



# **'They Kept Filming Until the End' Trustworthiness in Journalistic Testimony during the Gaza War (2023-2024)**

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# 01

## Presentation Outline

*A comprehensive overview of the research on journalistic trust and testimony in the Gaza conflict.*

# Research Agenda

- ★ Introduction and Context of Journalist Fatalities in Gaza
- ★ Methodology for Analyzing Journalist Testimony and Trust
- ★ Quantitative and Qualitative Results of the Analysis
- ★ Discussion of Trust, Credibility, and Institutional Framing
- ★ Conclusion and Implications of Findings

# Research Context & Background

- ★ **Problem Domain:** Unprecedented rate of journalist fatalities in the Gaza conflict from October 2023 to March 2024.
- ★ **Current State:** Local journalists served as primary witnesses during communication blackouts and infrastructural collapse.
- ★ **Current State:** Tensions exist between professional journalistic neutrality and the lived experience of victimhood.
- ★ **Research Gap:** How is epistemic trust established when institutional frameworks are compromised and risk is integral to reporting?

# Motivation & Research Objectives

1

## Why This Research?

Addresses an unprecedented crisis in war reporting with 158 verified journalist fatalities in six months.

2

## Core Questions

How is credibility perceived in final testimonies? What communicative features foster trust under extreme risk?  
How does institutional framing shape reception?

3

## Expected Impact

To develop conceptual frameworks for understanding trust in journalistic testimony during high-risk, infrastructurally compromised conflicts.

# Theoretical Framework & Related Work

## Foundational Theories

- ★ Epistemic Trust (Fricker, 2007): Examines how credibility is granted to testifiers.
- ★ Moral Witnessing (Margalit, 2002): Focuses on the ethics of bearing witness to atrocities.
- ★ War Reporting (Tumber, 2020): Contextualizes the challenges of reporting in conflict zones.

## Limitations of Existing Work

- ★ Often focuses on institutional, foreign correspondents rather than local journalists under siege.
- ★ Less emphasis on testimony produced under immediate mortal risk and infrastructural collapse.
- ★ Limited integration of quantitative fatality patterns with qualitative analysis of testimonial content.

# 02

## Research Methodology

*An exploratory mixed-methods case study integrating quantitative description with qualitative interpretation.*

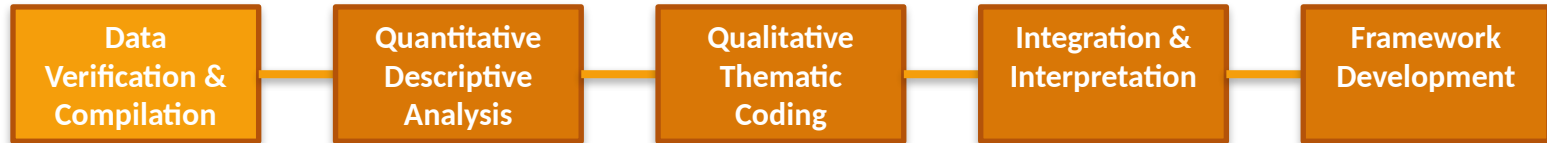
# Research Design & Data Collection

- ★ **Approach:** Exploratory mixed-methods case study, explicitly descriptive and interpretive.
- ★ **Data Source:** Analysis of verified records of 158 journalist fatalities in Gaza (Oct 2023 - Mar 2024).
- ★ **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis of final communications, social media posts, and published reports from deceased journalists.
- ★ **Tools:** Statistical software for quantitative analysis; qualitative coding software for thematic analysis.

# Methodological Constraints & Assumptions

- ★ **Temporal Focus:** Limited to the period from October 2023 to March 2024.
- ★ **Data Limitation:** Analysis based on verified records, which may not capture all incidents or contexts.
- ★ **Context Specificity:** Findings are specific to the Gaza conflict, affected by historical patterns and geopolitical constraints.
- ★ **Generalizability:** Caution required when applying insights to other conflicts with different media landscapes.

