



# DISASTER JOURNALISM

TEXTBOOK



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# **DISASTER JOURNALISM TEXTBOOK**

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## PREFACE

In an era where disasters have become an integral part of daily life, the role of well-trained journalists in reporting such events has gained critical importance. The ability of journalists to report disasters effectively and accurately not only ensures the dissemination of reliable information but also helps mitigate the negative impact of these events on societies.

Recognizing the need for specialized training in disaster journalism, the **Disaster Journalism: Preventing the News from Turning into a Disaster Project (2023-2-TR01-KA220-HED-000176222)** aims to bridge the gap in journalism education through a comprehensive curriculum dedicated to disaster reporting. Supported by the **Turkish National Agency**, this book has been developed as part of a European Union Erasmus KA220 Project in collaboration with **Selçuk University, Turkish Presidency of Directorate of Communication, the Radio and Television Supreme Council, Konya Metropolitan Municipality, University of Vigo, University of Primorska, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv**.

The Disaster Journalism Course Curriculum is designed to provide undergraduate students with practical knowledge and applicable skills to ensure accurate, ethical, and effective reporting during disasters. This curriculum has been published in **Spanish, Turkish, Slovenian, English, and Ukrainian**.

The first chapter, “**Defining Disasters**,” provides a comprehensive perspective on disasters by defining key concepts related to disasters and examining the institutional and legal frameworks of disaster management. This section explores the roles of governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, as well as the regulations governing disaster management.

The second chapter, “**Communication in Disaster Processes**,” focuses on the importance of effective communication during disaster periods, the tools used for communication, and strategies for managing crises. It primarily explains the correct strategies for effective communication and public perception management during disasters.

The third chapter, “**Socio-Psychological Preparedness in Disaster Reporting**,” examines extraordinary situations that arise during disasters and highlights the importance of strategies aimed at mitigating the socio-psychological effects of disasters. This section aims to prepare future journalists for the psychological impacts of disasters by addressing potential traumas and challenges, stress management techniques, and ways to enhance psychological resilience.

The fourth chapter, “**Physical Preparedness in Disaster Reporting**,” focuses on equipping journalists with the necessary skills to ensure personal safety, conduct risk assessments, and develop emergency planning during disasters. This section discusses identifying potential hazards in disaster zones, understanding the legal permits required for reporting, and developing the ability to work under extreme physical conditions.

The fifth chapter, “**Reporting Disasters Accurately**,” examines information-gathering processes during disasters, ensuring impartiality and transparency in disaster news, and maintaining the correct context in disaster reporting. It emphasizes the importance of news organizations establishing accurate broadcasting policies during disasters while explaining the practices that enable journalists to report disasters fairly and accurately.

The sixth chapter, “**Verification Processes in Disaster Reporting**,” highlights the importance of verifying information obtained during disasters, particularly from news sources and social media, to prevent

misinformation. It outlines the steps journalists should follow to ensure accuracy and emphasizes the necessity of collaborating with local, national, and international news agencies. Additionally, the role of expert opinions in verification processes is discussed.

The seventh chapter, “**Ethics in Disaster Reporting**,” addresses key principles such as avoiding sensationalism, maintaining ethical values, and respecting the privacy and dignity of disaster victims. It also explores the role of visual representation in disaster reporting and explains how ethical journalism can contribute to social recovery.

The eighth chapter, “**Visual Dimension in Disaster Reporting**,” focuses on producing and analysing visual content in disaster news within ethical boundaries. This section explains how to use visuals responsibly without violating legal limits or disregarding human sensitivities. It also discusses the role of visuals in preserving social memory and shaping public perception while enhancing journalists’ visual content creation skills.

The ninth chapter, “**Empathy in Disaster Reporting**,” explores how journalists can integrate empathy into disaster news coverage while avoiding the dramatization of victims and events. It highlights the importance of maintaining ethical standards while reporting crises and offers practical guidance on how journalists can report disasters with empathy.

The tenth chapter, “**Writing Disaster News**,” examines the technical and ethical principles of disaster news writing and emphasizes its societal importance. Through case studies and practical examples, this chapter provides journalism students with the necessary skills to write accurate and responsible disaster news.

The eleventh chapter, “**Editorial Oversight in Disaster Reporting**,” focuses on the editorial processes involved in disaster news writing, outlining content and structural standards. It highlights the necessity of strong editorial skills for journalists during disaster coverage and presents successful examples of disaster journalism.

The twelfth chapter, “**Redaction in Disaster News**,” explores techniques for editing disaster news to enhance accuracy and readability. It discusses textual and visual coherence, effective headlines, and strategic language use. This section provides journalism students with essential techniques for crafting reliable and engaging disaster news.

The thirteenth chapter, “**Combating Disinformation in Disaster Processes**,” examines the spread and impact of misinformation during disasters. It emphasizes the role of disaster journalists in preventing false information, maintaining public trust, and combating disinformation through best practices and case studies.

The fourteenth chapter, “**Journalism in Healing Disaster Wounds**,” explores the role of journalists in fostering social solidarity during disasters. It highlights the power of unity and discusses the importance of journalists in balancing government policies with societal needs while contributing to public diplomacy.

The final chapter, “**Use of Technology in Disaster Journalism**,” addresses the role of technology in disaster reporting, focusing on how journalists can collect, produce, and disseminate information using digital tools. It examines key technological resources such as emergency alert systems, social media, drones, satellite imaging, data analytics, and mobile applications, providing insights into their practical applications in crisis reporting.

# DEFINING DISASTERS

Lia Lola Vlado KOTNIK<sup>1</sup>



# BOOK CHAPTER 1

## DEFINING DISASTERS

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Defining Disasters: Definitions and Perspectives**
- **Types of Disasters**
- **Institutional Actors in Disaster Management**
- **Legal Framework of Disasters**
- **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**
- **Self-Assessment**
- **References**





## Introduction

**Understanding the varying definitions of disasters helps shape how societies prepare for, respond to, and recover from such events.**

Disasters are defining events in the human experience. Whether triggered by natural hazards or human activities, disasters disrupt societies, challenge the fabric of communities, and create long-lasting effects on individuals and institutions. From the destructive force of earthquakes and hurricanes to the devastating consequences of armed conflicts and industrial accidents, disasters represent a critical area of study within the social sciences and the humanities. Defining and understanding disasters is fundamental to effective disaster management, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Disasters are significant events that disrupt the functioning of societies, environments, collectives, and individuals. Understanding what constitutes a disaster is critical for disaster management, policy formulation, and response strategies. While the term 'disaster' may seem straightforward, the academic exploration of its definition reveals complex debates regarding its nature, causes, and impacts.

In this opening chapter, we will examine the definition of disasters from various academic perspectives, considering their social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Though intuitively understood by most, the concept of a disaster is nuanced and complex. The term 'disaster' is often used interchangeably with a variety of terms such as 'emergency', 'crisis', and 'catastrophe', but these words, while related, have distinct meanings in academic and practical contexts. The study of disasters and disaster management is a multidisciplinary field that incorporates elements from geography, sociology, anthropology, political science, communication science, media studies, journalism studies, law, ecology, and environmental science, among others.

The concept of disaster is fluid and ever evolving, shaped by changing global risks, social structures, and scientific advances. As such, the boundaries of what constitutes a disaster continue to expand, incorporating complex interdependencies and newly emerging challenges. Understanding the varying definitions of disasters helps shape how societies prepare for, respond to, and recover from such events. Disasters are typically framed as events that cause significant harm to human beings, their property, and the environment. However, this generalisation oversimplifies the dynamics of disaster occurrence and response. By understanding the definition of disasters and the broader context in which they unfold, we can better prepare for, mitigate, and respond to such events in a way that minimises harm and promotes resilience.

In this initial chapter, we will first outline key concepts related to disasters, followed by an in-depth analysis of disaster definitions and classifications. We will examine the roles of institutional actors in disaster management and the legal frameworks that govern disaster response. Additionally, we will offer a glossary of key disaster-related terms. Finally, we will summarise the key points of the chapter and suggest ways for learners to self-assess their understanding. This chapter draws from key scholarly sources and will thus cover the evolution of disaster definitions, the various types of disasters, the role of institutional actors, the legal framework that shapes disaster response, and also the disaster-related.

## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Hazard

Hazard is an event or phenomenon that has the potential to harm people, infrastructure, economies or the environment. They can be divided into three categories: natural, technological and anthropogenic (human-induced); natural hazards include natural events such as earthquakes and floods, technological hazards include accidents caused by human activities, and anthropogenic hazards include situations resulting from societal actions. Hazard identification, monitoring and early warning systems are important in disaster risk reduction frameworks to reduce the impacts of these hazards.

### Vulnerability

Vulnerability refers to the likelihood of harm to individuals, communities or systems when exposed to a hazard and is shaped by social, economic, political and environmental factors. Vulnerability is a dynamic process with physical, social and economic dimensions; for example, root causes such as insufficient resources or social inequality can increase exposure to hazards. It is emphasized that marginalized groups experience high levels of vulnerability due to systematic inequalities, and therefore strategies aimed at reducing disaster impacts should incorporate local knowledge and participatory management.

### Resilience

Resilience is the ability of individuals, communities or systems to withstand, adapt and recover from hazards. This concept refers to progress by integrating lessons learned from disasters into future preparations. With social, economic and ecological dimensions, resilience supports policies for sustainable development, climate adaptation and inclusive governance.

## Preparedness

Preparedness is the set of proactive measures taken before a disaster strikes and aims to reduce the impacts of a disaster and increase response capacity. It encompasses various activities such as risk assessment, emergency planning and early warning systems. Effective preparedness requires co-ordination, clear protocols and resourcing between governments, civil society organizations and local communities.

## Response

Response refers to immediate actions taken to address the effects of a disaster, with the main objective of saving lives, reducing suffering and preventing further damage. It includes services such as search and rescue, medical assistance, provision of temporary shelter and repair of critical infrastructure. Successful response is made possible by advance preparatory measures, the ability to make quick decisions and the ability to adapt to changing conditions.

## Recovery

Recovery is the process of rebuilding and improving communities, economies and infrastructure after a disaster. It includes both short-term repair and long-term economic revitalization and environmental improvement strategies. The goal is not just to return to the status quo, but to create more resilient and sustainable structures.

## Defining Disasters: Definitions and Perspectives

The definition of a disaster has evolved over time. In the field of disaster studies, scholars and practitioners have long debated what constitutes a disaster and how to best conceptualise and measure it. While there is no single, universally agreed-upon definition, several key perspectives help illuminate the complexity of disaster events. The definition of a disaster has been a subject of debate and evolution within disaster studies. If the emphasis is on defining the, of the phenomenon itself, rather than enumerating the causes of, conditions for or consequences of disasters, Perry (2018) identifies three collections of theory-based definitions: those representing the classical period, the hazards-disaster tradition, and the most recent focus on disasters as social phenomena.

### The Classical Period

This approach, which emerged in the early 20th century, typically defined disasters as external, natural events (e.g., earthquakes, floods, hurricanes) that disrupt societies and require response and recovery.

It emphasised the physical and environmental causes of disasters.

### The Hazards-Disaster Tradition

This tradition, which developed in the mid-20th century, focuses on the relationship between hazards (natural or man-made) and the vulnerability of people and communities. It emphasises the need for risk assessment and management, viewing disasters as the outcome of both hazard events and social vulnerability.

### Disasters as Social Phenomena

The most recent approach focuses on understanding disasters through a social lens, emphasising how human behaviour, social structures, and inequalities shape the impact and response to disasters. It argues that disasters are not just physical events, but social processes influenced by political, economic, and cultural factors.

Perry (2018) states that theory-based definitions of disasters have evolved from an agent-centred, damage-driven, uncontrollable event vision to one that is ecology-, vulnerability-, and resilience-centred, with "social disruption as the key defining feature or essential dimension of disasters" (p. 3).

As scholars and practitioners strive to create a universally accepted definition, they encounter challenges related to the diverse nature of disasters and the varying contexts in which they occur. However, several definitions have emerged that capture the key elements of what constitutes a disaster. Those common features included the definition of disasters as social events in social time, the acknowledgement that disasters are disruptive to social intercourse and that disasters should be understood in a context of social change (human and institutional adaptability), as indicated by Drabek (2017):

Most sociological research on disaster has been framed within commonly used definitions that include the following key ideas, that is, disasters are accidental or uncontrollable events, actual or threatened, that cause a society or a subsystem such as a community to incur human and/or physical losses or significant disruption of some essential functions like shelter, food or public safety (p. 139).

Across the work of several authors in the Quarantelli's edited volume *What is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question* (1998)—a foundational work that critically examines the concept of disasters, offering various viewpoints and exploring the complexities involved in defining and understanding disasters in

academic and practical terms—there is the basic agreement that disasters are disruptive, understood in social time as social events (not agent-based), and that they are intertwined with change.

This earlier Quarantelli's volume offers a more sociological perspective, stating that a disaster occurs when an event causes the functioning of a community or society to be disrupted to the extent that the usual routine is no longer possible. This definition stresses that disasters are not just the result of natural or technological hazards but are also a product of the societal context in which they occur. This definition actually underscores the social disruption caused by disasters, focusing on the breakdown of normal social routines and systems. Quarantelli's volume highlights that disasters are more than just physical events—they are significant social processes that impact communities in profound ways.

Despite certain disagreements among disaster theorists and researchers, there thus remains agreement that disasters are defined as “social occasions, that they are disruptive, and that they are related to social change” (Perry and Quarantelli, 2005, p. 315). In their seminal volume *What Is a Disaster? New Answers to Old Questions* (2005)—exploring different perspectives on what constitutes a disaster, providing new insights and refining the definition of disasters in the context of emerging challenges and research trends—Perry and Quarantelli with their contributors propose several definitions, among them also a definition of disaster that focuses on the suddenness, the societal impact, and overwhelming nature of the disaster event. They define a disaster as a situation or event which overwhelms the resources of a community or society, resulting in significant damage, loss of life, or the breakdown of normal societal functions. Such an understanding of a disaster defining it as a total or near total breakdown of local systems emphasises that a disaster is not just about the occurrence of a hazard but the disruption it causes to society's ability to function normally. Perry and Quarantelli's volume reflects the view that disasters are primarily social phenomena that result from the interaction between hazards, societal vulnerabilities, and the capacity of social systems to respond.

Perry's (2018) contribution—presenting an updated examination of how the concept of disaster has evolved, with attention to new types of hazards, such as cyber-attacks and pandemics, and changes in societal perceptions of disaster risks—further develops the understanding of disasters. He acknowledges that the definition of disaster is evolving due to the changing nature of risks and the broader social context. He argues that the understanding of disasters has shifted over time, particularly with the increased recognition of human vulnerability and the role of social systems in shaping disaster impacts. Perry notes that the changing nature of hazards, such as climate change, and the growing interconnectedness of the world have expanded the concept of disaster to include issues like global humanitarian crises. Perry (2018) argues that modern disasters are not limited to traditional natural or technological hazards but also encompass “emerging threats such as pandemics, cyberattacks, terrorism, and complex humanitarian crises” (p. 3.). This definition reflects the growing recognition that disasters are dynamic and multifaceted, often involving interactions between various types of hazards and vulnerabilities. Perry's perspective highlights that disasters are increasingly global and require an interdisciplinary approach to address their complexities.

All references just mentioned argue that a disaster is not just a physical event but a social phenomenon that is shaped by the vulnerabilities of affected populations. Again, a disaster is a dynamic process that unfolds over time, where the impact and recovery are influenced by various social, political, and economic factors.

Other scholars have also contributed to defining disasters. For example, Alexander (2002) in his book *Principles of Emergency Planning and Management*—a work offering a comprehensive overview of the principles of disaster management, including the planning, response, and recovery stages—em-

**Disaster is a dynamic process that unfolds over time, where the impact and recovery are influenced by various social, political, and economic factors.**

phasises that disasters involve societal failure to cope with a hazard, which is exacerbated by the lack of preparedness and mitigation efforts. Similarly, Blaikie et al. (1994) in their influential text *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters*—a work discussing mostly the social and political dimensions of disaster risks, emphasising how vulnerability, social inequalities, and power dynamics shape disaster outcomes—argue that disasters are social events shaped by the conditions of vulnerability that exist within a society. Blaikie and co-authors highlight the importance of viewing disasters through the lens of vulnerability, particularly in understanding how social factors contribute to the outcomes of disaster events. Their “At Risk” framework emphasises that disasters are not merely natural events but are socially constructed based on the levels of vulnerability present in a given population.

Building on these contributions, various perspectives have emerged in the effort to define disasters, each offering distinct insights into their causes and impacts.

### **Event-Centred Definition**

This definition focuses on a physical or environmental event, such as a hurricane, earthquake, or flood. According to this view, a disaster is a natural, human-made or complex event that causes significant damage or destruction. However, this definition is often criticised for overlooking the social and cultural aspects of disasters, such as the response capacity of affected populations. A disaster is not simply a rare or unusual event; it is an event that overwhelms the capacity of individuals or communities to cope. The scale of the event and the magnitude of its impact are critical components of disaster definitions.

### **Impact-Based Definition**

One common thread in disaster definitions is the impact of the event on human beings and their well-being. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), a disaster occurs when a hazard interacts with vulnerability, leading to widespread damage and suffering. The most visible effects are often loss of life, injury, and displacement, but disasters can also have long-term psychological, economic, and environmental consequences. This definition emphasises the magnitude of the impact on a community or society. A disaster is defined as an event that results in significant disruption to daily life, including loss of life, injury, economic loss, and environmental damage. In short, this definition highlights the socio-economic consequences of disasters.

### **Social-Construct-Centred Definition**

As Quarantelli (1998) points out, disasters are best understood as social constructs. A disaster is an event that exceeds the ability of a community or society to cope with its effects. The social construction definition stresses that disasters occur when a community's resources, organisational structures, and coping mechanisms are overwhelmed.

## Environment-Based Definition

Disasters not only affect human populations but also the environment. In many cases, environmental degradation or catastrophic ecological events (such as floods, forest fires, or hurricanes) are considered part of the disaster. Likewise, disasters can exacerbate existing social inequalities by disproportionately affecting marginalised groups (e.g., the poor, elderly, or disabled).

## Integrated Definition

Perry and Quarantelli (2005) propose an integrated definition that includes both the physical event and the social response. This definition recognises that a disaster involves not just the hazard but also the vulnerability of the affected population and their ability to respond.

## Internationality-Centred Definition

The international community often defines disasters based on their cross-border implications. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), a disaster is an event that causes significant human, economic, or environmental loss, often requiring international humanitarian assistance. The scale of such events often necessitates coordinated response efforts beyond the affected country's borders.

Disaster definitions have evolved as new insights and perspectives have emerged. For instance, while early disaster definitions were focused on natural hazards, more recent definitions include human-made and complex hazards such as technological failures, pandemics, and terrorism. These evolving definitions reflect the changing nature of threats and the increasing complexity of disaster response.

## Types of Disasters

**Disasters are inherently multidimensional, involving interactions between natural phenomena, human activities, and societal responses.**

The taxonomy and classification of disasters present unique challenges due to the complexity and diversity of such events. These challenges arise from several key factors. Disasters are inherently multidimensional, involving interactions between natural phenomena, human activities, and societal responses. For instance, an earthquake may trigger secondary effects like tsunamis or infrastructure collapse, demonstrating the interplay of physical, environmental, social, and economic dimensions. This complexity makes precise categorisation difficult.

A fundamental distinction exists between hazards, which represent potential threats, and disasters, which involve significant harm or damage. This differentiation depends on the vulnerability of the affected population and is essential for classification but often hard to define clearly. Disasters vary widely in type, with classifications based on criteria such as origin, scale, impact, or duration. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods, are typically grouped by cause, such as geological or meteorological factors. Human-made disasters include industrial accidents,

or duration. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods, are typically grouped by cause, such as geological or meteorological factors. Human-made disasters include industrial accidents,

chemical spills, and armed conflicts, categorised by their origin, such as industrial or biological. Complex disasters arise from interactions between natural and human-made factors, such as climate change-induced events or epidemics worsened by human infrastructure. The vast diversity of disaster types complicates efforts to establish a universally accepted taxonomy.

Temporal and spatial variability further complicate classification, as disasters differ across regions and timeframes. The same event, such as a flood, might cause significant damage in an urban area but less in a sparsely populated region. Similarly, preparedness, resilience, and infrastructure influence the impact. Disasters also vary in their development, with some unfolding gradually, like droughts or climate change, and others occurring suddenly, such as earthquakes or hurricanes. Placing these on a single spectrum of urgency or severity is challenging.

**Defining, categorising, and classifying disasters is a special problem in disaster studies because of the inherent complexity, variability, and context-dependence of disasters.**

The assessment of disasters often involves subjective judgment, as stakeholders like governments, researchers, and affected communities may evaluate impacts differently. Additionally, there is no universal threshold for when a hazard becomes a disaster, as each event's impact on communities varies based on factors like scale of damage, economic loss, and social disruption. The classification process is also heavily influenced by social, cultural, and political contexts. For example, a minor event in one country could be a major disaster in another, depending on local capacity to respond, population vulnerability, and infrastructure resilience.

structure but lead to significant destruction in another. Disaster studies are interdisciplinary, involving geography, sociology, economics, environmental science, and public health, each contributing unique perspectives to the classification process. For example, geographers may focus on the physical characteristics of hazards, while sociologists examine social vulnerability, and public health experts prioritise health consequences. This breadth of perspectives precludes a unified approach to classification.

The evolution of global risks introduces new disaster types, challenging traditional taxonomies. Pandemics like COVID-19 highlight intersections between health crises and social or economic factors, raising questions about whether they should be classified as natural or human-made. Similarly, climate change and cyber disasters, such as cyber-attacks and technological risks, do not fit neatly into existing categories. Disparities between global and local perspectives also add complexity. What qualifies as a major disaster in a developed country may differ from the experience in a developing country, where infrastructure vulnerabilities might amplify the impacts of even minor events.

In summary, defining, categorising, and classifying disasters is a special problem in disaster studies because of the inherent complexity, variability, and context-dependence of disasters. They involve a wide range of factors, including human vulnerability, environmental hazards, social systems, and infrastructure. Given the evolving nature of risks and the interdisciplinary nature of the field, disaster taxonomy must be flexible, dynamic, and sensitive to local contexts while maintaining some level of consistency to support effective research, policy-making, and disaster management.

Disasters can be thus categorised in various ways, depending on the type of hazard, their scale, and the nature of their impacts. While explicitly recognising that such events vary across a wide variety of characteristics, e.g., scope, agent, predictability, duration, suddenness, and the like, most researchers differentiate three “types” of disasters: (1) natural, (2) technological, and (3) conflict-based; or, (1) natural, (2) technological, and (3) complex; or (1) natural, (2) technological, and (3) environmental; etc. However, behind these recent triads lies a much older and more influential dualistic model of disaster classification. According to this model, disasters are categorised into two main types: natural and human-made (or man-made).

## **Natural Disasters**

These disasters are caused by natural events and processes. They include earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, and pandemics. Natural disasters often result from environmental forces and can cause significant destruction and loss of life, particularly when human settlements are located in hazard-prone areas.

### **Seismic Disasters**

Earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions are classic examples of seismic disasters. These events are often sudden, unpredictable, and have the potential for widespread devastation. The 1995 Kobe earthquake in Japan and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami serve as significant case studies that illustrate the catastrophic impacts of seismic events. More recently, the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye demonstrated how a lack of resilient infrastructure and preparedness can exacerbate the consequences of seismic disasters.

### **Hydrological Disasters**

Floods, landslides, and droughts are often the result of irregular patterns in water cycles, either due to extreme precipitation or prolonged dry periods. These disasters can have long-lasting effects on agriculture, water resources, and human health. For example, the 2010 Pakistan floods affected millions of people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. Similarly, the 2023 floods in Slovenia and the 2024 floods in Spain's Valencia region highlight how extreme weather events can cause widespread destruction and displacement.

### **Meteorological Disasters**

Hurricanes, tornadoes, heatwaves, and blizzards fall into this category. They are driven by atmospheric conditions and can be exacerbated by climate change. For example, the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005 in the United States highlighted the vulnerability of coastal communities to intense storms.

### **Biological Disasters**

Pandemics, epidemics, and insect infestations are also categorised as natural disasters. They are events caused by the rapid spread of infectious diseases or harmful organisms, leading to widespread illness, environmental damage, and loss of life or resources. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, illustrates the global impact of biological disasters, affecting both public health systems and economies.

### **Human-Made (or Man-Made) Disasters**

These disasters are caused by human actions, whether intentional or accidental. Examples include industrial accidents, oil spills, nuclear accidents, terrorism, and armed conflicts.

## Technological Disasters

These include nuclear accidents, chemical spills, and industrial explosions. The Chernobyl nuclear disaster (1986) and the Bhopal gas leak (1984) are two of the most notorious examples of technological disasters that have had devastating effects on human health and the environment. There are industrial accidents (chemical spills, nuclear accidents, oil spills), transport accidents (airplane crashes, train derailments, shipping accidents) and cybersecurity incidents (cyber-attacks, data breaches, infrastructure disruptions).

## Human-Conflict Disasters

Wars, civil unrest, and terrorism are human-made events that often lead to large-scale displacement, loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, and long-term social and economic instability. The Syrian Civil War and the Rwandan Genocide are prime examples of conflict-driven disasters that have had profound impacts on affected populations. More recently, the war in Ukraine has resulted in humanitarian crises, mass displacement, and widespread destruction, illustrating the severe consequences of conflict-related disasters.

## Environmental Disasters

Human activities, such as deforestation, urbanisation, pollution, soil erosion, or loss of biodiversity, can contribute to disasters like land degradation, air pollution, and oceanic contamination. These disasters often have long-term environmental and health consequences, such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. These types of disasters may occur gradually and may not always be immediately recognised as disasters but can have long-term social and environmental consequences.

## Complex Disasters

Some events may be classified as “complex” disasters, which involve a combination of natural and human-made elements. For instance, the aftermath of an earthquake may be exacerbated by a technological failure or poor governance. Or, for example, war or conflict zones can be impacted by both political instability and natural hazards, leading to complex humanitarian crises.

Classifying disasters as “man-made” versus “natural” is a dominant approach in disaster studies, but it is problematic for several reasons. While this dichotomy has been useful historically for organising disaster knowledge, it oversimplifies the complex interactions between human and natural systems. The renowned disaster theorist Perry (2005) takes the following critical stance on this matter: Indeed, classification is itself a way of defining disasters more precisely. Even primitive phenotypic typologies—now seen as very naïve—like classifying disasters as “manmade” versus “natural,” begin the process of specifying what a disaster is. At the most basic level, this distinction was useful in its time as a means of grouping human response differences.

Further research and reflection have caused us to realize that issues in addition to what precipitates the event in simple terms are important. Many disaster researchers are ready to begin thinking about genotypes: expressing classification in terms of social impacts, social time and the like. As this process continues, one can expect more sophisticated typologies that will allow researchers to group and compare their findings with those of others in theoretically meaningful ways (p. 318).

The “man-made” vs. “natural” disaster classification has long been a dominant framework in disaster studies for several reasons. Historically, this dichotomy emerged because early research and response efforts primarily focused on understanding natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes, which were seen as external forces beyond human control. Concurrently, industrialisation and urbanisa-

Modern disasters increasingly arise from interactions between human activities and environmental factors, making them neither purely natural nor entirely man-made.

tion highlighted disasters caused by human activities, such as industrial accidents, war, and environmental degradation, where human decisions clearly influenced outcomes.

This simplified classification system offers an accessible framework for understanding causes (natural or human-driven), impacts (human or environmental), and responses. It is particularly useful for disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response, providing clarity for governments, organisations, and scholars. Furthermore, many policy and legal frameworks are built around this division, with distinct strategies for addressing natural and man-made disasters. For example, natural disasters often involve disaster management agencies focusing on recovery from events like floods or hurricanes, while man-made disasters typically engage legal frameworks addressing corporate liability or industrial safety. Cultural and psycho-

logical factors also reinforce this dualistic classification. Viewing natural disasters as forces beyond human control can provide psychological relief by fostering acceptance of the inevitable. Conversely, man-made disasters emphasise human responsibility and the potential for accountability and prevention, which can drive action and policy changes.

However, this classification is increasingly problematic because it fails to capture the interconnectedness of human and natural systems. Many disasters result from a combination of natural hazards and human actions. For instance, extreme weather events like hurricanes and droughts, while natural in origin, are increasingly influenced by human-driven climate change, which amplifies their frequency and severity. Similarly, floods, while natural phenomena, are exacerbated by human settlement patterns, deforestation, and inadequate urban planning. The boundaries between man-made and natural disasters are often blurred. Nuclear accidents like the Chernobyl disaster involve human error but have widespread environmental impacts. Similarly, chemical spills may result from industrial accidents but affect ecosystems and water supplies, merging human and natural consequences. Events like the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi disaster illustrate how a natural hazard, such as a tsunami, can trigger a technological disaster, demonstrating the interdependence of these classifications.

Modern disasters increasingly arise from interactions between human activities and environmental factors, making them neither purely natural nor entirely man-made. Urbanisation and resource depletion, for example, create vulnerabilities that compound the severity of natural hazards. Settlements in flood-prone areas or deforestation triggering landslides are clear examples of human choices amplifying the impacts of natural events. Human vulnerability is a critical determinant of whether an event becomes a disaster. For instance, a hurricane may have minimal impact in areas with robust infrastructure and preparedness but cause devastation in regions lacking these resources. This demonstrates that the severity of "natural" disasters is often shaped by human decisions, policies, and social structures. Disasters, therefore, are not merely caused by natural or human forces but by societal vulnerabilities to these forces. Moreover, the concept of a disaster is a social construct influenced by societal perceptions and responses. A natural hazard may not lead to a disaster in one context but could be catastrophic in another due to economic, social, or political factors. This underscores the need for a more nuanced approach to disaster classification.

While the natural vs. man-made dichotomy provides a convenient framework, it oversimplifies the complex, interconnected nature of disasters. Many disasters stem from a combination of natural and human factors, and their impacts are shaped by human activities, vulnerabilities, and policies. To address this complexity, disaster classification must adopt a more integrated approach that acknowledges the interplay between human and natural systems, recognising their shared contributions to risk and resilience.

