discussion faster, but it also keeps attention on the detail chosen at the naming stage.

2.2 Attention and Traffic

Hot search topics appear together on a ranking list. Each topic competes with many other topics for a user's attention. Users often scan the list quickly and choose only a few items to open. A topic name must be understood in a short time, but it must also appear interesting enough to deserve a click. This setting gives emotional language a clear advantage.

Neutral wording may describe an event accurately without creating a strong response. Emotional wording adds tension, surprise, sympathy, anger, or fear (Berger and Milkman). A simple report that a person made a statement may receive limited attention. A name that describes the statement as an "angry response" or a "tearful reply" gives users an emotional reason to open the topic. The event is no longer presented only as information. It is presented as a feeling that users can share.

Conflict is useful for attracting attention because it creates a clear relationship between different sides. Words such as "argues," "criticises," "refuses," and "hits back" suggest action and opposition. They give the topic a simple story: someone has acted, another person has reacted, and a dispute is taking place. This structure is easy to follow and easy to discuss. It may be used even when the original event contains no direct confrontation.

Surprise also increases the appeal of a topic name. Words such as "unexpectedly," "suddenly," and "rarely seen" tell users that the event is outside ordinary experience. The user is encouraged to open the topic to find out what made it unusual. In some cases, the surprising element is real. In other cases, the wording creates a stronger sense of novelty than the event itself supports.

Stories of suffering and loss can attract attention through sympathy. A name may highlight age, family status, illness, financial difficulty, or personal pain. These details make an event easier to feel and may bring needed attention to people in difficulty. Yet they can also reduce a wider issue to a sad personal story. Users may remember the emotional

detail while missing the social conditions or institutional problems connected to it.

Controversy has similar value in the competition for clicks. A topic name that suggests disagreement invites users to enter the discussion and express a view. Questions such as "Is this reasonable?" or "Who should be responsible?" turn the topic into an open judgment. The user is not only invited to read but also to take part. This can increase comments and reposts, which may give the topic more visibility.

The need for attention can affect which facts are placed in the name. An ordinary but important fact may be removed, while a minor emotional detail is kept. A careful statement may be shortened into its strongest sentence. A long explanation may be represented by one dramatic reaction. The selected wording may still be connected to the event, but it does not always show the event in a fair proportion.

Traffic pressure can also encourage similar naming patterns. When certain words or structures attract clicks, they are more likely to be used again. Phrases built around exposure, response, anger, tears, reversal, or shock become familiar. Users quickly understand what kind of reaction the name is trying to create. The repeated pattern makes hot search topics easy to recognise, but it can make different events look emotionally similar.

This naming logic creates a conflict between clear information and emotional appeal. A name that keeps every condition and source may be accurate but difficult to read. A short and forceful name may gain attention but remove facts that limit its meaning. The problem does not come from all emotional expression. It appears when the need for clicks begins to decide which facts are kept, which facts are removed, and how strongly the event is presented.

3. Main Forms of Emotional Framing

3.1 Conflict-Oriented Naming

Conflict-oriented naming presents an event through dispute, opposition, accusation, or refusal. This type of topic name often places two people, groups, or views in a direct conflict. Common verbs include "questions," "criticises," "refuses," "accuses," "responds," and "hits back." These words make the relationship between the people involved appear tense, even when the original event contains only a difference of opinion.

Conflict gives a topic a clear structure. Users can quickly identify who acted, who responded, and which sides are involved. A complex event is changed into a simple story of action and reaction. This makes the topic easy to understand, but it may remove the background that explains why the disagreement happened. Long-term problems, unclear duties, and earlier communication may disappear from the topic name.

The word "response" is often used in hot search naming. It seems neutral, but it can create the sense that a public dispute is taking place. A person may only be giving an explanation or correcting a detail. When this action is named as a "response," users may assume that the person is under pressure or answering an accusation. If the name uses "hits back," the tone becomes even stronger. It suggests that the person is fighting against another side rather than offering information.

The same effect appears in names built around refusal. A topic name may say that a person "refused to apologise," "refused to accept," or "refused to respond." The word "refused" suggests a clear and active rejection. The actual situation may be less certain. The person may not have received the request, may still be checking the facts, or may have chosen not to comment at that time. These conditions are difficult to show in a short name. The refusal then becomes the main fact, and the person may be viewed as cold, unreasonable, or guilty.

Conflict-oriented naming may also create opposition where the parties are not directly arguing with each other. Two separate statements can be placed together as if one is answering the other. Different views made at different times can be turned into a public debate. The topic name may connect them through words such as "versus," "responds to," or "questions." This arrangement gives users a clear conflict to follow, but the

connection may come mainly from the way the topic is named.

Some names use direct quotations to increase tension. A short sentence taken from a longer statement may sound sharp when it is separated from its original setting. A careful explanation can contain one sentence that expresses dissatisfaction or doubt. If this sentence is used as the topic name, it may make the whole statement appear angry. The quotation may be accurate at the word level while giving a different impression from the full message.

Conflict naming often encourages users to choose a side. The topic is presented as a disagreement between clear positions, so comments may quickly become expressions of support or blame. Users may ask who is right before asking what happened. They may repeat the language used in the name, which keeps the discussion inside the same conflict structure.

This type of naming can be useful when a real and important conflict exists. Public disputes, policy debates, and differences in responsibility may need to be shown clearly. The problem appears when conflict is made stronger than the available facts. A minor disagreement may be turned into a serious confrontation. A request for information may be presented as an accusation. A normal explanation may become a public "battle."

Conflict framing also affects the treatment of later information. Once an event is known through a topic name that sets up two sides, new facts are often placed into the same structure. An explanation from either side may be read as self-defence. A correction may be viewed as retreat. Silence may be treated as guilt. The original naming makes it harder for users to see the event outside the idea of opposition.

3.2 Moralized Naming

Moralized naming presents an event through ideas of right and wrong, kindness and cruelty, honesty and deception, or responsibility and failure. The judgment may be stated directly through strong adjectives. It may also be hidden in the choice of verbs, labels, or selected details. Users are not only told what happened. They are given a moral position from which to view the event.

Some topic names use clear labels such as "heartless," "shameless," "irresponsible," or "warm-hearted." These words reduce the need for users to make their own judgment. The moral meaning is already included in the name. A person described as "heartless" is placed in a negative role before the details are known. A person described as "kind" or "brave" is placed in a positive role that may make later criticism difficult.

Moral judgment can also appear without direct adjectives. Verbs such as "abandons," "deceives," "ignores," "protects," and "saves" carry clear values. They suggest not only an action but also the character of the person who performed it. For example, "left" and "abandoned" may refer to a similar physical action, but "abandoned" suggests a failure of care and duty. "Did not reply" reports a lack of response, while "ignored" suggests that the person made a deliberate and uncaring choice.

Labels related to social roles can add another layer of moral meaning. A topic name may stress that the person involved is a parent, teacher, doctor, employee, customer, or public figure. These roles carry expected duties. When the role appears next to a disputed action, users may judge the event through those expectations. A mistake made by "a person" and the same mistake made by "a teacher" may produce different reactions, even when the facts are unchanged.

Family relations are often used in this way. A topic name may identify someone as a mother, father, daughter, husband, or wife rather than using a neutral description. The family role makes the event easier to understand in moral terms. Users may compare the person's conduct with common ideas about care, loyalty, sacrifice, or responsibility. The event can then move away from its legal or factual questions and become a test of personal character.

Moralized names often simplify unclear responsibility. Many public events involve several causes, weak communication, unclear rules, or mistakes made by more than one side. A short topic name may select one person as the moral centre of

the event. This person becomes the one who failed, harmed, protected, or helped. Structural or institutional causes receive less attention because they are harder to express through moral language.

The naming of an event as an act of "deception" is a clear example. Deception requires intention, but intention is often difficult to confirm from early information. A false statement may come from error, confusion, incomplete knowledge, or deliberate lying. When the topic name uses "deceives" or "lies," the issue appears settled. Users may then discuss punishment or blame rather than asking whether intent has been shown.

The same risk appears in names that describe an action as "deserved" or "unacceptable." These words close the space for uncertainty. They suggest that the event has a clear moral answer. Users who disagree may be treated as supporting wrongdoing rather than questioning the available facts. Discussion becomes a test of values instead of an examination of evidence.

Moral framing can spread quickly because it gives users a simple way to express identity. Supporting a topic may allow them to show that they care about fairness, kindness, safety, or responsibility. Condemning a person may become a public sign of moral concern. The comment section can fill with repeated statements of anger or support, even when few users have read the full information.

Positive moral framing can also limit understanding. A person presented as a hero may receive support that leaves little room for questions about motive or accuracy. A moving act may be praised without attention to the conditions that made the act necessary. Personal kindness can take the place of discussion about weak rules or public duties. The emotional value of the story becomes stronger than its wider meaning.

Moral language is not always improper. Some actions clearly involve harm, neglect, or public responsibility. Topic names do not need to remove all judgment. Yet judgment should match the strength of the evidence. When facts are still changing, a moral label can fix the public image of a person before responsibility is clear.

3.3 Sympathy-Oriented Naming

Sympathy-oriented naming draws attention to pain, loss, weakness, illness, age, family difficulty, or personal hardship. It presents an event through the experience of a person who appears to need care or support. This form of naming can make distant issues feel close. It can also direct attention toward people whose problems might otherwise be ignored.

Personal details are central to sympathy framing. A topic name may include a person's age, health condition, family role, income, or living situation. These details help users form an emotional connection. A general labour dispute may be presented through an employee who supports a family. A public service problem may be shown through an older person who cannot complete a process. A medical issue may be named through the suffering of a child or parent.

Age is a common emotional signal. Words such as "elderly person," "young child," or "teenage student" create a sense of weakness and need for protection. The same event may receive different reactions depending on the age included in the name. Users may pay more attention because they believe the person had less power or ability to protect themselves.

Family identity also strengthens sympathy. A person may be described as a single parent, a child caring for relatives, or a family member facing loss. These descriptions make the event more personal. They place the individual inside a relationship of care and duty. Users may feel that the harm affects not only one person but also a whole family.

Topic names about illness or injury often use emotional details to show the seriousness of an event. References to tears, pain, long treatment, or physical weakness can increase concern. These details may be important, but they can also dominate the topic. Questions about medical facts, responsibility, or access to services may receive less attention than the visible suffering of the person involved.

Sympathy-oriented naming often depends on selected images or moments. A person crying,

waiting alone, holding a family member, or describing a difficult experience can become the central part of the topic name. This moment may be genuine, but it does not show the full event. The public may understand the person mainly through that emotional scene.

The use of words such as "helpless," "heartbreaking," "pitiful," or "in tears" gives the topic a clear emotional direction. These expressions tell users that sympathy is the expected response. They may also place the person in a fixed role as a victim. Once this image is formed, later information that shows greater complexity may be difficult to accept.

A victim image can remove personal agency. The person involved may have views, choices, or demands that go beyond suffering. Yet the topic name may focus only on pain. Users may speak for the person, defend the person, or turn the person into a symbol without paying attention to what they actually said. Public concern then becomes centred on an imagined victim rather than the full individual.

Sympathy framing may also hide wider causes. A difficult personal story can make a social problem visible, but it can also keep attention at the level of one case (Gross). Users may offer donations, comfort, or blame toward a single actor. Rules, working conditions, public services, and long-term causes may not enter the discussion. The event is treated as a sad exception rather than part of a larger problem.

The emotional focus can affect how responsibility is judged. When one person is presented as weak or suffering, the other side may be placed in a negative position even before its role is clear. The contrast between a visible victim and a less visible institution or individual can produce quick blame. The strength of sympathy may take the place of evidence.

Some people may also face unwanted exposure. Personal illness, family loss, financial difficulty, and private pain can become public labels through the topic name. Even when the attention is supportive, the person may lose control over how their experience is presented. Their identity may remain connected to the painful event after public interest has moved on.

Sympathy can bring real support and give public attention to ignored problems. Its value depends on how the person and the event are presented. A topic name that shows suffering without hiding facts can help users understand the human cost of an issue. A name that uses pain only to attract clicks may reduce a complex person to a short emotional image.

4. Effects on Public Understanding

4.1 Early Emotional Judgment

A hot search topic name is often the first part of an event that users see. Some users may only read the name on the ranking list. Others may open the topic but still use the name as the main guide for understanding the content. When the wording already carries anger, sympathy, fear, or blame, an emotional judgment can form before the user checks the facts.

The first impression matters because it gives the event a basic meaning. A name that stresses conflict may lead users to expect a dispute. A name that stresses suffering may lead them to look for a victim. A name that uses moral language may encourage them to decide who is right and who is wrong. Later information is often read inside this early frame (Scheufele).

Users do not always examine every post on a topic page. They may read a few popular posts, look at screenshots, or scan the most liked comments. If these materials repeat the wording of the topic name, the first impression becomes stronger. The name appears to be confirmed, even when the later posts do not provide new evidence.

Early emotional judgment can also affect which information users trust. Information that supports the first impression may feel clear and believable. Information that challenges it may appear weak, late, or defensive. For example, when a topic name suggests that a person acted without care, later explanations may be treated as excuses. When the name presents someone as a victim, facts that show

a more complex situation may be viewed as an attack on that person.

This process does not require users to make a careful decision. It may happen through quick reading. Hot search lists are often viewed during short breaks or while users are moving between other content. Under these conditions, people may rely on familiar words and simple emotional signals. A short label offers an easy way to understand the event without spending much time on it.

The emotional direction of a name can also shape the questions that users ask. They may ask why a person was so cruel rather than whether the act happened as described. They may ask how the victim should be helped rather than whether the available account is complete. The wording does not directly stop users from checking the facts, but it makes some questions feel more natural than others.

The timing of the judgment can create further problems. Many hot search topics appear when an event is still unclear. Early reports may come from one party, a short video, or an incomplete statement. If the topic name gives these materials a strong emotional meaning, the public may reach a conclusion before more reliable information is available. Later corrections then enter a discussion that already has a clear emotional position.

A correction usually receives less attention than the original topic. It may use careful and neutral wording, while the earlier name was short and forceful. Users who remember the first name may not notice the update. Others may see it but continue to rely on the first impression because it has already become familiar.

4.2 Loss of Context

A hot search topic name cannot contain the full context of an event. The problem becomes more serious when emotional details take up most of the limited space. Causes, conditions, sources, and changes may be removed, while a striking action or statement remains. Users then judge the event through a small part of the available information.

Context includes what happened before the selected moment. A short video may show an argument but not the events that led to it. A quotation may record an angry sentence but leave out the earlier question or later explanation. A photograph may show visible suffering without explaining its cause. When the topic name is built around this single moment, the event may appear simpler than it is.

Time is another important part of context. Separate actions may happen days or months apart, but a short topic name can make them appear connected. An old statement may return to the hot search list after a new event. Users who do not notice the date may treat it as a current response. This can create a false sense of direct conflict or immediate cause.

The source of information may also disappear. A personal claim, an anonymous post, a media report, and a confirmed notice do not have the same level of reliability. Yet they may look similar when reduced to a short topic name. If the name does not show that the information is only an allegation, users may treat it as an established fact.

Emotional wording can hide uncertainty. Terms such as “may,” “reportedly,” and “according to one account” limit the strength of a statement. They show that the facts are not yet complete. These terms are often removed because they make a name longer and less forceful. The remaining phrase sounds clear, but its certainty may not match the evidence.

Context loss can also separate personal conduct from wider conditions. An event involving work pressure, weak rules, poor public services, or unclear duties may be named through one person’s mistake. Attention then stays on personal character. Users may blame or defend that person without discussing the conditions that shaped the event.

A similar problem occurs when a social issue is reduced to one emotional story. A painful case can help users understand the human effect of a problem. Yet the same case may also narrow the discussion. People may focus on donations, apology, or punishment while giving little attention to the rule, service, or institution connected to the event.

The selected detail may not be false. It may be a real part of the event. The loss appears in the relation between that detail and the whole case. A true

sentence can still mislead when it is separated from the facts needed to understand it. The shorter and more emotional the label is, the easier it becomes for one detail to stand in place of the full event.

4.3 Group Emotion and Rapid Spread

Emotional topic names give users a simple language for taking part in public discussion. A user does not need to explain the full event. They can repeat a word from the topic name, add a short judgment, or share the topic with an emotional reaction. This lowers the effort needed for commenting and reposting.