# Analytical Process



# Key Analytical Frameworks

- ★ **Credibility Perception:** Analyzed through lens of 'embodied persistence'—physical presence at events.
- ★ **Trust Establishment:** Examined features like transparency of risk and narrative authenticity.
- ★ **Institutional Framing:** Compared how local vs. international media institutions presented the journalists and their work.
- ★ **Integration:** Quantitative patterns (e.g., fatality causes) were used to contextualize qualitative themes in testimony.

# Experimental Setup & Evaluation

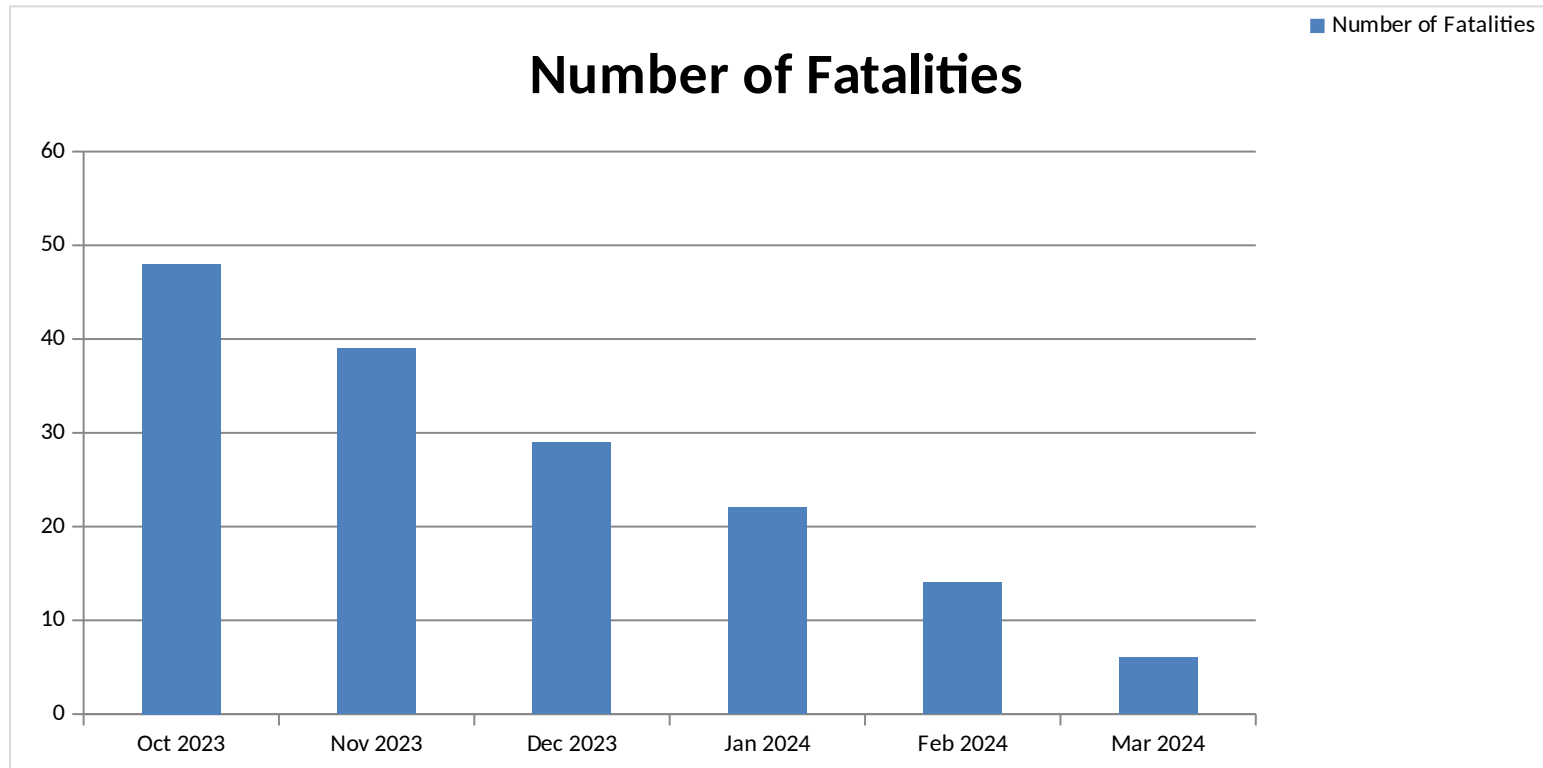
Aspect	Description	Evaluation Metric
Dataset	158 verified journalist fatalities	Completeness, verification source
Temporal Scope	October 2023 - March 2024	Monthly distribution patterns
Qualitative Sample	Final communications & reports	Thematic saturation, authenticity
Analysis Goal	Pattern documentation & framework proposal	Conceptual coherence, explanatory power