## Institutional Actors in Disaster Management

Disaster management is a complex, multi-faceted process that involves numerous institutional actors, both public and private, at local, national, and international levels. These actors play a pivotal role in disaster response, recovery, and mitigation. Disaster management therefore involves a complex array of institutional actors, each playing a critical role in preparedness, response, and recovery. These actors operate at various levels of governance and coordination, from local communities to international organisations. Effective disaster management therefore requires coordination among multiple institutional actors, including:

### National Governments & Local Authorities

Governments are the primary institutional actors responsible for disaster management. National and local governments are tasked with emergency preparedness, response coordination, and post-disaster recovery. Local governments play a critical role in responding to disasters, as they are most familiar with the specific needs and vulnerabilities of their communities. In many cases, local authorities are the first responders and have the responsibility to coordinate emergency services. Government agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the U.S. and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in India have been pivotal in disaster response. Besides emergency management agencies, there are also public health departments and military organisations that provide logistical support. Governments also play a crucial role in passing legislation that dictates disaster preparedness and management policies. For example, in the United States, the National Response Framework (NRF) outlines how federal, state, and local governments should coordinate disaster response efforts.

Country	Original Name	English Translation
Spain	Dirección General de Protección Civil y Emergencias (DGPCyE)	General Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergencies
Slovenia	Uprava Republike Slovenije za zaščito in reševanje (URSZR)	Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief
Türkiye	Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (AFAD)	Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD)
Ukraine	Державна служба України з надзвичайних ситуацій (ДСНС)	State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU)

In Spain, DGPCyE, situated under the Ministry of the Interior, handles disaster management and emergency response, including natural, man-made and complex disasters. In Slovenia, URSZR is responsible for civil protection, disaster response, and recovery. In Türkiye, AFAD is the primary government agency responsible for managing disasters, emergencies, and civil protection. In Ukraine, SESU is responsible for managing disaster prevention, response, and recovery in Ukraine, and it plays a key role in emergency situations. These agencies are responsible for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery in their respective countries, similar to FEMA in the U.S. and the NDMA in India.

## **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)**

NGOs such as the international Red Crescent Society and Red Cross Society with their national affiliations (such as the Turkish Red Crescent affiliate Türk Kızılay, the Ukrainian Red Cross affiliate Товариство Червоного Хреста України [Tovarystvo Chervonoho Khresta Ukrayiny], the Slovenian Red Cross affiliate Rdeči križ Slovenije, the Spanish Red Cross affiliate Cruz Roja Española [Spanish], Creu Roja Espanyola [Catalan], Cruz Vermella Espanyola [Galician], Spainiako Gurutze Gorria [Basque], Médecins Sans Frontières (also known as Doctors Without Borders), and local humanitarian organisations are often at the forefront of disaster response, providing emergency relief, medical care, and recovery assistance. They play an essential role in areas where government responses may be insufficient. NGOs also help communities recover by providing long-term rehabilitation programs.

## **International Organisations**

International organisations, such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank provide guidance on disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance. These organisations help coordinate global disaster responses, especially when disasters cross borders or overwhelm national capacities. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is another key actor, providing humanitarian aid and relief to affected populations. They play a vital role in disaster response, particularly in the aftermath of natural disasters and conflicts.

## **Private Sector**

The private sector plays a growing role in disaster response, particularly in sectors like logistics, communications, and construction. Companies like FedEx and UPS have provided essential logistical support during large-scale disaster responses, while engineering firms contribute to rebuilding efforts. Businesses, especially those in the construction, logistics, and technology sectors, contribute to disaster management by providing critical services, goods, and infrastructure. Private companies are also often involved in insurance and risk management.

## **Community-Based Organisations**

Local organisations, including community groups and volunteer networks, play a significant role in disaster preparedness and response. They are often the first responders in a crisis and help to bridge the gap between formal institutions and affected populations.

## Legal Framework of Disasters

The legal framework for disaster management encompasses national legislation, international treaties, and humanitarian law. These laws guide how disasters should be managed, how response efforts should be coordinated, and how affected populations should be protected. The legal framework for disaster management thus involves international, national, and local laws that regulate disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Key aspects include:

### International Law (International Disaster Law)

A key legal instrument is the International Disaster Response Law (IDRL), which governs the provision of humanitarian assistance during disasters. International law provides a framework for countries to cooperate in disaster response. For example, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), carried out by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in Geneva, aims to reduce the risk of disasters and enhance resilience globally: “The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 outlines seven clear targets and four priorities for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks: (i) Understanding disaster risk; (ii) Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (iii) Investing in disaster reduction for resilience and; (iv) Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. It aims to achieve the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries over the next 15 years” (UNDRR, 2015). This framework outlines global priorities for disaster risk reduction and emphasises the need for a holistic approach to disaster management, including reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience and preparedness across nations.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), also located in Geneva, provides guidance for countries in preparing for and mitigating the impacts of disasters as well. IFRC published World Disasters Report 2015: Focus on Local Actors, the Key to Humanitarian Effectiveness, a document that highlights the importance of local actors in disaster management, emphasising their role in response and recovery efforts, and offers insights into how humanitarian organisations can improve their effectiveness. The document on the website features this introduction: “Our 2015 World Disasters Report focused on local actors as the key to humanitarian effectiveness. The Ebola crisis in West Africa, the Nepal earthquake, the conflict in Syria, floods in Germany and Hurricane Sandy in the United States mobilized our humanitarian response. They were all very different crises, but they shared one common feature. Each of them highlighted the critical yet often undervalued role of local actors. Local actors are always the first to respond. In Nepal, local volunteers and emergency workers were responding even as the dust from the earthquake still hung in the air. In West Africa, well before the world woke up to the true nature of the Ebola threat, local health workers and affected communities were treating and isolating the sick and burying the dead. Their effectiveness goes beyond their proximity. They are also effective because of the perspective they bring. Because they are present in communities before a crisis hits, they see it not as an event in and of itself, but as something that is linked to the past, to unaddressed risks, vulnerabilities and inequalities. Emergencies – disasters, health crises, even conflicts – are not beginnings or ends, no matter how severe. They are moments that need to be overcome; simply overcoming them, however, will not put an end to the challenges faced by communities” (IFRC, 2015).

### National Laws (National Legislations)

Countries typically have national disaster management laws that define the responsibilities of various government agencies and the mechanisms for disaster response and recovery. These laws are crucial in ensuring effective disaster management within a country’s borders. In many countries, disaster manage-

ment laws are enacted to govern the responsibilities of different levels of government and institutional actors. For example, the U.S. Stafford Act provides a legal foundation for federal disaster assistance, the Disaster Management Act in India created the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to coordinate disaster management efforts at the national level, while countries like Japan and Indonesia have specific laws governing disaster risk reduction and recovery.

## **Humanitarian Law (Human Rights Law)**

In conflict situations, international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions, provides protection for civilians and addresses the responsibilities of states to provide aid and assistance during disasters. Human rights law also intersects with disaster management. In the aftermath of disasters, governments are obligated to protect vulnerable populations, provide essential services, and ensure that rights are not violated. International human rights frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, mandate the protection of disaster-affected populations.

## **Insurance and Liability Laws**

Legal frameworks also address the liability and insurance aspects of disaster management, determining who is responsible for damages and who will cover recovery costs.

## **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**

This first chapter has examined the concept of disaster from various academic perspectives. We have defined disasters, explored different types of disasters, and discussed the roles of institutional actors in disaster management. We have also reviewed the legal framework that governs disaster response and recovery. The key learning outcomes of this chapter include:

- **Students can understand the multifaceted nature of disasters and their causes.**
- **Students can understand the complexity of disaster definitions and the factors that influence them.**
- **Students can gain insight into the different types of disasters and their impacts on societies and environments.**
- **Students can recognise the roles of institutional actors in disaster management, from government agencies to local communities.**
- **Students can explore the legal frameworks that guide disaster response, mitigation, and recovery.**
- **Students become familiar with key terminology used in disaster research and management.**

## Self-Assessment

1 What is a key characteristic of a disaster?

- It occurs only due to natural hazards
- It causes significant disruption to society
- It is always predictable
- It primarily affects only the environment

2 Which academic discipline is NOT commonly associated with disaster studies?

- Sociology
- Political science
- Biology
- Environmental science

3 The 1755 Lisbon earthquake was significant because:

- It was the deadliest earthquake in history
- It led to early social scientific analysis of disasters
- It was the first recorded earthquake
- It only affected Portugal

4 What does the vulnerability model in disaster studies emphasise?

- The randomness of disasters
- The role of social and economic factors in disaster risk
- That disasters are purely natural events
- The inevitability of disasters

5 According to Perry (2018), which of the following is NOT a primary approach to defining disasters?

- Classical period approach
- Hazards-disaster tradition
- Technological accident model
- Social phenomena approach

6 The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction emphasises:

- Solely focusing on emergency relief
- Reducing disaster risks through international cooperation
- Ignoring social vulnerabilities
- Restricting disaster studies to natural disasters

7 How do disaster scholars critique the traditional “natural vs. human-made” disaster classification?

- It oversimplifies the interaction between natural and human factors
- It is the only valid classification method
- It ignores technological disasters
- It only applies to developed countries

8 Which of the following is an example of a complex disaster?

- A small-scale flood
- A cyber-attack on a financial system
- An earthquake leading to a nuclear accident
- A minor earthquake with no damage

9 Which of the following organisations is involved in disaster response at the international level?

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)
- Local fire department

10 The concept of resilience in disaster studies refers to:

- The inability of societies to recover from disasters
- The capacity of individuals and communities to adapt and recover
- The number of fatalities in a disaster
- The total financial loss caused by a disaster

## Answer Key

1.b, 2.c, 3.b, 4.b, 5.c, 6.b, 7.a, 8.c, 9.b, 10.b

### Note

The author used AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to support drafting, editing, and improving clarity and coherence in this chapter.

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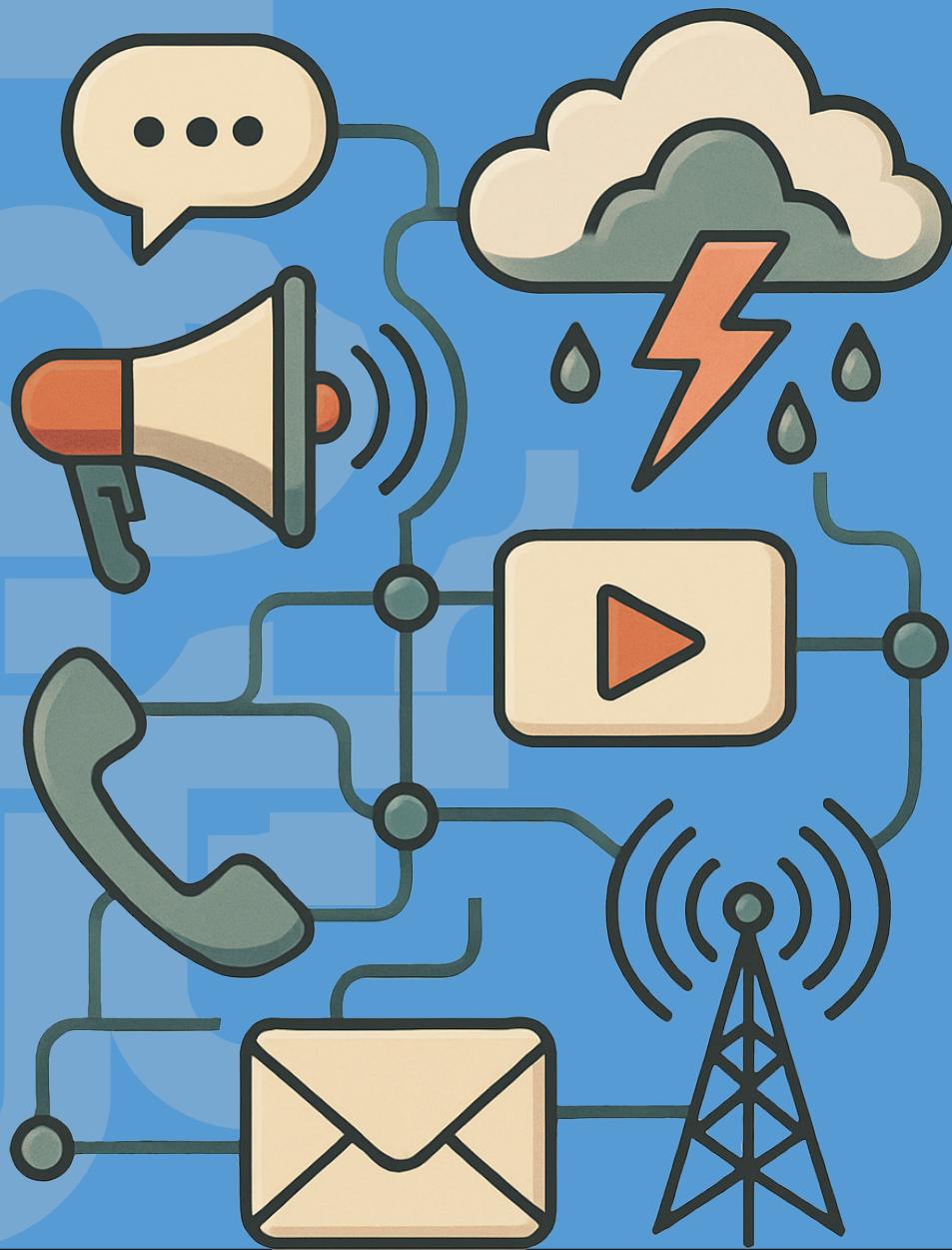
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# COMMUNICATION IN DISASTER PROCESSES

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## BOOK CHAPTER 2

### COMMUNICATION IN DISASTER PROCESSES

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Importance of Communication in Disasters**
- **Conceptual Framework of Disaster Communication**
- **Disaster Communication Across Phases**
- **Communication Principles in Disasters**
- **Communication Strategies in Disasters**
- **Communication Challenges in Disasters**
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- **References**



## Introduction

Disasters are multifaceted events that profoundly impact societies, manifesting through loss of life, destruction of property, disruption of essential services, and long-term economic challenges. They represent both acute emergencies and prolonged crises, requiring coordinated responses across diverse sectors and scales. The reach and scope of disasters have grown in recent years, transcending local, regional, and even national boundaries. As Steffens (2012) observes, “disasters now have global reach. It seems that every week, journalists report from the far corners of the globe, relaying dramatic stories of survival or heartache in big cities or remote villages struck by an earthquake, hurricane, blizzard, terror attack, tsunami, mine collapse, famine, or plane crash” (p. 1). This global dimension of disasters underscores the need for widespread, coordinated communication efforts.

*Among the myriad factors determining the success of disaster management efforts, communication emerges as a critical determinant, shaping the trajectory of preparedness, response, and recovery.*

Among the myriad factors determining the success of disaster management efforts, communication emerges as a critical determinant, shaping the trajectory of preparedness, response, and recovery. Effective communication in disaster contexts extends beyond the mere dissemination of information. It encompasses the ability to convey complex messages clearly, manage public perception, coordinate multi-sectoral efforts, and ensure equitable access to life-saving information, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised populations. These populations often face compounded challenges during crises, underscoring the ethical imperative of transparent, responsible, and inclusive communication strategies.

As Haddow and Haddow (2013) highlight in their work *Disasters Communications in a Changing Media World*, disaster communication is not only a technical function but also a relational and adaptive process.

Disasters, whether natural—such as hurricanes and earthquakes—or human-made, including industrial accidents or acts of terrorism, disrupt both physical infrastructures and informational networks. Such disruptions can exacerbate chaos and impede timely decision-making if communication systems fail to bridge critical gaps. Consequently, the role of communication extends to countering misinformation, promoting social cohesion, and reinforcing community resilience amidst uncertainty and adversity.

This chapter explores the centrality of communication in disaster management, integrating insights from leading academic research and case studies. It examines foundational principles, innovative tools, and strategic frameworks essential for effective communication during disasters. Particular attention is given to the role of emerging technologies, cultural competence, and participatory approaches in enhancing communication outcomes. Through this outline, the chapter aims to equip students with a nuanced understanding of communication dynamics in disaster scenarios and their implications for policy and practice.

## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Hazard

Hazard is an event or phenomenon that has the potential to harm people, infrastructure, economies or the environment. They can be divided into three categories: natural, technological and anthropogenic (human-induced); natural hazards include natural events such as earthquakes and floods, technological hazards include accidents caused by human activities, and anthropogenic hazards include situations resulting from societal actions. Hazard identification, monitoring and early warning systems are important in disaster risk reduction frameworks to reduce the impacts of these hazards.

### Disaster Communication

Disaster communication refers to the exchange of information before, during, and after a disaster, with the aim of protecting lives, reducing damage, and facilitating recovery efforts (Haddow & Haddow, 2013). Emergency communication strategies include the timely and accurate transmission of warnings, instructions and updates; for example, the issuance of evacuation orders during the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake demonstrates the importance of this communication. It also focuses on long-term strategies, providing resources and information about ongoing efforts in the post-disaster recovery process.

### Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is the process of managing and disseminating information during a crisis or disaster, with the aim of informing, guiding and reassuring the public while minimizing confusion and panic (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments and health organizations implemented effective crisis communication strategies by providing real-time updates on safety measures and public health issues. Successful crisis communication requires consistent, empathetic and clear messaging to build trust, and platforms such as social media and hotlines become important tools in this process.

### Risk Communication

Risk communication refers to the exchange of information about potential risks and hazards, which helps individuals, communities and organizations understand and mitigate the impact of disasters (Lundgren & McMakin, 2018). It aims to educate the public before disasters and inform them about preventive measures; for example, earthquake preparedness campaigns in California or public health initiatives during Zika virus outbreaks are examples of this type of communication. The effectiveness of risk communication is enhanced when local stakeholders develop messages tailored to community needs.



## Resilience Communication

Resilience communication refers to the sharing of information to increase the ability of individuals and communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from challenges (Kar & Cochran, 2019). This communication strengthens resilience by raising community awareness; for example, in the aftermath of the 2019 cyclone in and around Mozambique, information was disseminated in collaboration with local communities. It also aims to strengthen the social and psychological wellbeing of communities, supporting the achievement of long-term resilience goals.

## Public Communication

Public communication is a form of communication conducted through Public Information Officers (PIOs) to convey official statements and coordinate with the media in disaster situations (Macnamara, 2018). This communication is critical to maintain trust and transparency; it is also an important strategy to correct misinformation. Social media platforms are an effective tool to ensure the rapid dissemination of accurate information, so clear and consistent messaging is essential.

## Media Communication

Media communication refers to the use of various platforms (television, radio, social media, websites) to disseminate information during a disaster (Watson, 2008). Traditional media is critical, especially in reaching elderly or rural populations; for example, during Hurricane Harvey in 2017, emergency broadcasts provided important updates. While social media platforms increase interactive communication by providing real-time updates, there is a risk of misinformation spreading; therefore, it is important to quickly correct false narratives through trusted accounts.

## Inclusive Communication

Inclusive communication aims to ensure that disaster messages reach all segments of the population, especially marginalized groups and people with disabilities (Bush & Lindsey, 2024). Accessibility measures such as sign language interpretation and captioned videos are important for individuals with sensory disabilities; such practices were used effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, creating collaborations between governments, NGOs and local communities to ensure the dissemination of multilingual and culturally sensitive messages strengthens disaster communication.

## Importance of Communication in Disasters

The importance of communication in disasters cannot be overstated. Effective communication can save lives, prevent injury, reduce panic, and enhance community resilience. This section outlines several critical ways in which communication impacts disaster processes, drawing on examples and best practices from around the globe.

### Informing The Public

One of the primary functions of communication during a disaster is to inform the public about the nature of the threat and the necessary actions they should take. Clear, concise, and accurate messages are critical in reducing confusion and ensuring individuals can protect themselves. Misinformation or delays in communication can lead to panic, improper responses, or unnecessary casualties.

One of the primary functions of communication during a disaster is to inform the public about the nature of the threat and the necessary actions they should take.

For example, during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, a lack of an effective early warning system and clear public communication contributed to the devastating loss of life. Many coastal communities, particularly in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, had little to no warning before the massive waves struck. In some areas, people noticed the ocean receding from the shore—a natural precursor to a tsunami—but were unaware of the danger and, in some cases, even walked toward the exposed seabed out of curiosity. Additionally, inconsistent or delayed messaging from local authorities meant that even those who received warnings did not always understand the urgency or appropriate evacuation procedures. As a result, over 230,000 people lost their lives across multiple countries.

In contrast, Japan's sophisticated warning systems use automated text alerts, public address systems, and television and radio broadcasts to provide real-time, actionable information during earthquakes and tsunamis. Additionally, social media platforms and emergency apps now play a growing role in disaster communication, allowing officials to reach people quickly and correct false information that may spread. These measures demonstrate how timely and accurate public information dissemination can significantly reduce harm, increase public trust, and improve overall disaster preparedness.

### Coordinating Response Efforts

Communication is also central to the coordination of disaster response efforts among various agencies, including emergency services, government bodies, humanitarian organizations, and local communities. A lack of effective communication can result in fragmented and inefficient responses. For example, du-

ring Hurricane Katrina in 2005, communication breakdowns among federal, state, and local authorities delayed relief efforts and caused widespread public dissatisfaction. Conversely, some have argued that the coordination during the 2010 Haiti earthquake response demonstrated the value of robust communication systems, as international organisations, including the United Nations and the Red Cross, utilised digital platforms and mobile technologies to align resources and minimise duplication, ensuring timely delivery of aid. However, the reality of the Haiti response was far more complicated.

The earthquake severely damaged Haiti's infrastructure, including cell towers, roads, and government buildings, making communication difficult for local responders and authorities. This disruption contributed to delays, confusion, and inefficiencies in aid distribution. Furthermore, despite international efforts, coordination among various humanitarian organisations was often inconsistent. Many operated independently, leading to duplication of efforts in some areas and shortages in others. Local communities and government agencies struggled to integrate effectively into the relief efforts, limiting the overall efficiency of the response. Additionally, logistical bottlenecks, particularly at the Port-au-Prince airport, delayed the delivery of critical supplies, further hampering aid efforts. While digital communication tools played a role in facilitating some aspects of coordination, they did not ensure a seamless or efficient response. The Haiti earthquake response highlights both the importance and the limitations of communication systems in disaster relief. Effective disaster management requires not only technological tools but also well-established coordination mechanisms that integrate local and international efforts.

**Effective messaging helps individuals and communities cope with uncertainty by fostering a sense of stability, solidarity, and hope, ultimately reducing long-term psychological impacts such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression.**

### Providing Emotional Support

Disasters often trigger emotional and psychological distress in affected populations, and communication serves as a vital tool for providing reassurance, emotional support, and guidance during these times. In moments of crisis, individuals may experience heightened anxiety, fear, grief, and confusion, making clear and compassionate communication essential in alleviating distress. Effective messaging helps individuals and communities cope with uncertainty by fostering a sense of stability, solidarity, and hope, ultimately reducing long-term psychological impacts such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression.

For instance, after the Christchurch earthquake in New Zealand (2011), government and local agencies used radio broadcasts and community meetings not only to share critical updates but also to offer psychological support resources, including counselling services and helplines. Similarly, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (2005), mental health professionals worked alongside media channels to disseminate messages that validated survivors' emotions while directing them to available support networks. These efforts ensured that affected individuals felt heard, understood, and connected to a broader community of care.

Additionally, countering misinformation through consistent, empathetic, and transparent communication plays a crucial role in alleviating fears and restoring public confidence. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, public health agencies worldwide emphasised mental well-being in their outreach, promoting stress management techniques, crisis hotlines, and community support networks. By acknowledging the emotional toll of disasters and integrating psychological first aid into crisis communication strategies, authorities can empower communities to navigate adversity with resilience and hope.

## **Building Trust**

Trust is a cornerstone of effective disaster management, and communication plays a pivotal role in establishing, maintaining, and restoring it. Without trust, public compliance with emergency directives may falter, leading to greater risks and prolonged crises. Transparent, frequent, and accurate communication is essential to counter misinformation, dispel rumours, and reassure the public that authorities are acting in their best interests. Clear messaging from credible sources fosters a sense of security, allowing communities to make informed decisions and respond effectively to disasters.

For instance, during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014–2016), misinformation and scepticism toward health agencies initially hindered containment efforts, as many communities distrusted government interventions and resisted medical assistance. To address this challenge, response teams implemented culturally sensitive communication strategies, partnering with local leaders, religious figures, and community organisations to deliver accurate information in ways that resonated with the affected populations. These tailored efforts not only dispelled fears but also encouraged individuals to adopt safety measures such as quarantine protocols and safe burial practices, ultimately improving public compliance and aiding in outbreak control.

Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments worldwide faced challenges in combating misinformation and vaccine hesitancy. Nations that prioritised transparency—such as holding regular press briefings, engaging with health experts, and addressing public concerns openly—were more successful in securing public trust. In contrast, inconsistent messaging and a lack of transparency in some regions fuelled scepticism, leading to lower adherence to health guidelines.

Trust-building also requires sustained engagement beyond crisis moments. Establishing reliable communication channels before a disaster strikes—through public awareness campaigns, emergency preparedness education, and community outreach—ensures that when a crisis occurs, people already have confidence in the sources delivering critical information. This proactive approach strengthens resilience, enhances cooperation, and creates a foundation of trust that can withstand even the most challenging emergencies.

## **Fostering Preparedness and Prevention**

Communication is integral to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and preparedness. By educating the public about potential hazards, risks, and preventive measures, authorities can enhance resilience and reduce vulnerabilities. Effective communication ensures that individuals and communities understand the steps they need to take before, during, and after a disaster, leading to more coordinated and efficient responses.

For example, regular earthquake drills in Japan and school-based hurricane education programs in the United States empower communities to respond effectively during crises. These programs instil a sense of preparedness by familiarising people with emergency procedures, such as identifying safe zones, practising evacuation routes, and understanding early warning systems. Similarly, in countries prone to wildfires, public awareness campaigns and controlled burn demonstrations teach residents how to mitigate fire risks by maintaining defensible spaces around homes and following evacuation orders.

Proactive communication strategies, such as distributing flood-risk maps and evacuation plans, not only improve preparedness but also reduce losses. Governments and disaster agencies worldwide use multiple communication channels, including social media, SMS alerts, and community meetings, to ensure

timely dissemination of critical information. In regions vulnerable to tsunamis, siren systems and text-based alerts serve as life-saving tools, allowing populations to evacuate before waves reach coastal areas.

**By prioritising communication in preparedness strategies, societies can build a culture of safety and resilience, reducing both human and economic losses in the face of natural, man-made and complex disasters.**

Campaigns like the “Stop the Bleed” initiative in the U.S., which teaches bystanders to manage severe bleeding during emergencies, exemplify how communication fosters a culture of readiness. Likewise, initiatives such as the “ShakeOut” earthquake drill, held annually in various countries, reinforce preparedness through mass participation. These efforts highlight that disaster resilience is not solely the responsibility of authorities but a collective effort requiring active public engagement, continuous education, and widespread access to accurate information.

By prioritising communication in preparedness strategies, societies can build a culture of safety and resilience, reducing both human and economic losses in the face of natural, man-made and complex disasters.

## Post-Disaster Recovery

Finally, communication remains essential during the recovery phase, as it helps communities access resources, understand relief processes, and engage in long-term reconstruction efforts. Timely and clear information ensures that affected populations know where to find food, shelter, medical assistance, and financial aid, reducing confusion and frustration during a critical period. Post-disaster communication also fosters collaboration among government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and local communities, ensuring that aid reaches those most in need.

Effective communication during this phase enhances transparency and accountability in aid distribution, preventing misinformation and inequitable resource allocation. It also fosters hope and direction for affected populations, reassuring them that recovery efforts are ongoing and that their needs are being addressed. For example, after the 2015 Nepal earthquake, relief organisations used social media platforms and radio broadcasts to disseminate real-time updates on aid delivery schedules, available

medical services, and infrastructure repairs. Similarly, in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico (2017), community-led radio stations and digital platforms played a vital role in reconnecting families, coordinating relief efforts, and countering misinformation.

Beyond immediate relief, communication supports long-term reconstruction and resilience-building. Governments and NGOs often document recovery efforts through public reports, digital storytelling, and community forums, allowing for institutional learning and improvement of future disaster response strategies. Engaging local voices in these conversations ensures that rebuilding efforts align with the needs and priorities of affected populations. For instance, following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, participatory recovery planning in Indonesia involved local communities in decision-making, ensuring that new housing and infrastructure were built to better withstand future disasters.

Moreover, ongoing public engagement through storytelling, media coverage, and educational campaigns helps sustain global awareness and support for long-term recovery projects. By continuously updating the public on progress, highlighting resilience stories, and sharing best practices, post-disaster communication lays the groundwork for rebuilding stronger, more resilient communities.

## Conceptual Framework of Disaster Communication

The conceptual framework of disaster communication encompasses the underlying theories and models that guide communication practices across disaster settings. These frameworks provide structured approaches to understanding the complexities of communication in disaster scenarios, from risk perception to community engagement. By integrating diverse perspectives and methodologies, these models inform strategies to enhance preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.

### Notable Models in Disaster Communication

One key model within this framework is the **Risk Communication Model**, which emphasises understanding how individuals perceive risks and respond to related information. Public perception of risk is often shaped by factors such as cultural beliefs, trust in authorities, and personal experiences. For example, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, differences in public risk perception significantly influenced adherence to health guidelines. Those who trusted health authorities and had access to clear, consistent information were more likely to follow safety measures. Effective risk communication, therefore, involves addressing public concerns, engaging stakeholders, and ensuring transparency to foster trust and encourage informed decision-making.

Another critical model is the **Social Amplification of Risk Model**, which examines how risk information is amplified or diminished through social, media, and communication channels. This model highlights the dynamic relationship between information dissemination and public response. For instance, sensationalised media coverage of certain disasters, such as the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011, heightened public anxiety and uncertainty. Conversely, risks like the gradual effects of climate change are often underreported, leading to widespread complacency and inaction. By understanding these amplification and attenuation processes, disaster communication strategies can better manage public awareness, ensuring balanced and accurate messaging.