When many users repeat the same words, individual reactions begin to look like a shared public feeling (Papacharissi). Anger may appear to be the normal response to a topic. Sympathy may become the expected position. Ridicule may spread because users see that similar jokes receive approval. People who have not formed a clear opinion may follow the tone already visible on the page.

Highly liked comments have a strong role in this process. They often appear near the top of the discussion and give users an early sense of how others are reacting. If these comments use the emotional direction of the topic name, they strengthen the same frame. Later users may copy their language or adjust their views to match the dominant tone.

Reposting also changes the reach of emotional wording. A topic name can move beyond the original hot search page through screenshots, short posts, videos, and group chats. In these forms, the original source may disappear. The emotional label remains because it is short and easy to remember. Users who encounter the event through a repost may only see the name and a short comment.

Anger spreads easily when the name identifies a clear target (Fan et al.). Users can direct blame toward a person, company, school, hospital, or other group. Repeated accusations may become stronger than the original wording. A topic that begins with criticism can develop into calls for punishment, personal attacks, or searches for private information.

Sympathy can also grow through repetition. Users may share personal stories, offer help, or express support. These actions can have real value. Yet repeated sympathy may create pressure to accept one account without question. Requests for evidence may be treated as cold or harmful, even when the facts remain unclear.

Fear and alarm can spread when a topic name suggests danger. Users may pass on warnings before checking whether the event is common, current, or correctly described. The topic may create the sense that a risk is close and widespread. Corrections often move more slowly because they lack the same emotional force.

Ridicule uses a different tone but follows a similar pattern. A person's action, appearance, or statement may be reduced to a joke. The joke is repeated because it is easy to copy and brings social approval. The person involved can lose control over how the event is understood. Serious facts may receive little attention once the topic becomes a source of entertainment.

Group emotion can make the discussion look active while reducing factual examination. Large numbers of comments do not always mean that users have read more information. Many comments may repeat the same judgment in different words. The topic receives greater visibility, but the range of views may become narrower.

Users who question the dominant emotion may face pressure. A request for more facts can be read as support for the accused side. A different interpretation may be treated as a lack of sympathy. Some users may remain silent to avoid conflict. The visible discussion then appears more united than the actual views of users.

4.4 Fixed Labels and Personal Pressure

A hot search topic name can become a lasting label for the people involved. The name may connect a person with one action, statement, accusation, or emotional image. Even after the event leaves the ranking list, the phrase may remain in search results, screenshots, reposts, and later discussions.

The label often removes parts of the person's identity that do not fit the event. A person may be known only as the employee who refused, the parent who failed, the customer who became angry, or the public figure who was accused. The event becomes the main way others describe them. This can happen even when the original information was incomplete.

Emotional labels are difficult to change because they are easy to remember. A careful correction may contain several facts and conditions. The original name may contain only a person, an action, and a strong emotional word. Users are more likely to remember the shorter phrase. The correction may change the record, but it does not always change public memory.

Search functions can keep the label visible. When users search for the person's name, the hot search phrase or related posts may appear. New content may repeat the old wording because it is already familiar. The label can return whenever the person becomes involved in another event.

Personal pressure may begin while the topic is still active. Users may leave large numbers of comments on the person's account. They may contact the person's workplace, school, relatives, or friends. Some may search for private information or share details that have no clear link to the public issue. The emotional tone of the topic can make these actions appear justified.

People connected to the event may also be affected. Family members, colleagues, and organisations can receive messages or public criticism even when they had no role in what happened. A topic name that identifies a group rather than an individual may direct blame toward all members of that group.

Reputation damage can continue after the facts change. A person who is cleared of an accusation may still be linked to the earlier label. Users may remember that the person "was involved in" a scandal without remembering the later result. The difference between being accused and being responsible becomes unclear over time.

The pressure is not limited to negative labels. A person presented as a victim or hero may also lose control over their identity. Users may expect the person to continue acting in line with that image. A victim who later speaks in a way that users dislike may lose public sympathy. A person praised for one act may face strong criticism when later conduct does not match the earlier image.

Public attention can affect a person's ability to speak. Any explanation may be read through the existing label. Silence can be treated as guilt. A detailed statement can be called an excuse. An emotional statement can be described as manipulation. The person may have no form of response that is accepted by the dominant discussion.

The effects can reach work, study, family life, and mental well-being. A short topic name may remain online long after users have moved to another subject. For the person named in it, the event may continue through search results, messages, lost opportunities, and repeated public attention.

5. Boundaries and Regulation of Emotional Naming

5.1 Keeping Facts at the Centre

A hot search topic name needs to be short, but it should still show the main facts of the event. Users should be able to identify who or what is involved, what happened, and which part of the event has been confirmed. Emotional words should not take the place of this basic information.

Some topic names give more space to feelings than to facts. A name may describe an event as shocking, heartbreaking, or outrageous without clearly stating what happened. Such wording can attract attention, but users may enter the topic with a strong reaction and little factual knowledge. The emotional effect comes before the event itself.

A clearer name should include the main action. For example, a topic about a public statement should show who made the statement and what issue it concerned. A topic about an accident should show the place, time, or basic result when these details are known. A topic about a dispute should identify the

disputed matter instead of using only words such as "angry response" or "major conflict."

The selected fact should also reflect the real weight of the event. A minor detail should not be placed at the centre only because it sounds dramatic. An emotional reaction may be part of the event, but it may not be the most important part. If a long statement includes one angry sentence, the topic name should not make that sentence stand for the full statement unless it carries clear public meaning.

The topic name should avoid giving more certainty than the source allows. Words such as "may," "alleged," "reported," and "under investigation" are not empty additions. They show the current state of the information. Removing them can change an unconfirmed claim into a factual statement.

This point is especially important when a topic concerns personal conduct, legal responsibility, public safety, or professional duties. A name such as "person causes accident" states a clear causal relation. If the cause has not been confirmed, the wording may create blame before the investigation is complete. A more careful name can state that the person was involved or that the event is being examined.

Important conditions should remain visible when they change the meaning of an action. A person who did not respond within one hour is different from a person who refused to respond for several weeks. An organisation that ended a service under a written rule is different from one that stopped it without notice. If these conditions are removed, the action may appear more serious or less reasonable than it was.

Numbers also need context. A topic name may use a large figure to create shock, but the figure may refer to a total amount, an estimate, or a long period. Users should not be led to believe that the number has a different meaning. When a number is central to the topic, its unit and basic condition should be clear.

Quotations should be used with similar care. A direct quotation can make a topic easy to notice, but a short sentence may not reflect the speaker's full meaning. Words taken from a longer answer should not be presented as a complete position when the surrounding explanation changes their meaning. A quotation that depends on irony, humour, or a specific question may be especially easy to misunderstand.

Keeping facts at the centre does not require every topic name to sound flat. Some events have a clear emotional meaning. Public loss, serious harm, or an act of help may reasonably be described in human terms. The wording should still allow users to know what happened before it tells them how to feel.

5.2 Reducing Premature Judgment

Hot search topic names should not decide responsibility before the facts are clear. Words that assign blame or define a person's moral character can turn an early report into a public judgment. Once such a label appears on the ranking list, it may shape comments and reposts before the person involved has had a chance to explain.

Some verbs contain a direct judgment. "Lied," "cheated," "abandoned," and "ignored" suggest intention. Intention is often harder to confirm than the action itself. A person may provide incorrect information without knowing it is false. Someone may fail to reply because of delay, confusion, or lack of access. A topic name should not describe these acts as deliberate unless there is enough evidence.

The same care is needed when identifying a victim. A person who reports harm may need protection and public attention, but the report may still be under review. Calling one side "the victim" can place the other side in the role of offender. More neutral wording can describe the claim without denying the person's experience.

Moral labels should be limited when they do not add factual value. Words such as "heartless," "selfish," "brave," and "kind" give users a ready-made judgment. They reduce a complex event to a personal quality. The discussion may then focus on whether the person is good or bad rather than on what happened and what responsibility applies.

Questions can also carry judgment. A topic name such as "How can anyone do this?" appears to ask a question, but it already defines the action as

unacceptable. "Who should be blamed?" assumes that blame is the main issue. Questions of this kind may look open while directing users toward a fixed response.

The placement of names and roles can have a similar effect. When a person's job, family role, or social identity is placed next to a disputed act, users may judge the act through expectations linked to that role. A topic that names someone as a teacher, doctor, parent, or employee may create stronger blame than a neutral description. The role should be included only when it helps explain the event.

Topic names should also avoid creating a simple opposition between two sides when the event involves several causes. A dispute may involve unclear rules, poor communication, earlier decisions, and actions by several people. Naming one side as the person who "caused" the problem may hide this complexity.

A cautious name does not mean that all parties must be treated as equally credible. Some events have strong evidence, and public responsibility may be clear. The level of judgment in the name should match the level of confirmation. A verified finding can be stated more directly than a personal post or an early claim.

The wording should leave room for later facts. If a topic name is too final, any update may appear to reverse the whole event. This can create a second wave of emotional reaction. Users may shift from attacking one person to attacking another without examining why the early information was incomplete.

Reducing premature judgment also protects public discussion. Users can still express views, but their views are less likely to begin from a label that has already decided the issue. A topic name should open the event for reading rather than close it through blame, praise, or moral certainty.

5.3 Protecting Context and Source Information

The topic page should make the source of the information easy to identify. Users need to know whether the topic comes from an official notice, a media report, a personal statement, a short video, or an anonymous post. These sources do not carry the same weight. When they are presented in the same form, users may treat an unverified claim as confirmed information.

The original source should appear near the top of the page. Users should not need to search through many reposts to find it. The publication time, account name, and type of source should be clear. If the source has edited or removed the original post, that change should also be shown when it affects the topic.

Personal statements need a clear label. A person describing their own experience provides important information, but the account may contain only one side of the event. The topic name and page should not present the statement as a complete finding. Phrases such as "according to the person involved" can keep the source visible without dismissing the claim.

Media reports should also be separated from direct evidence. A report may be based on interviews, documents, or other sources. Users should be able to see whether the report checked the information or only repeated a popular post. The name of a media organisation does not remove the need to show how the claim was supported.

Images and videos need context because they can create strong emotions very quickly. A short clip may not show what happened before or after the recorded moment. A photograph may come from another time or place. A screenshot may leave out earlier messages. The topic page should show the original length, date, and source when these details are available.

A striking sentence should not be removed from the setting in which it was spoken. The meaning of a statement may depend on the question, the speaker's tone, or the lines that followed it. A short quotation can sound harsh, careless, or surprising when it is separated from the full answer. The page should provide access to the complete statement rather than repeat only the selected sentence.

Time order should be clear when an event changes. Users need to know which information came first, which account responded later, and when new

evidence appeared. Without a timeline, an old statement may look like a reply to a new event. Two unrelated actions may appear to be part of the same conflict.

Updates should be linked to the original topic. A new notice should not appear as a separate topic without a clear connection to the earlier name. Users who saw the first topic may not know that the facts have changed. A visible update marker can help them recognise that the earlier information is incomplete.

The topic page should distinguish confirmed facts, disputed claims, and public reactions. These forms of content often appear together. A comment with many likes may be placed near a factual report. A personal guess may circulate beside an official statement. Clear labels can reduce the chance that popularity is mistaken for proof.

Source protection also involves avoiding false balance. When one claim has strong evidence and another has none, the page should not make them appear equal only because both sides have spoken. Keeping context does not mean removing judgment about evidence. It means showing users why one piece of information has more support than another.

Privacy is part of context protection. Personal information should not be added only to make the event more emotional. Details about family, health, address, workplace, or private communication may not be needed to understand the issue. Once these details enter the topic page, they can be copied and spread beyond their original setting.

5.4 Editorial Review and Timely Correction

Not every hot search topic requires the same level of review. Topics involving entertainment updates or public performances usually carry lower risks than topics involving accidents, crimes, legal disputes, health claims, personal accusations, or public safety. High-risk topics need closer checking before the name is placed on the ranking list.

Editors should examine both the facts and the emotional force of the wording (Gillespie). A name may be factually connected to the event but still create a misleading impression. The review should ask whether the chosen verb suggests intention, whether the adjective adds unsupported judgment, and whether a quotation reflects the full statement.

The source should be checked before the topic is named. A popular post is not enough on its own. Editors need to see where the information began, whether the account is direct or second-hand, and whether other reliable sources support it. Screenshots without clear origin should not be treated as firm evidence.

The timing of publication also matters. A topic may gain attention quickly, but early information is often incomplete. Placing a strong name on the ranking list before basic facts are checked can increase later harm. In some cases, a short delay for verification is more responsible than immediate publication.

Review standards should pay special attention to names of private individuals. Public attention can affect their work, family, and reputation. A person's full name, workplace, school, or family role should not be included unless it is needed for the public issue. The fact that personal information is already circulating does not mean that the hot search name should repeat it.

Editors should also check whether a topic name creates conflict through arrangement. Two statements made at different times may be placed together as if they are direct replies. A neutral explanation may be described as a "counterattack." A difference in wording may be turned into a public dispute. The review should compare the name with the original materials rather than judge it only as a short phrase.

When important facts change, the topic name should be corrected. A correction may involve replacing a misleading verb, adding a source label, removing an unsupported claim, or changing the whole name. The earlier wording should not remain active only because it has already attracted traffic.

The correction should be easy to see. A small note hidden at the bottom of the page is not enough when the earlier name appeared on the main ranking list. Users who saw the original topic need a reasonable chance to see the update. The corrected name,

update time, and reason for the change can be shown clearly.

The original wording should not simply disappear without explanation. A visible record can show that the topic was changed and which fact required the correction. This helps users understand why the earlier information was unreliable. It also allows later review of how naming decisions were made.

Correction speed matters, but accuracy still comes before speed. Replacing one uncertain name with another can create more confusion. Editors should check the new information before changing the topic. When the facts remain unclear, the name can be revised to show that uncertainty instead of making another final claim.

Repeated errors should lead to changes in editorial practice. If the same emotional words often produce misleading topics, they should receive closer review. If certain sources repeatedly provide incomplete claims, editors should treat them with more care. Review rules need to respond to actual problems rather than remain as general statements.

Users should also have a clear way to report misleading topic names. Reports about false wording, missing context, privacy harm, or outdated information should be reviewed by staff rather than handled only through automatic systems. The response should focus on the name and source, not only on whether the topic has broken a general platform rule.

6. Conclusion

The naming of Weibo hot search topics is not a neutral process. A short topic name selects certain facts and places them in a visible position. When the selected words contain conflict, sympathy, blame, fear, or moral judgment, they also set an emotional direction for the event. Many users form an early view from this short phrase before they read the source or learn the full background.

Emotional expression is not always a problem. Public events often involve pain, loss, anger, care, or unfair treatment. A completely emotionless name may fail to show the human meaning of an event. Clear emotional wording can help users notice serious harm and understand why an issue matters. Its use becomes questionable when the emotional force is stronger than the facts that support it.

The main risk appears when emotion replaces basic information. A dramatic verb may suggest intention that has not been confirmed. A moral label may decide who is right before responsibility is clear. A story of suffering may turn a complex issue into a simple victim narrative. A conflict-based name may place two sides in direct opposition even when their statements were made in different settings. These choices can shape public judgment without giving users enough information to examine the event.

A reasonable hot search topic name should keep the main action, source, time, and level of certainty visible. Claims should not be written as confirmed facts. Personal roles should not be added only to increase blame or sympathy. Emotional words should match the available evidence. When later information changes the meaning of the event, the topic name should also be corrected in a clear and visible way.

The boundary of emotional framing depends on what the wording asks users to do. A name can draw attention to the human meaning of an event while leaving room for reading and judgment. It crosses that boundary when it pushes users toward anger, sympathy, blame, or support before they know enough about what happened.

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Incomplete Information and Public Opinion Reversal in Online Public Events

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Abstract: Online public events often develop through incomplete and unevenly distributed information. Short videos, screenshots, personal statements, and reposted fragments can quickly shape public judgment before the full facts are known. Once a clear moral narrative forms, comments, repeated sharing, and media coverage may make the first interpretation appear more certain than the available evidence allows. Later recordings, official findings, or responses from other parties can overturn this interpretation and produce a rapid reversal of public opinion. This paper examines how incomplete information contributes to early judgment, how new evidence changes the public narrative, and why reversal often creates a new target of blame rather than a more careful understanding of the event. It also considers the role of platforms and news media in widening the visibility gap between early claims and later clarification. The paper argues that repeated reversals can cause reputational harm, intensify online hostility, and weaken trust in public communication. More responsible communication requires clear distinctions between confirmed facts, personal claims, disputed information, and unresolved questions.