# 03

## Key Findings

*Integration of quantitative fatality patterns with qualitative insights into trust and testimony.*

# Quantitative Finding: Monthly Fatality Distribution



# Quantitative Finding: Demographics & Cause of Death

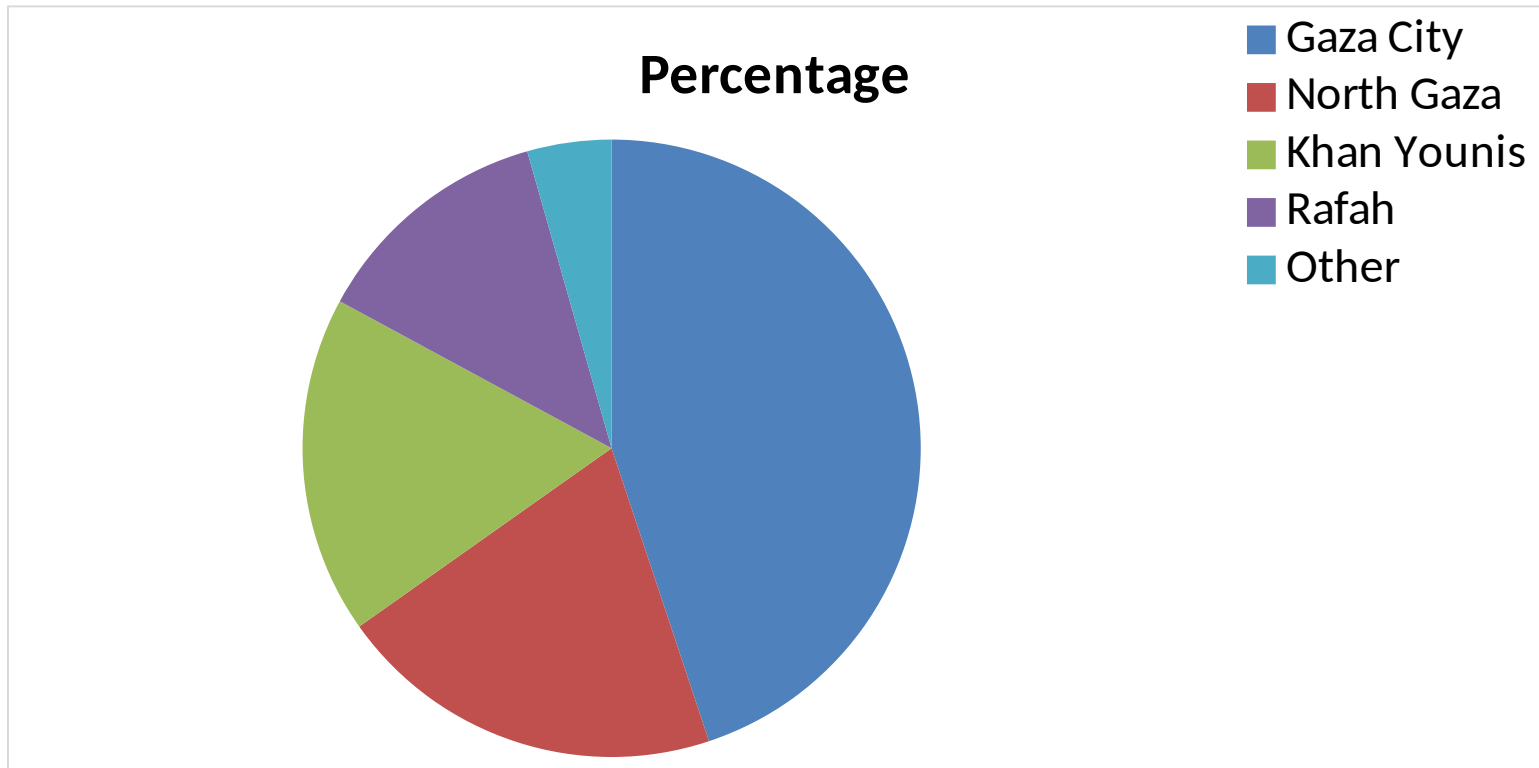
## Gender & Affiliation (n=158)