The **Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations** advocates for an interactive and balanced communication approach, emphasising reciprocal dialogue between organisations and the public. This model underscores the importance of listening to public concerns and feedback, enabling organisations to tailor their messaging to meet specific needs while fostering mutual trust. During Hurricane Sandy in 2012, organisations such as US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) effectively utilised social media platforms to engage in real-time dialogue with affected populations. By responding promptly to questions, addressing misinformation, and sharing timely updates, they demonstrated the value of participatory communication in crisis management. This approach not only improved information dissemination but also strengthened public confidence in disaster response efforts.

The **Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) Framework** highlights the importance of grassroots engagement and local knowledge in disaster risk management. This framework prioritises involving communities in planning and decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and resilience. For example, in the Philippines, community-based approaches have been integral to disaster preparedness initiatives in flood-prone areas. Local leaders and residents collaborate on hazard mapping, evacuation planning, and the development of early warning systems. These efforts demonstrate how bottom-up communication processes leverage local expertise, ensuring culturally relevant and sustainable solutions to disaster risks.

Together, these models form the backbone of disaster communication strategies, illustrating how theoretical frameworks can be translated into practical applications. They emphasise the importance of trust, transparency, engagement, and community involvement in managing disaster-related challenges. By integrating these principles, authorities and organisations can craft communication strategies that not only inform but also empower communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters more effectively.

## Disaster Communication Across Phases

Disaster communication frameworks outline responsibilities and approaches tailored to different phases of the disaster management cycle.

Disaster communication frameworks outline responsibilities and approaches tailored to different phases of the disaster management cycle. These phases—pre-disaster, during disaster, and post-disaster—each require distinct communication strategies to ensure effective preparedness, response, and recovery.

### Pre-disaster Communication

In the pre-disaster phase, communication focuses on risk identification, dissemination, community engagement, and capacity building. Early warning systems play a pivotal role in preparing at-risk populations. Systems such as seismic alerts, cyclone advisories, and flood warnings provide critical, real-time information that enables individuals and communities to take

proactive measures. For example, the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System integrates advanced hazard mapping and real-time alerts to protect coastal populations from imminent risks. Similarly, public education campaigns like Japan's earthquake preparedness drills cultivate a culture of safety, helping people internalise life-saving actions through repeated practice.

Community engagement initiatives further bridge the gap between theoretical awareness and actionable preparedness. Drills, workshops, and public forums empower individuals and institutions to become familiar with disaster response protocols. The ShakeOut Earthquake Drill, conducted annually in regions prone to seismic activity, engages millions globally in practicing techniques to safeguard themselves during earthquakes. These activities not only foster practical readiness but also strengthen communal bonds and collective efficacy.

Capacity building is another vital component of pre-disaster communication. Training responders, educating local leaders, and equipping stakeholders with the skills needed for disaster management enhance resilience and promote timely action during crises. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts workshops in vulnerable regions to prepare communities for effective disaster response and recovery, ensuring that local knowledge and leadership are integral to preparedness strategies.

## **During Disaster Communication**

When a disaster strikes, communication must adapt to rapidly evolving conditions. Real-time updates are critical to guiding protective behaviours and allocating resources efficiently. Social media platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter), have become indispensable tools for this purpose. During the 2015 Nepal earthquake, hashtags like #NepalQuake provided immediate information to millions, facilitating rescue operations and enabling effective aid distribution.

Stakeholder coordination is equally vital during this phase. Centralised communication hubs serve as a nexus for aligning the efforts of government agencies, NGOs, and emergency responders. For example, during the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) established mechanisms to integrate international and local actors. This approach streamlined relief operations, avoided duplication of efforts, and ensured that aid reached affected populations promptly.

Dynamic messaging is another crucial element of disaster-phase communication. As conditions evolve, communication strategies must remain adaptable to maintain relevance and accuracy. During the 2020 Australian bushfires, authorities continuously updated the public on shifting fire patterns, evacuation orders, and safety measures. These real-time adjustments were instrumental in mitigating risks and safeguarding lives.

## **Post-Disaster Communication**

In the aftermath of a disaster, communication focuses on recovery, feedback collection, and institutional learning. Providing clear information about relief distribution, available aid, and medical services is essential for supporting affected populations. Following Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, communication efforts prioritised disseminating details about water distribution points, operational medical facilities, and power restoration timelines, offering vital support to communities in need.

Feedback collection is another critical aspect of post-disaster communication. Surveys, interviews, and community meetings capture valuable insights into public experiences, helping organisations identify strengths and weaknesses in their approaches. For example, post-tsunami evaluations in Indonesia revealed significant gaps in early warning communication, prompting the introduction of multilingual alerts and improved community outreach programs to address linguistic and cultural barriers.

**Effective disaster communication across all phases is integral to minimising harm, optimising response efforts, and building resilient communities.**

Institutional learning is the final cornerstone of post-disaster communication. By documenting strategies and outcomes, organisations can strengthen preparedness for future crises. Reports on the response to Hurricane Harvey in 2017 highlighted effective use of social media for crisis communication, which has since informed disaster planning in the region. These lessons, drawn from practical experience, contribute to a continually evolving body of knowledge that enhances global disaster management practices.

Effective disaster communication across all phases is integral to minimising harm, optimising response efforts, and building resilient communities. By tailoring communication strategies to each phase of the disaster management cycle, authorities and organisations can address immediate needs, empower stakeholders, and foster long-term recovery and preparedness.

## Communication Tools in Disasters

Effective communication during disasters necessitates the deployment of a diverse array of tools and platforms to ensure messages reach all segments of the population. The choice of tools often depends on the nature of the disaster, the affected region, and the audience's accessibility to technology. These tools facilitate the dissemination of timely, accurate, and actionable information.

### Traditional Mass Media (Television, Radio, Print)

Traditional mass media remains indispensable during disasters due to its extensive reach and reliability. Television and radio are particularly effective for real-time updates, emergency alerts, and instructional content. For instance, during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, radio broadcasts were crucial in disseminating evacuation orders when other communication channels were unavailable. Print media, such as newspapers and posters, can provide detailed, enduring information about recovery plans and safety guidelines, especially in areas where electronic communication is limited.

### Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram are increasingly cri-

tical in disaster communication. These platforms allow for rapid dissemination of information, such as evacuation orders or updates on hazardous conditions, while also enabling direct interaction between authorities and the public. For example, during the 2015 Nepal earthquake, hashtags like #NepalEarthquake helped coordinate relief efforts and locate survivors. Geotagged posts provide valuable situational data, while live streaming enhances real-time visibility of unfolding events.

## **Emergency Alert Systems (EAS)**

Automated emergency alert systems provide immediate warnings about imminent threats, ensuring rapid dissemination of critical information. Tools such as Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) deliver messages directly to mobile phones, alerting individuals to dangers like tornadoes, tsunamis, or terrorist attacks. These systems were pivotal during the 2018 California wildfires, where targeted alerts prompted timely evacuations. Integrating these alerts into public address systems and transportation networks enhances their efficacy, reaching those in transit or in public spaces.

## **Mobile Apps**

Mobile applications designed for disaster management provide tailored notifications and resources to users. Apps like FEMA's Disaster App in the U.S. and India's NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority) app offer features like real-time alerts, emergency checklists, and family location services. These apps empower individuals by delivering personalised disaster updates, suggesting nearby shelters, and providing safety tips. Furthermore, apps like Zello, a push-to-talk communication tool, have been instrumental in facilitating volunteer coordination during crises.

## **Websites and Portals**

Government websites and emergency management portals are essential repositories of information before, during, and after disasters. These platforms, such as Ready.gov in the U.S. or ReliefWeb internationally, provide comprehensive resources, including evacuation maps, shelter locations, and disaster preparedness guides. Additionally, interactive dashboards, like those used by the European Space Agency for flood monitoring, combine real-time data with visual tools to enhance public understanding and decision-making.

## **Community and Local Communication Networks**

In areas where access to mainstream media is limited, community-based communication networks play a vital role. Local radio stations, for instance, can broadcast messages in native languages, ensuring inclusivity. During the 2010 Haiti earthquake, community radio became a lifeline for isolated populations. Similarly, local leaders and organisations often act as trusted messengers, tailoring information to cultural and linguistic contexts. Faith-based groups, neighbourhood associations, and NGOs leverage their established networks to ensure marginalised populations are reached effectively.

## **Public Information Campaigns**

Public information campaigns utilise visual and print media such as posters, flyers, and billboards to raise awareness and educate the public. These campaigns are particularly useful for disseminating preparatory advice and post-disaster recovery information. For instance, in flood-prone regions of Bang-

ladesh, brightly coloured posters illustrating flood safety tips are displayed in schools and community centres. These campaigns often incorporate symbols and visuals to overcome literacy barriers, ensuring broader accessibility.

## Communication Principles in Disasters

The communication principles—such as accuracy, transparency, timeliness, empathy, and collaboration—represent fundamental attributes that enhance effective communication and foster positive interactions.

Disaster communication focuses on managing the flow of information during the acute phase of a disaster. Its primary objective is to provide accurate, timely, and actionable information that helps affected populations make informed decisions while also maintaining public confidence in response efforts. Transparent, consistent, empathetic, and collaborative communication not only mitigates the immediate impact of disasters but also lays the groundwork for recovery by fostering trust and collaboration among stakeholders. The communication principles—such as accuracy, transparency, timeliness, empathy, and collaboration—represent fundamental attributes that enhance effective communication and foster positive interactions. These principles guide how communication should be conducted to ensure it is effective and trustworthy.

### Accuracy

Accuracy plays a crucial role in this process. Providing correct information is vital; misinformation, disinformation, or malinformation can lead to panic or ineffective responses. Therefore, ensuring that information is fact-checked and reliable is essential. Accurate communication helps to build credibility and trust, enabling affected communities to take appropriate actions in response to the disaster. Additionally, when organisations prioritise accuracy, they not only support the immediate needs of those affected but also contribute to long-term recovery efforts by instilling confidence in the response system. By integrating accuracy into disaster communication strategies, stakeholders can better navigate the complexities of crisis situations and foster a more informed and resilient community.

### Transparency

Transparency is the cornerstone of disaster communication, requiring authorities to provide clear, open and truthful information, even when delivering unfavourable news. By acknowledging uncertainties and sharing verified facts, communicators can prevent the spread of rumours and misinformation, which are often rampant during crises. Transparency is critical to disaster communication, requiring authorities to provide accurate and timely information. In situations where facts are incomplete or evolving, it is equally important to communicate the current state of knowledge and acknowledge uncertainties to maintain public trust. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, health agencies faced challenges in balancing transparency with the uncertainty of emerging scientific data, underscoring the need for adaptive

communication strategies. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) maintained transparency by regularly updating the public on virus transmission rates, vaccination efficacy, and emerging variants. This approach helped build trust in scientific authorities and guided global response strategies. A lack of transparency, in contrast, can erode trust and amplify panic, as was seen during the Chernobyl disaster when delayed communication exacerbated public fear and mistrust.

## **Consistency**

Consistency in messaging across all communication channels is vital to avoid confusion and maintain public confidence. Contradictory information from different sources can lead to uncertainty and undermine trust in official communications. For instance, during Hurricane Katrina, inconsistent evacuation instructions from local and federal agencies led to widespread chaos and disorganisation. Conversely, coordinated messaging during the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan exemplified effective disaster communication. The Japanese government worked closely with media outlets and emergency services to ensure unified messaging, minimising public confusion and facilitating an orderly response.

## **Timeliness**

The speed at which information is disseminated can significantly influence outcomes during a disaster. Timely updates enable individuals and communities to take immediate protective actions, potentially saving lives and reducing harm. For example, the U.S. National Weather Service uses real-time alerts to warn of impending severe weather events, such as tornadoes and hurricanes, providing critical minutes for evacuation or sheltering. However, timeliness must not come at the cost of accuracy. During the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, delayed warnings in some areas contributed to the high death toll, highlighting the importance of rapid and reliable communication.

## **Empathy and Reassurance**

Acknowledging the emotional toll of disasters and offering words of reassurance are essential components of disaster communication. Empathetic messaging helps calm public fears, fosters solidarity, and demonstrates that authorities understand and care about the challenges faced by affected individuals. During the Christchurch earthquake in 2011, New Zealand's Prime Minister addressed the nation with empathetic and reassuring messages, emphasising the government's commitment to recovery efforts and community support. Such communication fosters resilience and cooperation among affected populations.

## **Collaboration**

The media plays a pivotal role as both a partner and a conduit in disaster communication. Engaging the media ensures the widespread dissemination of accurate and timely information. Press conferences, media briefings, and interviews serve as platforms for addressing public concerns, debunking misinformation, and updating on response efforts. For instance, during the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, daily press briefings provided by U.S. government officials and BP representatives kept the public informed about containment measures and environmental impacts. Collaboration with media outlets also enables targeted communication, as journalists often act as intermediaries between authorities and the public, tailoring messages to meet the needs of specific audiences.

## Communication Strategies in Disasters

Effective communication strategies are the backbone of disaster management, playing a vital role at every stage—preparedness, response, and recovery.

These strategies ensure that accurate, timely, and actionable information reaches affected populations, instilling trust, guiding behaviour, and fostering resilience. Tailoring communication approaches to the specific demands of each phase is essential for addressing the complexities and dynamics of disaster scenarios.

### Three-Phase Disaster Communication Strategy

#### Preparedness Phase

In the preparedness phase, the primary objective is to educate the public about potential risks and encourage proactive measures. Clear, consistent messaging equips communities with the knowledge to anticipate and mitigate disaster impacts. Examples include campaigns encouraging the assembly of emergency kits, developing family evacuation plans, and participating in community drills.

These efforts must be inclusive, addressing the unique needs of diverse cultural and linguistic groups. For instance, multilingual materials and culturally relevant examples can make preparedness messages more relatable and actionable for immigrant or minority communities. Collaborative partnerships with trusted entities, such as religious organisations, local leaders, and media outlets, can amplify the reach and resonance of these messages. For example, the "ShakeOut" earthquake preparedness drills in the United States and other countries engage schools, businesses, and local governments to promote widespread awareness and participation.

Digital platforms, such as social media and dedicated apps, can play a complementary role by providing interactive resources like hazard maps, safety checklists, and real-time weather updates. Combining these with traditional methods, such as community workshops and radio broadcasts, ensures inclusivity, especially for populations with limited internet access.

#### Response Phase

The response phase demands rapid, clear, and accessible communication to address immediate needs. A multi-channel approach is vital for disseminating information to people across different technological and geographic contexts. Digital platforms like social media can provide real-time updates, while traditional media, such as television and radio, remain indispensable for reaching wider audiences, especially in areas with limited internet connectivity.

Grassroots methods, such as community noticeboards and announcements via local leaders, help ensure the inclusion of marginalised or remote populations. For instance, during Cyclone Idai in Mozam-

bique, community radio stations played a crucial role in broadcasting evacuation instructions and safety information to isolated areas.

Real-time coordination among agencies is another cornerstone of effective response communication. Establishing centralised information hubs allows consistent messaging across government bodies, NGOs, and emergency services. Feedback mechanisms, such as hotline services and social media inquiries, enable authorities to monitor public concerns and adapt messages to the evolving disaster landscape. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp were used by health agencies to directly engage with the public and dispel misinformation.

## Recovery Phase

In the recovery phase, communication shifts toward fostering resilience and rebuilding trust within affected communities. Storytelling emerges as a powerful strategy, with personal and collective recovery narratives serving to inspire hope, solidarity, and communal rebuilding. Highlighting examples of resilience, such as how communities restored livelihoods after a disaster, reinforces a positive outlook and encourages active participation in recovery efforts.

Transparent updates about available recovery resources, ongoing risks, and long-term reconstruction plans are essential for maintaining trust and engagement. For instance, during the rebuilding efforts following the 2010 Haiti earthquake, regular public announcements and stakeholder meetings helped clarify timelines for aid distribution and infrastructure repair.

Digital tools, such as mobile apps, can help affected populations access recovery services and track the progress of reconstruction projects. Community forums and public consultations also provide platforms for feedback, enabling authorities to address concerns and refine their strategies.

## Key Considerations for Disaster Communication Strategies

To succeed, disaster communication strategies must prioritise cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Messages should address the specific needs of vulnerable populations, including marginalised groups, the elderly, and non-native speakers. For example, during Hurricane Harvey in Texas, bilingual messaging and partnerships with local Hispanic organisations ensured that Spanish-speaking communities received critical updates.

Collaboration among stakeholders—including government agencies, NGOs, private organisations, and community groups—is crucial for ensuring consistent messaging and effective resource allocation. Joint training exercises and pre-disaster agreements can strengthen these partnerships, as demonstrated by the coordination efforts of the United Nations and local agencies during the Nepal earthquake recovery in 2015.

By integrating these principles into all phases of disaster management, communication strategies can drive effective and inclusive outcomes, solidifying their role as a cornerstone of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

## Communication Challenges in Disasters

Communication challenges in disasters are critical issues that can significantly impact the effectiveness of response efforts. Here are some major challenges:

### Misinformation and Rumours

The rapid spread of inaccurate information during a disaster can lead to confusion and panic among affected populations. Misinformation can arise from social media, word of mouth, or miscommunication among responders. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous false claims about the virus's origin, transmission, and treatment circulated widely on social media platforms. This misinformation created public confusion and led to harmful behaviours, such as hoarding supplies and resistance to vaccination efforts.

### Lack of Trust

Communities may have historical reasons for distrust toward authorities or organisations, which can hinder effective communication. This lack of trust can stem from previous negative experiences or perceived biases. For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, many residents of New Orleans, particularly in marginalised communities, expressed distrust towards government agencies. They believed they had been neglected during the response and recovery efforts, which hampered effective communication and coordination in subsequent disasters.

### Technological Limitations

Disasters can damage communication infrastructure, such as cell towers, internet access, and broadcasting systems, leading to disruptions in the dissemination of critical information. Following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, for example, many communication systems were severely damaged, complicating response efforts. Organisations struggled to communicate with each other and with affected populations, delaying the delivery of aid and vital information.

### Language Barriers

Diverse populations may not share a common language, making it difficult to effectively convey critical information and instructions. During the 2018 Camp Fire in California, officials faced challenges in communicating with non-English speaking residents about evacuation orders and safety information. This situation highlighted the need for multilingual communication strategies in disaster response to ensure that everyone receives essential messages.

### Cultural Differences

Different cultural backgrounds can influence how individuals interpret messages and respond to directives. Misunderstandings may arise if communication does not consider cultural norms and values. For example, in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, some communities in Indonesia and Sri Lanka interpreted warnings and evacuation orders differently due to cultural beliefs and practices. Understanding local customs and communication styles could have improved the effectiveness of response efforts in these areas.

## Geographical Challenges

Remote or hard-to-access areas may lack communication resources, complicating outreach and information dissemination to affected populations. Geographic barriers can hinder both physical access and the establishment of communication networks. After the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, many rural communities were cut off due to landslides and damaged infrastructure, making it difficult for aid organisations to reach them. The lack of communication resources in these areas impeded timely access to information about available assistance and safety measures.

## Four Examples of Disaster Communication

Effective communication during disasters is crucial for coordinating response efforts, disseminating vital information, and maintaining public trust. Analysing recent events such as the 2023 earthquake in Türkiye, the 2023 floods in Slovenia, the 2024 floods in Spain's Valencia region, and the 2023 destruction of the Kakhovka Dam amid the war in Ukraine reveals diverse communication situations and their challenges.

### The 2023 Earthquakes in Türkiye

The Türkiye-Syria two devastating earthquakes and numerous aftershocks, struck southern Türkiye and northwest Syria on 6 February 2023, demonstrated the critical role of disaster communication in emergency response. Following the disaster, the Türkiye Radyo Amatörleri Cemiyeti (TRAC) coordinated emergency communication when conventional infrastructure was compromised (ARRL, 2023). International aid mobilised quickly, with organisations launching airlifts to deliver humanitarian relief. However, communication challenges emerged, particularly regarding marginalised communities. A CDAC Network report highlighted the need for inclusive messaging tailored to different populations (CDAC Network, 2023). Their brief, published six months later, presented the following key lessons and recommendations to ensure robust communication, community engagement and accountability (CCEA) efforts to meet the needs of affected people in Türkiye and Syria:

People still need actionable information to help access critical services and rebuild their lives. Affected people still face physical barriers to accessing information. Humanitarian actors should leverage understanding of two-way information flows with affected communities to tailor communication and community engagement activities. CCEA efforts must be linked with local systems and existing coordination structures. Rumours can be a matter of life or death – develop collective means to monitor and counter them with accurate information. Humanitarian actors must elevate the language needs of disproportionately disadvantaged groups. Cash assistance requires specialised communication and community engagement strategies to increase impact and resilience. The information and communication needs of marginalised groups require of special attention in CCEA strategies (CDAC Network, 2023).

In summary, the earthquake highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of disaster communication in Türkiye. While there was a robust international and local response, the event underscored the necessity for inclusive communication strategies that cater to all affected populations.

## The 2023 Floods in Slovenia

The August 2023 floods in Slovenia were one of the most severe disasters in the country's history. When the first call came in the early hours of 4 August 2023, activating the National Plan, the staff of the Government Communication Office (UKOM), as well as that of the Civil Protection Headquarters, responded immediately and was constantly involved in communicating government decisions. The UKOM played a key role in disseminating information to the public, with its directorship highlighting the importance of a well-coordinated team (GOV.SI UKOM, 2023). In her role as guest speaker at the 5th Government Communicators Day, Petra Bezjak Cirman, Director of the Government Communication Office (UKOM), said that UKOM's success in communicating information during the catastrophic floods was all thanks to an excellent and experienced team:

"We worked hard to inform the public in a timely and clear manner in the first phase, when people's lives were being saved, as well as to be responsive, to present accurate information and to have trusted spokespeople who act in a reassuring way. We used both traditional communication channels such as press conferences, press releases, direct responses to journalists' questions, and guest appearances on various broadcasts, as well as modern channels such as social networks. Using a variety of channels and our own video and graphic production allowed us to reach as many people as possible quickly and inform them properly about what to do in the situation. On the second day of the floods, 5 August, we also launched a dedicated website [gov.si/poplave](http://gov.si/poplave), where we kept both the domestic and foreign public up-to-date with the latest information and advice. The first month's statistics showed that the new page had 99,565 views" (GOV.SI UKOM, 2023).

Civil protection agencies were activated immediately, and within 12 hours, 168 fire brigades carried out over 1,000 interventions. Public communication efforts focused on regular updates across multiple channels, including social media, television, and emergency radio broadcasts. This ensured residents received timely evacuation alerts, reducing casualties and infrastructure damage. Post-disaster evaluations emphasised the role of pre-established communication protocols and real-time information-sharing technologies (Mikoš, 2023). Post-disaster analyses highlighted the importance of pre-established communication protocols and the integration of modern technologies to enhance real-time information sharing. The Slovenian experience demonstrated that preparedness and a well-coordinated communication strategy are vital components in managing natural disasters effectively.

## The 2024 Floods in Spain's Valencia Region

The catastrophic floods that struck Spain's Valencia region on October 29, 2024, resulted in over 224 fatalities and extensive devastation. A critical factor exacerbating the disaster's impact was the significant delay in issuing public alerts. Despite the national meteorological agency, AEMET, issuing an "extreme danger" warning ten hours prior, the regional government dispatched text message alerts to residents a full eight hours after the initial floods were reported (Influence Online, 2024).

In the midst of the unfolding crisis, Vicente Mompó, President of the Diputación de Valencia, expressed urgent frustration during a meeting of the Centro de Coordinación Operativa Integrado (Cecopi). He emphatically urged the immediate dissemination of an alert, reportedly exclaiming, "¡Enviadla de una puta vez!" ["Send it already, for f\*\*\*'s sake!"] (El País, 2025). This exclamation underscores the internal recognition of the dire need for prompt communication to the public. Reflecting on the events, Mompó

confirmed his insistence on expediting the alert, stating, “Yo fui una de esas personas que metió prisa para enviar el mensaje de alerta” [“I was one of those people who hurried to send the alert message”] (Cadena SER, 2025). This acknowledgment highlights the internal pressures and challenges faced by officials in real-time crisis management.

The delayed communication has been widely criticised and is currently under judicial investigation. The content and timing of the alert have been scrutinised for their inadequacy in effectively informing and protecting the public (El País, 2025). This situation has prompted calls for a comprehensive review of emergency communication protocols to prevent such failures in the future. Investigations revealed that better coordination between meteorological agencies and emergency services could have mitigated the disaster’s impact. Experts have since recommended improved early warning systems, real-time monitoring technologies, and clear communication protocols to prevent future failures (GNDR, 2024).

The event highlighted the necessity for clear protocols and the integration of advanced warning systems to ensure rapid dissemination of information. It also underscored the importance of inter-agency coordination and the need for regular drills to prepare for such emergencies.

In summary, the Valencia floods of 2024 exposed critical deficiencies in disaster communication. The internal appeals for prompt action, juxtaposed with the actual delays, underscore the necessity for streamlined and efficient emergency response systems to safeguard public welfare.

### **The 2023 Kakhovka Dam Disaster Amid the Ukraine War**

On June 6, 2023, the Kakhovka Dam on the Dnieper River in Ukraine was destroyed, leading to extensive flooding and environmental degradation. The immediate aftermath saw the release of approximately 90% of the reservoir’s freshwater content downstream (Stone, 2024), inundating vast areas and displacing numerous communities. The floodwaters carried sediments contaminated by decades of industrial activity, raising concentrations of pollutants such as polychlorinated biphenyls, lindane, copper, zinc, and arsenic downstream (Vyhnevskyi et al., 2023). This contamination posed significant risks to both human health and local ecosystems. The sudden influx of freshwater into the Dnieper-Bug estuary caused a sharp decline in salinity, leading to algal blooms near Odesa and threatening the survival of native aquatic species, including the potential extirpation of the rare *Sander marinus* fish. Additionally, the destruction of the dam disrupted the migration routes of anadromous sturgeon species, further endangering their populations. The incident also raised concerns about the stability of the nearby Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, as the reservoir had been a critical source of cooling water for its reactors. In response to the disaster, Ukrainian authorities and international organisations launched extensive environmental assessments and remediation efforts to address the immediate and long-term impacts of the dam’s destruction.

Following the dam’s destruction, Russian state media and officials launched a propaganda campaign blaming Ukraine for the disaster. The Kremlin claimed that Ukraine deliberately destroyed the dam to hinder a Russian offensive, a narrative amplified through diplomatic channels and social media, with over 1,300 tweets pushing this message in a week.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian authorities and Western intelligence assessments pointed to Russia as the likely perpetrator, arguing that the explosion served Moscow's strategic interests by flooding Ukrainian-held areas. Russian disinformation efforts sought to obscure responsibility and generate confusion internationally, a tactic consistent with previous information warfare strategies. This case highlights how environmental disasters in war zones are often accompanied by intense propaganda battles aimed at shaping public perception.

In summary, the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam exemplifies the critical role of effective communication in managing environmental disasters precipitated by conflict. Timely, transparent, and coordinated communication is essential to mitigate the immediate impacts and to facilitate long-term recovery and environmental restoration.

## **Lessons for Future Disaster Communication**

The communication surrounding the 2023 Türkiye earthquake, 2023 Slovenia floods, 2024 Valencia floods, and the 2023 Kakhovka Dam destruction reveals significant challenges in disaster response, ranging from delays in emergency alerts to the politicisation of information. In Türkiye, the slow response and lack of clear communication in the critical early hours led to widespread confusion and hampered rescue efforts, with many survivors voicing frustration over ineffective coordination, most likely exacerbated by previous mismanagement of disaster preparedness. A similar failure occurred during the Valencia floods, where despite meteorological warnings, authorities delayed issuing emergency alerts, exposing serious flaws in the crisis management system. In contrast, Slovenia's flood response saw more effective civic mobilisation, although the government's vehemently optimistic promises of swift reconstruction, which did not materialise, later overshadowed the success of the initial effective response. The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam demonstrated how environmental disasters in war zones become propaganda tools, with Russia and Ukraine disseminating conflicting narratives to influence public perception, complicating international response efforts. This reflects a broader trend in disaster communication, where state- or politically-controlled narratives can either suppress criticism or increase public frustration, as seen in Türkiye and Spain, or actively spread disinformation, as Russia did follow the Kakhovka Dam incident. Social media played a dual role across these events, proving useful for volunteer mobilisation in Slovenia while also serving as a battleground for propaganda in Ukraine and a source of misinformation during the Valencia floods. The failures in communication across these disasters underscore the importance of timely, transparent, and coordinated messaging. When emergency information is delayed or manipulated, public trust in institutions erodes, as seen in Türkiye and Spain, where citizens openly criticised authorities for their mishandling of alerts. Conversely, Slovenia's response showcased the impact of well-organised civic engagement in mitigating certain institutional shortcomings, though it later provoked public frustration during the recovery phase, as the reconstruction did not proceed in accordance with the authorities' forecasts and promises. The Slovenian and Spanish cases suggest that all those involved in disaster management must first recognise that any disaster communication is, first and foremost, public communication that produces communication-driven effects.

These cases highlight the importance of clear, timely, transparent, and responsible communication, along with the need for multi-channel dissemination of alerts and trust-building strategies to ensure effective warnings and emergency responses. Equally crucial is the role of international organisations and independent media in countering disinformation and ensuring accurate reporting, particularly in politically sensitive disaster situations.