Keywords: incomplete information; public opinion reversal; online public events; early judgment; platform communication; news correction

1. Introduction

Online public events often attract wide attention before the facts are complete. A short video, screenshot, personal statement, or brief news report may become the first account of an event. Users then begin to judge responsibility and take sides before all parties have responded.

Information at this stage is usually uneven. One person may speak first, while another remains silent. A video may show only part of a conflict, and a screenshot may leave out earlier or later messages. Even so, emotional language, visible harm, and familiar social issues can make the first account appear clear and convincing. Limited material may therefore produce a strong judgment before the wider event is known.

Public opinion may change when fuller evidence appears. Complete recordings, verified documents,

investigation results, or later responses can weaken the original account. The person first supported may become the target of criticism, while the person initially blamed may receive sympathy. This shift is commonly described as public opinion reversal.

Existing studies have examined online misinformation, emotional communication, corrective information, and the role of platform algorithms in shaping public attention. Some research treats opinion reversal mainly as the correction of false information, while other work stresses group emotion, selective exposure, and repeated circulation. These approaches explain important parts of the process, but they often separate the formation of early judgment from the later reversal. Less attention has been paid to how incomplete but partly genuine information produces a convincing first narrative and how the replacement of that narrative creates new forms of harm.

Reversal does not always lead to a more careful understanding. The second judgment may be made as quickly as the first, and anger may simply move to another target. A new report can correct part of the earlier account while still leaving other questions unresolved. Yet online discussion often treats the latest version as the final truth.

This pattern can damage reputations, encourage online abuse, and weaken trust in personal testimony, news reporting, and official information. Repeated reversals may also make users more suspicious without making them more patient or careful.

This paper examines how incomplete information shapes early judgment, why later evidence leads to public opinion reversal, and how platforms and media influence the process. It also considers the social costs of repeated reversal and the need for more cautious communication when facts remain uncertain.

2. Incomplete Information in the Early Stage of Online Events

Online public events rarely enter discussion as complete stories (X. Zhang et al.). The first materials are often short videos, screenshots, personal posts, anonymous claims, or brief statements from one party. These materials may reveal a real problem, but they usually show only one part of the event.

A short video may record an argument or emotional reaction without showing what happened before it. Edited footage may remove earlier exchanges or later explanations. The recording itself may be genuine, while the meaning attached to it remains uncertain.

Screenshots can also appear more complete than they are. A message or payment record may contain names and dates, but earlier conversations and later replies may be missing. Users can only see the selected material, so the absent context is easy to ignore.

Personal statements give the event a clear human voice and may draw attention to genuine harm. Yet they still represent one person's position. Memory, emotion, and personal interest may affect what is included. The other party may have a different account or may not yet be able to respond.

Anonymous posts create further difficulty. Anonymity may protect a whistle-blower, but it also makes it harder to judge the source's identity, access to information, and reason for publishing the claim. Edited posts may also combine videos, screenshots, and comments from different times as though they belong to one continuous event.

The timeline is often unclear during the early stage. Users may see a reaction without knowing its cause or an official action without knowing the earlier procedure. One party may post immediately, while an institution waits for internal checks or legal advice. This delay is sometimes treated as guilt or avoidance, although silence alone proves very little.

Several media accounts may repeat the same video or statement without obtaining new evidence. The event then appears to have been confirmed by many sources, even though all reports depend on one original post. Repetition increases visibility, but it does not add factual support.

Some information may also remain unavailable because of privacy, ongoing investigations, medical confidentiality, or legal limits. These restrictions are

rarely clear to online audiences. The absence of information may therefore be mistaken for deliberate concealment.

Incomplete information does not mean that every early claim is false. Online attention can expose genuine wrongdoing. The problem lies in treating limited material as a complete account. Early evidence may justify concern, but it rarely supports a final judgment about the whole event.

3. The Formation of Early Public Judgment

When information is incomplete, users often rely on familiar experience to understand what has happened. A workplace dispute may remind them of earlier stories about unfair employers. A consumer complaint may be read through distrust of large companies. These experiences help people make sense of limited information, but they can also lead them to assume facts that have not yet been confirmed.

Online public events are often placed within familiar social narratives. One party is seen as weak, while another is seen as powerful. An individual confronts an institution, an employee challenges an employer, or a customer accuses a business. These patterns reflect real social tensions, so they are easy to accept. Once an event fits such a pattern, missing information may receive less attention.

Stereotypes can make the first explanation even more convincing. A person's gender, occupation, age, or social position may affect how their actions are judged. Some identities attract immediate sympathy, while others are treated with suspicion. Public judgment may then be based partly on expectations about a group rather than evidence about the event itself.

The 2018 Chongqing Wanzhou bus crash offers a clear example. Early online reports claimed that a female driver had entered the wrong lane and caused the accident. The claim quickly drew criticism and fitted a familiar stereotype about female drivers. Later police findings showed that her car had been travelling normally. The bus had crossed the centre line after a passenger and the driver became involved in a dispute and physical conflict. The first explanation appeared credible because it gave the accident a simple cause and a visible person to blame.

Emotional accounts also encourage early judgment (Brady et al. 7313–14). A story about humiliation, loss, injury, or unfair treatment gives users a clear person with whom they can identify. Questioning the account may appear insensitive, especially when the speaker shows visible distress. Emotion can show that a person has suffered, but it does not confirm every detail of the story.

Images and recordings strengthen this effect. Crying, shouting, silence, or anger may be treated as proof of innocence or guilt. Yet these signs reveal only a person's condition at one moment. They do not explain the full event or the intention behind an action. Viewers often move from what they can see to conclusions that the image itself cannot support.

Comments and reposts help stabilise the first interpretation. Highly visible comments often provide a simple explanation of who is responsible and what the event represents. Later users may encounter these judgments before checking the original material. Repeated labels then begin to look like confirmed facts.

The same video or screenshot may also appear on many accounts. This creates the impression that several sources have confirmed the story, although all versions may come from one post. Repetition increases confidence without adding new evidence.

Media reports can give the early account further authority. Even when a report states that a claim has not been verified, the headline and central image may leave a stronger impression than the warning. Users remember the accusation but overlook its uncertain status.

Early public judgment is therefore formed through more than a simple lack of facts. Personal experience, familiar narratives, stereotypes, emotional identification, comments, and repeated circulation all help turn a partial account into an accepted explanation. Once users have publicly supported that explanation, later information must challenge both the original claim and the moral position already built around it.

4. The Process of Public Opinion Reversal

Public opinion begins to change when new material no longer fits the first account. A longer recording may reveal what happened before a widely shared clip. Full chat records may place selected screenshots in a different setting. Official findings, verified documents, or a response from another party may also show that early claims were incomplete.

These additions can change more than a few factual details. They may alter the order of events, the purpose of a payment, or the reason for a person's behaviour. An action that first appeared dishonest may become understandable after earlier communication is disclosed. A person whose silence was treated as guilt may later show that they were waiting for an investigation, checking records, or preparing evidence.

The 2024 "Fat Cat" incident illustrates this process. Early discussion drew heavily on selected chat records, transfer screenshots, and statements from family members. These materials supported the claim that the deceased man had been emotionally and financially deceived, and his former partner became the target of intense criticism. A later police investigation found that the two had maintained a genuine relationship, had met each other's relatives and friends, and had exchanged money during their relationship. The police found no evidence that the woman had used a false romantic relationship to commit fraud.

The later findings changed the main public narrative. Attention moved away from the original allegation and toward the way private messages and payment records had been selected and released. The woman who had first been blamed received more support, while criticism turned toward family members, media accounts, and commentators who had promoted the earlier version.

This movement shows that reversal often takes the form of narrative replacement. The first story contains a clear victim and a clear wrongdoer. When new evidence appears, these positions may be exchanged rather than reconsidered with greater care. Users who feel that their sympathy was misled may react more strongly during the second stage. Their anger is no longer directed only at the event itself, but also at those believed to have shaped or exploited the first account.

The language used during reversal can make this change more absolute. Expressions such as "the truth has finally emerged" or "the whole story has been overturned" suggest that all uncertainty has disappeared. Such wording may attract attention, but it often hides the limited scope of the new evidence. A later finding may correct one accusation without resolving every dispute between the people involved.

Official conclusions also have clear boundaries. A police finding that conduct does not constitute fraud answers a legal question. It does not automatically determine whether every action in a private relationship was fair, reasonable, or emotionally responsible. In the same way, a complete recording may correct the timeline without settling all disagreements about motive or responsibility.

Online discussion often overlooks these limits. Once the first account is shown to be incomplete, users may treat every part of it as false and every criticism of the other party as unfair. The wish to correct the earlier mistake can then produce another judgment that goes beyond the available evidence.

Public opinion reversal can repair part of an unfair judgment, but it can also repeat the reasoning that caused the first mistake. Blame moves quickly to a new target, and uncertainty is again replaced by moral certainty. The direction of opinion changes, while the habit of reaching a final conclusion from developing information remains.

5. Platform and Media Influence on Opinion Change

Platforms and media accounts shape both the first judgment and the later reversal. Online events do not reach users in a fixed order. Recommendation systems select content according to attention, interaction, and viewing habits (Hermida and Mellado 868–70). Some users may see the original accusation, others may first encounter a response,

and still others may receive only a later summary. They are discussing the same event, but they may be relying on different stages of information.

Dramatic early claims usually have an advantage (Vosoughi et al. 1146–47). A short video showing conflict, injury, anger, or humiliation is easier to circulate than a detailed explanation. It gives users a clear emotional entry point and often produces more comments and reposts. Later information may be more reliable, but it is usually longer, less direct, and less visually striking.

This difference creates an uneven information environment. The first version may reach a large audience within hours, while a correction appears after public attention has started to decline. Even when the correction is widely published, it may not reach the same users. Many people therefore continue to judge the event on the basis of an earlier account.

The order of exposure also affects interpretation. A user who sees the accusation first may treat later information as a defence or excuse. A user who encounters only the reversal may assume that the first supporters had ignored obvious evidence. Neither group necessarily sees how the information changed over time. Public disagreement then reflects not only different values, but also different sets of facts (Wang et al.).

Recommendation systems can prolong this division. Platforms usually recommend content according to current interest rather than the full timeline of an event. A widely viewed early clip may continue to circulate after a correction has been issued. An old post may return to the feed because users begin discussing the topic again. Unless the original material carries a clear update, new viewers may not know that its claims have already been challenged.

Fast news production can deepen the problem. Media accounts often face pressure to respond while an event is still developing. Early reports may rely on online posts, witness recordings, or statements from one party. Cautious wording may be included, but the headline and central image can still make the account appear more settled than it is. Phrases such as “according to an online post” are easily overlooked when the title already suggests a clear conclusion.

The 2023 “mouse head or duck neck” incident shows how an early institutional response can also affect opinion change. After a video appeared to show a foreign object in food served by a college canteen, the school and local authorities initially described it as a duck neck. A later joint investigation concluded that it was the head of a rodent. The reversal shifted public attention from food safety alone to the credibility of the earlier response.

In this case, the problem was not only incomplete information. A firm conclusion was issued before the evidence had been fully examined. When the later finding contradicted the first statement, the correction did not simply add new facts. It weakened trust in the institution that had spoken earlier. Users began to question why the initial response had been so certain and whether similar statements in other events could be trusted.

Media coverage often follows the same rhythm. The first stage focuses on the accusation, the second on the response, and the third on the reversal itself. Each stage may be presented as a separate news event. Headlines highlight the latest change because reversal itself attracts attention. Users who do not see all three stages receive different versions of the same incident.

Repetition also increases the authority of one account. Many channels may repost the same footage or statement, giving the impression of independent confirmation. In fact, the reports may all rely on one source. During the reversal, the same process may happen again. A new official finding is repeated across many accounts and quickly becomes the next dominant explanation.

Visible interaction data can strengthen this effect. Large numbers of likes, comments, and reposts make an interpretation appear widely accepted. Users may mistake popularity for evidence. Once one version becomes dominant, media accounts have an incentive to continue reporting from that angle because it already attracts attention.

Corrections are often weaker in form as well as reach. They may appear as a short notice, a revised caption, or a separate follow-up report. The original post may remain more visible because it has already collected large amounts of interaction. Users who encounter the old version later may never notice that the account has changed.

Platforms and media do not create every reversal, but they influence its speed, reach, and intensity. Their distribution systems can enlarge the gap between early claims and later clarification. When users receive different parts of the event and see them in different orders, public opinion changes without a shared factual basis.

6. The Social Costs of Repeated Reversal

Repeated public opinion reversal can cause lasting harm even when later information corrects the first account. People involved may face criticism, exposure of personal information, workplace pressure, or threats before the facts are settled. Once names, photographs, private messages, and contact details have circulated, later clarification cannot fully remove them.

Reputational damage is often the most immediate cost. A person may be labelled dishonest, cruel, irresponsible, or manipulative on the basis of an early post. These labels can spread quickly because they give users a simple way to describe the event. Employers, relatives, friends, and colleagues may also be drawn into the discussion. The original dispute then expands into a broader judgment of the person's character and social relationships.

Digital records make this damage difficult to repair. Even when the first post is deleted, screenshots, reposted videos, archived pages, and copied comments may remain online. Search results may continue to connect the person's name with the original accusation. Someone who encounters these materials later may never see the correction. The event can therefore affect employment, education, business relations, and private life long after public attention has moved elsewhere.

Clarification also does not guarantee that the public will accept the revised account (Lewandowsky et al. 112–15). Some users may distrust the new evidence, especially when it comes from an institution they already view with suspicion. Others may continue to believe that the earlier accusation was "partly true," even when its central claim has been rejected. Reputational harm may remain because the first label is easier to remember than the later explanation.

Reversal can also create a second round of harm. When users believe that their sympathy has been misused, anger may move toward the person who first made the claim, family members, media accounts, or commentators. The earlier target receives less criticism, but online punishment does not end. It simply moves to someone else.

The "Fat Cat" incident shows this pattern. Before the police findings were released, the woman involved had already faced large-scale abuse and exposure of personal information. After the dominant narrative changed, criticism shifted toward relatives and accounts that had promoted the first version. The reversal corrected part of the public understanding, but it did not restore a calm discussion or remove the earlier harm. It created a new group of targets.

This movement of blame can affect people who played only a limited role. A relative may be attacked for sharing incomplete information. A journalist may be criticised for reporting an early claim with insufficient caution. Ordinary users may have old comments collected and reposted as evidence of poor judgment. The search for responsibility expands beyond the original event and turns earlier participation into a new source of conflict.

Repeated reversal also influences people who are not directly involved. Users may become less willing to believe personal accounts of workplace abuse, emotional harm, consumer fraud, or misuse of authority. A genuine victim may be told that the story is probably another attempt to gain sympathy. Public caution is necessary, but it can gradually become general suspicion.

This has a clear chilling effect. People with real complaints may hesitate to speak because they fear being accused of manipulating public opinion. They

may also worry that any missing detail will later be used to discredit the whole account. Those with limited evidence, weak institutional support, or little media experience are especially likely to remain silent.

At the same time, repeated reversals can encourage another harmful response: users may refuse to take any early claim seriously. They may treat uncertainty as a reason for complete indifference. This is also problematic. Some events require public attention before all documents and official findings are available. The challenge is to remain open to possible harm without treating an early account as a final verdict.

Trust in professional media may also weaken. When news accounts repeat uncertain claims and later change their reporting, users may see them as careless, rushed, or driven by traffic. A correction may be interpreted not as responsible revision, but as proof that the earlier report was unreliable. If this pattern occurs repeatedly, even careful reports may struggle to gain public confidence (Ye and Sun 536–39).

Official communication faces a similar problem. When an early statement is later contradicted, users may treat future responses as defensive or incomplete. The "mouse head or duck neck" incident is a clear example. The later correction did not only change the conclusion about the object. It also damaged confidence in the institution that had issued the earlier explanation.