- ★ Local Media: 123 fatalities (77.8%).
- ★ International Media: 21 fatalities (13.3%).
- ★ Freelance: 14 fatalities (8.9%).
- ★ Male Journalists: 132 fatalities.
- ★ Female Journalists: 26 fatalities.

## Primary Cause of Death

- ★ Airstrikes: 121 fatalities (76.6%).
- ★ Gunfire: 19 fatalities (12.0%).
- ★ Building Collapse: 9 fatalities (5.7%).
- ★ Other/Unknown: 9 fatalities (5.7%).

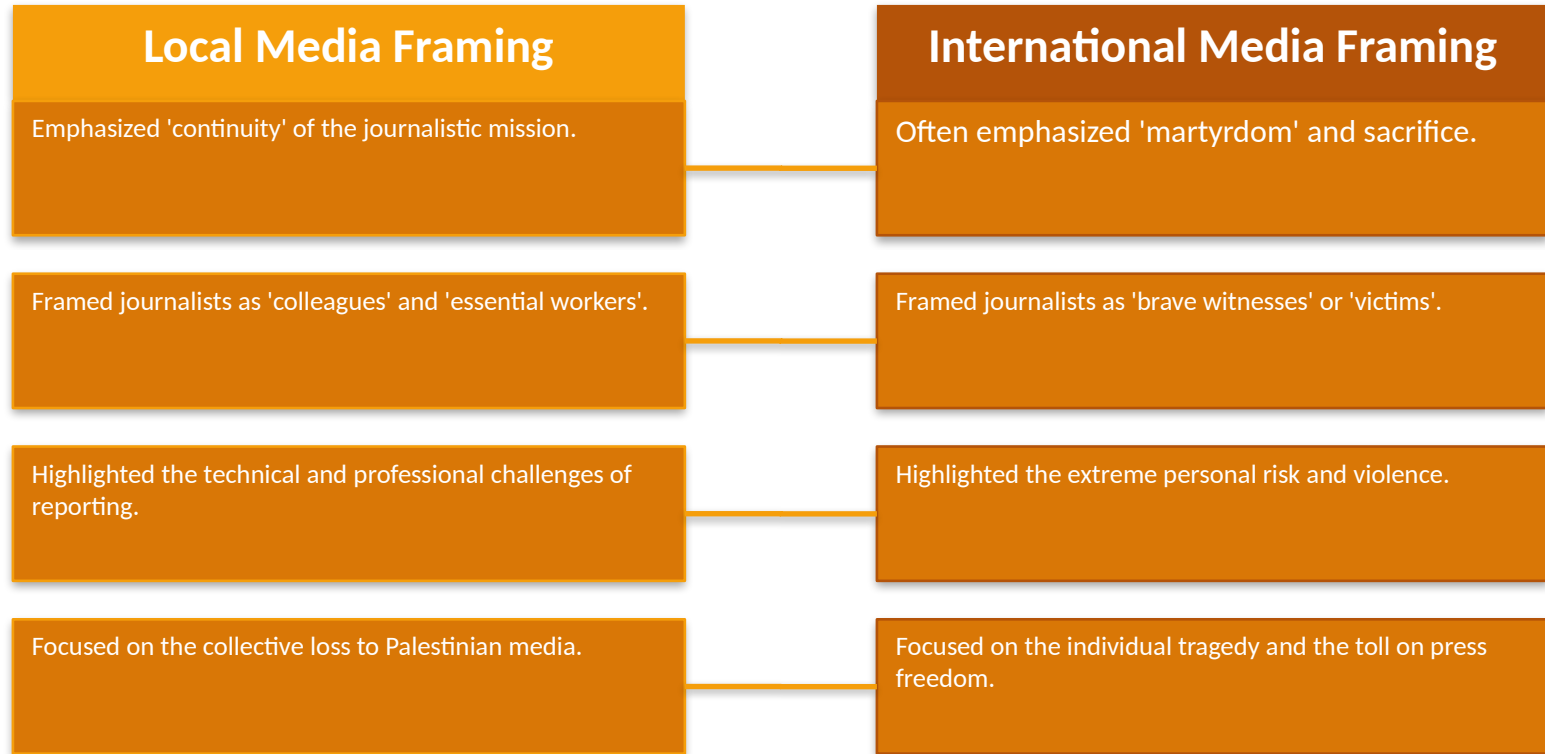
# Quantitative Finding: Geographic Distribution