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

This chapter highlighted the indispensable role of communication in disaster management, emphasising its impact across preparedness, response, and recovery phases. By examining foundational concepts, frameworks, tools, principles, and strategies, we demonstrate how accurate, transparent, consistent, timely, and collaborative communication serves as a lifeline in disaster scenarios, shaping outcomes and fostering resilience. The key learning outcomes of this chapter include:

- **Students can understand the importance of communication in disaster management and its influence on preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.**
- **Students can identify and explain foundational concepts such as risk communication, crisis communication, and resilience communication, as well as their practical applications in disaster contexts.**
- **Students can assess the strengths and limitations of various communication tools, from traditional mass media to modern digital platforms, and understand their relevance in different disaster scenarios.**
- **Students can describe the unique communication needs and strategies required for the preparedness, response, and recovery phases of disaster management.**
- **Students can evaluate the crucial communication principles, including transparency, consistency, timeliness, and empathy, in diverse contexts.**
- **Students can learn and employ disaster communication strategies to overcome common barriers in disaster communication, such as misinformation and accessibility issues.**



## Self-Assessment

1 What is the primary role of communication in disaster management?

- To share general news unrelated to the disaster
- To ensure timely dissemination of warnings and instructions
- To overwhelm people with excessive information
- To restrict access to information

2 Which of the following is NOT a key concept in disaster communication?

- Crisis communication
- Risk communication
- Resilience communication
- Targeted communication

3 What was a major communication failure during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami?

- The public received too many alerts
- Social media spread false information
- Early warnings were not effectively communicated to at-risk populations
- There was an overuse of radio stations

4 Which model emphasises how risk information is amplified or diminished through media and communication channels?

- Social amplification of risk model
- Two-way symmetrical model
- Disaster resilience model
- Public relations model

5 How did misinformation impact the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014–2016)?

- It increased public trust in authorities
- It made people more likely to follow safety measures
- It led to resistance to medical assistance and scepticism towards health agencies
- It improved the speed of crisis response

6 Which principle of disaster communication ensures that information remains accurate, truthful, and open?

- Empathy
- Transparency
- Confidentiality
- Restriction

7 What was a major issue in the 2024 floods in Spain's Valencia region?

- The disaster was ignored by the media
- The alert system failed to activate due to a power outage
- Authorities delayed sending alerts to the public, despite early meteorological warnings
- Citizens did not follow evacuation orders

8 What is a key advantage of social media in disaster communication?

- It allows misinformation to spread quickly
- It provides real-time updates and enables direct interaction with the public
- It replaces all traditional communication methods
- It is the only reliable source of disaster information

9 What is one of the biggest challenges in disaster communication?

- Overcommunication with affected populations
- Ensuring that information reaches all groups, including marginalised communities
- A lack of disasters to report on
- Too much funding for emergency alerts

10 What was one of the lessons learned from the 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye?

- International aid organisations refused to help
- Inclusive and accessible communication strategies are essential for all affected populations
- The government stopped all disaster communications
- People ignored disaster warnings

## Answer Key

1.b, 2.d, 3.c, 4.a, 5.c, 6.b, 7.c, 8.b, 9.b, 10.b

## Note

The author used AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to support drafting, editing, and improving clarity and coherence in this chapter.

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# SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS IN DISASTER REPORTING

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## BOOK CHAPTER 3

### SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS IN DISASTER REPORTING

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Extraordinary Situations Encountered in Disasters**
- **Socio-Psychological Preparedness Strategies for Disasters**
- **The Social Impact of Disasters on Journalists**
- **Preparedness for the Psychological Impacts of Disasters**
- **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**
- **Self - Assessment**
- **References**

## Introduction

While preparedness in disaster journalism is often framed in logistical and technical terms, such as safety training, protective equipment, and emergency communication strategies, disaster reporting is not just a physical challenge—it is also a psychological and social one.

Disaster journalism is a vital yet psychologically demanding field, requiring journalists to navigate high-risk environments while maintaining professional objectivity. The study of disaster journalism has grown within media and communication scholarship, with research exploring risk communication, emergency response coordination, ethical reporting, and psychological resilience (Cottle, 2013; Houston, Pfefferbaum, & Rosenholtz, 2012; Panti, Wahl-Jorgensen, & Cottle, 2012). While much of this scholarship originates in advanced economies, disaster journalism is not confined to high-income countries. Journalists in the Global South often face additional challenges, including weaker infrastructure, limited press freedoms, and constrained institutional support, making preparedness even more critical (McLean & Power, 2014). Since disasters transcend national and economic boundaries, journalists across the world serve as critical conduits of information, shaping public perception, influencing response strategies, and contributing to long-term community recovery.

While preparedness in disaster journalism is often framed in logistical and technical terms, such as safety training, protective equipment, and emergency communication strategies (Houston et al., 2019), disaster reporting is not just a physical challenge—it is also a psychological and social one. Journalists frequently witness trauma, suffering, and devastation, often reporting on events that have deeply personal or emotional significance (Cottle, 2013). Without adequate psychological preparedness, journalists are vulnerable to stress, emotional exhaustion, and vicarious trauma, which can undermine both their well-being and the quality of their reporting (Panti et al., 2012). Houston et al. (2019) outline several key dimensions of disaster journalism, including understanding disaster management, technical preparedness, and ethical reporting, yet socio-psychological preparedness remains underexplored. This chapter centers on socio-psychological preparedness strategies for disaster journalists, emphasizing how journalists can build resilience, ethical awareness, and emotional self-regulation while working in crisis environments.

Although physical preparedness—including safety training, protective gear, and emergency communication protocols—remains essential (Houston et al., 2019), these measures alone do not address the mental and emotional burden journalists experience. Psychological preparedness, therefore, is equally crucial, allowing journalists to mitigate burnout, secondary trauma, and moral distress. Core aspects of psychological preparedness include (1) trauma awareness and stress management, equipping journalists with tools to recognize their own emotional distress (Houston et al., 2012); (2) peer support and debriefing, fostering professional and emotional support networks; (3) establishing emotional boundaries, helping journalists balance empathy with detachment to avoid burnout; and (4) access to mental health resources, ensuring that structured counseling and trauma-informed care are available (Steffens et al., 2021).

Frances Perreault (2021) highlights how psychological preparedness is particularly critical for local journalists, who must navigate the dual burden of reporting on disasters while being personally affected by them. Examining the 2015 Memorial Day flooding in Wimberley, Texas, Perreault illustrates how local journalists balance their own trauma with their professional obligation to report sensitively and accurately. This dual role presents unique psychological pressures, requiring not only individual coping mechanisms but also long-term resilience, trauma-informed storytelling, and community engagement. By shaping disaster narratives that foster hope, recovery, and collective resilience, journalists play a role not just as information providers but also as contributors to communal healing. Perreault's study underscores the need for mental health resources, peer support systems, and structured newsroom training to help journalists manage the emotional toll of crisis reporting while fulfilling their public service role.

This chapter will examine socio-psychological preparedness in disaster reporting, focusing on four key areas. First, it will explore extraordinary situations encountered in disasters, analysing the unique psychological pressures journalists face, including emotional exhaustion and moral dilemmas. Next, it will outline socio-psychological preparedness strategies for disasters, assessing frameworks that help journalists maintain resilience, emotional balance, and well-being. The discussion will then turn to preparedness for the social impacts of disasters, addressing how journalists can ethically and sensitively engage with affected communities while maintaining professional boundaries. Finally, the chapter will examine preparedness for the psychological impacts of disasters, exploring trauma-informed reporting, stress management techniques, and the role of media organizations in providing mental health support. By implementing these strategies, newsrooms can ensure that journalists are equipped to handle the psychological demands of disaster reporting, preserving both their professional integrity and long-term well-being.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Secondary Traumatic Stress

The natural consequent behaviours resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other. It is the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.

### Trauma Accumulation

When someone experiences traumatic events repeatedly and may not fully process the reactions or emotions they experienced during those events.

### Psychological First Aid

An evidence-informed approach that is built on the concept of human resilience. PFA aims to reduce stress symptoms and assist in a healthy recovery following a traumatic event, natural disaster, public health emergency, or even a personal crisis.

### Trauma-Informed Reporting

Practicing empathy on the job and using language and tactics that promote healing and avoid re-traumatizing those involved.

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

A condition of persistent mental and emotional stress occurring as a result of injury or severe psychological shock, typically involving disturbance of sleep and constant vivid recall of the experience, with dulled responses to others and to the outside world.

### Stress Management

To reduce the negative impacts caused by stress and to improve a person's physical and mental well-being. Stress management may include self-care, managing one's response to stress, and making changes to one's life when in a stressful situation.

### Peer support

It is a supportive relationship between people who have a lived experience in common. It is a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful. Peer support is not based on psychiatric models and diagnostic criteria. It is about understanding another's situation empathically through the shared experience of emotional and psychological pain.

### Socio-psychological

It is of, relating to, or involving a combination of social and psychological factors or relating to social psychology.

## Emotional Resilience

Ability to respond to stressful or unexpected situations and crises. The amount of emotional resilience you have is determined by a number of different things, including your age, identity and what you've experienced in your life.

## Re-traumatizing

One's reaction to a traumatic exposure that is coloured, intensified, amplified, or shaped by one's reactions and adaptational style to previous traumatic experiences.

## Anxiety

An anticipation of a future concern and is more associated with muscle tension and avoidance behaviour. Fear is an emotional response to an immediate threat and is more associated with a fight or flight reaction – either staying to fight or leaving to escape danger.

## Flashback

It is a psychological phenomenon in which an individual has a sudden, usually powerful, re-experiencing of a past experience or elements of a past experience. These experiences can be frightful, happy, sad, exciting, or any number of other emotions.

## Emotional numbing

It is the mental and emotional process of shutting out feelings and may be experienced as deficits of emotional responses or reactivity. It is a state of being in which a person can neither feel nor express emotions. It's not a clinically diagnosable condition, although it can be a symptom of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or another clinical condition.

## Avoidance behaviours.

It is a way of coping with challenging feelings, thoughts, and experiences. People use avoidance to minimize dangers and threats. Basically, the mind is trying to keep a person safe from a source of anxiety or danger. Involves any act or series of actions that enables an individual to avoid or anticipate unpleasant or painful situations, stimuli, or events.

## Psychological Distress

A set of painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood in most people. In some cases, however, psychological distress may indicate the beginning of major depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, somatization disorder, or a variety of other clinical conditions. It is thought to be what is assessed by many putative self-report measures of depression and anxiety.

## Acute Stress

An intense, unpleasant, and dysfunctional reaction beginning shortly after an overwhelming traumatic event and lasting less than a month.

## Disaster-stricken

Refers to the occurrence of a natural disaster in a specific location, making it dangerous and difficult to access a person or a place is stricken by a disaster, are severely affected by it.

## Extraordinary Situations Encountered in Disasters

Disasters, whether natural or human-made, are events that disrupt normal life and create a host of challenges that require immediate attention and innovative responses. These catastrophic events, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, industrial accidents, or terrorist attacks, generate extraordinary situations that not only overwhelm existing infrastructure but also place immense pressure on social, psychological, and governance systems. The term “extraordinary situations” refers to scenarios that go beyond normal crisis management, requiring unique, often improvisational strategies.

### The Nature of Extraordinary Situations in Disasters

Journalists play a pivotal role in disaster areas by providing essential information that aids in disaster response, recovery, and public awareness.

Extraordinary situations in the context of disasters involve events that defy routine crisis management and present unique challenges. These situations are typically marked by unpredictability, scale, and complexity. While disasters may share common elements, the specific circumstances often create unprecedented challenges that require quick thinking, resourcefulness, and adaptability from governments, organizations, and communities.

Journalists play a pivotal role in disaster areas by providing essential information that aids in disaster response, recovery, and public awareness. Their involvement in disaster coverage is not limited to mere reporting but extends to shaping public perception, guiding governmental and humanitarian interventions, and holding responsible entities accountable. The journalists have multifaceted role in disaster-stricken regions which illustrate the complexities of disaster journalism.

### The Informational Role of Journalists in Disaster Areas

One of the primary functions of journalists during a disaster is the provision of timely, accurate, and reliable information. According to Pérez and Ahern (2014), journalists serve as intermediaries between the affected communities and external aid organizations, governments, and the global public. By disseminating critical updates on weather conditions, evacuation procedures, and the status of emergency services, journalists ensure that the public remains informed and can make informed decisions during crisis situations. As noted by Fuchs (2019), effective disaster communication can significantly reduce harm, mitigate panic, and increase community resilience in the face of a crisis.

Furthermore, disaster journalism is not confined to the immediate aftermath of a disaster but continues through the recovery phase. Research by Gower et al. (2011) underscores the role of journalists in highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by affected communities, including issues related to displacement, healthcare, and the rebuilding of infrastructure. This extended coverage helps maintain public attention and political pressure, which can lead to sustained assistance from national and international agencies.

## Shaping Public Perception and Social Behaviour

In addition to providing information, journalists significantly influence public perception and behaviour during disasters. Media coverage can shape how individuals interpret risk, mobilize resources, and engage in protective behaviours. A study by Lee and Sandoval-Almazán (2017) found that the portrayal of a disaster in the media can impact the level of perceived risk among audiences, which, in turn, influences their decisions to evacuate or follow public safety guidelines. Journalists are thus tasked with balancing the need to inform the public without inducing unnecessary fear or complacency.

The framing of disaster events is another key aspect of journalistic influence. Entman (1993) discusses how the framing of a disaster in terms of “victimhood” or “heroism” can shape public empathy and the response of both citizens and policymakers. For instance, portraying communities as helpless victims can spur immediate charitable action but may also undermine the agency of local populations. Conversely, framing disasters in terms of local resilience and recovery efforts can foster hope and a sense of collective action.

## Accountability and Advocacy in Disaster Reporting

By reporting on inadequate preparedness or the slow distribution of aid, journalists play a watchdog role, ensuring that those responsible for disaster response are held to account.

Journalists also hold governments, humanitarian organizations, and other stakeholders accountable for their disaster response. A study by Chouliarakis (2013) highlights how journalists' investigative work in disaster areas often uncovers inefficiencies, corruption, and failures in disaster management. By reporting on inadequate preparedness or the slow distribution of aid, journalists play a watchdog role, ensuring that those responsible for disaster response are held to account.

Moreover, disaster journalism often intersects with advocacy, particularly in cases where journalists highlight the vulnerability of marginalized populations. According to McLuhan and Wesch (2011), journalists' advocacy for these populations can lead to the allocation of resources and policy changes that prioritize the needs of the most affected communities. This advocacy role is crucial in ensuring that disaster recovery efforts are inclusive and equitable.

## Ethical Considerations in Disaster Journalism

The ethical dimensions of disaster reporting are also critical. Journalists must navigate the complexities of reporting in distressing environments while respecting the dignity of disaster survivors. Balancing the compelling stories with sensitivity to trauma is challenging. For example, a study by Silverman (2014) discusses the ethical considerations surrounding the depiction of disaster victims in the media, particularly in terms of avoiding exploitation and maintaining the integrity of survivors' narratives. Journalists must also be cautious about the accuracy of the information they report, as misinformation can exacerbate an already volatile situation.

## Socio-Psychological Preparedness Strategies for Disasters

Journalists play a crucial role during and after a disaster, disseminating critical information and providing coverage of the affected areas. Their work often places them in stressful, sometimes dangerous situations that can impact their psychological well-being. Socio-psychological preparedness strategies for journalists are essential in ensuring their mental health, resilience, and efficiency during disaster coverage. Regular psychological support is essential for journalists to cope with stress during times of crisis.

### Understanding the Socio-Psychological Challenges Faced by Journalists

Journalists covering disasters often face various socio-psychological challenges, such as stress, trauma, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress (STS). These challenges are exacerbated by exposure to graphic content, the urgency of reporting, and the emotional toll of witnessing human suffering (Bender, 2020). According to the work of Thurman et al. (2015), disaster reporters are at risk of developing psychological symptoms similar to those of disaster survivors. This is especially true for journalists working in conflict zones or areas of natural disasters where the coverage involves significant human suffering.

The socio-psychological challenges faced by journalists are not just individual but can also affect news organizations' collective capacity to respond. A study by Osofsky et al. (2018) found that journalists' ability to cover disasters is influenced by their sense of personal and professional preparedness. Emotional resilience is necessary to handle the stressors that arise in high-risk environments (Benoit, 2013). These factors highlight the importance of strategic psychological preparation for journalists working in disaster settings.

### Training and Psychological Resilience Programs

Psychological preparedness programs help journalists to recognize early symptoms of psychological distress, such as burnout and STS, and provide strategies to cope with them effectively.

In times of disaster, journalists working continuously and for long hours without taking time for rest triggers stress. One of the most effective preparedness strategies is the implementation of psychological resilience programs. These programs equip journalists with coping mechanisms to manage the psychological impact of disaster reporting. According to Pfefferbaum et al. (2014), resilience training focuses on enhancing emotional regulation, stress management, and self-care techniques. Psychological preparedness programs help journalists to recognize early symptoms of psychological distress, such as burnout and STS, and provide strategies to cope with them effectively (Stamm, 2010). This training should be incorporated into journalists' professional development to ensure long-term mental health sustainability.

### Peer Support Systems

Another important strategy is the establishment of peer support networks within news organizations. Journalists often experience similar stressors and creating a platform where they can share their experiences and support one another has been shown to reduce psychological distress. A study by Canetti et

al. (2010) found that peer support was crucial in reducing feelings of isolation and enhancing resilience in disaster reporters. Support networks help journalists feel understood, foster a sense of community, and allow for shared coping strategies, which are key to maintaining mental health during high-stress reporting periods.

## Work-Life Balance and Supervision

A sustainable approach to disaster reporting involves maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Journalists must have adequate rest, recovery time, and opportunities for debriefing, particularly after intensive reporting assignments. News organizations should also have supervisors who are trained to recognize signs of psychological distress and intervene early (Krasny et al., 2014). Implementing rotation systems where journalists are given time away from disaster zones is another strategy to prevent burnout and trauma accumulation (Saylor, 2001). These strategies ensure that journalists do not face prolonged periods of stress without appropriate intervention.

## Psychological First Aid (PFA)

Journalists, especially those reporting from the field, are often exposed to the same traumatic events as disaster victims. Psychological first aid is an essential approach that can be utilized to get assistance in the aftermath of exposure to traumatic events. PFA includes providing practical support, stabilizing emotions, and encouraging normal responses to stress (Wagner, 2013). Incorporating PFA into the disaster reporting process helps ensure that journalists receive the immediate psychological care they need after exposure to trauma, thus preventing long-term psychological consequences.

## Media Ethics and Trauma-Informed Reporting

Ethical guidelines and trauma-informed reporting practices are also essential for minimizing the psychological impact on journalists. Trauma-informed reporting encourages journalists to adopt sensitive approaches when covering traumatic events, ensuring they are mindful of their own psychological safety and the dignity of the affected communities (Hernandez et al., 2010). Understanding how to navigate ethical dilemmas, respect victims' privacy, and manage emotional reactions during interviews can reduce the potential for psychological harm.

Socio-psychological preparedness is critical for journalists working in disaster settings. Through training programs, peer support, work-life balance, psychological first aid, and ethical reporting practices, journalists can be better equipped to handle the psychological challenges they face. These strategies not only protect their mental health but also enhance the quality and accuracy of disaster reporting, ensuring that journalists remain effective and resilient in their role as information providers during crises.

During disaster events, the role of the journalists extends beyond reporting; they are also exposed to the social and psychological consequences of disasters, which can affect both their professional capabilities and personal well-being. The journalists should adopt the social impacts of disasters; thus it is a critical aspect of a journalist's ability to work effectively in high-stress environments while maintaining their mental health.

## The Social Impact of Disasters on Journalists

Disasters—whether natural or man-made—bring significant social consequences, not only for the affected populations but also for those reporting on the crisis. Journalists are exposed to the traumatic experiences of survivors, the emotional weight of crisis coverage, and, in some cases, the physical dangers of disaster zones (Eberhardt & Lynch, 2017). Social impacts on journalists include the emotional toll of witnessing suffering, social isolation due to the high demands of disaster reporting, and the ethical dilemmas that arise when covering vulnerable populations (Wright, 2015). Moreover, journalists often experience secondary trauma, which refers to the emotional distress they experience as a result of empathizing with disaster survivors (Banyard et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the social role of journalists in disseminating information can affect their interactions with the communities they cover. As communication intermediaries, journalists help shape public discourse about the disaster, influencing how communities perceive their recovery efforts and government responses (Mitchell et al., 2018). This can create tension between journalists' responsibilities to provide accurate reporting and their empathetic relationships with affected individuals, further complicating their role during crises.

### Disaster Reporting and Emotional Resilience

Preparedness begins with training to be equipped with the necessary skills to handle the social and psychological impact of disaster reporting. According to Bender (2020), journalists who undergo training in coping strategies for stress and trauma are better prepared to manage their emotions during critical incidents. The techniques for emotional regulation, recognizing the signs of stress, and understanding secondary traumatic stress, which can arise when repeatedly exposed to others' trauma (Figley, 1995).

The specific social challenges journalists face, such as maintaining objectivity while fostering empathy. Research by Gibbons (2017) suggests that training programs should also emphasize the importance of ethical reporting, focusing on how journalists can balance their role as objective reporters with their emotional responses to disaster survivors.

### Peer Support and Mental Health Networks

Creating supportive work environment is another key aspect of preparedness. Peer support systems within news organizations can help journalists process the social and psychological effects of covering disasters. Canetti et al. (2010) argue that peer support plays a crucial role in alleviating the stress of covering traumatic events, offering a platform for journalists to share their experiences, decompress, and receive emotional support. This is particularly important when journalists work in teams, where mutual understanding of the emotional challenges of reporting in disaster zones can foster solidarity and collective resilience.

Mental health networks that provide access to psychological support also contribute to preparedness. Establishing accessible counselling services and making mental health resources available to journalists after coverage can mitigate the long-term psychological effects of exposure to traumatic events (Krasny et al., 2014). Psychological first aid (PFA) programs, which provide immediate, short-term assistance to individuals experiencing acute stress, are another effective tool for supporting journalists in the sequel of disaster reporting (Wagner, 2013).

## Ethical Reporting and Cultural Sensitivity

Disaster reporting involves numerous ethical dilemmas, particularly when covering vulnerable populations such as refugees, survivors of violence, or those suffering from post-traumatic stress. Ethical preparedness, therefore, is essential in minimizing the social impact on both the journalists and the communities they cover. A study by McDonald (2016) highlights that disaster journalists should be trained in trauma-sensitive journalism, which involves recognizing the potential harm of graphic or sensationalized reporting. Journalists must be mindful of the dignity of disaster survivors and avoid exploitative practices that may deepen the suffering of already vulnerable individuals.

Moreover, cultural sensitivity is crucial when reporting on disasters. Different cultures may have unique ways of experiencing and expressing trauma, and journalists must be aware of these cultural nuances to avoid misrepresentation and stigmatization (Benedict, 2019). Journalists should maintain professional ethics while building trust with the communities they cover.

## Workplace Policies for Journalist Safety and Well-being

The news organizations on the other hand should implement workplace policies that prioritize the well-being of journalists working in disaster zones. These policies should include measures for ensuring journalists' physical and psychological safety, such as offering regular debriefings, encouraging time off after extensive assignments, and providing rotating shifts to reduce stress (Osofsky et al., 2018). Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is also essential for long-term resilience. Newsrooms that foster a supportive culture are more likely to have journalists who are psychologically resilient, which ultimately leads to better reporting and more accurate coverage (Benoit, 2013).

Being prepared to the social impacts of disasters is a multifaceted approach that involves emotional, ethical, and professional strategies for journalists. Establishing peer support networks, ensuring ethical reporting practices, and implementing policies that safeguard journalists' well-being, can enhance the capacity of journalists to cope with the social and psychological challenges of the disaster zone. This preparedness not only protects the health of journalists but also ensures that the public receives accurate, compassionate, and ethical coverage of disasters.

## Preparedness for the Psychological Impacts of Disasters

Journalists who report on disasters face a unique set of challenges, as they are exposed to traumatic events that can have significant psychological impacts. The nature of disaster reporting often requires journalists to witness and describe distressing scenes, interact with survivors, and navigate high-pressure environments. Consequently, journalists may experience emotional distress, secondary trauma, burnout, or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

## Psychological Impacts of Disaster Reporting on Journalists

Disaster reporting is inherently stressful and can have significant psychological consequences. Journalists covering disasters may experience direct emotional reactions to the suffering and devastation they witness, leading to what has been termed "vicarious trauma" or "secondary traumatic stress" (STS). According to Shoham and Bar-On (2017), journalists who are repeatedly exposed to traumatic events can develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), similar to those experienced by the disaster survivors themselves. These symptoms may include anxiety, flashbacks, emotional numbing, and avoidance behaviours.

In addition to direct exposure to trauma, journalists often face the social and organizational pressures of timely reporting. The constant demand for breaking news, combined with the emotional strain of witnessing human suffering, increases the risk of burnout (Harrison & McLellan, 2019). Journalists, particularly those covering natural disasters, can also suffer from feelings of helplessness, guilt, and emotional overload, particularly if they are unable to offer practical help to the victims they cover (Deahl et al., 2009).

Moreover, the ethical challenges inherent in disaster reporting can exacerbate the psychological impact. Journalists may struggle with how to balance objectivity with empathy, as well as the potential harm of sensationalizing traumatic events (Gibbons, 2017). These ethical dilemmas can create internal conflicts that contribute to psychological stress, as journalists may fear exploiting victims for the sake of a compelling story or sensational headlines.

## **Psychological Resilience and Stress Management**

One of the most effective ways to be prepared for the psychological impacts of disaster reporting is through resilience and stress management. As Bender (2020) emphasizes, training journalists in coping strategies, such as mindfulness, emotional regulation, and techniques for managing stress, can help them navigate the emotional challenges of disaster reporting. Training programs should provide journalists with the tools to recognize early signs of psychological distress, including burnout and STS, and offer strategies for mitigating these symptoms.

Psychological resilience training should also focus on developing skills for managing emotional reactions to trauma. For instance, Pfefferbaum et al. (2014) highlight the value of resilience programs that promote emotional self-awareness, self-care, and the ability to reframe negative emotions. Resilience training should be integrated into the professional development of journalists, as it equips them to handle the psychological toll of disaster reporting and maintain their long-term well-being.

## **Support Systems and Mental Health Resources**

Given the psychological challenges associated with disaster reporting, the creation of support systems within news organizations is crucial. Peer support networks, which allow journalists to share their emotional experiences and coping strategies, can reduce the sense of isolation that often accompanies disaster coverage (Osofsky et al., 2018). Peer support can also facilitate a sense of shared responsibility and understanding, helping journalists feel less overwhelmed by their emotional responses to traumatic events.

Mental health resources, including access to counselling services, are also critical for disaster reporters. Research by Harrison and McLellan (2019) shows that confidential psychological support and regular debriefing sessions can help mitigate the effects of secondary trauma. Furthermore, organizations should have policies in place to ensure that journalists have access to professional psychological care, especially after covering traumatic events. The provision of psychological first aid (PFA) for journalists in disaster zones can help reduce the immediate psychological distress associated with exposure to trauma (Wagner, 2013).

## **Work-Life Balance and Rotation Systems**

A key component of psychological preparedness is ensuring that journalists maintain a healthy work-life balance. Prolonged exposure to disaster reporting without adequate breaks can lead to burnout and chronic stress. Saylor (2001) suggests that news organizations should implement rotation systems for journalists working in disaster zones to ensure they do not experience prolonged periods of stress without recovery. Adequate rest, regular shifts, and time away from the frontlines of disaster coverage are crucial strategies for preventing burnout.

Moreover, organizations should encourage journalists to disconnect from their work when possible and engage in self-care practices. Deahl et al. (2009) recommend that newsrooms adopt policies that allow journalists to take restorative breaks after intense assignments. This approach ensures that journalists have the time and space to recover from the psychological demands of their work and can continue performing their roles effectively.

## **Trauma-Informed Reporting and Ethical Journalism**

Another critical element of preparedness is trauma-informed reporting practices. Trauma-informed reporting is a model that prioritizes the emotional well-being of both disaster survivors and the journalists covering them. It encourages journalists to approach sensitive subjects with compassion, to avoid re-traumatizing victims, and to report on traumatic events in a way that does not sensationalize the suffering of others (Hernandez et al., 2010).

Gibbons (2017) stresses the importance of recognizing the emotional consequences of reporting for both the affected populations and journalists. This includes learning to balance the need for compelling storytelling with the ethical responsibility to protect the dignity of those involved. By adopting trauma-informed reporting practices, journalists can reduce the psychological harm caused by their coverage, which in turn helps protect their own mental health. The psychological impacts of disaster reporting on journalists are significant and multifaceted, ranging from secondary traumatic stress and burnout to ethical dilemmas that exacerbate emotional distress. However, preparedness strategies, such as resilience training, support systems, work-life balance, and trauma-informed reporting, can help mitigate these impacts.

## **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**

Journalists play a crucial role in disaster response by providing accurate, timely information and shaping public perception. They act as intermediaries between affected communities and external aid organizations, ensuring people receive vital updates on weather, evacuation, and emergency services. Their coverage extends into the recovery phase, highlighting ongoing challenges and keeping public and political attention on the situation.

Media can influence public behaviour, risk perception, and decisions to evacuate or follow safety guidelines. The framing of disasters—either as tragic victimhood or resilient recovery—affects empathy and responses from citizens and policymakers. Journalists also hold stakeholders accountable for disaster management, uncovering inefficiencies and corruption while advocating for marginalized populations. Ethical considerations in disaster journalism are crucial. Journalists must balance reporting compelling stories with sensitivity to survivors' trauma and ensure accuracy to prevent misinformation. Respecting the dignity of disaster victims and avoiding exploitation are key ethical challenges in this field.

Journalists covering disasters often face significant socio-psychological challenges such as stress, trauma, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress (STS). These challenges can arise from exposure to graphic content, emotional toll, and the urgency of reporting. The psychological impact on journalists can mirror the symptoms experienced by disaster survivors, particularly in conflict zones or areas of severe natural disasters.

Journalists covering disasters face significant psychological challenges, including emotional distress, secondary traumatic stress (STS), burnout, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The emotional toll of witnessing trauma, the high-pressure environment of disaster reporting, and ethical dilemmas can all contribute to psychological strain. Journalists may also experience vicarious trauma, where repeated

exposure to suffering leads to anxiety, flashbacks, and emotional numbing, similar to the trauma experienced by disaster survivors.

In summary, preparedness for the psychological impacts of disaster reporting involves resilience training, support systems, work-life balance, and trauma-informed reporting practices. These strategies help mitigate the psychological toll on journalists and enable them to continue reporting effectively and ethically in high-stress environments.