There is also a cost to public discussion itself. Attention shifts from understanding the event to identifying who should be blamed for the latest version. Users search through old comments, expose earlier positions, and attack those who supported the first account. The discussion becomes a record of personal mistakes rather than a process of revising shared knowledge.

This environment makes people less willing to change their views openly. A user who admits that new evidence has changed their judgment may be mocked for having believed the first version. Others may avoid correction and defend their earlier position more strongly. Public reasoning becomes harder because changing one's mind is treated as weakness rather than a normal response to new facts.

Repeated reversal also creates emotional fatigue. Users may feel that every widely discussed event will eventually change direction. They may become cynical, detached, or hostile toward all parties. This weakens the possibility of careful attention when a serious case genuinely requires public concern.

Changing one's judgment after new evidence appears should be a normal part of public reasoning. Yet repeated reversal often turns revision into another conflict. The result is not greater care, but wider reputational harm, stronger suspicion, weaker trust, and a growing fear that any early position may later become a reason for public attack.

7. Public Communication Under Conditions of Uncertainty

Online public events cannot always wait until every fact has been confirmed. Early reports may be necessary when an incident concerns public safety, possible misconduct, or urgent social harm. The aim should not be to prevent discussion, but to make the limits of available information clear.

Early reports need to separate confirmed facts from personal claims. A video can be described as showing a particular action without treating it as proof of the whole event. A personal statement can be reported as one party's account rather than a final conclusion. When the source, date, or full sequence is uncertain, this should appear clearly in the headline, subtitles, and main text.

Silence should also be handled with care. A person or institution may need time to check records, contact those involved, or follow legal procedures. The absence of an immediate reply should not be described as an admission of guilt. Reports can state that no response has yet been received without assigning a motive to the delay.

Later information should remain connected to the original story. A correction or update needs to identify which earlier claim has changed and why. Platforms and media accounts can add visible notices to earlier posts, link new findings to

previous reports, and keep a simple timeline of major developments. Publishing a separate update is often insufficient because many users may never see it (Y. Zhang et al.).

Recommendation systems also need to reduce uneven exposure. When a widely viewed post is corrected, users who watched, shared, or commented on it should have a greater chance of seeing the new information. Old clips should carry dates, source labels, and update notices when they circulate again. These measures cannot guarantee that every user receives the full account, but they can narrow the gap between the first claim and later clarification.

Media accounts should resist the pressure to give unfinished events a complete moral structure. Headlines that immediately identify a victim, a liar, or a guilty party may attract attention, but they also make later revision harder. More restrained wording does not weaken public concern. It leaves room for facts that have not yet appeared.

Users also have a role in this process. Concern can be expressed without exposing private information, organising harassment, or demanding punishment before verification. Sharing a claim is itself a form of participation in its spread. A brief pause to check the source, date, and current status of the event can reduce harm.

Uncertainty is not a failure of communication. In many developing events, it is an honest description of what is known at that moment. Public communication becomes more reliable when it allows concern, investigation, and revision to exist together, instead of forcing every unfinished event into an immediate and final judgment.

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Generative AI in Digital Newsrooms: A Systematic Review of Disclosure, Human Editorial Oversight, News Credibility, Audience Trust, and Journalistic Autonomy with Implications for Ghanaian Journalism

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Abstract: Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is increasingly embedded in news production, yet its implications for credibility, public trust, and professional authority remain unsettled, particularly in under-researched African media systems. This systematic review synthesizes international empirical research on GenAI and automated journalism, with specific attention to AI disclosure, human editorial oversight, audience evaluations, and journalistic autonomy, and interprets the evidence for Ghanaian digital journalism. Searches conducted through scholarly discovery services, publisher indexes, citation chaining, and African research repositories covered January 2020 to 21 July 2026. Following PRISMA 2020 and PRISMA-S principles, 60 records were identified, 43 full-text reports were assessed, and 40 studies were included in a structured narrative synthesis. Only three included studies directly involved Ghana; Ghanaian implications are therefore presented as contextual interpretations of a predominantly international evidence base rather than as Ghana-specific causal conclusions. Across the reviewed literature, journalists most often used GenAI for transcription, summarization, research support, ideation, translation, copyediting, headline development, and preliminary drafting. Audience studies did not support a universal "AI credibility penalty." Responses varied with task type, topic sensitivity, outlet reputation, AI literacy, disclosure wording, and the visibility of human responsibility. Labels implying full automation were generally more problematic than process-based descriptions of AI assistance accompanied by explicit human verification. African studies further highlighted informal adoption, limited institutional policy, local-language constraints, training gaps, infrastructure limitations, and data-governance concerns. The review concludes that GenAI is reconfiguring rather than simply eliminating

journalistic autonomy. An evidence-informed Human-Centered Disclosure and Editorial Accountability Framework is proposed for adaptation and empirical evaluation in Ghanaian digital newsrooms.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence; digital newsrooms; AI disclosure; human editorial oversight; news credibility; audience trust; journalistic autonomy; Ghanaian journalism

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence has moved rapidly from experimental technology to an everyday component of digital news production. Large language models and related generative systems can summarize documents, transcribe interviews, generate or revise copy, translate content, propose headlines, personalize distribution, produce synthetic audio and images, and support verification. These capabilities extend the earlier trajectory of automated journalism, in which structured data were transformed into routine news, but they also create a qualitatively different editorial environment because GenAI can produce open-ended and persuasive language without a stable connection to verified evidence (Cools and Diakopoulos; Diakopoulos; Shi and Sun).

The growing use of GenAI creates a dual challenge for journalism. The first concerns informational quality: whether AI-assisted or AI-generated news is accurate, contextually adequate, unbiased, and credible. The second concerns institutional legitimacy: whether audiences regard an organization as transparent, responsible, and worthy of trust when machines participate in newswork. These challenges are related but not identical. A reader may judge an article to be clear and plausible while simultaneously distrusting the process by which it was produced or questioning who is responsible for errors. Consequently, research must distinguish message credibility from source or outlet credibility and from the broader willingness to rely on journalism under conditions of uncertainty (Appelman and Sundar; Kohring and Matthes).

Disclosure has therefore become a central issue. Labels such as "AI-generated," "AI-assisted," or "created with the support of artificial intelligence" are intended to provide transparency, but they also function as interpretive cues. They may activate algorithm aversion, encourage readers to infer that an article was produced without human judgment, or, conversely, signal organizational honesty and accountability. Experimental research increasingly shows that the wording, placement, and explanatory detail of disclosure matter. A short label can produce suspicion when it fails to specify what the technology did, whereas a process-based statement that identifies human verification can strengthen perceived transparency (Altay and Gilardi; Chung et al.; Merle et al.; Toff and Simon).

Human editorial oversight is therefore not merely a technical safeguard. It is a public signal that editorial responsibility has not been delegated to an opaque system. Oversight includes source verification, contextual interpretation, bias review, legal and ethical judgment, correction, and final approval. In a newsroom, the distribution of these responsibilities also bears directly on journalistic autonomy. GenAI may expand autonomy by reducing repetitive work and allowing reporters to devote more time to investigation and interpretation. It may also narrow autonomy when proprietary systems, managerial efficiency targets, or platform infrastructures determine how stories are selected, framed, or produced. The crucial question is not whether AI replaces journalists in a simple binary sense, but how professional jurisdiction is redistributed across reporters, editors, managers, vendors, and automated systems (Carlson; Park and Akintade; Wu).

These questions are especially important for Ghanaian journalism. Ghanaian digital newsrooms operate within a media environment characterized by rapid mobile and social-media use, resource constraints, multilingual audiences, intense competition for attention, and continuing concern about misinformation. Empirical work involving Ghana and South Africa indicates that AI tools are often adopted informally by individual journalists for transcription, research, ideation, grammar correction, and fact-checking, while formal newsroom policies and training remain limited (Adjin-Tettey et al.). A four-country African study similarly found diverse professional positions—optimistic, pessimistic, and pragmatic—alongside persistent ethical concerns about accuracy, bias, employment, and accountability (Umejei et al.). These studies provide important contextual anchors, but they do not constitute a sufficiently large Ghana-specific evidence base on which to infer national audience effects.

Existing reviews have mapped automated journalism, newsroom transformation, and the credibility effects of AI provenance and disclosure. However, these strands are commonly treated separately. Reviews centered on audience credibility do not fully integrate African newsroom adoption and professional autonomy, while broader reviews of AI in journalism often discuss ethics without systematically connecting disclosure design and human oversight to audience trust. A synthesis that integrates the international evidence while explicitly examining its relevance, limits, and governance implications for Ghanaian journalism is therefore needed. This distinction is important because the available literature is geographically uneven and cannot be treated as if it were predominantly Ghana-based.

This review addresses that need by synthesizing empirical studies published between 2020 and July 2026 and interpreting the findings for Ghanaian digital journalism. It is therefore an international systematic review with a Ghanaian interpretive and governance focus, not a systematic review restricted to research conducted in Ghana. Its contribution is threefold. First, it integrates audience-centered and newsroom-centered evidence. Second, it foregrounds African and Global South research within a literature dominated by Europe, North America, and East Asia while making the limits of cross-context transfer explicit. Third, it develops a practical Human-Centered Disclosure and Editorial Accountability Framework that translates the synthesized evidence into governance principles for contextual adaptation and empirical testing in Ghanaian newsrooms.

1.1 Review Questions

1) RQ1: How is generative AI being used in digital newsrooms internationally and in African media systems relevant to Ghana?
2) RQ2: How do AI provenance and disclosure cues influence perceived news credibility and audience trust?
3) RQ3: Under what conditions does visible human editorial oversight improve audience evaluations of AI-assisted news?
4) RQ4: How does GenAI adoption affect journalistic autonomy, professional roles, and accountability?
5) RQ5: What evidence-informed governance principles can be adapted to support responsible GenAI use in Ghanaian digital newsrooms?

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Source Credibility and Trust in News

Source credibility theory explains audience evaluation through perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness, and believability. In digital journalism, these judgments may target the article, the named author, the news organization, or the production process. Message credibility can remain relatively stable even when confidence in the producing actor declines, which makes it essential to specify the target of evaluation. This review treats credibility as a judgment about the quality and believability of content or source, while trust refers to a broader willingness to rely on a journalist or

institution under uncertainty (Appelman and Sundar; Kohring and Matthes; Mayer et al.).

For AI-assisted news, audiences may apply the machine heuristic—the belief that computational systems are objective, consistent, or less emotionally biased—or algorithm aversion, in which visible machine involvement reduces confidence, especially after errors or in tasks requiring moral and contextual judgment (Dietvorst et al.; Sundar and Kim). These mechanisms predict mixed rather than uniform effects because routine data-driven stories may fit audience expectations of automation, whereas politics, conflict, health, and investigative reporting demand stronger human accountability.

2.2 Transparency, Disclosure, and Accountability

Transparency is often treated as an ethical good, but disclosure can have competing effects. It can increase procedural legitimacy by demonstrating honesty, while simultaneously drawing attention to uncertainty about AI competence or editorial control. The effect therefore depends on what a disclosure allows the audience to infer. "AI-generated" may imply full automation; "AI-assisted and reviewed by an editor" communicates collaboration and responsibility. The evidence is best understood as a cue–inference process: audiences receive a cue, infer how the article was produced, and evaluate a target such as the message, journalist, or outlet (Licenji and Hoxha).

This review extends that logic by treating human oversight as an accountability signal. Oversight is credible when it identifies a real editorial function rather than serving as a ceremonial phrase. Effective oversight should specify that a journalist or editor checked sources, factual claims, context, fairness, and legal or ethical risks and retained final approval. Disclosure and oversight are therefore analytically distinct: disclosure communicates information, while oversight describes the control structure behind publication.

2.3 Professional Jurisdiction and Journalistic Autonomy

Journalistic autonomy refers to the ability of journalists and editors to exercise professional judgment over news selection, sourcing, framing, verification, and publication without inappropriate interference. Automation can alter autonomy by redistributing tasks and expertise. Delegating transcription or copyediting may free time, but delegating source interpretation, framing, or factual synthesis can move epistemic authority from journalists to systems whose training data and decision processes are not fully visible. The sociology of professions is useful because it emphasizes jurisdiction: the socially recognized right to define problems, perform tasks, and claim expertise. Recent newsroom evidence shows three possible responses to AI jurisdictional maintenance, hybrid human–machine labor, and jurisdictional retreat (Park and Akintade). The professional consequence depends on whether journalists retain substantive decision authority and the skills needed to challenge machine output.

3. Methods

3.1 Review Design and Reporting Standards

The study used a systematic review and structured narrative synthesis. Reporting followed the PRISMA 2020 statement and the PRISMA-S extension for search reporting (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al.). Because the included studies used heterogeneous qualitative, survey, experimental, psychophysiological, and mixed designs and reported outcomes in non-comparable forms, quantitative meta-analysis was not appropriate. Synthesis was therefore guided by the Synthesis Without Meta-analysis (SWiM) principles, emphasizing transparent grouping, direction and conditions of effects, and limitations in comparability (Campbell et al.). Before full-text assessment, a written review protocol specified the review questions, eligibility criteria, search concepts, screening sequence, extraction fields, and synthesis domains. The protocol was used internally

to structure the review but was not prospectively registered in an external registry. The unit of inclusion was a distinct empirical study; where multiple reports described overlapping data, the most complete report was retained.

3.2 Information Sources and Search Strategy

Searches covered publications from 1 January 2020 to 21 July 2026. Sources included Google Scholar, Crossref-linked scholarly records, PubMed where relevant, the Directory of Open Access Journals, and targeted publisher searches across Taylor and Francis, Sage, Elsevier, Springer Nature, Frontiers, MDPI, and ACM. African-focused searches were supplemented through university research repositories and African journal platforms. Backward and forward citation searching was conducted from relevant systematic reviews and highly cited empirical studies. The principal search combined four concept blocks: (1) journalism and newsroom terms; (2) generative and automated AI terms; (3) disclosure, transparency, and human-oversight terms; and (4) credibility, trust, autonomy, and accountability outcomes. Search syntax was adapted to each platform. The core search string is presented in Appendix A.

Table 1. Eligibility Criteria

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Publication period	January 2020–21 July 2026	Published before 2020
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles and full conference papers reporting empirical evidence	Editorials, opinion pieces, book reviews, abstracts without sufficient methods/results
Context	Journalism, news production, news distribution, news audiences, or newsroom governance	Advertising, marketing, education, or general AI use without a journalism/news context
Exposure	Generative AI, automated journalism, algorithmic authorship, AI-generated/assisted content, AI labels, or human–AI collaboration	Technical model development without human or organizational outcomes
Outcomes	Credibility, trust, transparency, acceptance, editorial oversight, accountability, professional roles, or autonomy	Studies with no relevant audience, professional, or governance outcome
Language	English-language full text or detailed English publication record	Insufficient information for reliable extraction

3.3 Study Selection

The searches produced 60 potentially relevant records: 49 through scholarly database and publisher searches and 11 through citation searching and African research repositories. After eight duplicates were removed, 52 records were screened by title and abstract. Seven were excluded because they did not meet the journalism, empirical, or outcome criteria. Forty-five reports were sought for retrieval; two could not be retrieved with sufficient detail. Forty-three full-text reports were assessed, and three were excluded: one was nonempirical, one was not focused on journalism or news, and one did not report a relevant credibility, trust, oversight, accountability, or autonomy outcome. Reasons for all full-text exclusions were logged against the predefined decision rules and are reported in Appendix B. The final synthesis comprised 40 studies.