# Qualitative Finding: Themes in Final Testimonies

- ★ **Embodied Persistence:** Repeated emphasis on 'being there' and continuing to film/document despite immediate danger.
- ★ **Transparency of Risk:** Journalists explicitly communicated the risks they were taking, often in real-time.
- ★ **Blurring of Roles:** Tension between professional reporter and civilian victim was a recurring narrative.
- ★ **Appeal to Global Audience:** Direct addresses to international viewers, urging them to 'see' and 'bear witness'.
- ★ **Focus on Continuity:** Messaging emphasized the importance of the story continuing beyond their own potential death.

# Case Study: Institutional Framing Analysis



# Integrated Insight: Trust & Credibility

1

## Visual Proximity > Institutional Affiliation

Audience credibility was more strongly tied to visual evidence from the scene than to the reporter's institutional backing.

2

## Trust Strengthened by Risk Transparency

Explicit communication of danger (e.g., saying 'they are bombing near us') enhanced perceived authenticity and trust.

3

## Trust Hindered by External Narratives

External political or institutional narratives that delegitimized local sources actively eroded inferred trust among global audiences.

# 04

## Analysis & Implications

*Interpreting the integrated results and their significance for war reporting and epistemic trust.*

# Interpretation: The 'Eyewitness' Premium

- ★ The high fatality rate (76.6% from airstrikes) created conditions where the final testimony carried immense 'eyewitness' weight.
- ★ The collapse of infrastructure meant traditional editorial oversight and verification were impossible, shifting trust to the individual reporter's embodied presence.
- ★ The tension between neutrality and victimhood was not resolved but became a core feature of the testimony, adding a layer of raw, perceived authenticity.
- ★ Institutional framing acted as a lens, but for direct consumers of raw footage (e.g., on social media), the journalist's immediate, risky presence was the primary trust signal.

# Impact & Theoretical Applications

- ★ **Practical Application:** Provides a framework for media organizations to support and understand local journalists in high-risk zones.
- ★ **Theoretical Application:** Extends theories of epistemic trust (Fricker) into domains of extreme physical risk and institutional failure.
- ★ **Real-World Impact:** Highlights the critical, irreplaceable role of local journalists as epistemic anchors during communication blackouts.
- ★ **Use Case:** Informs safety protocols and ethical guidelines for news organizations relying on local stringers in conflict areas.