In this chapter, it is aimed to reach the following achievements.

**Students can understand and explain how to cope with extraordinary situations during disasters.**

**Students can analyze and compare healthy decision-making strategies by remaining calm during and after a disaster.**

**Students can identify and apply socio-psychological preparedness methods for disasters.**



## Self-Assessment

1 Which of the following is a basic duty of journalists in times of disaster?

- To report the news as quickly as possible
- To provide accurate and reliable information
- To explain the damage and losses caused by disasters without verifying them
- To make predictions about when disasters will be over

2 Which of the strategies that journalists working in times of disaster should include in their socio-psychological preparation processes is wrong?

- Receiving psychological first aid training and being able to apply this information in times of crisis
- Learning stress management and self-care techniques to increase emotional resilience
- Creating support networks with colleagues and sharing emotional difficulties
- Working with continuous and long hours without taking time for rest

3 Which of the following methods is one of the most effective strategies for journalists working in times of disaster to be socio-psychologically prepared?

- Spending more time at the scene, ignoring the risk of exposure to trauma
- Regularly receiving psychological support to cope with stress during times of crisis
- Trying not to think about the events they witnessed to reduce emotional impact
- Getting used to carrying the emotional burden individually by working alone at the scene

4 Trauma-sensitive reporting requires journalists to prioritize which core ethical principle in times of disaster?

- Bypassing the verification process to get the story out as quickly as possible
- Reporting with dignity while respecting the privacy of victims
- Dramatizing the impact of the disaster to increase public interest
- Sharing victims' most vulnerable moments to maximize the emotional impact of the images

5 Why are ethics important for journalists in times of disaster?

- To respect the dignity of disaster victims and avoid exploitation
- To make news more dramatic and attention-grabbing
- To attract more viewers in a competitive media environment
- To exaggerate the impact of the disaster and motivate authorities

6 Which of the following are policies that news organizations can implement to ensure the well-being of journalists working in disaster areas?

- Providing rotating shifts to reduce stress
- Limiting psychological support to increase journalists' emotional resilience
- Working journalists in disaster areas for long periods without interruption
- Working journalists alone in disaster areas

7 What strategies should disaster journalists employ to protect their psychological well-being while reporting on traumatic events?

- By focusing only on bad news and ignoring positive stories
- By remaining completely indifferent to events and suppressing their emotions
- By constantly staying in disaster areas and reporting as much as possible
- By taking time for themselves regularly and seeking professional psychological support if necessary

8 Which of the following is not a key aspect of psychological preparation for disaster journalists in times of disaster?

- Trauma awareness and stress management,
- Peer support and information,
- Establishing emotional boundaries, helping journalists balance empathy with detachment to avoid burnout,
- Not feeling anything emotional about disasters

9 What do journalists pay attention to in times of disaster to report news while maintaining objectivity in stressful situations?

- Verifying news sources and confirming information
- Incorporating their own personal opinions into the news
- Exaggerating news language and visuals to increase emotional impact
- Only reporting information provided by official authorities without questioning

10 How can disaster journalists pay attention to cultural sensitivity to avoid ethical violations?

- By researching the local values and traditions of the region and adjusting the language and content of the news accordingly
- By focusing on producing rapid news, ignoring the sensitivities of the communities affected by the disaster
- By accepting their own cultural perspective as universal and shaping the news accordingly
- By ignoring the local context, considering only international media standards

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## Answer Key

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1.b, 2. d, 3.b, 4.b, 5.a, 6.a, 7.d, 8.d, 9.a, 10.a

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# PHYSICAL PREPARATION IN DISASTER JOURNALISM

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## BOOK CHAPTER 4

### PHYSICAL PREPARATION IN DISASTER JOURNALISM

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## Introduction

**Disaster journalism is a special type of journalism that aims to provide accurate and timely information to the public during natural or man-made disasters.**

Disaster journalism is a special type of journalism that aims to provide accurate and timely information to the public during natural or man-made disasters. Access to information is vital during disasters, as accurate public information directly contributes to preventing panic and chaos, enhancing the effectiveness of rescue efforts, and promoting informed behaviour within society (Kartal ve Dağ, 2021). In this context, disaster journalism aims not only to report events, but also to ensure the accuracy and reliability of information enabling the public to act safely and responsibly.

For disaster journalism to be successful, journalists need not only professional competencies but also physical preparedness. Physical preparation is an important process that ensures that journalists are equipped in advance against the challenging conditions they may encounter in the disaster zone. This preparation is necessary for the journalist to ensure his/her own safety as well as to carry out his/her duties

in an uninterrupted and effective manner (Antunes et al., 2022). Journalists working in disaster areas may be exposed to physical risks, including exposure to debris, exposure to hazardous materials, damage to infrastructure and unhealthy environments.

Physical preparedness includes the steps to be taken before going to the disaster area and at the time of the event. This process includes analysing the disaster area in advance, assessing potential risks, mastering basic safety protocols, learning first aid skills, using the right equipment, and following legal procedures (Newman et al., 2009). Especially in large-scale disasters, this preparation is critical for journalists to protect both their own safety and the accuracy of their reporting. Especially in the case of physical difficulties in the field, earthquakes or floods, it can be critical for journalists to protect their personal safety and report the events accurately. Therefore, disaster journalism is not only about transferring information, but also about ensuring that reporters in the field are adequately equipped.

In this chapter, the importance of physical preparation in disaster journalism will be discussed in detail and the importance of identifying risks, safety procedures, equipment use, and emergency plans will be emphasized. The aim is to ensure the personal safety of journalists working in disaster periods and to increase their competencies to inform society correctly.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Physical Preparation

It is the preparation process of reporters who will work in disaster areas to increase their physical endurance and adapt to harsh conditions. This process includes habits such as regular physical exercise, balanced nutrition and adequate rest. The harsh environmental conditions encountered in disaster reporting (e.g. standing for long periods, carrying heavy equipment or moving quickly) require physical strength. Physical preparedness helps the individual not only to protect his/her own health but also to fulfil his/her mission effectively.

### Risk Analysis

It is the process of identifying potential hazards and planning the measures to be taken against them by reporters working in disaster areas. Risk analysis involves taking into account the geographical characteristics of the region, environmental hazards and social dynamics. For example, regional risks such as landslides, floods, or debris entrapment are assessed, and plans are developed to protect against these hazards. Risk analysis is the basis not only for safety measures but also for task efficiency.

### First Aid Skills

It is the competence to perform basic interventions in the face of unexpected health problems or injuries in the disaster area. First aid skills are critical to stabilize an injury, control life-threatening situations in emergencies and ensure the safety of individuals until professional help arrives. For example, skills such as stopping bleeding, performing CPR or responding to shock are vital for reporters working in the field.

### Safety Procedures

Rules and practices determined to ensure the safety of individuals while working in disaster areas are of great importance. Safety procedures include identification of hazardous areas, correct use of protective equipment and communication methods within the team. For example, if there is a leak of hazardous materials in an area, proper implementation of safety procedures reduces the risk of exposure to individuals. Adhering to these procedures helps reporters to ensure both their own safety and the uninterrupted flow of information.



## Equipment Use

It is the correct and effective use of tools such as cameras, microphones, communication devices and protective equipment by reporters in disaster areas. This includes all processes from safe transportation of equipment to its maintenance and proper use. For example, the use of technological tools such as drones not only allows reporters to gather information from different angles but also increases their personal safety. The correct use of equipment enables reporters to fulfil their duties quickly and effectively.

## Disaster Area Risks

It refers to the natural, physical and social hazards encountered in disaster areas. These risks may include exposure to toxic substances, extreme weather conditions, collapsed buildings or social conflicts. Disaster area risks vary according to the specific conditions of each region. For example, in a flood disaster, risks such as water contamination and electrocution are at the forefront, while in an earthquake the risk of being buried under rubble or aftershocks becomes more prominent. Understanding these risks in advance and taking appropriate precautions is an important part of physical preparedness.

## Emergency Planning

It is a series of measures and action plans prepared for sudden situations that may occur during a disaster. Emergency planning includes steps such as determining safe exit routes in the disaster area, keeping communication tools ready and ensuring that individuals know in advance how to act. For example, identifying a safe gathering area after an earthquake in case of aftershocks increases the safety of individuals. This planning makes it possible to make quick and effective decisions under stress.

## Understanding the Disaster Area

Understanding the disaster area is one of the cornerstones of effective disaster management and reporting. Disasters deeply affect the structure of societies as events that cause serious physical and social losses. Therefore, accurate analysis of disaster areas directly affects both the success of response processes and the speed of recovery processes. Understanding the disaster area requires not only the identification of natural hazards, but also the assessment of the state of the infrastructure in the area at social structure, risk factors and the vulnerability level of the community. This comprehensive approach aims to minimize the loss of life and property by identifying and analysing the risks in advance. Various methods are used for a correct understanding of disaster areas. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and risk maps are among these methods. GIS provide mapping of hazard zones, guide response teams and allow prioritization of areas under risk (UNDP, 2014). For example, the Early Earthquake Warning System (EEW) implemented in Japan plays an important role in reducing the loss of life and property by quickly estimating possible damages and risks during a disaster. Such technological tools strengthen the scientific basis of disaster management and make interventions more effective. In addition, field observations also contribute to understanding the dynamics of disaster areas on the ground. This combination of technological and analytical methods makes it possible to address disaster areas in a more comprehensive manner.

Understanding the disaster area should not be limited to technical analysis. The social fabric and socio-economic structure of society is also an integral part of this process. The economic status, education level, cultural structure and the presence of disadvantaged groups directly shape the extent of the impacts of the disaster and the success of the response processes (CRED, 2019). At this point, it is of critical importance to assess the needs of disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities. According to the World Health Organization, there are approximately one billion people with disabilities worldwide and this group is one of the groups that may suffer the most from the effects of disasters (Kurt, 2019). During the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, only 41 out of 102 individuals with special needs in a nursing home in Sri Lanka survived. This incident clearly shows that disaster planning should be designed to include the needs of disadvantaged individuals.

Accessibility of disaster areas for people with disabilities is one of the critical components of pre-disaster preparedness and evacuation processes. Factors such as the suitability of evacuation routes for physically disabled individuals, the presence of directional signs for the visually impaired, or the effectiveness of warning systems for the hearing impaired are of vital importance. Therefore, disaster reporting should not only be limited to documenting physical destruction. At the same time, making visible the capacity of people with disabilities to cope with the crisis and the problems they face will ensure their effective inclusion in the disaster management process.

Journalists need to take physical safety measures to provide effective and reliable information in disaster areas. Identifying risky areas, proper use of personal protective equipment, and developing appropriate reflexes in case of danger not only help journalists ensure their safety in the field but also help them fulfil their duties more effectively (Antunes et al., 2022; Kartal ve Dağ, 2021). In addition, journalists should fulfil their duty to inform the public during disasters by practicing reliable and ethical reporting without demoralizing the public. Such an approach both contributes to the post-disaster recovery process of the society and allows media members to fulfil their professional responsibilities.

## Identifying Risks in the Disaster Area

Risk identification, one of the key elements of physical preparedness in disaster reporting, has a critical role in both disaster management and ensuring reliable news flow. Risk is associated not only with the probability of the occurrence of potential hazards, but also with analysing the damage that these hazards may cause. Risk assessment in disaster areas is not limited to the identification of natural hazards; it also includes the physical conditions, infrastructure damage, logistical obstacles and threats that journalists may face. This process is as important for journalism as it is for disaster management because it both ensures safety in the field and supports the process of accurate information.

Assessing natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides, as well as man-made risks such as industrial accidents and infrastructure problems, increases the safety of journalists in the field.

Risk assessment for journalists is a process that starts before entering a disaster area. Assessing natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides, as well as man-made risks such as industrial accidents and infrastructure problems, increases the safety of journalists in the field. For example, identifying the effects of industrial accidents, as well as the dangers arising from poor infrastructure, in advance is vital to the sustainability of reporting. Accurate assessment of risks guides the adoption of physical security measures in disaster areas (Örçen Güler, 2019). Therefore, journalists need to act consciously against potential threats in disaster areas. In this process, technological tools increase the effectiveness of the risk assessment process. Geographic information systems (GIS) and risk maps provide an important resource for both journalists and disaster management teams. By identifying hazard zones, these tools enable the identification of vulnerable areas and strategic planning for safe reporting.

For example, during a disaster, risk maps based on the geographical characteristics of the area allow journalists to avoid risky areas and work more safely. This use of technological tools supports informed decision-making in the field.

The risk identification process is not limited to physical factors but also includes social factors. The social structure of the population in disaster areas, economic challenges, and the fact that disadvantaged groups are more affected by disasters are important factors that journalists should consider in their reporting. These social dynamics ensure not only the accuracy of reporting but also the maintenance of ethical standards (CRED, 2019; Newman et al., 2009). For example, the fact that economically vulnerable groups are more affected by disasters should be seen not only as a news topic but also as a matter of social responsibility.

The success of the risk identification process relies on collaboration among various stakeholders. Coordination between public institutions, local administrations, civil society organizations and the media plays a critical role in ensuring the reliability of information flow and safety in the field. It is an important part of this cooperation that journalists are familiar with physical preparedness elements such as entry permits to disaster areas, use of security equipment, and basic first aid knowledge (Azimli Çilingir, 2019; Kartal ve Dağ, 2021). Effective implementation of these elements ensures both the safety of journalists and the protection of ethical and professional standards in disaster reporting.

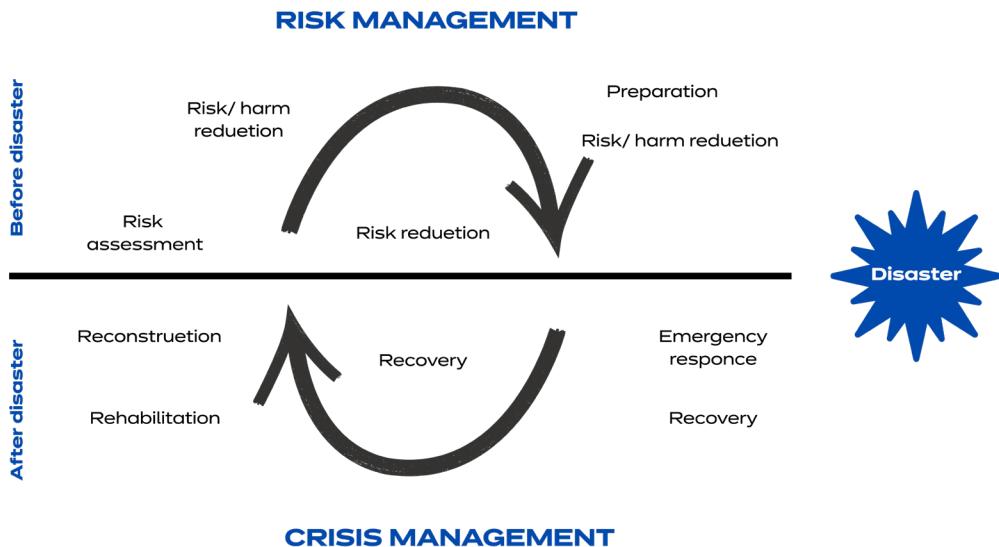


Image 1. Disaster Management Cycle (Doğan and Biberci, 2017)

## The Importance of Physical Preparation in Disaster Journalism

Assessing natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides, as well as man-made risks such as industrial accidents and infrastructure problems, increases the safety of journalists in the field.

In disaster reporting, physical preparedness stands out as a critical element for journalists to operate safely and effectively in disaster areas. Physical preparedness covers the processes of identifying the hazards in the disaster area in advance, determining the risks and taking precautions against these risks. Natural disasters (such as earthquakes, floods, landslides) and man-made disasters (industrial accidents, infrastructure collapses) can threaten the safety of both journalists and the public in the region. Therefore, physical preparedness is important not only for individual safety but also for maintaining accurate and reliable journalism.

Physical preparation for journalists includes identifying the risks that may be encountered in the field, taking safety precautions and adapting to working conditions. Journalists working in disaster areas should be able to identify risk areas, have safety equipment and take personal health precautions before going to the

**The main objective of physical preparedness is to ensure the safety of journalists and minimize risks that could disrupt the transmission of information.**

area. For example, in flood zones, hazards such as slippery ground and electrocution can be minimized through the use of insulated footwear and protective equipment. Such measures form the basis of physical preparation and are effective steps to reduce safety risks in the field (Tanyaş et al., 2013).

The main objective of physical preparedness is to ensure the safety of journalists and minimize risks that could disrupt the transmission of information. Early warning systems and pre-disaster information programs enable journalists to analyse the magnitude of the disaster and potential hazards in advance. With the radical changes in disaster management in Türkiye after the 1999 Marmara Earthquake, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) was established and a “Risk Management” approach was adopted. This approach is based on identifying risks in advance and taking preventive measures. The training programs initiated by AFAD aim to provide journalists

with the necessary field knowledge and safety skills to work safely in disaster areas. Research discusses how social media provides information flow during disasters and how journalists should act in this regard.

Physical preparedness is not only limited to structural security measures, but also includes elements such as first aid training, mastery of emergency communication protocols and compliance with security procedures in the disaster area. Especially in natural disasters, threats such as the risk of being buried under debris, gas leaks and electric shocks are among the factors that can directly affect safety in the field (AFAD, 2014). In this context, physical preparedness both increases individual safety and supports accurate information processes in crisis situations.

## **Basic First Aid Skills in Disaster Journalism and Basic Needs for Survival**

Basic first aid skills and survival needs in disaster reporting are vital for journalists to be able to work safely in disaster areas and to provide accurate information in times of crisis. The majority of injuries in disaster areas occur before professional aid teams arrive at the scene. This situation makes it imperative for journalists to be familiar with basic first aid knowledge and practices. Timely and correct interventions both reduce the mortality rates due to injuries and ensure that journalists act consciously in the field (Fatoni et al., 2022; Heard et al., 2020).

Basic first aid skills include rapid and effective interventions at the scene. The European Resuscitation Council (ERC) states that first aid aims to support the life functions of the individual until professional aid teams arrive. In particular, the ABC (Airway, Breathing, Circulation) protocol is one of the basic techniques for keeping the airway open, supporting respiration and regulating circulation. In more complex cases, the XABC (Exsanguination - Bleeding Control, Airway - Airway, Breathing - Breathing, Circulation - Circulation) protocol comes into play, ensuring that the focus is primarily on bleeding control in trauma. This approach is of great importance in terms of preventing life-threatening, especially in serious injuries (Zideman et al., 2021; Bayram et al., 2023).

For journalists, mastering these techniques is a critical necessity to increase their own safety in the disaster zone and to support the individuals around them. In disaster reporting, meeting survival needs is as important as ensuring physical safety. Basic needs such as clean water, food, shelter and hygiene products are of vital importance not only for disaster victims but also for journalists working in disaster zones. Disinfection of water sources due to the risk of contamination, creation of temporary shelters and protection of food stocks are critical steps for basic health and functionality in disaster areas (Uscher-Pines et al., 2012; AFAD, 2015). Meeting these needs properly enables journalists to fulfil their duties in a sustainable manner. At the same time, being prepared for logistical challenges within the scope of physical preparedness increases the efficiency of journalists in the field.

Physical preparation for journalists should not be limited to learning basic first aid skills. Updating these skills through regular training enables journalists reporting on disasters to make conscious interventions. The periodic renewal of first aid certificates in Türkiye is an important practice that supports continuity in this field. In addition, the role of technology in disaster response is increasing. Drones and artificial intelligence-based analysis systems are effectively used in rapid data collection and aid delivery processes in disaster areas (IFRC, 2023). These technologies allow journalists to both ensure their safety and perform disaster reporting more effectively. Such preparations for basic first aid skills and survival needs in disaster reporting ensure the physical safety of journalists and enable them to convey accurate information to the public in times of crisis. This situation is of great importance not only for journalists to fulfil their professional responsibilities but also for the protection of ethical values and raising social awareness.

## Legal Safety Procedures and Permits in Disaster Journalism

In disaster reporting, legal security procedures and permits are a fundamental requirement for journalists to work safely, ethically and effectively in disaster areas. Disaster areas stand out as complex areas where both physical and social risks are intense. Therefore, members of the media need to comply with certain safety standards and legal regulations while performing their duties. Legal security not only ensures the physical safety of journalists but also aim to adhere to the principles of ethical journalism and maintain transparency in access to information. Complying with these procedures in disaster areas not only increases individual safety but also enables accurate and reliable news flow. "Disaster journalism defines how journalists should act in the field and what permissions they must obtain." Frameworks have been set at a national and international level to ensure safety. These frameworks define how journalists should act on the ground and what permissions they need to obtain.

The United Nations' 1994 Human Development Report defined human security as the protection of individuals from sudden and painful disruptions to their daily way of life (UNDP, 1994). The risks faced by journalists in disaster areas are directly related to this definition. Misinformation, lack of access to information and security gaps can increase social insecurity. For this reason, members of the media should obtain the necessary permits from the authorities and plan their working conditions in advance (UNISDR, 2012).

Security clearances supervised by local governments and international organizations are important to minimize the risks that journalists may face in the field. Keeping the activities of international aid organizations under control is a critical element to prevent illegal acts that may be carried out in the name of humanitarian aid (Fondation de France, 2023). In addition to security clearances, verifying the accuracy of news sources and controlling the flow of information are also part of legal security procedures.

Legal security procedures also cover journalists' access to basic needs. Ensuring food security, access to clean water and hygiene conditions in disaster areas is important not only for disaster victims but also for the physical and professional sustainability of journalists (Bacon and Hobson, 2014). Accessibility and sustainability of health services play a decisive role in the ability of media workers to work safely in disaster areas. Especially in the post-disaster period, taking health precautions and implementing safety procedures protect both media professionals and other stakeholders in the region.

## Equipment and Infrastructure Preparation in Disaster Journalism

In disaster journalism, equipment and infrastructure preparation is an indispensable element to ensure accurate and reliable information flow in times of crisis. To minimize the devastating effects of disasters, to ensure the safety of journalists working in the field and to ensure that the public is accurately informed, it is necessary to plan equipment and infrastructure in advance. Such preparations enable media workers to work effectively in the field and prevent the interruption of information flow during a crisis. Preparation of equipment and infrastructure not only facilitates the fulfilment of journalists' duties but also increases the overall effectiveness of disaster management.

Equipment readiness includes technical equipment and communication tools to be used in the field. Equipment such as cameras, microphones, portable energy sources, satellite phones and data transmission devices are essential to ensure the sustainability of information flow in disaster areas. Satellite phones and emergency radios enable journalists to connect with the center when the communication infrastructure is damaged (AFAD, 2004). In addition, portable energy sources are a critical requirement for the long-term use of equipment in the field. Effective use of technical equipment enables journalists to provide faster and more accurate information during a crisis.

Infrastructure preparedness includes logistical support to ensure the safety of journalists, secure data transmission and facilitate access to the disaster area. Establishing safe working areas, determining access routes to disaster areas and providing temporary shelters are important parts of this preparation process. In addition, backup systems and secure server connections are essential to ensure data security during a disaster. These infrastructural measures not only increase the safety of journalists but also guarantee the delivery of accurate information to large audiences.

In Türkiye, equipment and infrastructure preparedness is organized within the framework of national disaster response plans determined by AFAD. AFAD has established guidelines on how members of the media should operate in disaster areas and has set standards for the use of equipment, security measures and logistical support (AFAD, 2018). These plans cover the necessary preparations for members of the media to work more effectively in times of crisis.

Preparation of equipment and infrastructure is not limited to technical elements. Training of media members and raising their awareness on ethical journalism principles is an integral part of this preparation process. Journalists should work in cooperation with search and rescue teams, obtain the necessary permissions from the competent authorities and respect the sensitive conditions in the disaster area (Kadioğlu, 2008). This kind of awareness raising ensures that journalists act in accordance with both ethical and professional standards in a disaster environment. Equipment and infrastructure preparation in disaster reporting should be based on both the safety of journalists and the public's access to reliable information. A preparation process supported by proper planning, technical equipment and ethical principles makes it possible for the public to access the information they need in times of crisis. This integrated approach enables media and journalists to play an effective role in disaster management.

## Emergency Plans in Disaster Journalism

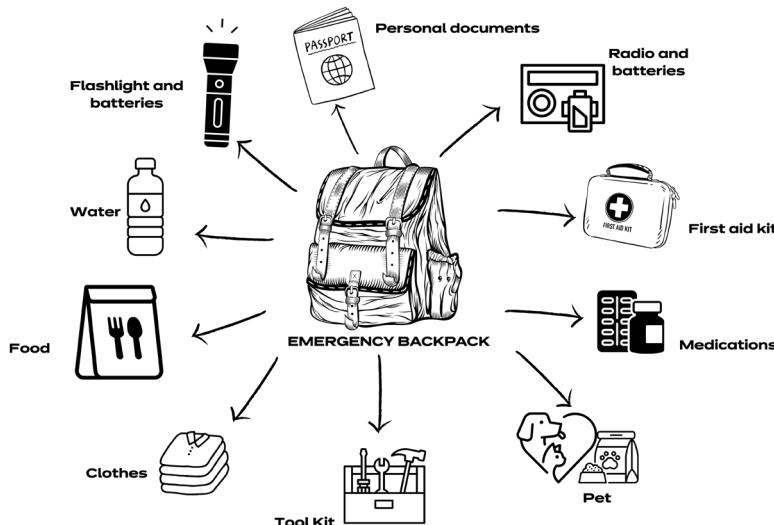
In disaster journalism, contingency plans play a vital role in ensuring the physical safety of journalists in times of crisis, as well as the uninterrupted delivery of accurate information to the public. Disaster zones pose a high risk to journalists due to unpredictable hazards and rapidly changing conditions. Therefore, detailed emergency planning covering pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis processes ensures that journalists can safely fulfil their duties (AFAD, 2023).

Contingency plans are structured to increase journalists' safety in the field, facilitate their access to information and support their accurate reporting in times of crisis. Training journalists before they encounter potential hazards, equipping them with the necessary equipment and providing them with access to alternative communication systems are important steps in this process. In addition, procedures in place during and after disasters facilitate journalists' work in the field and ensure that the public has access to reliable information.

### Pre-Disaster Planning and Preparedness

The pre-disaster phase includes preparations to minimize the risks that journalists may face in disaster areas. In this phase

- Identify potential hazards and risk factors in advance,
- Organizing safety and first aid trainings,
- Provision of protective equipment (helmet, gas mask, first aid kit, etc.),
- Identification of alternative means of communication (satellite phones, radios),
- Conducting drills is one of the most important steps. Such preparations allow journalists to act consciously and safely in a crisis.



**Image 2:** Emergency Case (Eskişehir AFAD and Anadolu University, 2017)



## Crisis Intervention

Contingency plans to be implemented in times of crisis ensure that journalists can fulfil their duties while maintaining their safety in the field. In this process

- i.Creation of safe working spaces,
- ii.Using reliable sources to access accurate information,
- iii.Putting evacuation protocols in place,
- iv.Steps such as coordination with local authorities and search and rescue teams are critical.
- v.Journalists play an active role in crisis management by working in cooperation with other teams in the field while performing information gathering tasks during a disaster.

## Post-Crisis Recovery

In the post-crisis period, it is assessed whether emergency plans have been effectively implemented.

At this stage

- i.Analysis and reporting of the situation in the disaster area,
- ii.Review of equipment and communication tools used,
- iii.Health checks of journalists in the field,
- iv.It is important to draw lessons from the experience and prepare recovery plans for future crises. These assessments make it possible to plan more effectively and safely in the future.

## Importance of Emergency Plans

Contingency plans not only ensure the safety of journalists in disaster reporting but also create the necessary infrastructure to ensure the uninterrupted transmission of accurate information to the public. These plans include elements such as risk analysis, training, communication protocols, use of protective equipment and psychological support. Regularly updated and implemented plans support journalists to work safely, ethically and professionally in the field. Effective emergency planning in disaster journalism allows journalists to fulfil their duties in a sustainable manner in times of crisis. In this way, the task of informing the public is fulfilled and the safety of journalists is ensured.

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

This chapter discusses the importance of physical preparation in disaster reporting. The difficulties that journalists may face in disaster areas and the measures to be taken against these difficulties are detailed. Disaster journalism is critical for providing accurate information to the public. In this process, physical preparation increases the safety of journalists and ensures that the flow of information is not interrupted.

Key elements of physical preparedness include risk analysis, equipment readiness, first aid skills and safety procedures. Technological tools and planning used in disaster zones allow journalists to fulfil their duties effectively. In addition, the contribution of legal safety procedures and emergency plans to journalists' work in the field is discussed in detail. It is emphasized here that physical preparedness is an important tool not only for individual safety but also for protecting the principles of ethical journalism and raising public awareness. The necessity of equipping journalists with knowledge and skills for pre-, during and post-crisis processes has been revealed.

The aim of this section is to provide journalists with the basic skills and knowledge they need to work effectively and safely in disaster areas.