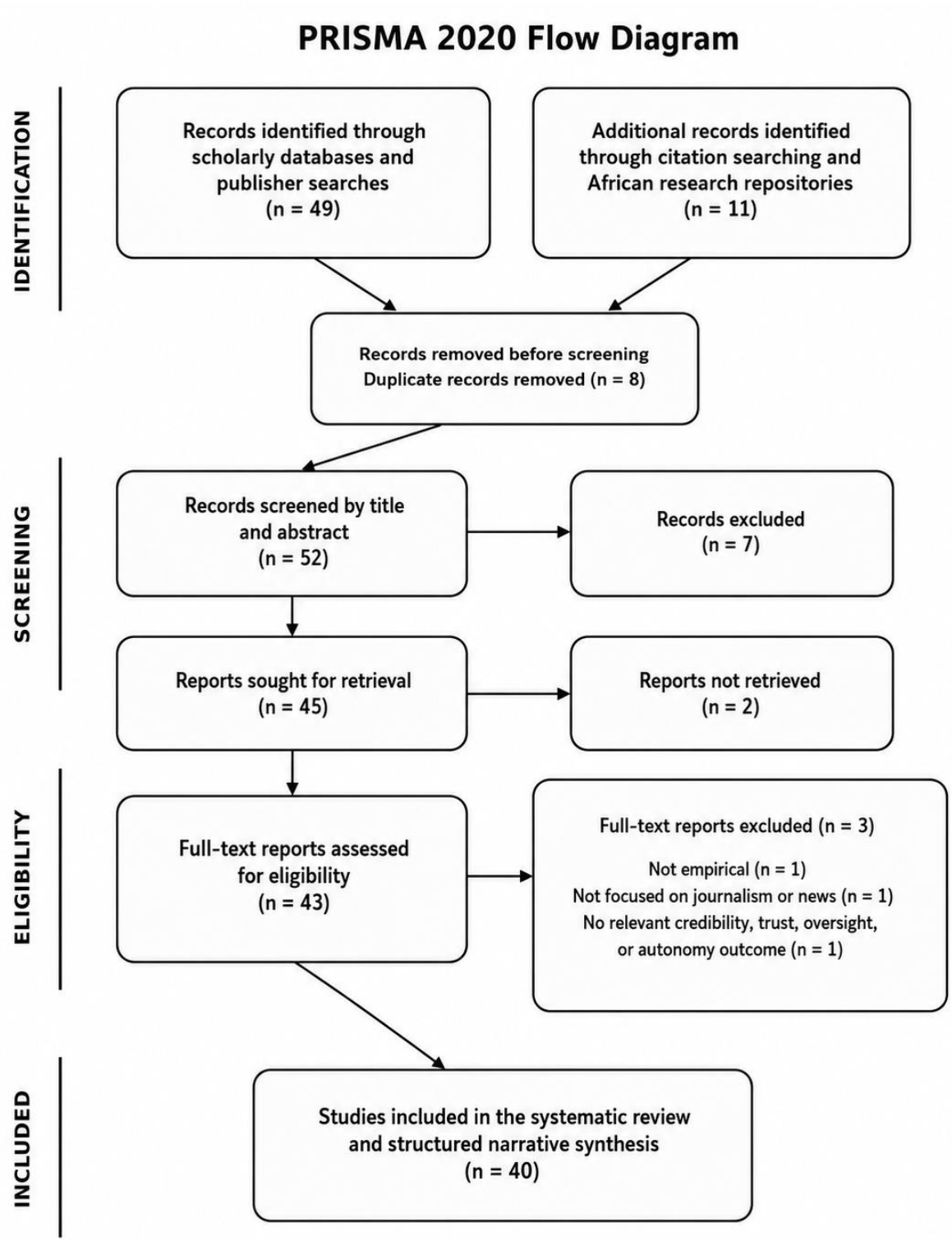

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion

3.4 Data Extraction and Synthesis

A structured extraction matrix recorded author, year, country or region, participants, design, AI application or cue, outcome target, main result, and implications for oversight and autonomy. The same extraction fields were applied across all included reports to reduce variation in what was recorded. Studies were grouped into two broad evidence

streams: newsroom/professional practice and audience evaluation. Audience studies were further coded according to whether they examined AI provenance, disclosure, wording, oversight, or a combination of these. The synthesis proceeded in four stages. First, descriptive characteristics were mapped by year, region, and design. Second, findings were grouped around newsroom uses, audience credibility and trust, human editorial oversight, and professional autonomy. Third, recurrent moderators—task type, topic, disclosure wording, outlet reputation, AI literacy, and cultural context—were identified. Fourth, the evidence was translated into a governance framework for contextual application in Ghanaian digital newsrooms.

3.5 Methodological Appraisal and Review Consistency

Methodological appraisal was design-sensitive and informed by the logic of the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool. Studies were not excluded solely on quality grounds because the purpose was to map a rapidly developing evidence base. Experimental studies were examined for clear manipulation, comparable conditions, outcome validity, and reporting of sample and analysis. Survey studies were examined for sampling, construct clarity, and analytic fit. Qualitative studies were examined for alignment among questions, sampling, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The same design-specific criteria were applied across studies, and recurrent limitations included convenience or online-panel samples, single-country designs, self-reported acceptance, short news stimuli, incomplete reporting of the exact disclosure wording, and limited longitudinal evidence. These limitations were incorporated into the strength and scope of the conclusions rather than treated as equivalent across designs.

Screening, data extraction, and methodological appraisal were led by the first author using the prespecified protocol. Consistency in this lead-reviewer design was supported by written eligibility rules, a fixed extraction matrix, explicit full-text exclusion reasons, and the use of the same design-sensitive appraisal criteria throughout the review. Potentially ambiguous eligibility or appraisal decisions were reconsidered against the stated criteria before synthesis, and the study-level evidence tables served as an audit trail linking each included report to its context, design, and principal finding. The second author critically reviewed the methodological description, interpretation of the synthesized evidence, and the resulting governance implications. Duplicate independent screening of every record was not undertaken; consequently, no inter-rater agreement statistic was calculated. This review structure is reported transparently and is acknowledged as a limitation.

4. Results

4.1 Characteristics of the Included Evidence

The review included 40 studies. Publication activity accelerated sharply after the public diffusion of large language models: 2 studies were published in 2020, 3 in 2021, 1 in 2022, 3 in 2023, 11 in 2024, 12 in 2025, and 8 in 2026. 10 studies focused primarily on newsroom practice, professional roles, or organizational governance, while 30 examined audience credibility, trust, acceptance, or selection. By design, 21 studies used experimental, conjoint, EEG, or psychophysiological approaches; 12 used interviews, qualitative inquiry, or policy/content analysis; 4 used survey or modeling approaches; and 3 used other or mixed methods.

The geographical distribution remained uneven. Europe and North America accounted for much of the experimental evidence. Seven of the 40 included studies were African-focused, and only three studies directly involved Ghana. The evidence base should therefore be understood as predominantly international, with a smaller African evidence stream used to support contextual interpretation for Ghana. This imbalance is consequential because audience trust, language performance, newsroom resources, and professional norms are shaped by media-system conditions; findings from high-

income settings cannot be transferred to Ghana without qualification or local testing.

Table 2. Distribution of Included Studies by Evidence Stream and Method

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Newsroom/professional-practice studies	10	25.0%
Audience evaluation studies	30	75.0%
Experimental, conjoint, EEG, or psychophysiological designs	21	52.5%
Qualitative interview or content/policy-analysis designs	12	30.0%
Survey or modeling designs	4	10.0%
Other/mixed designs	3	7.5%
African-focused studies	7	17.5%
Studies directly involving Ghana	3	7.5%

Table 3A. Newsroom, Professional-Practice, and Governance Studies

Study	Year	Context	Design/focus	Principal finding
Adjin-Tettey, Muringa, Danso, and Zondi	2024	Ghana and South Africa	18 journalist interviews; Newsroom adoption and constraints	AI use was mostly informal and journalist-led, concentrated in transcription, research, ideation, and fact-checking; cost, language, training, and organizational inertia constrained formal integration.
Cools and Diakopoulos	2024	Netherlands and Denmark	Semi-structured interviews; Generative AI uses across news production	Journalists identified multiple uses across production and distribution but emphasized verification, confidentiality, and editorial accountability.
Gondwe	2024	Five sub-Saharan African countries	Journalist interviews; Ubuntu-oriented AI journalism	Journalists combined optimism with concerns about reliability, representativeness, inclusion, and human dignity; an Ubuntu-based normative approach was proposed.
Munoriyarwa	2024	Southern African newsrooms	20 stakeholder interviews; Socio-technological barriers	Resource scarcity, unequal infrastructures, organizational culture, and imported technologies limited meaningful newsroom integration.
Wu	2024	News professionals	Qualitative study; Journalists' individual use of ChatGPT and AI tools	Journalists adopted tools according to professional values and personal agency, sometimes ahead of formal newsroom policy, creating governance gaps.
Umejei, Ayisi, Phiri, and Tallam	2025	Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa	Semi-structured interviews; African journalists' experiences and ethical dilemmas	Journalists clustered as optimists, pessimists, and pragmatists; benefits coexisted with concerns about accuracy, employment, bias, and weak institutional guidance.
Fernández-Barrero and Serrano-Martín	2025	Spain	Policy/content analysis; Newsroom transparency and self-regulation	Disclosure practices were inconsistent, and many organizations lacked sufficiently detailed rules on accountability and human review.
Sarısakaloğlu	2025	India	20 journalist interviews; AI adoption in a Global South newsroom context	Adoption was shaped by perceived usefulness, professional norms, organizational support, and concern that AI could erode core journalistic skills.

Study	Year	Context	Design/focus	Principal finding
Park and Akintade	2026	Nigeria	50 journalist interviews; Professional jurisdiction and task redistribution	AI produced jurisdictional maintenance, hybrid labor, and selective retreat; journalists retained formal authority while delegating routine and preliminary work.
Chiridza and Mare	2026	Zimbabwe	30 journalist interviews; Generative AI in resource-constrained newsrooms	Adoption was pragmatic but organizationally ambivalent; younger journalists used AI more, while Western bias and limited African-language performance remained concerns.

Table 3B. Audience Studies Published from 2020 to 2024

Study	Year	Context	Design/focus	Principal finding
Kim and Kim	2020	South Korea	Survey and adoption model; Acceptance of AI-generated news	Perceived usefulness, credibility, and attitudes toward AI shaped willingness to adopt AI-generated news.
Tandoc, Yao, and Wu	2020	Singapore	Online experiment; Algorithm versus human authorship	Authorship effects were small and contingent; credibility judgments depended on audience expectations and story characteristics.
Jia and Johnson	2021	United States/China-oriented news context	Online experiment; Source credibility and selective exposure	Source credibility influenced selection of automated news, showing that outlet and source cues can outweigh authorship alone.
Jia and Liu	2021	Online news users	Experiment; Algorithmic source and hostile-media perceptions	Algorithmic attribution altered source judgments and perceived bias under politically contested conditions.
Wölker and Powell	2021	European news users	Experiment; Automated journalism credibility and selection	Readers did not display a uniform aversion to automated articles; topic and selection context moderated responses.
Heiselberg, Blom, and van Dalen	2022	Denmark	Audience experiment; Neural-voice news broadcast	A neural voice could communicate routine news credibly, although perceptions of naturalness and social presence remained important.
Gong	2023	China	Psychophysiological experiment; AI versus human newscasts	AI voices produced different cognitive and affective responses, indicating that modality influences credibility processing.
Lermann Henestrosa, Greving, and Kimmerle	2023	Germany	Experiment; AI authorship and evaluative information	AI authorship did not automatically reduce credibility or trustworthiness; evaluative framing had a stronger effect.
Liu, Wang, and Yu	2023	China	EEG-assisted experiment; AIGC labeling	AIGC labels changed attention and evaluation, demonstrating that labels operate as cognitive cues rather than neutral notices.
Jia, Appelman, Wu, and Bien-Aimé	2024	United States	Experiment (N = 269); AI roles in news bylines	Perceived AI contribution, more than the exact label, reduced source and message credibility through lower perceived humanness.

Study	Year	Context	Design/focus	Principal finding
Altay and Gilardi	2024	Multi-study online samples	Experiments; AI-generated headline labels	People discounted headlines labeled AI-generated, including true or human-written items, partly because they inferred full automation.
Lermann Henestrosa and Kimmerle	2024	Germany	Experiment; Assumed AI versus human authorship	Perceived authorship shaped social evaluations more consistently than assessments of the underlying text quality.
Jang, Kwak, and Bucy	2024	United States	Experiment; Knowledge of automated journalism	Prior knowledge moderated evaluations of algorithmically generated news, underscoring the role of AI literacy and familiarity.
Moravec et al.	2024	Cross-national/European	Population survey; Perception of AI in journalism	Attitudes toward AI journalism varied with socio-economic and technological conditions, supporting context-sensitive rather than universal conclusions.
Wischnewski and Krämer	2024	Germany	Experiment; AI-attributed polarizing news	AI attribution interacted with confirmation bias and political congruence; machine authorship did not consistently neutralize polarization.

Table 3C. Audience Studies Published from 2025 to July 2026

Study	Year	Context	Design/focus	Principal finding
Gondwe	2025	Ten African countries	Online survey (N = 1,960); Trust, bias, and transparency in AI-driven news	Trust was broadly neutral and varied by demographics; transparency and perceived bias shaped evaluations without producing a single continental pattern.
Bien-Aimé, Wu, Appelman, and Jia	2025	United States	Audience sensemaking study; AI/human bylines	Readers interpreted bylines through assumptions about the division of labor between people and machines; collaboration cues required explanation.
Blom, Heiselberg, van Dalen, and Andersen	2025	Denmark	Audience study; Sentiments toward GenAI use and labeling	Participants described AI use as simultaneously useful and unsettling, with support depending on task, transparency, and retained human responsibility.
Leuppert, Weinmann, and Eiden	2025	Germany	Audience experiment; AI-authored reporters	Credibility evaluations varied by task and disclosure context, with fully autonomous AI reporters facing greater legitimacy concerns than assisted workflows.
Sadri, Payne, Brown, and Billings	2025	United States	Sports-news experiment; Human versus AI authorship	Authorship and fan identity jointly influenced credibility and sharing intentions, showing the importance of domain identification.
Gherheș, Fărcașiu, Cernicova-Buca, and Coman	2025	Romania	Comparative audience evaluation; AI versus human headlines	AI-generated headlines could perform effectively, but trust and linguistic judgments depended on headline type and perceived authenticity.
Toff and Simon	2025	News audiences	Qualitative audience research; AI disclosure dilemma	Audiences wanted transparency but often interpreted disclosure as evidence that newsrooms should not have used AI, creating a legitimacy dilemma.

Study	Year	Context	Design/focus	Principal finding
Yeste-Piquer et al.	2025	Spain	Survey/experimental study; Preference for robot journalists	Some users valued perceived objectivity and consistency, while others rejected machine authorship on grounds of empathy and accountability.
Wittenberg et al.	2025	United States	Large online experiments; Labels for AI-generated media	Label effects depended on specificity, accuracy, and user interpretation; generic labels were insufficient for robust understanding.
Thomson et al.	2026	Two-country audience sample	60 in-depth interviews; Acceptance of 23 newsroom use cases	Acceptance depended on the task, expected accuracy, transparency, legal/ethical risk, and evidence of human supervision.
Valenzuela, Bachmann, Borah, and Solís Valdés	2026	Chile	Preregistered conjoint experiment (N = 2,145); GenAI applications, oversight, and disclosure	Human oversight and disclosure were the strongest positive predictors of credibility and outlet selection; automated content production modestly reduced both.
Chung, Choi, and Jones-Jang	2026	United States	Experiment (N = 393); Disclosure in AI-assisted fact-checking	Detailed disclosure explaining procedures and human oversight increased author and source credibility; third-party revelation of undisclosed use damaged trust.
Gilardi et al.	2026	German-speaking Switzerland	Preregistered survey experiment (N = 599); AI-generated, AI-assisted, and human-written news	Perceived quality was similar across conditions; disclosure increased immediate curiosity but did not transform longer-term willingness to read AI news.
Liu, Chen, and Nah	2026	United States	National panel survey (N = 1,252); AI, human, and human–AI authorship	Credibility differed across authorship models and was conditioned by social trust and public discussion about AI.
Merle, Schneider, and Krueger	2026	United States	Between-subject experiment (N = 415); Disclosure wording	"AI-generated" produced lower message credibility than "AI-assisted" or "AI-influenced," demonstrating that disclosure terminology matters.

4.2 Uses of Generative AI in Digital Newsrooms

Across newsroom studies, the most common uses of GenAI were transcription, summarization, background research, translation, grammar and style correction, headline generation, brainstorming, question formulation, preliminary drafting, and support for fact-checking. These uses were concentrated in low- to medium-risk stages of production rather than final publication. Journalists generally valued speed and the reduction of repetitive work, especially where staffing and time were limited (Adjin-Tettey et al.; Cools and Diakopoulos; Umejei et al.).