# Challenges & Methodological Limitations

- ★ **Data Challenge:** Verifying circumstances of each fatality and accessing all final communications was difficult and incomplete.
- ★ **Emotional Challenge:** Conducting qualitative analysis on final messages from deceased subjects required rigorous ethical reflection.
- ★ **Analytical Challenge:** Integrating stark quantitative data (death counts) with nuanced qualitative themes risked oversimplification.
- ★ **Limitation:** The study documents patterns and proposes frameworks; it does not test causal hypotheses, which remains for future work.

# Key Contributions Summary

1

## Pattern Documentation

Comprehensive quantitative analysis of 158 journalist fatalities, revealing temporal, demographic, and geographic patterns.

2

## Trust Mechanism Analysis

Identifies 'embodied persistence' and visual proximity as key to credibility perception under extreme conditions.

3

## Framing Influence

Shows how institutional framing (local vs. foreign) shapes the visibility and reception of journalistic testimony.

4

## Integrated Methodology

Demonstrates the value of mixing quantitative fatality data with qualitative thematic analysis of final communications.

# Future Research Directions

- ★ **Longitudinal Study:** Track how trust in this specific testimony evolves over time in public memory and historical record.
- ★ **Comparative Analysis:** Apply the developed framework to other contemporary conflicts with high journalist casualty rates.
- ★ **Audience Reception Study:** Empirical research on how global audiences actually process and trust this type of high-risk testimony.
- ★ **Technology Focus:** Investigate the role of specific platforms (e.g., Telegram, Instagram) in disseminating and shaping final testimonies.
- ★ **Policy Extension:** Develop concrete policy recommendations for protecting journalists and preserving testimony in similar future scenarios.

# Limitations & Scope

- ★ **Temporal Bound:** Findings are specific to the intense six-month period studied; dynamics may shift in prolonged conflict.
- ★ **Data Scope:** Relies on verified records; the full spectrum of intimidation, injury, and non-fatal trauma is not captured.
- ★ **Generalizability:** The unique media environment and political context of Gaza limit direct application elsewhere.
- ★ **Perspective:** Primarily analyzes the testimony and its framing; does not include extensive direct audience perception data.

# Conclusions

- ★ Local journalists in Gaza, facing unprecedented fatalities, became primary epistemic agents through 'embodied persistence'.
- ★ Trust in their testimony was forged through visual proximity and transparency of risk, often outweighing institutional credibility.
- ★ Institutional framings shaped the narrative, but the raw, final communications carried a unique power as moral testimony.
- ★ This case redefines the relationship between risk, authenticity, and trust in journalism under conditions of systemic collapse.

# References

- ★ **Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.**
- ★ Margalit, A. (2002). *The Ethics of Memory*. Harvard University Press.
- ★ Tumber, H. (2020). *The Routledge Companion to Media and Conflict*. Routledge.
- ★ Reporters Without Borders (RSF). (2024). *Annual Report on Journalists Killed*.
- ★ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). (2024). *Database of Journalist Fatalities*.
- ★ Additional sources include verified news reports, NGO briefings, and analysis of social media content from October 2023 to March 2024.

# Acknowledgments

- ★ We acknowledge the journalists whose work and sacrifice are the subject of this study.
- ★ Thanks to the research assistants and institutions that supported data verification and analysis.
- ★ This research was conducted under the ethical guidelines for studying traumatic events and victim testimony.
- ★ We are grateful for feedback from colleagues in media studies, ethics, and conflict analysis.



# Thank You

Questions: [research.trust@media.shambhala.edu](mailto:research.trust@media.shambhala.edu) | Project Archive: [www.shambhala.edu/gaza-testimonies](http://www.shambhala.edu/gaza-testimonies)