- **Students can understand the role of disaster journalism in social information and crisis management.**
- **Students can identify physical risks that journalists may face in disaster areas.**
- **Students can have the ability to perform risk analysis during the disasters.**
- **Students can learn how emergency plans should be created and implemented.**
- **Students can master basic first aid techniques in disaster areas.**
- **Students can learn to compliance with legal safety procedures and ethical reporting principles.**
- **Students can maintain both their safety and professional standards in disaster areas.**
- **Students can developed strategies to raise public awareness and increase social resilience against disasters.**



## Self-Assessment

1 What is the main purpose of disaster reporting?  
 a) Remaining insensitive to the needs of the public  
 b) To ensure that the public is informed accurately and in a timely manner  
 c) Making the news more sensationalized  
 d) Just to increase the speed of news agencies

2 Why is physical preparation important in disaster reporting?  
 a) To avoid the need for equipment during a crisis  
 b) To make journalists less tired  
 c) To increase the attractiveness of news  
 d) To cope with hazards in the disaster area

3 For what purpose is risk analysis done?  
 a) To identify potential hazards in the disaster area in advance  
 b) To guide the people in the disaster area  
 c) To take advantage of opportunities that may arise after a disaster  
 d) Just to facilitate equipment choices

4 What is the importance of basic first aid skills in disaster reporting?  
 a) Making timely and correct intervention to injuries  
 b) Increasing the physical fitness of journalists  
 c) Making it easier to find people under the rubble  
 d) Accelerating logistics arrangements in the disaster area

5 Why is the use of equipment important in disaster reporting?  
 a) For better quality images  
 b) To sustain the flow of information in the disaster area  
 c) To make journalists look aesthetic  
 d) To present simple news more effectively

6 Which processes do emergency plans cover?  
 a) Pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis  
 b) Only permits to enter the disaster area  
 c) Aid from outside the region during the crisis  
 d) Post-disaster media assessment reports

7 Why is it important to follow legal safety procedures?  
 a) To create an ethical and safe working environment in a disaster area  
 b) To ensure that the public receives quick information about the disaster  
 c) To ensure that journalists attract more attention  
 d) To create unrestricted mobility in the disaster area

8 Which technological tools are useful in disaster reporting?  
 a) Crisis desk coordination software  
 b) Only portable radios  
 c) Geographic Information Systems, satellite phones and drones  
 d) Thermal cameras and seismic sensors

9 What are the physical risks that journalists may face in a disaster area?  
 a) Bad weather only  
 b) Debris exposure, toxic substance exposure, infrastructure damage  
 c) Inadequate equipment only  
 d) Difficulty communicating with people

10 What is the importance of ethical journalism principles in disaster reporting?  
 a) Increasing social media followers of journalists  
 b) To give morale to people in the disaster area  
 c) The news attracted more attention in international media  
 d) Ensuring public trust and information

## Answer Key

1.b, 2.d, 3.a, 4.a, 5.b, 6.a, 7.a, 8.c, 9.b, 10.d

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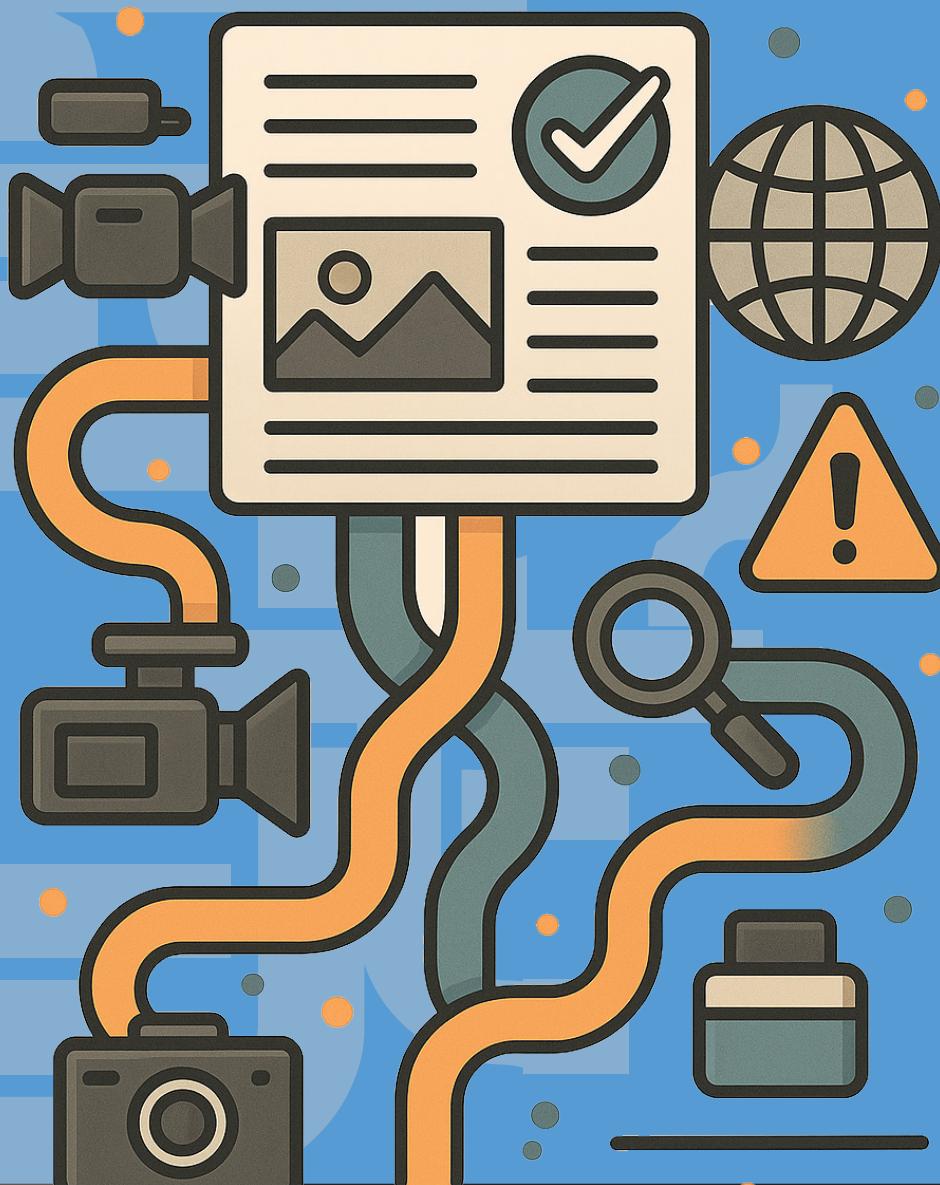
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# REPORTING DISASTERS ACCURATELY

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## BOOK CHAPTER 5

# REPORTING DISASTERS ACCURATELY

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Disaster Reporting**
- **News Gathering Processes in Disaster**
- **News Sources and Their Usage in Disasters**
- **Context in Disaster News**
- **Impartiality and Transparency in Disaster Reporting**
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## Introduction

This section will address the issue of how disaster news should be reported correctly. First, the section will explain how information should be gathered when reporting disasters and the use of news sources in disaster reporting. Then, it will discuss how context should be presented/addressed in disaster reporting. The basis of journalism is to report events in an impartial and objective manner. Therefore, the importance of impartiality and transparency in disaster reporting will be discussed in detail.

This section aims to explain how journalists should apply their publishing policies when reporting natural disasters, man-made crises, terrorist attacks and similar disasters. Reporting disasters accurately makes significant contributions to the process both in terms of society and the emergency during a disaster. Therefore, the most important aspect of reporting is to obtain the right information from the right news sources. News sources and their types are discussed under subheadings.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Disaster Reporting

In addition to the use of sources during the pre-disaster, intervention and recovery phases, it includes journalists' expertise in reporting disasters and their approaches to reporting during extraordinary situations that societies face.

### Reporting

It is the process of gathering, organizing and presenting accurate and objective information about an event, situation or subject. Reporting ensures that the news is shared with society accurately and completely.

### News Sources

News sources are the sources from which the news content is obtained. News sources can be classified as economy, security, finance, courthouse etc. According to the type of news, and can also be defined according to the person, institution or organization from which the news is received.

### Context

When describing an event or situation, it is a framework that covers all the environmental conditions, causes, results and other elements related to the event in question.

### Impartiality and Transparency

Impartiality in news means the impartiality and objectivity of the news, in other words, conveying events objectively by eliminating emotional elements. Transparency is the apparent conformity of news content to reality.

### Editorial Policy

An expression that defines the identity or personality of the publication, the news perspective, the publishing channel. In other words, it is the creation of a publishing line by revealing a newspaper's perspective on news, political stance, news writing rules and styles, national policy and foreign policy.

## Disaster Reporting

Accurate reporting during disasters is critical for informing the public, guiding emergency response efforts, and contributing to the recovery process.

Every year, natural and man-made disasters such as earthquakes, floods, storms, tsunamis, volcanoes, attacks and crisis occur all over the world. Depending on their severity, these disasters cause irreparable damage, losses and loss of life. When disasters occur, journalists need to provide timely and reliable information, and report in a way that the masses can understand, rather than complex scientific information, when explaining what happened, how and why.

Accurate reporting during disasters is critical for informing the public, guiding emergency response efforts, and contributing to the recovery process. However, reporting disasters also presents unique challenges, such as gathering and communicating information under conditions of confusion, uncertainty, and often chaotic conditions. Accuracy in disaster reporting means journalists must adhere to strict ethical standards, verify information, and consider the potential consequences of misinformation.

There are some points to consider when reporting disasters. First, the report should include information defining the disaster, such as which disaster event occurred, who was affected, how long the disaster lasted, what the connections (technical, social or political) that led to the disaster were, and whether the government and society were able to cope with the disaster, and what people should do when a disaster occurs. Secondly, the report should be clear. In other words, the main theme of what the reporter wants to say should also be understood by the readers and the message should be received. The most important part of journalism is to make an introduction that will attract the reader to the news. It is important for the title of the news to be connected to its content. The news should be written with concise words, adhering to the main title, and irrelevant information and quotes should not be added. Another point to consider when writing a report is the sources used. The report written about the disaster should have sufficient information to convince the readers that the sources cited are both expert and credible. Writing style is another point to consider. The report should be written in clear and simple words so that readers can easily understand and get the message.

There are four stages in disaster reporting (ADPC, 2024). These are;

### Non-Disaster Phase

In this phase, the media covers policy and legislation related to the disaster. Interviews should be conducted to emphasize the importance of long-term disaster mitigation measures by the public and private sectors. The public, especially vulnerable communities, should be informed about measures taken by the government regarding disaster risk management.

## Pre-Disaster Stage

In this stage, the media can emphasize the importance of disaster risk reduction and preparedness by encouraging people to take appropriate actions to reduce damage in future disasters. In addition, the media can raise awareness about early warning, inform the public about precautionary measures and structural/engineering measures to be taken to prevent losses.

## Disaster Stage

The media acts as a bridge between the disaster-affected community and aid organizations. It can facilitate communication between disaster victims and their families. It can ensure that the focus is on the minimum needs of disaster victims, such as water, food, shelter and sanitation.

## Post-Disaster Stage

In the final stage, the focus should be on early recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure. Mobilization of financial, technical and material resources is an important requirement in the post-disaster stage. Regular monitoring of ongoing recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts is also an important task for the media at this stage.

### News Gathering Processes in Disaster

From the moment a disaster occurs, the media tries to reach the scene with all its equipment and to inform the public to meet the public's need for news about the region affected by the disaster, often proportional to the scale of the disaster's impact. The correct selection, access and use of news sources in the news are very important, especially in disaster situations, for accurate and impartial news information based on the event. This is because the eyes and ears of the public are focused on the news coming from the disaster area.

Especially during disasters, media organizations emerge as a power in providing information and guidance. In a study conducted by Yakut (2005) in the center of İzmit in Türkiye, 99% of the participants stated that there was a need for information about the disaster experienced from newspapers, television and radio. Therefore, the use of visual and auditory tools such as television and the internet, printed tools such as newspapers and magazines and audio tools such as radio during disasters are important both in informing the society and increasing its resilience. Media plays a role in informing the public before and after natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires, floods and tsunamis, chemical and nuclear attacks, in establishing communication between the authorities and the public, and in reducing the material and moral damages caused by disasters. In addition, rescue and aid teams need appropriate planning and decision-making to carry out the necessary actions. To make good planning and then make the right decisions, accurate information is needed as soon as possible after the disaster (Nejad et al., 2015).

During disaster periods, the news gathering process of reporters working in disaster areas should be carried out with the utmost care that prioritizes life safety and facilitates the work of search and rescue teams. It is also important to pay attention to the sound and lights of cameras and still cameras during the rush of the news gathering process. Because sounds and lights can negatively affect the psychological state and health of the disaster victim. This awareness should be considered.

There are various techniques used by reporters in the news gathering process. One of these techniques is observation. The first method of gathering news is through observing and experiencing events first-hand. Another technique is interview and reportage. It is the search for answers to a reporter's questions on a certain subject through interviews. For example, it is important for reporters working in disaster zones to exercise caution when using this technique during the news-gathering process. The micro-

phone should not be extended to people under the rubble, and they should stay away from the race to record the moment when disaster victims are being pulled out of the rubble. Another method is research. Detailing the information that has been tipped off in some way and accessing reliable information requires conducting research. For example, investigating the cause of the Los Angeles fire, which occurred recently and is considered the costliest fire in modern history, why it occurred, whether it was a natural fire or sabotage is important in terms of making accurate news.



**Image 1.** America Los Angeles Fire / Source: Hans Gutknecht/ BBC News

## News Sources and Their Usage in Disasters

The first stage of the news production process is the occurrence of an event and the provision of information about the subject. The person, institution, organization from whom information is obtained about the event, person or developments that are the subject of the news and the documents that narrate the event are referred as news sources.

In any disaster where there is mass destruction, journalists are the most important source of information in the media, to which the public gives all their attention and time as a source of accurate and reliable news. Because in times of disasters fast, accurate, reliable and life-saving information is the most valuable treasure. Individuals affected by disasters want to trust several news and information sources during and after disasters. To clarify information about the disaster in the crisis environment, professional skills and the use of the right news source are needed.

In journalism, the most important element in obtaining information for writing news is having a source. News production is based on information from certain sources. The person or institution that provides content support to journalists while writing the news is called a news source. The news production process is the stage in which journalists compile and process the information, documents, and photographs they obtain from news sources and transform these elements into news format. News sources provide journalists with information that the public does not know. There are many different sources that a jour-

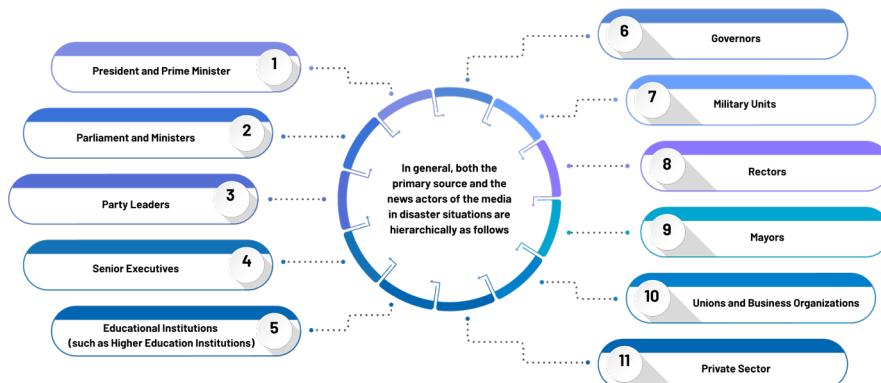
nalist can use to create a news story. However, news sources are generally considered in two categories: primary and secondary news sources.

## Primary Sources

**In disaster situations, a significant portion of the news sources are also actors in the disaster management system.**

Primary news sources are sources that are directly involved in the alleged event. The news media often obtain their sources from official sources such as the government. Since these sources are reliable and accessible news providers, they are held in a special position by media organizations. In this context, when the news media's relations with official sources are considered, the news or information of these institutions will be the priority in the news in the media. These sources are called primary sources. In disaster situations, a significant portion of the news sources are also actors in the disaster management system.

In general, both the primary source and the news actors of the media in disaster situations are hierarchically as follows:



Generally, in disaster situations, there is a hierarchical order among both primary sources and media news actors. The public affected by the disaster is in great need of information in the following hours and days. During this period, the expectations of the audience are directed towards understanding the extent of the danger, ongoing aid activities, material damage, preventive measures taken and possible legal investigations. In this context, the media plays an important role and conveying the situation comprehensively, media organizations use primary sources such as government institutions, security forces, universities, local governments, international organizations, professional chambers and civil society or-

ganizations to collect information. Sources such as government agencies, emergency services and aid organizations are reliable sources of information. These institutions can provide up-to-date statistics, warnings and guidance during and after disasters. For example, after a hurricane, authorities such as FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) or local security units are important sources of information for journalists.

Routine calls are also considered as primary news sources during disaster periods. Routine calls to emergency services such as police, fire departments and ambulances, notifications from disaster victims and information obtained because of interviews with authorized bodies are important news sources. In addition, reports obtained by journalists following the trials of those who caused the disaster are among the primary sources.

Field reporting is also one of the most reliable ways to get first-hand information. Journalists can observe the destruction, interview survivors and witnesses, and contact local authorities. However, in some disaster cases (such as hurricanes, earthquakes, or wildfires) it may not be possible to be on the ground and journalists may have to rely on secondary sources.

## Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are sources from which information about the event is obtained indirectly. Secondary sources, which generally include information obtained from another publication or broadcasting organization or person, include printed media such as television, books, documents, reports, articles, and can also be counted as eyewitnesses of the event in the news. Secondary sources include letters to the editor, news bulletins, content that comes free of charge and is published in more than one organization, news from other organizations, information and records obtained by going to the scene of the incident later and conducting interviews.

Second-hand sources do not have the function of confirming, verifying and defining information from primary sources that provide information to reporters during the news production process. The information that is the subject of the news consists of a message. Because in times of disaster when accurate information is needed the most, secondary sources are the ones that will provide evidence for the information, ensure reliability and prevent false information. Documents, that is, secondary sources, are of great importance for the credibility of the news.

Scientific and expert opinions are considered secondary sources. Information from scientists provides important context for understanding the causes of a disaster (for example, an earthquake, wildfire, or flood). For example, in the case of an earthquake, geophysicists can explain the characteristics of the earthquake, while meteorologists can help predict the path of a hurricane. In addition, witness and survivor testimonies often provide important information for understanding the human dimension of events. However, such sources must also be carefully verified, and a balance must be struck between the various views.

There is another view that divides news sources into three groups, namely internal sources, external sources and research sources, apart from primary and secondary news sources. The units within the mass media and the reporters who collect news in these units are considered as internal sources. External sources are bulletins of foreign agencies, news coming from reporters in foreign missions, press releases of international organizations and news of foreign organizations. Research sources consist of information obtained through the reporter's own investigation and individual efforts (Vural, 2012). In addition, social media and digital platforms with millions of users have become news reporting tools and news sources for those who use these tools.

## Social Media

News is of vital importance in disasters. While news that goes through the editorial process in traditional media contributes to the process by reporting accurate and essential data, social media makes significant contributions to disaster reporting with its fast and interactive structure. The use of social media as a news source enhances situational awareness and facilitates two-way communication. Social media fulfils important functions such as providing emergency communication in disaster situations, issuing warnings, receiving requests for help from disaster victims, creating situational awareness and making damage estimates. In this process, user activities and posts are monitored, uploaded images are used for damage assessments and thus information about the effects of the disaster is obtained. For example, during

Hurricane Sandy in 2012, approximately 800,000 photos were shared on Instagram with the #Sandy Hashtag and these photos also showed geographical locations. In the 2015 Nepal earthquakes, a digital volunteer group called Digital Humanitarian developed digital tools for disaster management. More than 3,000 volunteers contributed to the mapping process, which resulted in 1,500 reports on affected areas and the number of victims. The data obtained was used extensively by the American Red Cross and the Nepalese government in effectively conducting relief operations (Sakurai & Murayama, 2019).

Providing fast and effective access to information is of great importance in the period following a disaster. In disasters such as earthquakes where there is a power outage, continued internet access plays a critical role in providing communication via social media. Since social media allows information to spread very quickly, it becomes more useful in important areas where information flow is not available from traditional news sources. Many information sources, especially videos and photos taken by eyewitnesses, are spread much faster through social media tools compared to traditional news broadcasters, allowing instant information about the situation to be obtained.

In addition, platforms such as X, Instagram, and Facebook facilitate the instant sharing of information during disasters, allowing not only government agencies and humanitarian organizations but also individuals to quickly disseminate updates. This feature provides a more dynamic and responsive flow of communication, where news can be updated as new developments occur and urgent alerts can reach a wide audience almost instantly. The interactive nature of social media also increases community participation by allowing two-way communication. This interaction allows people to share their experiences, convey information about local conditions, and contribute to awareness of the disaster situation by providing updates. This allows for a richer and more diverse understanding as the disaster unfolds, helping responders to tailor their actions to specific needs.

The most widely used news-based application of social media is X (formerly known as Twitter). X is a social networking site and microblog that allows users to send updates via short messages known as "tweets" and for other users to read these updates. X is a medium where journalists, political leaders, public institutions, businessmen, celebrities, opinion leaders, and many private and legal entities maintain an active presence. X is the news source where people get the most information, especially with the solidarity and cooperation environment it provides during disasters. In disasters, X usage can consist of tweets called "producer tweets" that contain raw material information, as well as tweets produced from the primary source, and information created by synthesizing information from the web, news sources, and other tweets. In disasters, X users share information they want to be highlighted by retweeting. They also ensure that the original information spreads more quickly by following hashtags, sharing URLs, and sharing external source information (Siapera & Veglis, 2012). Considering that journalists cannot always be everywhere, eyewitnesses in places where disasters occur share relevant posts, especially on X, Instagram and Facebook, and these posts reach millions very quickly. Thus, social media has become a prominent news source for journalists in this period.

## Context in Disaster News

Situations such as natural disasters, humanitarian crises or large-scale social events highlight the media's responsibility to inform the public and accurately report events.

Disaster reporting is one of the most challenging and ethically complex areas of journalism. Situations such as natural disasters, humanitarian crises or large-scale social events highlight the media's responsibility to inform the public and accurately report events. When reporting on disasters, journalists should avoid exploiting the emotions of victims and witnesses, and adhere to ethical principles to ensure that the context of events is not distorted. Understanding the victims of the disaster, the affected region, the social structure and the atmosphere, and accurately reporting the event is very important in terms of the context of the news. Not deviating from the context in disaster news does not mean reporting a chronological order of the disasters. Maintaining the context in disaster news means covering the causes and effects of the disaster. Journalists reporting on disasters should evaluate the causes of the disaster, the affected groups, and the social and economic impact of the event. Journalists should also consider the social and psychological effects of disasters, infrastructural deficiencies and political conflicts related to the effects of the disaster.

Context is critical to accurate storytelling. When an event or situation is presented in isolation, it can be difficult to understand its true impact. But context shows why the event is significant and what impact it has on society, economy, or culture. For example, in disaster reporting, context refers to the specific background, environment, and circumstances surrounding the disaster event and how these elements are communicated to society, authorities, and aid agencies.

The effects of natural disasters and catastrophes are not short-term. Journalists continue to report on disasters when the physical damage from the danger is over, the areas are made safe, the rescue efforts are completed, and the delivery of aid is complete. It can take a long time for the wounds resulting from disasters to heal, for social recovery to be achieved, and for infrastructure and social welfare services to be restored. During this process, disaster journalists continue to follow the process and report on the effects of the disasters in a comprehensive manner. At this stage, disaster journalists should report in a way that contributes to social recovery without highlighting the suffering of the victims and witnesses.

A framing that emphasizes victimization in disaster news carries the risk of normalizing such images over time and causing disaster victims to be perceived as individuals who are dependent on aid and unable to rebuild their livelihoods. A negative framing in disaster news can prevent the contributions of individuals to physical, economic, social and psychological recovery processes from being recognized. This situation may also undermine the rights of disaster victims to determine the types of support they request by denying their own capacities and sacrifices (Few, et al., 2021). Therefore, journalists reporting on disasters should avoid a news language and narrative structure that will highlight the victimization of disaster victims and should follow the post-disaster processes by deeply addressing the causes and effects of disasters.

Journalists reporting on disasters should avoid a news language and narrative structure that will highlight the victimization of disaster victims and should follow the post-disaster processes by deeply addressing the causes and effects of disasters.

Journalists who shape and construct the meaning of certain events and report them may want to create sensitivity by highlighting feelings of pity in disaster news. Journalists who witness disasters may prefer to convey a part of the 'reality' openly so that their audience can empathize. The journalist's sense of ethical responsibility and understanding of creating pity and victimization contradicts objectivity and negatively affects the context of the news. Journalists may see emotions such as pain and sadness as a legitimate part of disaster narratives when reporting disasters. However, focusing on the pain and trauma of victims and witnesses in disaster news can shift the news away from its context and towards the feeling of pity. One of the factors that distorts the context in disaster news is sensationalism and the use of dramatic language. Journalists' race to be the first to report the news from the field and the pressure to announce the news immediately can lead to an exaggerated and sensational narrative that strays from ethical concerns. On the other hand, the urge to be fast can distract the focus of disaster news from the actual disasters and facts, highlighting only superficial or striking elements (Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2013). For example, after the 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Pazarcık district of Kahramanmaraş in Türkiye on 6 February 2023, which caused great destruction in the surrounding provinces, news about explosions and water leaks in dams on social media spread rapidly and received great interactions without being checked for accuracy. Such posts made without an official source cause great panic at the time of disaster.



Image 2. Türkiye Kahramanmaraş Earthquake / Source: Ozan Kose/AFP

Considering the power of the media and its role in managing conflicts in society, it is very important to position the context of disaster news correctly. When disasters are reported through the media, they have the capacity to mobilize solidarity both nationally and globally. In general, there is a tendency in disaster reporting to focus on visible effects such as housing, infrastructure damage, loss of life and

the number of people affected, and to quantify the damage experienced. This approach can hide the abstract effects by highlighting the physical effects of disasters. In times of disaster, the media's comprehensive coverage of the people affected by disasters, support and recovery processes will help to understand disasters in the right context and their social effects better.

## Impartiality and Transparency in Disaster Reporting

The basis of journalism is that the media reports and reports events in an impartial and objective manner. The media must inform individuals about important issues and developments in an impartial manner. News is inherently value-laden, meaning that news inevitably contains certain values, priorities and perspectives. The selection of an event as news, the language, headline and visuals used in the news, the parts emphasized in the news text and the sources used show that absolute objectivity is not possible. Since journalists include value judgments in the news writing process when reporting an event, it is possible for any event to be rewritten and defined in many ways with different terms and concepts. Definitions include comments and comments are value oriented. For this reason, it is seen that newspapers and journalists with different publishing policies report the same event in very different ways. However, this does not mean that the news is directly biased. In journalism, unlike fictional events, there is a reality of an event and the principle of impartiality in journalism aims to reach this reality and convey the truth as it is. When reporting an event, journalists have the obligation to present only accurate and impartial information, free from bias, interests, personal views and opinions (Kieran, 2002).

The principle of impartiality offers the journalist, as an observer, a reliable reporting method that aims to present the 'truth'. The principles of impartiality and objectivity, which are at the core of journalism, position the journalist as an impartial observer who collects information for people and presents it as news. The principle of impartiality suggests that journalists should present the truth without bias or shaping, without taking sides, without values and judgments. Impartiality, or the approach of 'showing the truth as it is', has become one of the cornerstones of reporting an event as news. During disaster events, the media serves multiple functions, including fulfilling the public's need for information, strengthening social solidarity, providing accurate guidance, issuing early warnings, and raising awareness. Reporting events, especially in disaster periods that deeply affect humanity and require time for social recovery, requires much more attention, sensitivity and care. The principle of impartiality in disaster news means reporting events objectively, free of emotional elements. Impartiality requires that disaster-related events are not dramatic and biased, but rather that the facts are conveyed clearly and explicitly.

Disasters and natural disasters challenge journalists mentally, physically, ethically and emotionally. Reporting on disasters involves complex elements for journalists regarding witnessing events and impartiality. Journalists may encounter ethical dilemmas between the obligation to provide accurate, impartial information and the responsibility to accurately present the human drama they witness while reporting on disasters. Journalists who are present at the scene of disasters experience pain and destruction while reporting the news. Journalists also convey the emotional impact of these events on individuals while reporting on disasters. Viewers and readers also become witnesses of disasters through the personal testimonies of journalists. At this point, it is questioned whether journalists violate the principles of objectivity and impartiality while reporting on disasters due to their witnessing role. Because witnessing disasters can develop an understanding that will allow journalists to experience pain and empathize with those who experience disasters. The emotional connection to be established with people affected by the disaster can create an ethical conflict. On the other hand, reporting disasters and seeking compassionate and pity-filled responses from viewers and readers would violate the principle of impartiality (Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2013).

**The principle of impartiality in disaster news means reporting events objectively, free of emotional elements.**

When it comes to natural disasters and catastrophes, it can be difficult to remain completely impartial and indifferent in the face of suffering and loss. For this reason, journalists who report on disasters adhere to certain ethical values and the principle of impartiality. The duty of a journalist who reports on disasters is to record the feelings of those who experience them and to report developments in an impartial manner. The use of expressions that will provoke public emotions or attempts to manage people's emotions in disaster news violates the principle of impartiality. Therefore, in times of disaster, journalists should report developments without violating the principle of impartiality, upholding ethical values and without exploiting compassion. Journalists frame events according to their interpretation values of reality and the broadcasting policies of the media organizations they work for. However, disasters and the chaotic situations brought about by these events can impose certain frames on journalists when reporting these events. In the face of

unforeseen events, journalists are affected by reality and can only report events through socially accepted frames. When the chaotic nature of disasters prevails, journalists' news production routines can be disrupted. Journalists can lose sight of the principle of impartiality when faced with unexpected disasters. However, journalists' deviations from the norms of objectivity in disasters are not always misjudged. The fact that the media is generally the center of a society's collective memory and recovery can assign a different role to the media in times of disaster.

In disasters, media organizations can strengthen the sense of solidarity in society by breaking free from the constraints of objectivity and engaging in emotional interaction with those who have experienced the disaster. However, if emotions have too much influence on journalists, it is possible that the accuracy of information and the principle of impartiality will be damaged. In short, disasters show that journalists are emotionally attached to society and cannot always be completely impartial when reporting disasters. Journalists accept the principle of impartiality as a deep-rooted value due to their profession. However, it would be wrong and incomplete to see journalists as mere cogs in a system that has become routine in times of disaster. In a society faced with disasters, journalists can transform from objective news recorders to participatory ones and report news especially for people's needs (Schudson, 2007).

Limiting media news to presenting only objective facts is an incomplete approach. Since media is a structure that reflects and nourishes socio-cultural understandings, it also conveys personal values, attitudes and emotions. It is normal for readers or viewers to expect not only objective information and facts but also emotional information and expressions that will affect the understanding of an event. The correct use of emotional expressions and content in news does not negatively affect the principle of impartiality. Including emotions in disaster news also increases the impact of the news. However, at this point, it is very important how journalists include emotions in the news in order not to violate the principle of impartiality. Journalists avoid using overtly emotional expressions and interpreting emotions and can use these expressions by using anecdotes and quotations (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012).