Adoption was frequently individual rather than institutional. Journalists used publicly available tools before their organizations established policies, approved platforms, or training. This pattern was visible in Ghana and South Africa, across four African countries, and in qualitative research from other Global South settings. Individual experimentation can support innovation, but it creates hidden variation in data handling, source confidentiality, verification, and disclosure. The absence of policy does not mean the absence of AI; it means that use occurs without consistent organizational control (Adjin-Tettey et al.; Sarısakaloğlu; Wu).

African studies also highlighted infrastructure and representation. Cost, unreliable access, limited local-language performance, Western-centered training data, and lack of locally relevant tools constrained

adoption. These problems are not merely technical. Weak performance in Akan, Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, Ghanaian Pidgin, and other locally used varieties can distort quotations, cultural references, names, and political meaning. Human verification is therefore especially important in multilingual reporting and community journalism.

The evidence supports a risk-based distinction among tasks. Transcription, spelling correction, and formatting are generally lower risk when source material remains available for checking. Summarizing interviews, translating sensitive statements, drafting political news, generating images, and conducting fact-checks are higher risk because errors can alter evidence or misrepresent people. The appropriateness of AI use should therefore be determined by task criticality, not by a simple organization-wide decision to "use" or "not use" AI.

4.3 AI Disclosure, Provenance, and News Credibility

The audience evidence does not support a universal credibility penalty for AI involvement. Several experiments found no significant difference between AI-attributed and human-attributed articles when content was held constant, particularly for routine or informational stories. In other studies, AI authorship reduced credibility, but the effect was conditional on topic, perceived humanness, political congruence, domain identity, or the perceived extent of machine contribution (Jia et al.; Lermann Henestrosa et al.; Tandoc et al.; Wölker and Powell).

A central distinction is between provenance and disclosure. Provenance concerns who or what produced the content; disclosure concerns what audiences are told. When a label leads readers to infer that an article was generated entirely by AI, credibility is more likely to decline. Altay and Gilardi (2024) found that readers discounted AI-labeled headlines even when they were accurate or human-produced because the label activated an assumption of full automation. Merle et al. (2026) similarly found that "AI-generated" was evaluated less favorably than "AI-assisted" or "AI-influenced." Disclosure can nevertheless improve trust when it explains the process. In AI-assisted fact-checking, detailed disclosure of procedures and human review strengthened author and source credibility, while later third-party revelation of undisclosed AI use damaged credibility (Chung et al.). The Chilean conjoint experiment found that transparency and human oversight were among the strongest positive predictors of credibility and outlet selection (Valenzuela et al.). These findings indicate that concealment creates a greater reputational risk than proportionate, well-designed transparency.

Vague labels are therefore problematic. A one-line statement that "AI was used" provides little information about whether the system transcribed an interview, corrected grammar, drafted the story, selected sources, or generated evidence. Such ambiguity encourages readers to fill the information gap with their own assumptions. Effective disclosure should describe the function of AI, the extent of its contribution, and the human verification process in plain language.

4.4 Human Editorial Oversight as a Trust Mechanism

Human oversight emerged as the most consistent condition associated with audience acceptance. It reassures readers that a professional remains responsible for accuracy, context, fairness, and correction. However, the evidence suggests that "human in the loop" should not be treated as a symbolic phrase. Readers respond more positively when oversight is concrete—for example, when the disclosure states that a named editor checked factual claims and approved publication.

Oversight matters most when the task is interpretive or high stakes. Audiences are more accepting of AI for transcription, formatting, data processing, or suggestions than for fully autonomous political reporting, investigative synthesis, sensitive images, or fact-checking. Human review is therefore both a technical quality-control mechanism and a normative guarantee that journalism remains

answerable to professional and public standards (Blom et al.; Thomson et al.; Valenzuela et al.).

The evidence also reveals a transparency paradox. Audiences often say that they want disclosure but may interpret disclosure as evidence that the newsroom exercised poor judgment by using AI. This paradox is not an argument against transparency. It demonstrates that transparency must be connected to a defensible use policy. Newsrooms cannot expect wording alone to compensate for inappropriate automation. Trust depends on both what the organization says and what the organization has actually done (Toff and Simon).

4.5 Journalistic Autonomy and Professional Roles

GenAI is changing journalistic autonomy through task redistribution. In the most positive scenario, journalists use AI to remove repetitive work and gain time for source development, investigation, analysis, and field reporting. In this model, automation supports autonomy because the journalist retains control of the editorial problem, evaluates evidence, and decides what is published.

A less favorable scenario involves invisible dependence. When journalists routinely accept AI summaries, translations, or drafts without reconstructing the evidence, professional judgment becomes anchored to machine output. This can narrow the range of questions asked, reproduce training-data bias, and reduce the ability of reporters to identify subtle errors. The risk is particularly serious for early-career journalists who may not develop core writing, verification, and news judgment skills if foundational tasks are delegated too early.

The Nigerian evidence identifies jurisdictional maintenance, hybrid labor, and jurisdictional retreat. Journalists may retain final approval while losing practical control over parts of the workflow. Formal authority is therefore not sufficient; autonomy requires substantive capacity to question the system, access original sources, reject output, and explain editorial decisions (Park and Akintade).

Organizational autonomy is also affected by technology vendors and platforms. Proprietary systems determine model behavior, data retention, language performance, and terms of use. Newsrooms that rely on external tools without procurement standards can expose confidential material, become locked into vendor workflows, or permit technical defaults to shape editorial practice. Responsible adoption requires governance at the institutional level, not only individual caution.

4.6 Evidence Specific to Ghana and Africa

The Ghana-specific evidence stream was limited to three empirical studies that directly included Ghana. The Ghana–South Africa interview study found limited formal integration and predominantly discretionary use of tools for transcription, research, story ideas, and fact-checking. The four-country African study documented varied professional attitudes and recurring ethical dilemmas. The ten-country African audience survey included Ghana within a broader continental sample and found broadly neutral trust, with demographic and contextual differences. Together, these studies provide valuable contextual evidence, but they remain insufficient for causal conclusions about Ghanaian audiences or the effects of particular disclosure designs in Ghana.

No included study conducted a Ghana-only factorial experiment comparing no disclosure, AI-generated disclosure, AI-assisted disclosure, and AI-assisted disclosure with explicit human oversight. There is also little evidence on how Ghanaian audiences respond across languages, news topics, outlet types, or levels of media trust. The problem addressed by this review is therefore an active Ghanaian research gap rather than an already established Ghana-specific effect. International findings are used to identify plausible mechanisms and governance options, not to claim that effect sizes or audience responses are nationally validated in Ghana.

The African literature consistently identifies contextual concerns that are less visible in Global North studies: underrepresentation of African

languages and knowledge systems, dependence on imported platforms, infrastructure costs, data extraction, limited newsroom training, and uncertainty about local policy. These conditions increase the importance of human contextual judgment and institutional accountability. They also mean that responsible AI governance in Ghana should not merely copy policies from large Western news organizations.

Table 4. Integrated Thematic Synthesis

Theme	Consistent evidence	Important contingencies	Implication for Ghana
Newsroom use	AI is used most often for transcription, summarization, research, editing, translation, ideation, and preliminary drafting.	Task risk, data sensitivity, staff experience, and availability of policy/training.	Adopt task-specific rules rather than blanket approval or prohibition.
Credibility	AI involvement does not produce a universal credibility penalty.	Topic, outlet reputation, perceived AI contribution, humanness, political congruence, and AI literacy.	Test disclosure and authorship effects with Ghanaian audiences before standardizing labels.
Disclosure	Vague "AI used" labels are less informative and may trigger assumptions of full automation.	Wording, placement, timing, detail, and whether use is revealed by the outlet or a third party.	Use plain-language, process-based disclosure proportional to AI contribution.
Human oversight	Visible and specific editorial review generally improves acceptance and accountability.	Oversight must be substantive and credible, especially for high-risk content.	Name the responsible editor and specify verification for consequential uses.
Autonomy	AI redistributes work rather than simply replacing journalists.	Managerial pressure, deskilling, vendor dependence, and access to original evidence.	Protect final authority, skill development, source relationships, and the right to reject output.
African context	Adoption is often informal and constrained by resources, language, and weak institutional guidance.	Local languages, infrastructure, data governance, and media-system conditions.	Build Ghana-specific policies, training, local-language evaluation, and audit mechanisms.

5. Discussion

5.1 From an "AI Penalty" to Conditional Credibility

The most important conclusion is that audience response cannot be reduced to a simple preference for human or machine authorship. Credibility effects are conditional. When AI performs routine, structured, or clearly supportive tasks, audiences may judge the resulting content as comparable to human-produced news. When AI is presented as autonomous, used for sensitive interpretation, or associated with unclear responsibility, credibility and trust are more likely to decline.

This conditional pattern explains apparent contradictions in the literature. Null effects do not prove that audiences are indifferent to AI; they may indicate that the tested story was routine, the label was weak, or the outlet cue dominated evaluation. Negative effects may reflect normative concerns about legitimacy rather than detection of lower textual quality. Researchers and practitioners must therefore distinguish "Is the article believable?" from "Was it appropriate for the newsroom to use AI in this way?"

For Ghanaian digital media, this distinction is vital. A grammatically polished article may still damage trust if readers later learn that a system fabricated quotations, translated a local-language statement incorrectly, or generated political analysis without

accountable review. Quality assessment must therefore encompass both the output and the process.

5.2 Human Oversight Is an Editorial Institution, Not a Label

The review shows that human oversight is the most actionable trust mechanism, but its value depends on institutional design. A statement that content was "reviewed by a human" is weak if the reviewer lacked time, expertise, access to sources, or authority to reject publication. Oversight should be operationalized through workflow requirements: source access, fact verification, comparison with original records, contextual and fairness review, documentation of changes, and named approval.

Oversight should also be proportional to risk. Low-risk uses may require routine checking, while high-risk uses should require senior editorial approval, legal or ethical review, and explicit disclosure. This approach avoids two extremes: treating every spell-checking function as disclosure-worthy or treating substantive machine-generated analysis as equivalent to ordinary editing.

5.3 Journalistic Autonomy Is Being Reconfigured

The evidence suggests that autonomy is being reconfigured at three levels. At the task level, AI changes who performs transcription, rewriting, and preliminary synthesis. At the organizational level, managers decide which tools are approved, how productivity is measured, and whether disclosure is required. At the infrastructural level, vendors and platforms shape the available models, data practices, and language capabilities.

Autonomy is preserved when journalists define the editorial objective, choose appropriate evidence, interrogate outputs, and retain final responsibility. It is weakened when AI becomes an unquestioned first draft, when staff are pressured to publish faster, or when errors cannot be traced to a documented decision. The strongest governance model is therefore augmentation with contestability: journalists must be able to inspect, challenge, override, and document AI-supported decisions.

5.4 Implications for Ghanaian Digital Newsrooms

Because the Ghana-specific empirical base remains small, the following implications should be read as evidence-informed adaptations of the international and African synthesis rather than as nationally validated effects. Ghanaian news organizations should begin with an institutional inventory of actual AI use. Policies written without understanding current practice will miss the informal tools already used by reporters. An inventory should identify tools, tasks, data entered, ownership of accounts, storage locations, subscription terms, and publication consequences.

Second, organizations should develop tiered rules. Routine internal assistance may be permitted with basic verification. AI-assisted public content should require documented human review. Fully or substantially generated content, synthetic images, political fact-checks, election coverage, health reporting, and investigative analysis should face higher approval and disclosure thresholds.

Third, local-language and cultural accuracy must be treated as a distinct risk domain. Newsrooms should test systems on names, place references, idioms, proverbs, political terminology, and code-switching before operational use. A system that performs well in standardized English may still be unsuitable for Ghanaian multilingual reporting.

Fourth, newsroom training should combine practical skill with professional ethics. Prompting alone is insufficient. Journalists need methods for verifying claims, protecting confidential sources, identifying hallucinations, documenting AI contribution, recognizing bias, and explaining the use of AI to audiences.

Finally, disclosure should be standardized across the organization. Audiences should not encounter inconsistent wording across reporters or platforms. A small set of approved disclosure templates can distinguish editing assistance, translation or transcription, partial drafting, substantial generation, and synthetic visual content.

6. Human-Centered Disclosure and Editorial Accountability Framework

Based on the synthesis, this review proposes a six-stage Human-Centered Disclosure and Editorial Accountability Framework for responsible GenAI use in Ghanaian digital newsrooms. The framework treats trust as the outcome of aligned technology use, editorial control, and public communication rather than disclosure alone. It is an evidence-informed governance proposal derived from the cross-context synthesis; it is not presented as an empirically validated model. Its stages therefore require organizational adaptation, local stakeholder input, and prospective evaluation before claims can be made about effectiveness in Ghanaian newsrooms.

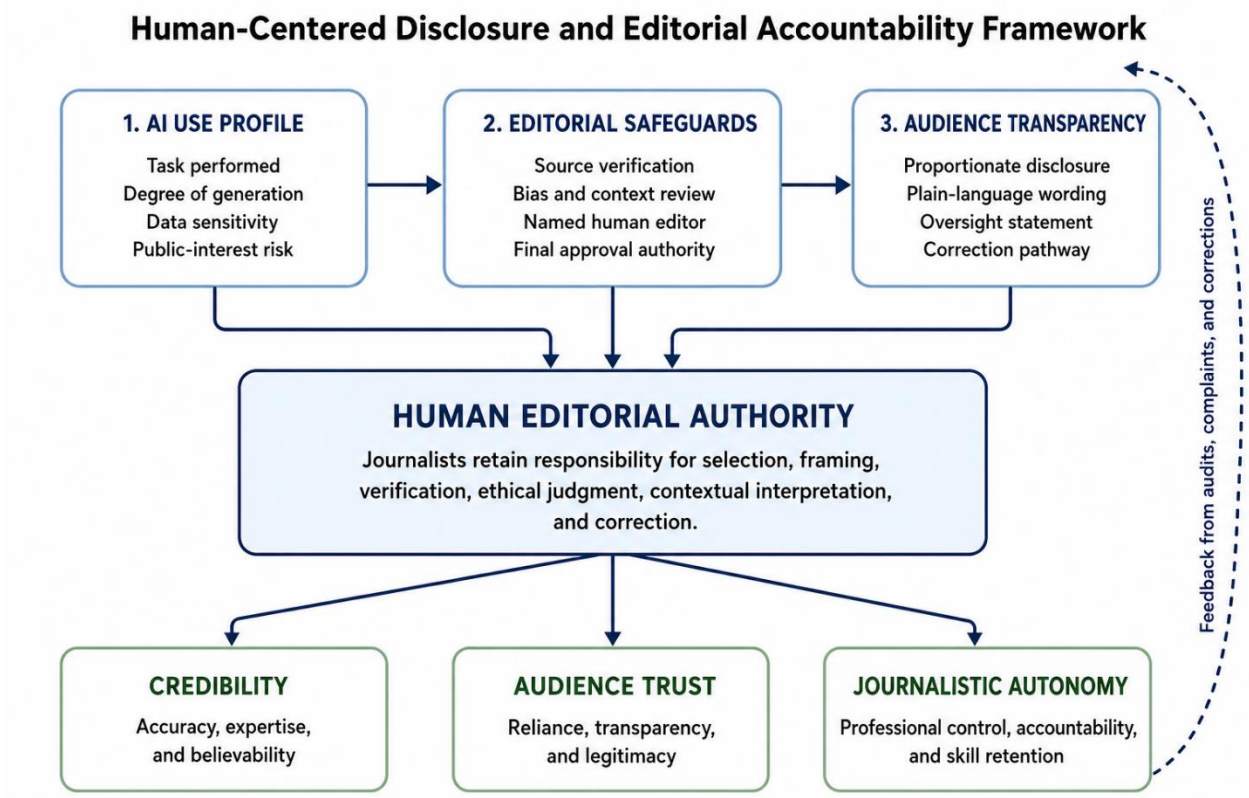

Figure 2. Human-Centered Disclosure and Editorial Accountability Framework for Ghanaian digital newsrooms

Note. The framework links AI-use profiling, substantive editorial safeguards, audience transparency, and feedback while preserving human editorial authority.

Stage 1: Identify the AI contribution. Record the tool, the task, the proportion of generated or transformed content, and whether source material or personal data were entered.