## Broadcasting Policy in Disaster

Journalists should pay utmost attention to ethical values and responsibilities when reporting on natural disasters, man-made crises, terrorist attacks, and similar disasters. In this context, media organizations' publishing policies should consider not only the accurate and effective reporting of disasters to society, but also the avoidance of harm to victims. In disaster journalism, publishing policies should be designed within a framework that not only ensures accurate and impartial information, but also protects the rights of individual victims, observes social sensitivity, and prioritizes ethical principles. These publishing policies regarding disaster processes allow information to circulate quickly and effectively during the disaster process. A correct publishing policy will minimize the effects of trauma, encourage social solidarity, and ensure that the news is structured in a way that avoids unethical approaches such as tabloidization.

**In disaster journalism, publishing policies should be designed within a framework that not only ensures accurate and impartial information, but also protects the rights of individual victims, observes social sensitivity, and prioritizes ethical principles.**

A determined publishing policy regarding disaster journalism contributes positively to social solidarity and recovery processes after disasters. In the context of disaster journalism, it is important for journalists and media managers to make ethical and responsible journalism principles an integral part of the institutional culture in a way that supports an accurate, sensitive, impartial and socially beneficial broadcasting approach in times of disaster.

Disaster journalism encompasses the process of gathering and presenting information about natural and man-made events that have occurred, are currently occurring or may occur in the future. In times of disaster, the media is of critical importance in warning about disasters, taking precautions, and in the process of post-disaster solidarity. In times of disaster, media organizations perform functions such as reporting disasters, obtaining information about the event, reporting developments, sending journalists to the scene, providing background information, verifying information, and correcting rumours or misinformation. Apart from these, in times of disaster, the media can implement a sensitive and responsible broadcasting policy such as warning people in advance, ensuring social solidarity, and coping with disasters. A broadcasting policy for disaster journalism encompasses values such as verification, impartiality, empathy and sensitivity, correct use of visuals and language, paying attention to ethical principles, and encouraging social solidarity. When media organizations go beyond their policies of presenting developments in times of disaster as breaking news and adopt broadcasting policies that develop awareness-raising content on disaster prevention, preparedness, social solidarity, and recovery processes; It can help people be better prepared for disasters, make more effective decisions in times of disaster, and help societies recover more quickly after disasters.

In times of disaster, journalists have responsibilities such as cooperating with official institutions to reduce risks, analysing the social, environmental and economic impacts of disasters, demanding transparency from authorized persons and institutions, ensuring accountability, making the voices of disadvantaged groups heard and ensuring social solidarity. All these responsibilities require planning. At this point, the publication policies prepared by broadcasting organizations make it easier for journalists to be a part of disaster processes without violating the principle of impartiality. Preparing a publication policy for times of disaster is an example of systematic journalism. A specific publication policy provides journalists with a consistent framework for writing and presenting news. This type of publication policy

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

This chapter covers how to accurately report disaster reporting. First, it explains how information gathering processes should be in reporting disasters and news sources and their use for disaster reporting. Then, it discusses how context should be in disaster reporting. The basis of journalism is to report events in an impartial and objective manner. Therefore, the importance of impartiality and transparency in disaster reporting is discussed in detail.

It has been tried to explain how journalists should use their publishing policies when reporting natural disasters, man-made crises, terrorist attacks and similar disasters. Reporting disasters correctly makes important contributions to the process both in terms of society and the emergency during a disaster. Therefore, the most important aspect of reporting is to obtain the right information from the right news sources. News sources and their types are discussed under subheadings. This chapter will help journalism students gain competence in news gathering processes and the use of news sources when reporting disasters. In the chapter, news reporting processes in disaster journalism, adhering to the principle of impartiality and reporting developments correctly without deviating from their context are explained. In this chapter, it is aimed to reach the following achievements.

- Students will be able to produce accurate and reliable news content based on events that occur during disasters.**
- Students can identify and explain the context and background of disaster-related news stories.**
- Students can develop appropriate broadcasting policies and strategies for disaster situations.**



## Self-Assessment

1 Which of the following is not one of the importance of accurate reporting during disasters?

- Informing the public
- Directing emergency response efforts
- Contributing to the recovery process
- Analysing the social, environmental and economic impacts of disasters

2 Which of the following is not one of the techniques used by reporters in the news gathering process?

- Observation
- Interview and Conversation
- Survey
- Research

3 The person or institution that provides content support to journalists while writing the news is called ..... Which of the following should be put in the blank space in the sentence?

- News source
- Scientist
- Editor
- Press organization

4 Which of the following is not a reason for using social media in disaster situations?

- Receiving requests for help from disaster victims
- Sharing
- Conducting emergency communication
- Creating situational awareness

5 Which of the following is not one of the primary news sources to be used in times of disaster?

- President and Prime Minister
- Parliament and Ministers
- Governors
- Reporters

6 What does the principle of impartiality mean in disaster journalism?

- Reporting news that supports disaster victims
- Using only government sources in the news
- Reporting events objectively, free of emotional elements
- Reporting only positive developments regarding disasters

7 Which of the following is one of the responsibilities of disaster journalists?

- Using photographs of disaster victims
- Sharing only the vulnerabilities of authorities
- Ensuring social solidarity
- Increasing the impact of the news by using disaster victims

8 Which of the following indicates that the principle of impartiality is violated in disaster news?

- Ensuring that society receives accurate information about disasters
- Covering disasters in all their dimensions and reporting them
- Using expressions that will provoke public emotions by the journalist
- Keeping an equal distance from different views

9 What does it mean to stay in context when reporting disaster events?

- Only giving the chronological order of disasters
- Covering the causes and effects of the disaster in a comprehensive manner
- Only highlighting the differences among disaster victims in the news
- Only showing the physical damage caused by the disaster

10 What should the publication policy that should be adopted in disaster reporting include?

- Protects the rights of individual victims and observing social sensitivity
- Quickly conveying disaster events to people
- Using only government resources in disaster news
- Focusing on the physical effects of disaster events

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## Answer Key

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1.d, 2.c, 3.a, 4.b, 5.d, 6.c, 7.c, 8.c, 9.b, 10.a

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# VERIFICATION PROCESSES IN DISASTER REPORTING

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## BOOK CHAPTER 6

### VERIFICATION PROCESSES IN DISASTER REPORTING

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Verification Processes for News Produced in The Field**
- **Cooperation with National and International Agencies**
- **Verification Processes for Social Media Sourced News**
- **How to do Fact-checking in Times of Disaster**
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As disasters often create a great deal of uncertainty and chaos, access to accurate information in a fast and reliable manner is a prerequisite for the public to make sound decisions and for the authorities to intervene effectively.

## Introduction

Developments in information and communication technologies have brought about a number of benefits for both news organisations and citizens, but they have also brought along the problem of rapid spread of false or incomplete information. Especially with social media taking a central position in the production, distribution and consumption of news, user-generated contents containing misinformation or disinformation spread rapidly around the world and pose a national and global threat on many sensitive issues ranging from public health to xenophobia. Recognising the problems caused by the spread of false/incomplete information, international organisations such as the UN and the EU, as well as national institutions in many different countries, have put this issue high on their agendas and developed roadmaps and action plans to combat disinformation and misinformation.

The spread of false or incomplete information, whether intentional (disinformation) or unintentional (misinformation), increases particularly in times of crisis, when society is vulnerable and fragile, and its consequences and problems are felt more acutely. For this reason, combating misinformation/incomplete information becomes more important than ever in times of disaster. One of the most well-known clichés in journalism, 'If your mother says she loves you, check it out' (Buttry, 2013), should be kept in mind by journalists, especially in times of disaster.

The verification process in disaster news plays a critical role not only in achieving accurate information and informing the public, but also in preventing the risk of panic. As disasters often create a great deal of uncertainty and chaos, access to accurate information in a fast and reliable manner is a prerequisite for the public to make sound decisions and for the authorities to intervene effectively. In this context, a verification process that prioritises not only journalistic standards but also ethical responsibility is essential for both media organisations and journalists to fulfil their social responsibilities.

This section provides information on the verification processes to be followed for both news produced directly at disaster areas and news produced based on social media-based information.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Source verification

It is the process of checking the reliability and accuracy of the source of information (person, institution, document). It looks at the source's history of providing accurate information, area of expertise, connections and impartiality. For example, an official statement from an organisation in a disaster area is more reliable than an anonymous social media account. Source verification focuses on who is saying it and why.

### Cross-checking

This is a method of checking the consistency of a news story by comparing it with different independent sources. For example, in a disaster story, reports from local authorities, credible media organisations and journalists on the ground are compared. It is used to ensure the integrity of information rather than relying on a single source. Cross-checking focuses on the question "What does other evidence say?"

### Source impartiality

This is the degree to which a source presents information independently of personal interest, bias or external pressure. This includes whether the source has a vested interest (political, financial, etc.) in the event and whether the information reflects different views. It also looks at whether the source has shown bias in previous statements on similar issues. Unbiased sources are factual and free from manipulation. In critical situations such as disasters, biased information can lead to panic or waste of resources.

## Verification Processes for News Produced in The Field

In the verification process, the reliability of news sources, the elimination of inconsistencies in information and the confirmation of the event in the context of time and place are the primary steps.

Journalists must apply verification processes to the news they produce, even when they are directly present in the disaster area. In the verification process, the reliability of news sources, the elimination of inconsistencies in information and the confirmation of the event in the context of time and place are the primary steps. In an age where technological tools and digital platforms are so widespread, while access to fake or manipulated information has become easier, methods and techniques for verifying the accuracy of such information have also increased. However, this process requires not only technical skills but also ethical and professional awareness. The principles of accuracy, independence and human-centredness that are at the core of the journalistic profession ensure that verification processes in disaster news serve a function that supports not only information security but also social solidarity.

The news production process assumes access to accurate and reliable information as a fundamental duty in an environment where information pollution is abundant. In this context, verification practices applied in the news production process enable journalists to provide objective, accurate and reliable content using various methods and tools. This section provides detailed information on these practices and the methods that can be used.

### Source Verification

Verifying the reliability of sources used in the production of news is one of the basic elements of journalism. The identity of the source providing information is as important as the accuracy of the information provided.

The characteristics of a reliable source include the following

- Has an area of expertise (e.g. an earthquake expert for disaster-related information),
- Has a history of providing verified information,
- Has an impartial position or clearly understandable motivation.

At the same time, if anonymised sources are used, it is necessary to confirm the identity of these sources with alternative evidence to defend their identity. As a practical suggestion, sources can also be compared with relevant records, previous statements or international sources to determine their accuracy (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

The reliability of sources used in news stories is an important step in ensuring accuracy and consistency in journalism. In a world where not all sources are reliable, especially in extraordinary situations such as disasters, journalists need to carefully evaluate each source of information. From this perspective, the first step is the "identity of the source". The source of the information should be clearly identified. The source's expertise, authority on the subject and past reliability should be examined. After all, the identity of the source is the most fundamental indicator of a news report's accuracy. The "impartiality of

the source" is also an important factor. This means considering whether there is any conflict of interest or bias in the content of the news. This is because information from an impartial source is generally considered to be more reliable than other information. In some cases, however, sources may be anonymous. "Anonymous source(s)" means that when information is provided by an anonymous person, that information must be corroborated by other evidence. For example, information provided by an eyewitness should be corroborated by official statements or the testimony of another eyewitness.

## Cross-Checking

Cross-checking is a method that requires confirmation from at least two different sources to verify the accuracy of a piece of information. The basic principle of this method, which is widely used in journalism, is that sources with different or opposing views confirm the accuracy of the same information. In this way, the reliability of information is increased by verifying it through multiple sources. Fact-checking platforms that specialise in verifying data often use this method and benefit from this practice in journalism (Şeko, 2023). Emphasising that the need for verification in journalism in the digital age is not only specific to disaster and crisis situations, but also related to the need to constantly assess the reliability of sources used in news production, cross-verification is crucial to prevent misinformation and disinformation, prevent social panic and provide reliable information. This method involves verifying the accuracy of information from more than one independent source.

Different methods can be used for cross-checking, which increases the accuracy of the news:

### Local sources

Since disasters usually affect a large number of people, other disaster victims or eyewitnesses in the region can be used as local sources to verify the information received from one source.

### Official sources

National relief organisations (Red Crescent, Red Cross, etc.) and national disaster units (such as AFAD) can be used as official sources.

### Expert opinion

For disasters such as earthquakes and floods, the analysis of experts in geology, meteorology or disaster management is important to verify the accuracy of the news.

### Independent news agencies

By comparing how different journalistic institutions report on the same event, it is possible to check whether the information is accurate or not.

### Checking aggregation platforms

Aggregation platforms are digital platforms such as Google News and Yahoo News that aggregate media content in one place and make it available to users. These platforms do not produce original content as they provide quick information by compiling news from different media outlets; they only provide links to other sources. It is important to check the source of news accessed through these channels and to verify it with independent sources. Aggregation platforms act as "news filters" and primary sources should be consulted to ensure the reliability of the information obtained.

Cross-checking is an important step in times of disasters. Mismanagement of information can add to the confusion and mistrust in the aftermath of a disaster. It is important to ensure that information from different sources is consistent and that each source is carefully checked, despite the pressure to publish quickly.

## Using Official Sources and Experts

Information from official sources and expert opinion are essential in news verification. The main sources on which the public relies for timely information include statements from official sources such as news organisations, emergency services and government agencies. However, official statements should also be corroborated by other independent sources for accuracy, as erroneous and delayed information may be published in times of crisis.

### Official statements and reports

Official statements usually provide a certain amount of information from the first moment of the incident. However, in times of crisis, there may be information gaps, the risk of misinformation or delays in official statements. It is therefore crucial for journalists to supplement official information with additional sources in order to understand it correctly. In addition, when there are contradictions between official sources, journalists should resolve these contradictions through independent verification mechanisms or expert opinion. But it is not enough to rely on official sources alone. Official organisations may often have a particular view of events or limited data. Therefore, journalists should try to conduct independent analysis and bring together different views, which increases the accuracy of information. However, official channels remain the first step in the verification process, as they are often still among the most reliable sources for people with limited access to information from the field.

### Academic and technical expertise

The use of technical experts in the news verification process both prevents the public from being led to misinformation and ensures that the news is supported by more accurate and robust information. Technically complex events (such as the collapse of a dam or structural analysis of a building) should be supported by information from experts in the field. Verification by scientists and engineers increases the accuracy of the news story.

## Cooperation with National and International Agencies

News verification is a detailed and multifaceted process that needs to be considered especially during crises, conflicts, natural disasters and major international events. In such situations, national and international news agencies are an important source of information and a verification tool for journalists and media organisations. International agencies such as Associated Press (AP), Reuters, Agence France-Presse (AFP) have extensive global news networks and local representatives who gather first-hand information from the field. This plays a crucial role in understanding the accuracy and context of events. Agencies working in different regions often have control mechanisms in place to verify each other's reporting. However, it is important to check the credibility of the agency(s) you are working with. In particular, content originating from social media should not be directly trusted. Taking these factors into account, cooperation with national and international agencies can be assessed under several headings:

### First-hand access and verification sources

International news agencies have journalists, local correspondents and business partners working in the field around the world. These agencies provide access to basic data that can be used in the verification process by obtaining information directly at the scene of events. For example, pictures taken or witnesses heard in a conflict zone, when provided by the agency, have often been subject to prior verification processes. Access to this information is invaluable in situations where media organisations cannot be present on the ground.

### Access to rapid and reliable information

International agencies help media organisations avoid disinformation by providing rapid information in

times of crisis. For example, in the case of natural disasters, the accuracy of the news can be improved by comparing the data provided by national disaster management agencies with the information that international agencies receive from local sources. National agencies are important to better understand the local context and provide detailed information specific to their own country. This cooperation also allows the messages from national agencies to be disseminated internationally.

### Provide context and perspective

Data from international agencies allows events to be placed in a global context. For example, in the case of a story about climate change, statistics provided by international agencies or reports on similar events in different countries put the details of the story in a global context. Such data can allow local stories to be put into a larger perspective.

### Cross-checking and countering disinformation

Cross-checking news from different agencies is an effective method, especially during conflicts or when the flow of misinformation is intense. For example, a report issued by national disaster management organisations such as AFAD can be compared with information from international agencies to increase the accuracy of the news. International cooperation also enables misinformation to be quickly corrected on a wider scale. Coordination between agencies is essential in crisis situations, as misinformation often spreads across international borders.

### Technical assistance and sharing of innovation

In addition to supplying information to media organisations, news agencies can also offer technical assistance. Agencies such as AFP and Reuters offer integrated solutions to media organisations with video verification tools, in-field digital content analysis programmes and visual verification algorithms. Such technological innovations speed up the news verification process and minimise human error.

## Verification Processes for Social Media Sourced News

In the case of disasters, much of the disinformation is generated and disseminated through social media platforms.

It is not always possible or necessary for a journalist to be present at the area of a disaster. Given the importance of maintaining an immediate news flow during disasters, it is natural for many journalists far from the disaster area to rely on social media-based information when reporting or verifying a news story. However, it is important to remember that social media is also full of false/incomplete information. As information containing disinformation/misinformation can spread rapidly through social media platforms and instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp or Telegram, it is important that the fight against it is also rapid and immediate, especially during disaster response. The longer false/incomplete information remains in circulation, the more people will believe it. This situation will make the fight against the disaster more difficult and at the same time increase the risk that the consequences of the disaster will be felt more severely, both physically and psychologically.

Fact-checking is the most effective method that can be used both in reporting information that comes

from social media and in verifying news that is circulated on social media. According to the Duke Reporters' Lab' January 2025 data, there are 446 active fact-checking sites around the world. In addition, many reputable news agencies and newspapers have dedicated fact-checking units. Although the extent to which fact-checking is effective on political issues is a controversial issue in the literature (Garrett et al., 2013; Jarman, 2016), there are also studies that show that fact-checking is also very effective on political issues (Nieminen & Rapeli, 2019; Walter et al., 2020), and although disasters are politicised issues, they are not purely political in nature and are more conducive to positive fact-checking outcomes.

As will be discussed in this section, there are many tools that can be used in fact-checking. But first, it is important to stress that a fact-checker's greatest weapon in the fight against disinformation is scepticism. In the case of disasters, much of the disinformation is generated and disseminated through social media platforms. Therefore, fact-checkers and journalists should be particularly sceptical about user-generated content on social media, especially during disaster processes. In addition, official persons and institutions or political actors may also resort to disinformation in disaster processes in order to hide their own responsibilities, to ease reactions and to blame their political rivals. Journalists and fact-checkers should therefore be sceptical about information from these sources.

## How to do Fact-checking in Times of Disaster

In the event of a disaster, fact-checking and related tools can be used both as a method of verifying news based on information obtained from social media, and to verify news/statements circulating on social media that may contain disinformation/misinformation. Especially with the increasing number of news sites that only post on social media and have no institutional structure behind them, fact-checking the news in circulation has become very important in times of disaster. Whether you are a journalist who wants to report on the information you find on social media about a disaster, or a fact-checker who wants to check the accuracy of the information being circulated, the path you need to follow is the same. This section discusses fact-checking social media information/news during disasters under two headings: verifying the source and verifying the content.

### Source Verification on Social Media

Just like a journalist working in the field, source verification is very important for a journalist making news based on information on social media. Because the source of information shared on social media could be a bot account or an internet troll, source verification takes on added importance.

There can be many different types of sources posting about a disaster on social media, and all are potential sources for the journalist. The source may be a government or organisation account, or an individual account. If it is an organisation account, it may be verified or unverified, real or fake/parody, or a bot account. Similarly, if it is an individual account, it can be verified or unverified, real or fake/parody, anonymous or bot. Distinguishing between these is the first step in verifying the source.

It is very important to check whether the account is verified, especially if the source of the post claims to be from a government agency or official, as posts from parody accounts or fake accounts that imitate them are more dangerous for disinformation than an ordinary social media account. For this reason, many social media platforms have a verification system to distinguish official accounts from others. On Instagram and Facebook, for example, a blue check mark indicates that an account has been verified. On X, formerly known as Twitter, accounts belonging to government organisations or officials are marked with a grey check. It is important to note that the blue check mark on X indicates premium membership, not verification, and that parody accounts can also receive blue check marks.



**Image 1:** View of the official accounts of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey on Facebook, Instagram and X, respectively

If the source of the post belongs to a news organisation or a non-state organisation, you should first check the verification status of the account. As mentioned above, verified accounts on Instagram and Facebook are marked with a blue check, regardless of whether they belong to state institutions, private organisations or individuals. In contrast, in X, such organisations are marked with a yellow check. In this case, it is necessary to look at the blue check mark on Instagram and Facebook and the yellow check mark on X to see the verification status of the account in an organisation's post.



**Image 2:** View of the official accounts of the BBC News on Facebook, Instagram and X, respectively

However, not all unverified government or organisation accounts should be considered fake or parody. It is also possible, especially for smaller government organisations, that they have not applied for verification or are still in the verification process. Therefore, information from such accounts should not be directly disregarded and other verification methods should be used.

Many of the social media users whose posts you will encounter, especially in times of disaster, will have unverified individual accounts, and some will be completely anonymous accounts. At this point, it is necessary to examine the information in the user's bio, profile photo, and past activity on the account, check the user's other social media accounts, and contact the user directly. In addition, bot detection tools such as Botometer can be used to get an idea of whether an account is a bot or not, and the Wayback Machine can be used to see previous versions of an account/website, both for individual accounts and to verify unverified governmental/organisational accounts.

## Content Verification on Social Media

Verifying the source of information/news coming from social media does not mean that the content posted is accurate. An official institution account or a verified individual account can also post disinformation/misinformation. Therefore, it is necessary to verify the content after verifying the source. This section discusses content verification under three headings: verification of the disaster, verification of the image, and verification of the location and time.

### Verification of the Disaster

The first and simplest step in content verification is to verify the alleged catastrophe. When a disaster occurs in regions with internet access, there will be many posts on social media platforms from disaster victims or eyewitnesses. For this reason, scanning social media platforms when faced with immediate information about a disaster will give a clear idea of whether the disaster has actually occurred or not. For example, for a flood disaster that is said to have occurred in the Yomra district of Trabzon, one can search X with the keywords "Yomra" and "flood" and see the posts where these two words appear together. For a more precise result, you can also search for posts from a specific region on X. To do this, you need to know the latitude and longitude of the region in question, which you can get by right-clicking on any location in Google Maps. The formula to use for this type of search is as follows;

"word to search" geocode: latitude, longitude, search radiuskm

In other words, if you only want to see tweets sent from within a 3km radius of Yomra that contain the word flood, you would search like this: "flood" geocode:40.960093,39.846430,3km

In addition to X, platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Tiktok also allow users to view posts from a specific region. It will be useful to check these platforms to corroborate the results of searches made on X.

It is also important to check the websites and social media accounts of relevant government agencies in the region, to contact these agencies via email or phone numbers, and to follow local media organisations and news agencies in the region in case the internet access of disaster victims and eyewitnesses is cut off after the disaster. It is also necessary to be in constant contact with experts during a disaster, both to verify the disaster and understand its extent, and to combat disinformation/misinformation about the disaster.

### Verification of the Image

Another dimension of the verification of social media-based content in disaster processes is the verification of visual content. As visuals are an element that add credibility, they are often used in disinformation content. It is common to use a photo or video of another event for the current disaster, or to use a manipulated photo or video.

The first step in image verification is to identify the source of the photo or video. If the visual content is a photograph, it is useful to conduct a reverse search first. A reverse image search can be used to find out when a photo was first uploaded to the internet, providing insight into the source and context of the photo. There are many free sites and extensions that allow you to do reverse image searches. In addition to search engines such as Google, Yandex and Bing, Tin Eye is a very useful reverse image search site. If the visual content is a video, InVID WeVerify's video analysis and keyframes tools and Amnesty's YouTube Data Viewer can be used to get contextual information about the video and reverse image search by breaking the video into keyframes.

After verifying that the image has not been previously shared on the internet, the next step is to contact the user who shared the image and verify that they own the image and the details of the image. Since relying on the source alone would not be the right approach for a journalist/fact-checker, it is also neces-

sary to examine the metadata of the image. Metadata can provide information about the device, where and when the photo or video was taken. However, in order to examine the metadata of an image, it is necessary to have the original image, as images downloaded from social media do not contain metadata information. For this reason, the original image should be requested from the source in order to examine its metadata. At this point, it is important to ask the source to send the original image via email, or as a document if they are sending it via WhatsApp, because if it is sent via social media, the metadata will be deleted again.

After accessing the original image, there are many ways to extract its metadata. InVID WeVerify's metadata tool and the Metadata2Go and Exifdata sites are good alternatives. Once you have accessed information such as the location, time and date of the image with these tools, you should compare it with the information provided by the source. However, it is important to remember that metadata data can be manipulated. Finally, if the image is a photograph, you can use InVID WeVerify's forensic tool, MeVer's Image Verification Assistant and FotoForensics to get an idea of whether the image has been forged.

### Verification of the Location and Time

One of the most basic principles of verification is to determine the 'what, where and when' in an unquestionable manner. In disaster situations, the extent and impact of the event may be misunderstood. If the exact location, time of occurrence and details of the event are not accurately described in disaster news, the public may be misled. This verification facilitates the provision of necessary intervention and support, especially in disaster areas, and helps the public to understand the situation correctly.

The methods and tools used to verify the disaster and the image in a social media-based disaster news will also be used to verify the location and time of the event. Social media scanning and advanced search techniques to verify the disaster and metadata analysis to verify the image will also provide information about the location and time of the event. In addition, you can compare the elements such as signs or buildings in the image in the information/news you are using with the images in Google Earth or a similar mapping tool, you can benefit from satellite images, you can examine the data shared by official institutions related to disasters - for example, looking at observatory data to determine the exact time of an earthquake (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), you can check weather reports to make sure that the claimed image is compatible with the location, and if the image contains expressions of an unknown language, you can get an idea of the location by using translation applications such as Google Translate (Barot, 2014).

### Chapter Summary and Learning Outcome

Developments in information and communication technologies have brought about a number of positive outcomes for both news organizations and citizens; however, they have also led to the problem of rapid dissemination of false or incomplete information. The spread of false or incomplete information tends to increase, particularly during times of crisis when society is sensitive and vulnerable, and the consequences and problems it creates are felt more severely. Therefore, combating false/incomplete information during disaster processes becomes more important than ever.

The verification process in disaster reporting plays a critical role not only in providing accurate information and informing the public but also in preventing the risk of panic. This process involves elements such as assessing the reliability of news sources, verifying the accuracy of images and information used, verifying time and place, and ethical responsibility. While technological tools make it possible to verify manipulated content, the ethical and professional awareness of journalists enhances the quality of this process.

The verification process in disaster reporting plays a critical role not only in providing accurate information and informing the public but also in preventing the risk of panic.

**Understand the importance and basic principles of the news verification process:**

Students will learn why verification processes are critical in disaster news and the methods and ethical principles used to reduce the impact of misinformation.

**Students can learn how to evaluate the news sources they use based on criteria such as expertise, impartiality and past reliability.**

**Students can learn how to cross-check with different sources to increase the accuracy of information in news and how to effectively use the collaborative processes of national/international news agencies.**

**Students can learn how to fact-check when encountering information/news coming from social media and the technological tools and methods to be used in fact-checking.**

## Self-Assessment

1. Which of the following is not a step in the verification process?

- To check the reliability of news sources
- Ensuring that the news is sufficiently disseminated
- Elimination of inconsistencies in information
- Verifying the location and time of the event

2. Which of the following is not a characteristic of a reliable source?

- Have a broad range of interests and intellectual background
- Have expertise in a subject
- Have a history of sharing verified information
- Being impartial

3. What is the most important contribution of international news agencies in crisis situations?

- Sharing information without checking social media
- Collecting only local news
- Providing first-hand information from the field
- Broadcast without verification

4. Which of the following is true of cross-validation?

- It is sufficient for a single source to provide information.
- It is necessary to check the same information from many different sources.
- Official statements should be published as they are.
- Social media information is the most reliable source.

5. Why is information from technical experts important for news accuracy?

- It ensures that the news is supported by scientific and sound information.
- It enables visual analysis in a short time.
- It increases the number of social media posts.
- It does not provide sources of information other than eyewitnesses.