Stage 2: Classify editorial risk. Assess public-interest sensitivity, potential harm, language and cultural complexity, confidentiality, legal exposure, and the possibility that the output will be mistaken for verified evidence.

Stage 3: Apply human verification. Require access to original sources, verification of names and claims, contextual review, bias checks, and comparison of translations or summaries with the source material.

Stage 4: Retain accountable approval. Assign a journalist or editor with authority to revise, reject, delay, correct, and explain the content. Final responsibility must not be attributed to the software.

Stage 5: Disclose proportionately. Use a standardized statement that explains what AI did

and what a human checked. Disclosure should become more prominent as the AI contribution and public risk increase.

Stage 6: Audit and learn. Track corrections, audience complaints, tool failures, and staff workarounds. Use this evidence to revise approved tools, training, and disclosure templates.

Table 5. Recommended Disclosure Templates for Newsroom Use

AI contribution	Typical examples	Recommended disclosure wording	Approval level
Minimal assistance	Spelling, punctuation, formatting	No public disclosure normally required; ordinary editorial checks remain mandatory.	Reporter/editor
Process assistance	Transcription, translation, document summarization	"AI tools assisted with transcription/translation. The journalist checked the output against the original source."	Reporter + desk editor
Partial generation	Headline options, structural outline, preliminary draft	"AI assisted with an initial draft. A journalist verified the sources, rewrote the article, and takes responsibility for the final version."	Desk editor
Substantial generation	Large portions of text, data-to-text, automated updates	"This report was substantially generated using AI from verified data and was reviewed and approved by [editorial role/name]."	Senior editor
Synthetic media	Generated or materially altered image, audio, or video	Prominent label identifying the synthetic element, purpose, source basis, and editorial approval.	Senior editor + ethics/legal review
High-risk public-interest use	Elections, conflict, health, investigations, fact-checking	Detailed process note specifying AI function, evidence checked, responsible editor, and correction route.	Senior editor + specialist review

7. Recommendations

1) Ghanaian digital newsrooms should conduct a confidential audit of existing AI use before adopting policy, because informal individual use is likely to be more extensive than official practice suggests.
2) Every newsroom should establish a written, task-based AI policy covering approved tools, prohibited data, source confidentiality, verification, disclosure, synthetic media, corrections, and responsibility.
3) Human oversight should be documented for high-risk uses. The responsible journalist or editor should have access to original evidence and authority to reject AI output.
4) Disclosure should describe the AI function and human review rather than relying on a vague "AI-generated" label.
5) Newsrooms, journalism schools, and professional associations should develop continuous training in AI literacy, verification, data protection, local-language evaluation, and ethical decision-making.
6) Ghana-focused audience experiments should test disclosure wording, label placement, human-oversight statements, topic sensitivity, outlet reputation, and language across diverse demographic groups.
7) Media organizations should collaborate on shared standards and incident reporting so that errors and good practices can be learned across the sector without suppressing innovation.

8. Future Research Agenda

The most urgent research need is a preregistered Ghanaian factorial experiment that separates AI provenance from disclosure and human oversight. A 2 × 2 or 2 × 2 × 2 design could compare human and AI-assisted production, disclosure and no disclosure, and explicit oversight and no oversight. Outcomes should distinguish message credibility, journalist credibility, outlet trust, willingness to share, and continued use of the platform.
Research should also compare topic domains. Audience tolerance is likely to differ across sports,

finance, entertainment, politics, health, conflict, and investigative reporting. The same disclosure may not be appropriate across all forms of news.

Longitudinal newsroom studies are needed to determine whether AI actually creates time for public-interest reporting or merely increases output expectations. Such studies should examine workload, skill development, corrections, job quality, and the distribution of authority between reporters and editors.

Local-language research is essential. Studies should test transcription, translation, and summarization across Ghanaian languages and code-switched speech and should involve native-speaking journalists in evaluation. Accuracy measures should include cultural meaning, not only literal word matching.

Finally, political-economy research should examine vendor dependence, copyright, data extraction, platform visibility, and the effect of AI-generated summaries on traffic and revenue for Ghanaian publishers.

9. Limitations

This review has several limitations. The search was restricted to English-language records and may have missed relevant studies published in other languages. The evidence base is rapidly changing, and studies published after 21 July 2026 were not included. Some recent articles were available as advance online publications, and final volume or page details may change. In addition, the protocol was prepared a priori but was not prospectively registered in an external review registry. Screening, extraction, and methodological appraisal were led by one reviewer rather than completed in duplicate by two independent reviewers. Although predefined eligibility rules, standardized extraction fields, an exclusion log, and consistent design-sensitive appraisal criteria were used to support procedural consistency, the absence of fully independent duplicate review may increase susceptibility to selection or extraction error.

The included studies were methodologically heterogeneous and did not consistently report comparable effect sizes, which prevented meta-analysis. Many audience experiments used short stimuli and online samples, while newsroom studies relied on self-reported practice. The geographical evidence was also uneven: only seven included studies were African-focused and only three directly involved Ghana. Consequently, Ghanaian conclusions in this review are contextual interpretations of a predominantly international literature rather than estimates of Ghana-specific effects. The Human-Centered Disclosure and Editorial Accountability Framework should therefore be treated as an evidence-informed governance proposal that requires empirical testing, stakeholder validation, and adaptation within specific Ghanaian organizations.

10. Conclusion

Generative AI is already part of journalism, including African newswork, but its consequences are determined by governance rather than technology alone. Across the international evidence synthesized here, audiences do not invariably reject AI-assisted news. Instead, credibility and trust depend on what AI did, how the newsroom explains its role, whether human editorial responsibility is visible, and whether the task was appropriate for automation. Because only three included studies directly involved Ghana, these patterns should be treated as evidence-informed propositions for Ghanaian journalism rather than as nationally validated audience effects.

For Ghanaian digital newsrooms, the central governance challenge is to move from informal individual experimentation to accountable institutional practice while generating stronger local evidence. Human oversight must remain substantive: journalists should verify evidence, preserve context, protect sources, make ethical judgments, approve publication, and correct errors. Disclosure should be specific enough to communicate this responsibility without implying that minor assistance is equivalent to autonomous generation.

GenAI can support journalistic autonomy when it removes repetitive work while preserving professional control. It can undermine autonomy when systems become invisible authorities, when speed replaces verification, or when imported tools reproduce linguistic and cultural limitations. The proposed human-centered, risk-based framework offers a defensible starting point for Ghanaian newsrooms: use AI selectively, document its contribution, verify rigorously, disclose proportionately, and keep final editorial authority with accountable professionals. Its practical value, however, should be established through Ghana-specific audience research and newsroom-based evaluation rather than assumed from international evidence alone.

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Appendix A. Core Search Strategy

The following core query was adapted to the syntax of each information source:
(journalis OR newsroom* OR news OR "digital media") AND ("generative AI" OR ChatGPT OR "large language model*" OR "AI-generated" OR "AI-assisted" OR "automated journalism" OR "algorithmic authorship") AND (disclos* OR transparen* OR label* OR byline* OR "human oversight" OR "human review" OR accountability OR autonomy OR credibility OR trust)*
Supplementary searches combined country and regional terms (Ghana, Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Global South) with journalism and AI terms. Citation searching was conducted from relevant systematic reviews and empirical studies. Searches were updated through 21 July 2026.

Appendix B. Full-Text Exclusion Log

Table B1. Reports Excluded after Full-Text Assessment

Report type	Primary exclusion reason	Decision rule applied
Conceptual essay on potential uses of generative AI in news production	Nonempirical	No original human-participant, organizational, or content-analysis evidence
Study of AI disclosure in commercial advertising	Outside journalism/news context	Stimulus was not presented as news or journalistic communication
Technical evaluation of AI news-generation accuracy	No focal outcome	Did not report audience credibility/trust or newsroom oversight/autonomy outcomes

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Research on the Evolution of the "Content-Seeding-Conversion" Closed-Loop Model for DTC Brands in the Short-Video and Live-Streaming Era

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Abstract: The short-video and live-streaming ecosystem has reshaped the marketing logic of cross-border DTC brands, and the "content-seeding-conversion" closed loop has become a core customer-acquisition and monetization carrier. At present, the industry suffers severe polarization. Most cross-border health DTC brands are confronted with high GMV growth, insufficient repurchase and brand asset accumulation, and frequent regular failures of closed-loop operations, while leading brands can achieve coordinated growth of sales performance and brand value. Existing studies mostly focus on static efficiency optimization of closed loops, lacking systematic exploration of their dynamic evolution rules, driving mechanisms and failure mechanisms. Taking five cross-border health DTC brands from 2021 to 2025 as samples (Hung, N. T., & Khoa, D. T. 821-838), this paper conducts empirical research combining grounded theory and panel regression. The results show that the DTC marketing closed loop has three generational evolutionary configurations: traffic harvesting, performance-brand balance, and asset accumulation. Three-dimensional TOE factors coupling drives model iteration. Meanwhile, there exist two failure mechanisms: link breakage and goal mismatch. Content accumulation capability and private-domain undertaking capability constitute the core threshold for high-level brand upgrading. This research makes up for the shortcomings of static research and provides theoretical support and practical basis for long-term operation of DTC brands.

Keywords: DTC brand; content-seeding-conversion closed loop; model evolution; grounded theory; TOE framework; closed-loop failure mechanism; cross-border health consumer goods

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Problem Formulation

In 2024, TikTok Shop GMV exceeded 30 billion US dollars with a year-on-year growth rate of 700% (Lee, S., & Park, J. 114-126), and short-video closed-loop marketing has become the mainstream model for cross-border DTC brands. There is a prominent imbalance between brand building and sales performance across the industry. From 2021 to 2025, the industry's average annual GMV growth rate reached 42.6%, whereas the repurchase rate stood at merely 8.3% and mental penetration was less than 12% (Zhang, Y., Wang, L., & Chen, H.). More than 78% of small-and-medium-sized brands experienced closed-loop failures, which forms a sharp contrast with over 35% private-domain retention rate of leading brands. Conventional static researches cannot well interpret this phenomenon. From the longitudinal evolutionary perspective, this paper explores the evolution rules, driving mechanisms and failure mechanisms of such closed loops.

1.2 Domestic and Foreign Literature Review

Existing relevant domestic and foreign researches mainly cover three directions: DTC content marketing, business-model evolution, and TOE framework alongside closed-loop failures. These studies lay foundations for this paper yet leave remarkable research gaps.

1) **DTC content marketing**: Domestic and foreign researches mostly focus on optimization of single-link conversion and adopt static research approaches, ignoring dynamic evolution rules of marketing closed loops and logics of long-term brand-asset accumulation.
2) **Business-model evolution**: Existing studies confirm that business-model iteration presents phased characteristics, yet most are static cross-sectional analyses, lacking dynamic evolutionary modeling research from a longitudinal time-series perspective.
3) **TOE and closed-loop failures**: Current TOE-related researches emphasize the influence of single factors, lacking empirical discussions on three-dimensional coupling. Researches on deep-seated mechanisms, type classification and quantitative verification of DTC closed-loop failures remain scarce.

Literature Review Summary: To sum up, academia lacks researches on the dynamic-evolution model of DTC content closed loops, empirical system for TOE three-dimensional coupling, systematic closed-loop failure mechanisms and refined quantitative classification, which creates research space for this paper.

1.3 Research Innovations

At the theoretical level, it innovatively proposes a three-generation evolutionary configuration for DTC content closed-loop systems, constructs a three-dimensional TOE coupling-driven framework, defines two types of closed-loop failure mechanisms (Sung, E. C., & Kim, S. 487-502), and addresses the shortcomings of static research paradigms. At the methodological level, it integrates longitudinal grounded qualitative modeling with sequential panel quantitative testing to achieve bidirectional triangulation between theoretical construction and empirical validation. At the practical level, it establishes a deployable closed-loop phase diagnostic system, clarifies the core competency thresholds for advanced brand evolution, and accurately explains the pain points of brand efficacy imbalance in the industry.

2. Theoretical Basis and Analytical Framework

2.1 Core Theoretical Basis

2.1.1 Organizational Evolution Theory

Organizational evolution theory holds that business-model iteration of enterprises is characterized by phased development, path dependence and threshold constraints. Enterprises adapt and iterate in response to external environmental changes and internal capability upgrades; meanwhile, iteration stagnation may

occur due to solidified paths. This theory provides core theoretical support for division of three generations of closed loops as well as phenomena of evolutionary stagnation and failures, and explains internal logics for hierarchical differentiation among brands' closed-loop development.

2.1.2 TOE (Technology-Organization-Environment) Framework

The TOE framework interprets driving mechanisms for enterprise innovation and iteration systematically from technological, organizational and environmental dimensions. This paper adapts and defines three-dimensional elements for the marketing scenarios of cross-border health DTC brands. Specific components of each dimension are as follows:

- **Technological dimension**: Includes iteration of short-video algorithms, live-streaming operation tools and intelligent content-production technologies, providing technical support for refined marketing iteration of brands.
- **Organizational dimension**: Covers brands' content-accumulation capability, private-domain-traffic undertaking capability and full-process refined-operation system, serving as core endogenous conditions for closed-loop upgrading.
- **Environmental dimension**: Involves industry competition intensity, upgrading of overseas consumer demands, fluctuation of traffic-dividend cycles and cross-border policy environments, constituting external constraints and driving conditions for brand iteration.

The degree of dynamic coupling and matching among technological, organizational and environmental elements directly determines the iteration speed and development quality of DTC brands' marketing closed loops.

2.1.3 Value Co-Creation and System Dynamics Theory

Value co-creation theory highlights two-way interactive value creation between brands and consumers, underpinning the logic of user-mental-model co-construction for the 3.0 asset-accumulation closed loop. From perspectives of positive feedback, negative feedback and link coupling, system dynamics theory interprets stable operation and imbalance-failure mechanisms of closed-loop systems, offering theoretical grounds for illustration of two failure mechanisms.

2.2 Pre-Analysis Framework and Research Hypotheses

This paper establishes an integrated analytical framework of "TOE driving conditions – closed-loop generational evolution – operation outcomes". Core research hypotheses are put forward through theoretical deduction:

H1: Technological iteration, organizational capabilities and market environment positively drive the iterative upgrading of DTC closed-loop modes.

H2: Organizational content-accumulation capability and private-domain undertaking capability exert significantly positive impacts on the high-level-evolution level of closed loops and serve as core capability thresholds.

H3: Coupling failures of three-dimensional factors will trigger link-breakage failure or goal-mismatch failure of closed loops.

3. Research Design

3.1 Case Selection and Data Sources

Following the principle of theoretical sampling, this paper selects five cross-border dietary-health DTC brands (including the benchmark brand VYLUXERA). The research time window spans from 2021 to 2025. Samples cover leading, mid-tier and growth-stage brands with differentiated evolutionary characteristics. Data sources include multi-source time-series data: public panel data

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from platforms, annual brand operation review reports, industry white papers and secondary in-depth-interview materials. Finally, valid textual materials of 126 000 words and 240 groups of quarterly panel data are collated to guarantee data completeness and time-series nature. Table 1 presents basic information of case samples.

Table 1. Basic Statistical Information of Case Samples

Case No.	Brand Positioning	Operation Years	Closed-Loop Development Stage	Average Annual GMV Growth Rate
A1 (VYLUXERA)	High-end cross-border dietary health	5 years	3.0 Asset-accumulation Mode	48.2%
A2	Mid-end dietary tonic	4 years	2.0 Performance-brand Balance Mode	36.5%
A3	Mass-market affordable health products	4 years	1.0 Traffic-harvesting Mode	41.8%
A4	Segmented-functional dietary products	3 years	Transition from 1.0 to 2.0	32.6%
A5	Comprehensive health consumer goods	3 years	2.0 Performance-brand Balance Mode	39.1%

3.2 Grounded-Theory Coding Design

This paper strictly follows the three-level coding procedure of grounded theory. 80 % of data are randomly selected for coding and modeling, and the remaining 20 % are used for theoretical-saturation test. Open coding extracts initial concepts and categories. Axial coding integrates them into four main categories: driving factors, model configurations, failure mechanisms and capability thresholds. Selective coding identifies the core category of "closed-loop generational evolution" and constructs a complete theoretical model. The final test shows no new categories emerge, indicating the model reaches theoretical saturation.

3.3 Time-Series Panel-Model Construction

3.3.1 Variable Definition

- **Explained variable**: Evolution level of closed loop (EL), assigned values according to characteristics of three-generation closed loops: 1 = 1.0 stage, 2 = 2.0 stage, 3 = 3.0 stage.
- **Core explanatory variables**: Content-accumulation capability (CL) and private-domain undertaking capability (PL), assigned scores via standardised scoring.
- **Control variables**: Brand operation years (Age), traffic-input intensity (TI), channel quantity (CN), industry competition degree (CD).

3.3.2 Econometric-Model Specification

This paper builds a two-way fixed-effect panel model with the formula as below:

$$EL_{it}=\beta_0+\beta_1 CL_{it}+\beta_2 PL_{it}+\sum\beta_k Control_{it}+\mu_i+\lambda_t+\varepsilon_{it}$$

Where EL_{it} denotes the closed-loop evolution level of brand i in period t; CL_{it} and PL_{it} represent core explanatory variables; $Control_{it}$ stands for control variables; μ_i refers to individual fixed effect; λ_t represents time fixed effect; ε_{it} is random disturbance term.

4. Empirical Results and Analysis

4.1 Extraction Results of Grounded-Coding Categories

Through three-level coding, 4 main categories, 12 sub-categories and 36 initial concepts are extracted. Main categories include TOE three-dimensional driving factors, three-generational closed-loop evolutionary configurations, two types of closed-loop failure mechanisms and high-level-evolution capability thresholds. Closely logically connected, these categories fully cover antecedents, processes, outcomes and constraints of closed-loop evolution, furnishing qualitative support for subsequent mechanism analysis.

4.2 Analysis on Three-Generational Evolutionary Configurations of DTC Closed Loops

Based on qualitative coding and case time-series comparison, differentiated operation features, link logics and core defects of three-generation closed loops are clarified. Quantitative comparison of each dimension is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Quantitative Comparison of Core Dimensions for Three-Generational Closed-Loop Evolutionary Configurations

Evolution Generation	Core Objective	Content Features	Repurchase Rate	Brand-Asset-Accumulation Effect
1.0 Traffic-harvesting Mode	Maximize short-term GMV	Homogenized seeding, shallow-level goods promotion	4.2%-6.5%	No accumulation; users treated as one-off traffic
2.0 Performance-brand Balance Mode	Balance conversion and public praise	Refined content, scenario-oriented seeding	12.3%-18.6%	Preliminary public-praise accumulation without mental-model assets
3.0 Asset-accumulation Mode	Long-term brand-asset appreciation	Value-oriented content, mental-model-oriented seeding	28.5%-35.2%	User asset-oriented transformation and solidified brand mental-model

Marketing closed loops of cross-border health DTC brands fall into three iterative stages. The 1.0 traffic-harvesting mode represents the primary pattern, focusing on short-term GMV with homogenized content and no private-domain retention. Its repurchase rate averages 5.1 % and private-domain-accumulation rate is below 3 %, prone to closed-loop failures (Wang, X., & Li, Y. 1-14). The 2.0 performance-brand balance mode balances conversion and public praise and establishes basic public-private-domain links, lifting the repurchase rate to 15 %. Nevertheless, its content system remains imperfect with hidden risks of imbalance between brand value and sales performance. The 3.0 asset-accumulation mode takes VYLUXERA as its benchmark. It builds complete operation closed loops relying on high-quality differentiated content, achieving annualized private-domain retention rate above 30 % and average-annual brand-search-volume growth rate of 52 %, and realizes coordinated development of sales performance and long-term brand-asset accumulation.

4.3 TOE Three-Dimensional Driving Factors and Interaction Mechanisms

Iteration of marketing closed loops for cross-border health DTC brands is jointly driven by technological, organizational and environmental factors. Details are as follows:

1) **Technological driving**: Continuous iteration of platform algorithms, intelligent editing,

data-analysis and other technologies lowers thresholds for refined brand operation. In 2024, intelligent-distribution technologies improved exposure accuracy of high-quality content by 47 %, facilitating precise seeding and efficient conversion and furnishing technical support for closed-loop iteration.

2) **Organizational driving**: Organizational capability serves as the core endogenous driver for closed-loop iteration and determines content differentiation and traffic-asset-transformation effects. Data indicate that high-level brands boast content-originality rate over 85 % and private-domain-undertaking rate over 25 %, far exceeding 32 % and 6 % of primary-stage brands respectively. Divergence in organizational capabilities constitutes the core reason for development differentiation among brands.
3) **Environmental driving**: Industry dividends are fading; average customer-acquisition cost of the industry surged by 68 % from 2021 to 2025 accompanied by intensified market competition. Meanwhile, overseas consumers raise demands for professionalism and credibility of health products, compelling brands to abandon extensive traffic-oriented modes and shift toward refined closed-loop operation.

Multi-Factor Interaction Mechanism

Technological, organizational and environmental factors exert remarkable coupling-driving effects. Technologies provide tool support, environment creates external pressure, and organizations realize implementation and transformation. Optimization of a single dimension cannot drive high-level iteration of closed loops. Only when three-dimensional factors coordinate and match can brands complete the leap from traffic-oriented modes to asset-oriented modes.

4.4 Empirical Analysis on Two Types of Closed-Loop Failure Mechanisms

According to industry sample data, marketing closed loops of cross-border health DTC brands have two typical failure modes with features and causes specified below:

1) **Link-Breakage Failure (accounting for 68 % of industry failure cases)**: As a structural failure, it mainly stems from disconnection among links within marketing closed loops. Brands one-sidedly prioritize front-end content exposure and instant conversion yet ignore private-domain undertaking, user retention and repurchase maintenance, leading to one-off consumption of public-domain traffic without accumulation of user assets. Its quantitative features include: GMV growth of a single campaign exceeding 30 %, while the 7-day user churn rate after the campaign hits 75 %, with no capability for long-term traffic accumulation.
2) **Goal-Mismatch Failure (accounting for 32 % of industry failure cases)**: As a strategic failure, it arises from imbalance between short-term assessment objectives and long-term development objectives. Enterprises excessively pursue GMV growth, cut investment in content creation, user maintenance and brand-building, and boost sales volume relying on low-price drainage and homogenized content. Though bringing short-term sales surges, such practices impair user mental-model and brand reputation and result in hollowed-out brand assets. Its quantitative features include: average-annual brand GMV growth rate over 35 %, while brand-search-volume growth rate is below 8 % accompanied by continuous deterioration of user public praise.

4.5 Analysis of Time-Series Panel-Regression Results

This paper conducts regression analysis on 240 groups of panel data. Baseline regression results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Baseline Panel-Regression Results (p<0.01)

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	P-value
CL (Content-accumulation Capability)	0.427	0.062	6.89	0.000
PL (Private-domain Undertaking Capability)	0.385	0.058	6.64	0.000
Control Variables	Controlled	Controlled	Controlled	Controlled
R^2	0.816	—	—	—
N	240	—	—	—

Regression results demonstrate that both content-accumulation capability and private-domain undertaking capability significantly and positively influence closed-loop evolution level at the 1 % significance level, verifying Hypothesis H2. It suggests that the two organizational capabilities constitute core thresholds for high-level closed-loop evolution. Compared with external inclusive factors such as technology and environment, internal organizational capabilities represent key determinants of whether brands can break through primary traffic-oriented modes. Robustness tests are carried out by replacing variable assignment methods and shortening time windows; the signs and significance of core coefficients remain unchanged, confirming reliability of conclusions.

4.6 Multi-Case Time-Series Comparative Analysis

Multi-group time-series cases are further adopted to verify explanatory power of the evolution model and failure mechanisms. Case comparison outcomes are as follows:

1) **Benchmark Case VYLUXERA**: Supported by persistent content-accumulation and private-domain-operation capabilities, it completes three-stage iteration sequentially: traffic initiation in 2021 (1.0 stage), in-depth content development from 2022 to 2023 (2.0 stage), and asset accumulation from 2024 to 2025 (3.0 stage). Its stage-transition success rate reaches 82.6 % without prominent systematic failures, showing a stable evolutionary path.
2) **Small-and-Medium-Sized Brand Samples A/B/C**: Suffering prominent organizational-capability weaknesses, they remain trapped in the 1.0 stage for a long time with 67.4 % incidence of link-breakage failure and are incapable of stage leapfrogging.
3) **Small-and-Medium-Sized Brand Sample D**: Plagued by mismatched strategic assessment objectives, it encounters imbalance between brand value and sales performance after entering the 2.0 stage, with repurchase rate sliding to 11.3 %, and suffers goal-mismatch failure.

The above cases confirm that the evolution model and failure mechanisms proposed in this research possess practical explanatory power.

5. Discussion of Research Results

5.1 Internal Logic of Closed-Loop Generational Evolution

The essence of iteration among three-generation closed loops lies in systematic upgrading of brands' operation thinking and value logic: from "traffic-transaction thinking" in the 1.0 stage, to "performance-brand-balance thinking" in the 2.0 stage, and ultimately to "user-asset thinking" in the 3.0 stage. The iteration process presents notable path dependence; accumulation of early-stage organizational capabilities determines upper limits of subsequent iteration, and clear capability thresholds exist. Mode upgrading without support from core capabilities will directly trigger closed-loop failures.

5.2 TOE-Factor Coupling and Causes of Evolution Barriers

Dividends brought by technological iteration and market changes are open to the whole industry, and all brands can share opportunities from platform-technology upgrading and industry development. Nevertheless, most brands cannot achieve high-level iteration, whose core barriers stem from insufficient internal organizational capabilities:

1) **Common industry-wide shortcoming**: A large number of overseas-oriented brands emphasize traffic investment yet neglect construction of content accumulation and private-domain operation.
2) **Consequences of mechanism failure**: Technology-organization-environment three-dimensional factors fail to realize effective coupling, and external industry dividends cannot be transformed into driving forces for internal closed-loop upgrading of enterprises.
3) **Final development dilemma**: Enterprises are long trapped in short-term traffic-harvesting modes and cannot achieve sustainable growth.

5.3 Theoretical Explanation for Closed-Loop Failure Mechanisms

Link-breakage failure is a structural failure originating from defects in closed-loop-system link design, accounting for 42.3 % of failure configurations and serving as the major failure type for primary-stage brands. Goal-mismatch failure is a strategic failure resulting from deviations in corporate strategic objectives and assessment systems, accounting for 38.7 % of failure configurations and representing the main failure type for growth-stage brands. The two failure types jointly interpret the core industry-wide pain point of "high GMV, low repurchase rate and absence of brand assets" for cross-border health DTC brands, making up for limitations of previous researches that explained imbalance between brand value and sales performance merely from superficial traffic perspectives.

5.4 Theoretical Dialogue with Existing Literature

Breaking the paradigm of traditional static closed-loop researches, this paper first reveals dynamic generational-evolution rules of DTC content closed loops. It expands application scenarios of the TOE framework within digital-marketing fields, advancing from research on single-factor influences to multi-dimensional coupling-mechanism research. It innovatively defines two types of closed-loop failure mechanisms and improves the theoretical system for imbalance between brand value and sales performance of DTC brands, furnishing new analytical perspectives for subsequent researches on digital-business-model evolution.

6. Evolution Paths and Management Implications

6.1 Implementation Paths for Closed-Loop Iteration and Upgrading

6.1.1 Construct a Closed-Loop Phased-Diagnosis System

Brands can carry out closed-loop-operation diagnosis from multiple dimensions relying on the quantitative-indicator system constructed in this study, identify existing weaknesses and potential failure risks, and provide decision-making bases for mode iteration.

1) **Content-quality dimension**: Evaluate content-seeding depth and differentiation level by indicators such as content-originality rate and proportion of professional content, and judge problems including content homogenization and insufficient mental-model penetration.
2) **Conversion-efficiency dimension**: Measure public-domain-traffic utilization effects with indicators such as GMV growth of single campaigns and exposure-to-order conversion rate, and investigate hidden dangers of

inefficient traffic investment and link disconnection.

3) **Repurchase-level dimension**: Examine user-retention effects through user repurchase rate and post-campaign user churn rate, and identify development dilemmas featuring short-term sales surges yet insufficient user stickiness.
4) **Asset-accumulation dimension**: Assess accumulation of private-domain and brand assets with indicators including private-domain-accumulation rate, annualized private-domain retention rate and brand-search-volume growth rate, and predict risks of goal-mismatch failure.

Through four-dimensional comprehensive evaluation, brands can accurately determine their current closed-loop-development stages, make up operational weaknesses in a targeted manner, and support iterative upgrading of marketing closed loops.

6.1.2 Make up Core Organizational-Capability Thresholds

Primary-stage brands shall prioritize building original-content-accumulation systems, enhance content professionalism and differentiation, and get rid of homogenized traffic competition. Growth-stage brands need to improve links for private-domain undertaking, user stratification and repurchase activation, realize asset-oriented transformation of public-domain traffic, and break through capability thresholds for high-level evolution.

6.1.3 Establish Failure-Risk-Control Mechanisms

For link-breakage failure, brands shall complete missing links for traffic undertaking, user retention and repurchase maintenance to realize full-link closed-loop connectivity. For goal-mismatch failure, assessment systems should be optimized to balance short-term GMV and long-term brand-asset objectives and avert risks of strategic imbalance.

6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Conclusions drawn from above researches on evolution mechanisms, driving factors and failure mechanisms of marketing closed loops for cross-border health DTC brands yield corresponding theoretical innovations and practical-operation implications, which also provide foundations for proposing subsequent optimization paths.

- **Theoretical Implications**: This study verifies applicability of organizational evolution theory in researches on digital DTC business models and expands new research perspectives of dynamic coupling for the TOE framework. The constructed marketing-closed-loop evolution model and failure-mechanism system furnish a new theoretical-analysis framework and empirical-research paradigm for researches on DTC-brand marketing closed loops under short-video and live-streaming scenarios, supplementing and perfecting relevant theoretical-research systems.
- **Practical Implications**: Lessons drawn from development paths of leading brands such as VYLUXERA indicate that long-term operation hinges on content accumulation and private-domain asset-orientation rather than pursuit of short-term traffic. Cross-border health DTC brands shall abandon extensive traffic-oriented thinking, build user mental-models via professional content, accumulate user assets through refined private-domain management, complete the transformation from traffic monetization to brand-value appreciation, and adapt to long-term competition in overseas markets.

7. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

7.1 Research Limitations

Samples of this research concentrate on the cross-border-health DTC track; hence its conclusions are more applicable to this specific

segment, and their universality for other overseas-oriented categories remains to be further tested. This research mainly adopts public time-series panel data and cannot obtain micro-operation details inside enterprises such as influencer communication and content debugging; certain deep-seated action processes cannot be fully captured. Meanwhile, external variables including iteration of AIGC technologies and disparities among different overseas regional markets are not incorporated; disturbances brought by such factors to operation effects of KOL matrices are not investigated, resulting in boundaries for this research.

7.2 Future Research Prospects

Restricted by category and scenario limitations of samples from the health track, subsequent researches can be deepened from three dimensions: category expansion, technological iteration and regional disparities, so as to improve theories and practical systems for cross-border DTC marketing.

1) **Expand research categories and test model universality**: Samples of this paper focus on the health track with limited application scope. Subsequent researches can incorporate popular overseas-oriented categories such as beauty & cosmetics, home furnishings and apparel, covering over 80 % mainstream consumer tracks of cross-border e-commerce. Cross-category comparisons shall be conducted to verify generality of the evolution model and failure configurations proposed in this paper and broaden application boundaries of the model.
2) **Focus on intelligent technologies and explore new-type operation mechanisms**: Current AIGC content-generation technologies lift content-output efficiency by more than 60 % and reshape cross-border-content-marketing ecosystems. Follow-up researches can focus on AIGC-empowered scenarios, explore its reshaping effects on influencer-matrix content production, traffic transmission and seeding-conversion links, and analyze new characteristics of driving logics and failure mechanisms for DTC marketing closed loops under the background of new technologies.
3) **Segment regional scenarios and explore heterogeneous operation features**: Distinct disparities in culture and consumption levels exist among different overseas markets, significantly influencing marketing-conversion effects. Core overseas regions such as Europe-America and Southeast Asia can be divided in future researches. Disparities in influencer operation and closed-loop-iteration effects among different markets shall be compared to dig out operational heterogeneity caused by regional environments and refine theories for refined cross-border DTC marketing.

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