6. Which of the following tools is not used to extract metadata from an image?

- Exifdata
- MetaData2Go
- InVid WeVerify
- Tin Eye

7. Which of the following tools is used to detect forgery in an image?

- FotoForensics
- YouTube Data Viewer
- Metadata2Go
- Exifdata

8. Which of the following is not used to verify location in social media-based news?

- Advanced search in social media
- Metadata analysis
- Google Translate
- Botometer

9. Which of the following is used to verify location in social media-based news?

- Mapping tools
- Weather reports
- Satellite imagery
- All

10. Which of the following is more important for a journalist who will report on a disaster?

- Courage
- Determination
- Skepticism
- Passion

1.b, 2.a, 3.c, 4.b, 5.a, 6.d, 7.a, 8.d, 9.d, 10.c

## Answer Key

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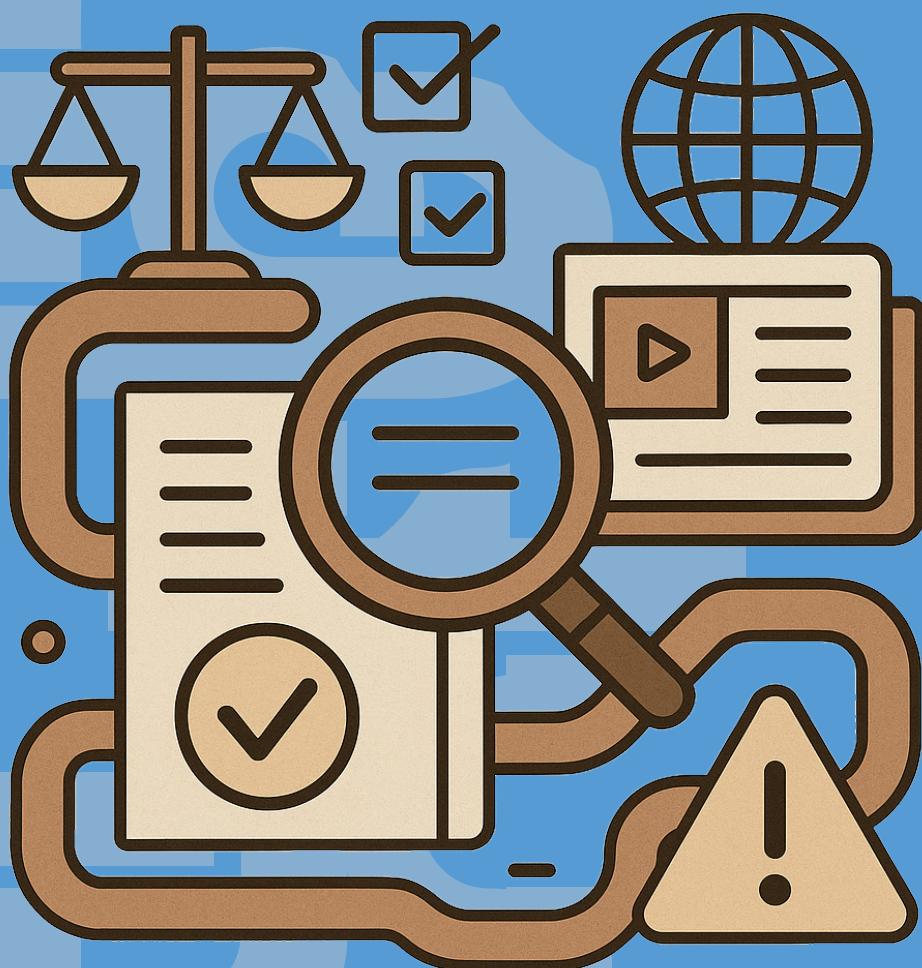
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# ETHICS IN DISASTER REPORTING

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# BOOK CHAPTER 7

## ETHICS IN DISASTER REPORTING

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Principles of Accuracy and Reliability in Disaster News**
- **Privacy and Dignity of Disaster Victims**
- **Visualization of Tragedy and Sensitivity**
- **Ethical Use of Information in Disasters**
- **Ethical Boundaries of Social Solidarity in Disasters**
- **Contribution of News to Social Recovery**
- **Real-Life Examples and Case Studies**
- **Key Media Case Studies**
- **Future Perspectives and Emerging Ethical Issues**
- **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**
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## Introduction

The ethics of journalism have been debated since the emergence of modern media, with early theoretical approaches laying the foundation for contemporary discussions. These approaches often examined the journalist's role in society, their responsibility to truth, and the balance between public interest and personal or institutional biases.

Libertarian theory, rooted in the Enlightenment and John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), emphasizes the importance of a free press as a cornerstone of democracy. It argues that the press should operate independently of government control and act as a "marketplace of ideas," where truth emerges from open debate. This approach places a strong ethical duty on journalists to seek and publish the truth, prioritizing freedom of speech even when it leads to dilemmas over potentially harmful or offensive content.

Emerging in the mid-20th century, Social Responsibility Theory, influenced by the Hutchins Commission Report of 1947, suggests that freedom comes with responsibility (Hutchins, 1947). According to this perspective, the press should serve the public good by providing accurate information, presenting diverse viewpoints, and producing content that supports democratic processes. Ethical imperatives for journalists include striving for accuracy, fairness, and balance while avoiding sensationalism or harm.

Deontological ethics, shaped by Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, focuses on adherence to universal moral principles such as truth-telling and respect for human dignity, regardless of outcomes (Kant, 1785). This ethical framework holds journalists to a strict duty of reporting the truth and maintaining integrity, even when these actions result in undesirable consequences, such as damage to reputation or financial losses.

In contrast, utilitarianism, advanced by thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, emphasizes outcomes, advocating for actions that create the greatest good for the greatest number. (Bentham, 1789; Mill, 1863). Journalists operating under this framework must weigh the benefits and harms of their reporting, deciding whether publishing a story serves the broader public interest or causes unnecessary harm.

Ethical relativism offers a more flexible approach, suggesting that ethical standards are culturally and contextually dependent, with no universal principles governing journalism ethics. This perspective allows journalists to adapt their practices to align with cultural norms, societal expectations, and situational factors, though it risks producing inconsistent ethical standards.

Virtue ethics, drawing on Aristotle's philosophy, prioritizes the character and moral virtues of journalists over specific rules or outcomes. From this viewpoint, a good journalist embodies virtues such as honesty, courage, fairness, and wisdom, making ethical decisions guided by these traits.

Lastly, pragmatism, associated with American philosophers like John Dewey, stresses practical and contextual problem-solving (Dewey, 1927). This approach focuses on the real-world implications of journalistic actions, encouraging journalists to evaluate situational contexts and pursue solutions that best address society's immediate needs while maintaining professional standards. Early attempts to codify journalistic ethics further shaped the profession.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Accuracy and verification of information

Empirically validated information should be used, reporting should be based on demonstrable facts, and the dissemination of unproven or speculative claims should be avoided. Verified information from multiple independent and reliable organizations and reliable, authoritative sources should be used.

### Ethical reporting

Reporting to prevent the spread of panic. Informing the public clearly and calmly to prevent the spread of fear or misinformation. Explain the sources and methods of information collection to ensure transparency, and any limitations that may affect reporting.

### Liability

Reporting to prevent the spread of panic. Informing the public clearly and calmly to prevent the spread of fear or misinformation.

### Conflict-sensitive reporting

Avoid taking sides and provide a balanced account of events. Ensure an understanding of the wider context of the conflict or disaster, including historical, political and social factors.

### Protection of journalists

Journalists reporting from war zones or disaster areas must have access to appropriate safety equipment and training.

### Humanitarian perspective

Reporting with a focus on human stories. Telling the stories of survivors, rescuers, and communities to highlight humanity and resilience. Providing and reporting information that can help those affected or support humanitarian action.

### Prevention of misinformation

Actively combat propaganda, fake news and manipulative reporting that can make the situation worse.

### Culture of peace

Promote dialogue, understanding and reconciliation, instead of inciting hatred and polarization. Application of these principles ensures professional and responsible reporting that serves the public interest and contributes to a better understanding of crisis situations. Media coverage of accidents and wars is crucial for understanding their consequences, impact on society and for forming public opinion. Journalism can help individuals and communities with these approaches to ethical disaster reporting: first explain the causes, identify the affected population, stop perpetuating myths and tropes, and stay there.

## Ethics in Disaster Reporting

Like all reporting, perhaps more so, disaster reporting raises several ethical and other issues (Ward, 2010).

Many challenges and many pitfalls await those who attempt to convey credible information or demystify expertise and data. Ethics, for many decades, has been a formal part of journalistic training in most countries, within the context of voluntary or legally binding codes of conduct for journalists of varying degrees of strictness.

**The main ethical principles in disasters are solidarity, responsibility, non-discrimination, impartiality, cooperation of all involved actors and the media.**

The role of the media in crisis situations is to connect and create link, dialoge, and consensus between people, the media and the authorities. But, important though such ethic codes are, journalists' working rules and norms are only one part of the domain of ethical questions raised by media (Silverstone, 2007).

The main ethical principles in disasters are solidarity, responsibility, non-discrimination, impartiality, cooperation of all involved actors and the media. But media coverage is often selective, not comprehensive, and it creates narratives that gather momentum. These

narratives can determine how disasters and various actors in the response to disasters are viewed in the public eye. They also determine who is blamed for failures or appreciated for an effective disaster response (Gowing, 2009).

The media must approach all crisis situations in a balanced, responsible manner and with respect for human rights, avoiding sensationalism and manipulation. Although journalists have the right and obligation to inform the public, they also have the responsibility to protect the dignity of victims and support the building of empathy and understanding in society.

For journalists, ethical principles such as truthfulness, respect for privacy, responsibility and respect for human rights need basic guidelines in their daily work, especially when reporting on sensitive topics, and all kinds of disasters.

## Principles of Accuracy and Reliability in Disaster News

Media principles of accuracy and reliability are crucial in reporting on accidents and wars, as such events often carry a high emotional charge and can have far-reaching consequences. Responsible reporting ensures not only credibility, but also ethical responsibility towards affected people, their families, and the wider public. Here are some of the basic principles related to accuracy and reliability in disaster reporting: accident and war reporting:

Journalists must thoroughly verify all information before publishing, especially in the context of disasters and wars, where information can be unreliable or inaccurate. The urgency of reporting increases the risk of spreading disinformation, making fact-checking a crucial responsibility.

To ensure accuracy, journalists should follow several key steps. First, verifying sources is essential,

each piece of information must be confirmed by multiple independent sources. A critical analysis of sources is also necessary, as journalists must remain aware of potential propaganda, manipulation, or inaccurate reports.

Equally important is the selection of reliable sources. When reporting on disasters, trustworthy sources include official statements, independent journalists, eyewitnesses, and survivors. While personal stories can be compelling, they must always be corroborated with other evidence to ensure credibility. Speculation should be avoided, and any information based on assumptions or insufficiently confirmed details must be clearly labelled.

Additionally, journalists should adhere to fundamental reporting principles, including using only verified reports, exercising caution when citing numbers, and providing proper context for information and events. Avoiding manipulation and sensationalism is crucial, as is maintaining transparency by issuing corrections when necessary. Special care should also be taken in real-time reporting to prevent the spread of misinformation.

While real-time reporting can be useful, journalists must be aware of the risks of jumping to conclusions. Waiting for key information to be confirmed before publishing helps prevent the spread of misinformation. Accuracy and reliability in media coverage of accidents and wars are crucial for maintaining audience trust and preventing potential harm. The media must responsibly access information, conduct rigorous fact-checking, use reliable sources, and always strive for objectivity in reporting. Only by adhering to these principles can journalists provide the public with an accurate understanding of complex and emotionally challenging situations. By following these standards, disaster news can effectively inform and guide the public while minimizing panic and misinformation.

## Privacy and Dignity of Disaster Victims

Privacy and dignity are the main issues related to media coverage (including social media). Privacy emphasizes the need to protect disaster victims from exploitation and additional trauma providing basic information about the potential risks and benefits of interacting with the media. It also emphasizes that

those affected must be aware of their rights, especially the right to privacy. A dignified attitude towards those affected by accidents varies according to individuals and circumstances but is necessary especially in their interaction with the media.

Media ethics play a key role in protecting the right to privacy and dignity of disaster victims through a series of principles and guidelines that journalists and media organizations should follow.

**Media ethics require a balance between the need to inform the public and the responsibility to protect individuals affected by disasters.**

One of the fundamental aspects is respect for privacy. Journalists should avoid revealing the identity of victims without their permission or the permission of their families, especially in sensitive situations such as violence, accidents, or natural disasters. Additionally, recording or interviewing victims should only be done with their express consent and in a way that does not disturb their emotional stability. The media should also

refrain from sensationalizing events by avoiding explicit images or details that could further traumatize victims and their families.

Another important principle is the preservation of dignity. Journalists should approach victims with empathy and understanding, acknowledging their emotions and current situation. Media coverage should avoid language that stigmatizes or discriminates against victims, instead promoting respect and humanity. Rather than focusing on sensationalism, the media can contribute by educating the public about the causes and consequences of disasters and providing information on how to help.

Ethical reporting is crucial in ensuring that information is accurate. False or unverified reports can cause additional harm to victims, making it essential for journalists to fact-check all information before publication. Furthermore, there must be a balance between public interest and privacy; while informing the public is necessary, journalists must carefully consider where to draw the line to protect the rights of individuals.

Lastly, legal frameworks and professional guidelines play a significant role in ethical reporting. Many countries have laws that protect the right to privacy, and media professionals must adhere to these regulations. Additionally, professional journalistic organizations often have ethical codes emphasizing the importance of privacy and the dignity of victims.

Media ethics require a balance between the need to inform the public and the responsibility to protect individuals affected by disasters. Adhering to these principles helps build trust between the media and the community while ensuring dignified and ethical reporting (Christians, Fackler, Richardson, Kreshel, 2020).

## **Visualisation of Tragedy and Sensitivity**

Different research shows that photographic depictions of various accidents and traumatic events further increase stress symptoms. When dealing with the complexity and uncertainty that abound in critical situations such as disasters, it is important to understand the influence that lies behind each of the photo. Images of death, disaster and destruction are powerful.

Media ethics play a key role in how tragedies are visually presented to the public. Ethics serves as a guide for journalists and media organizations to ensure that reporting on tragedies respects the dignity of victims, informs the public in a responsible manner and minimizes collateral damage.

Key aspects of media ethics in the visualization of tragedies revolve around respecting privacy, maintaining accuracy, and avoiding sensationalism. Journalists must ensure that their reporting is both informative and sensitive to those affected.

First and foremost, the privacy of victims and their families must be respected. Publishing images that depict suffering, injury, or death requires careful consideration to balance informative value with the potential for additional trauma. Consent also plays a crucial role—whenever possible, the media should obtain permission before sharing photos or videos. Additionally, the context of the material must be clear to prevent manipulation or sensationalism.

To maintain ethical reporting, the media should avoid using graphic imagery merely to attract attention. Instead, they should focus on providing accurate and essential information to help audiences understand the situation. Tragedies should be portrayed with empathy, ensuring that victims are humanized rather than reduced to numbers or shocking images.

The primary goal of visualizing tragedies should be to educate the public and raise awareness about the causes and consequences of such events, rather than inciting fear or shock. This is especially important when reporting on communities directly affected by the tragedy, as media coverage can influence their grieving and recovery process. While it is necessary to document the reality of a situation, journalists must carefully navigate the line between truth and unnecessary distress.

Cautions are needed when children are involved. The decision to publish images should be weighed against the risk of violating the dignity and identity of minor victims. Ethical journalism must prioritize the well-being of those affected while still fulfilling its duty to inform the public responsibly.

## **Ethical Use of Information in Disasters**

The ethics of helping those in need require balanced information. Reporting on disaster is at the same time informing and alerting the public to the suffering and needs of people and is in the service of the public interest. On such assignments, journalists inevitably encounter people who urgently need shelter, food or medical help, the public accurate and credible information.

In some cases, journalists may be the first on the scene before emergency services arrive. Although their primary job is to report and provide information, they may encounter people in distress whose real needs are medical care, reassurance, food, water and shelter. This is a real dilemma that many disasters reporters face. Human decency drives many journalists to offer help and comfort to suffering people. However, journalists should not profit from these actions or exploit those who help them for personal ambitions, fame and advancement. Based on this, there are recommendations for journalists in crisis situations. Mainly journalists covering crisis situations should prioritize responsible and ethical reporting.

Sensationalism must be avoided, and efforts should be made to prevent unnecessary panic. Sensitivity to the trauma of survivors is crucial, ensuring that those who are injured or distressed are not pressured into granting interviews. Respecting the personal space of affected individuals is essential, as their willingness to engage may change over time due to concerns about media coverage. Additionally, aggressive interactions should be avoided; instead, reporters should approach those affected with empathy and acknowledge any mistakes when necessary. Under no circumstances should rescue operations be disrupted, and the disclosure of deceased individuals' names should only occur after their relatives have been informed, adhering to legal and ethical considerations.

Beyond these immediate concerns, journalists should be mindful of their broader societal impact. Political conflicts should not be unnecessarily amplified, and coverage should consider its potential effects on cultural or ethnic groups to prevent stigmatization. Ethical judgment is particularly vital when using visuals of deceased individuals or those in distress. Reports should be based on verified facts, with casualty estimates carefully checked. If verification is not possible, the uncertainty must be clearly stated. Furthermore, attributing blame should not be rushed; maintaining neutrality in controversies is essential, as responsibility can be assessed at a later stage.

When portraying those affected by disasters, journalists should avoid depicting them solely as victims or implying they are responsible for their misfortune. Stories of heroes and villains in disaster scenarios should be approached critically, as they may be politically motivated. Additionally, journalists must refrain from portraying themselves as part of the disaster narrative. Instead, they should provide useful information on how the public can contribute to relief efforts, fostering a sense of solidarity and support. Putting these principles into practice requires coordination among different actors, including governments, media, non-governmental organizations and crisis management experts.

It is important to establish mechanisms to review and ensure ethical practices in the collection, analysis, and sharing of disaster-related information. Also to be accountable to affected communities and engage with those impacted by disasters to ensure their voices are heard and their rights respected. Collaboration and coordination must be with trusted partners, reputable organizations to enhance information-sharing and reduce duplication, and it is necessary to share information responsibly across sectors to improve response effectiveness, and to use data in ways that do not reinforce inequalities or biases.

The goal is to ensure that the information contributes to the well-being of communities and minimizes the negative consequences of disasters. Ethical information practices during disasters can save lives, reduce suffering, and support recovery, while also respecting the dignity and rights of affected populations.

## **Ethical Boundaries of Social Solidarity in Disasters**

There is a strong desire to know what is happening and how it will affect people's lives during disasters, but the public's right to know can come into conflict with the wider interest of these very groups – there is also a dilemma between the public interest and the public's right to know.

Above all solidarity in disasters requires a balance between the need for immediate response and long-term ethical responsibility, to ensure that aid remains humane and just. It is precisely for this reason that the ethical limits of social solidarity in disasters are shaped according to a complex set of moral, cultural, legal and practical factors. Here are the key aspects that define them:

**Above all is the priority of human life, and the rights and dignity and individuality.**

**The media should show solidarity towards vulnerable groups, but at the same time be careful to avoid sensationalism or exploitation of their stories.**

### **Solidarity versus the truth**

The media can show solidarity in protecting the right to freedom of expression and media freedom, but this should not undermine the obligation to the truth. Publishing false information in solidarity with colleagues or certain interest groups harms the public and professional standards.

### **Limits in peer support**

Supporting journalists or media houses that are under pressure or threats is ethically justified. However, this support must not include the concealment of unethical behaviour such as privacy violations, information manipulation, or the dissemination of misinformation.

### **Joint action in crisis situations**

During major crises (such as natural disasters, war conflicts or pandemics), solidarity among the media can help coordinate resources and inform the public.

However, each media must maintain autonomy in reporting, ensuring impartiality and avoiding propaganda.

## Solidarity and commercial interests

Sometimes solidarity can be influenced by commercial interests or political pressure. For example, if the media collectively chooses to ignore certain topics to protect their own interests, this can lead to an erosion of public trust.

## Protection of vulnerable groups

The media should show solidarity towards vulnerable groups, but at the same time be careful to avoid sensationalism or exploitation of their stories. Solidarity must not threaten the dignity of individuals.

## The question of pluralism

Excessive solidarity that leads to the homogenization of media coverage can threaten the pluralism of opinion. The media should preserve the diversity of voices and perspectives, even when they stand in solidarity on certain issues. Avoid portraying yourself as a hero or part of the drama of the disaster and include in your stories information about how those who are not affected by the disaster can assist.

Special care in relation to information collected from social networks, which can be invaluable for journalists, but also dangerous. Content circulating on social media can often include rumors, fearmongering, one-sided perspectives, wrong solutions, unfounded predictions, fake cures, dangerous mythology, de-contextualized or recontextualized videos, and perspectives that stigmatize certain social groups.

Ultimately, the limits of solidarity in the media are defined through the constant striving for a balance between professional standards, public interest and social responsibility. Clarity in ethical guidelines and openness to criticism are key to maintaining those boundaries.

## Contribution of News to Social Recovery

Media news and information play a key role in social recovery after disasters, contributing in several keyways.

**Beyond information, the media supports collective solidarity by mobilizing aid.**

First, the media serves as a crucial source of information and awareness. By providing timely updates on the extent of disasters affected areas, available resources, and ongoing recovery measures, it ensures the public remains informed. Additionally, media outlets issue hazard warnings, helping prevent further loss of life. Quality investigative journalism also plays a role in explaining the causes of disasters, fostering trust and enabling societies to learn from past events. Beyond information, the media supports collective solidarity by mobilizing aid. News coverage often inspires citizens, organizations, and the international community to contribute through donations, volunteer work, and other forms of support. Moreover, stories of resilience and heroism among survivors serve as powerful motivators, strengthening community bonds and encouraging acts of kindness.

platform for victims and vulnerable communities to share their experiences and needs, fostering inclu-

The media also promotes social cohesion by amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. It provides a

siveness. Through balanced reporting, the media can challenge prejudices and reduce stigmas associated with crises, such as those following wars or mass migrations.

In terms of psychological recovery, media plays an essential role in offering emotional support. Narratives of restoration, reconciliation, and resilience can provide comfort to traumatized communities. Additionally, creative content—including cultural programs and stories of successful reconstruction—helps people regain a sense of normalcy.

Finally, the media contributes to reconstruction and development by fostering trust in institutions. By monitoring the actions of authorities and other stakeholders, it ensures transparency and accountability. Furthermore, media outlets provide essential guidance on health, legal, and economic matters, enabling affected communities to make informed decisions.

While the media can accelerate social recovery, it must uphold ethical and responsible journalism. Sensationalism can deepen trauma, and misinformation can erode trust in both media and institutions. A balanced, empathetic, and professional approach to reporting is essential in ensuring a positive impact.

## Real-Life Examples and Case Studies

Media coverage plays a critical role in shaping public perception and response to disasters and wars. From providing real-time updates to influencing international aid efforts, the media has a profound impact. However, it also faces challenges, including misinformation, bias, and sensationalism. Below are some significant case studies illustrating both the positive and negative aspects of media reporting in times of crisis.

### Attack on the World Trade Center (September 11, 2001)

The media provided timely information about the attacks, security measures, and emerging threats. Stories highlighting the bravery of firefighters and emergency responders fostered solidarity and national unity. However, some coverage took on a sensationalist tone, exacerbating fear and anxiety. Additionally, the rapid spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories eroded public trust.

### War in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995)

International media outlets such as the BBC and CNN played a vital role in exposing war crimes, including the siege of Sarajevo and the genocide in Srebrenica. Their coverage mobilized global awareness and humanitarian aid. However, local media often fueled ethnic divisions through biased reporting, while propaganda and misinformation deepened social polarization.

### Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004)

Global media attention helped raise billions in aid for devastated regions like Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Human-interest stories on survivors and community rebuilding efforts highlighted resilience. However, some media outlets were criticized for excessive use of graphic images, raising ethical concerns about victim privacy.

### Syrian Civil War (2011 – 2024)

Activists and journalists, particularly those from organizations like the White Helmets, documented air-strikes and civilian casualties, increasing global awareness. Media reports also prompted humanitarian aid and refugee acceptance. Yet, misinformation and propaganda complicated the public's understanding of the conflict, while some outlets prioritized political narratives over human suffering.

### Fukushima Nuclear Disaster (2011)

The media's role in crisis communication became evident following the nuclear meltdown triggered by an earthquake and tsunami in Japan. International reports emphasized nuclear safety concerns, while Japanese media balanced criticism with cultural sensitivity. However, mixed messaging from authorities, combined with media speculation, led to public confusion and fear.

### Türkiye-Syria Earthquake (2023)

Extensive media coverage helped generate substantial international aid and humanitarian efforts. Stories of survivors rescued days after the quake boosted morale in affected communities. Nevertheless, political tensions between Türkiye and Syria at times overshadowed the urgent humanitarian needs on the ground.

### COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2023)

The pandemic marked an unprecedented level of media engagement, from real-time updates to combatting misinformation. Investigative journalism shed light on racial and economic disparities in health outcomes, while media campaigns influenced public behaviour, including vaccine uptake and mask-wearing. However, the widespread dissemination of misinformation highlighted the necessity of responsible reporting, particularly in prolonged crises.

## Future Perspectives and Emerging Ethical Issues

The media's coverage of disasters raises numerous ethical questions that continue to evolve, especially as technological advancements reshape the way information is transmitted. Looking ahead, several key challenges and ethical considerations are expected to emerge.

### Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence

The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism offers opportunities for faster news dissemination but also presents risks. Automated reporting, while efficient, may lead to misinformation and a lack of human judgment. Similarly, deep-fake technologies enable the manipulation of images and videos, potentially leading to false reports that can distort public opinion. Additionally, the personalization of content through algorithm-driven recommendations may create "filter bubbles," limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and contributing to a skewed perception of reality.

### Responsibility toward Victims and Communities

Ethical journalism demands a careful balance between informing the public and respecting the dignity of those affected by disasters. Coverage of suffering, death, or injury should prioritize privacy and sensitivity. However, the competition for audience attention often leads to sensationalist reporting, which can exacerbate the trauma experienced by affected communities. It is also crucial to amplify the voices of marginalized groups, ensuring that their experiences are represented in media narratives.

### The Role of Social Media

While social media enables rapid information sharing, it also increases the risk of spreading unverified or misleading content. The ethics of user-generated content must be considered, as firsthand footage and witness accounts can be invaluable yet require careful authentication to avoid privacy violations and misinformation.

### Challenges in War Zone Reporting

Journalists working in conflict areas face significant dangers, raising concerns about the responsibility of media organizations in ensuring their safety. Additionally, maintaining neutrality and impartiality remains

a challenge, as external pressures may influence reporting. A more humanitarian approach—focusing on individual stories rather than just political or military aspects—can foster deeper understanding and empathy.

### **The Influence of Virtual Reality and the Metaverse**

Emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR) offer new ways to engage audiences, potentially enhancing empathy by immersing viewers in war or disaster scenarios. However, such depictions also raise ethical concerns regarding the exploitation of trauma. Moreover, the rise of the metaverse could blur the lines between reality and simulation, further complicating public perception of real-world events.

### **Global Perspective and Cultural Sensitivity**

Media coverage should be mindful of cultural differences to ensure accurate and respectful reporting. The ethics of international journalism also require addressing biases in global narratives, as Western-centric perspectives often dominate, neglecting issues in developing countries and reinforcing inequalities.

**For future perspectives and emerging ethical issues** is important to underline, as media continues to evolve, the challenge lies in harmonizing technological innovation with core journalistic principles such as accuracy, impartiality, and responsibility. Empowering journalists through education on ethical dilemmas and ensuring transparency in reporting will be key to maintaining public trust in the digital era.

## **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**

This lecture covers essential ethical principles in disaster reporting, emphasizing the role of the media in crises and the balance between informing the public and protecting victims' rights. It explores key concepts such as objectivity, contextualization, and ethical challenges in journalism, along with the importance of accuracy and reliability in preventing misinformation and sensationalism.

Looking ahead, the lecture explores the impact of digital technologies, social media, and globalization on ethical challenges in reporting.

By engaging with these topics, students will gain a deep understanding of ethical principles in disaster reporting, develop the ability to apply guidelines for protecting victims' privacy, and cultivate a critical approach to avoiding sensationalism. They will also recognize the media's role in fostering solidarity, anticipate future challenges in the evolving digital landscape, and enhance their analytical skills through case study evaluations.

- Students will gain an understanding of the key ethical principles and challenges that journalists face in crisis situations, including accuracy, responsibility, and respect for the dignity of victims.
- Addressing ethical dilemmas in crisis reporting requires a multidimensional approach, encompassing the following aspects:
- Students will also learn about the main challenges and obstacles that journalists face when reporting on disasters.
- Students need to understand the challenges and obstacles that journalists face. Multi-dimensional thinking is essential, encompassing emotional intelligence and empathy. These skills allow journalists to view situations from multiple perspectives, an essential capability in both education and professional practice.

## Self-Assessment

1 Which ethical theory emphasizes a free press as a "marketplace of ideas" where truth emerges from open debate?

- Social Responsibility Theory
- Deontological Ethics
- Libertarian Theory
- Virtue Ethics

2 What is the primary ethical concern when reporting on disasters?

- Maximizing audience engagement
- Protecting the dignity and privacy of victims
- Ensuring government approval before publishing
- Prioritizing speed over accuracy

3 Which of the following is a key principle of ethical disaster reporting?

- Sensationalizing news to capture public attention
- Verifying information from multiple independent sources
- Prioritizing entertainment over factual reporting
- Avoiding coverage of sensitive topics

4 According to the chapter, why should journalists be cautious when using graphic images in disaster reporting?

To protect the financial interests of media companies

- To prevent unnecessary distress and trauma to audiences and victims
- To ensure government approval of news stories
- To increase audience engagement

5 What is a key challenge of reporting in real-time during disasters?

- Ensuring complete neutrality
- Avoiding misinformation and premature conclusions
- Maintaining commercial profitability
- Using only government-approved sources

6 Which of the following is NOT an ethical guideline for disaster reporting?

- Respecting the privacy of victims
- Avoiding the spread of panic
- Sensationalizing news to attract more viewers
- Verifying statistics and numbers before publication

7 What is one way media can contribute to social recovery after a disaster?

- Ignoring ongoing crises to prevent public panic
- Highlighting human resilience and solidarity
- Avoiding coverage of government responses
- Focusing only on economic impacts

8 Why is transparency important in disaster reporting?

- It ensures that audiences trust the media's reporting
- It allows for biased storytelling
- It prevents journalists from making mistakes
- It increases competition among media organizations

9 What ethical dilemma do journalists face when reporting from war zones?

- Choosing between accurate reporting and financial gain
- Balancing safety with the responsibility to inform the public
- Deciding whether to accept government funding for coverage
- Avoiding all coverage of politically sensitive conflicts

10 What future ethical challenge is highlighted in disaster reporting?

- The decline of social media platforms
- The impact of artificial intelligence and misinformation
- The elimination of journalism as a profession
- The reduced importance of disaster coverage

## Answer Key

1.c, 2.b, 3.b, 4.b, 5.b, 6.c, 7.b, 8.a, 9.b, 10.b

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# VISUAL DIMENSION IN DISASTER REPORTING

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# BOOK CHAPTER 8

## VISUAL DIMENSION IN DISASTER REPORTING

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Visualising Disasters (for Social Memory)**
- **Use of Visuals in Disasters**
- **Legal Boundaries in Disaster Imagery**
- **Human Sensitivities in Disaster Visuals**
- **Visual Content and Public Opinion Formation**
- **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**
- **Self-Assessment**
- **References**



## Introduction

The influence of mass media journalism in relation to disaster-related news has acquired unquestionable relevance in the global media landscape, not only as an information vehicle, but also as a key tool for shaping public perception of catastrophic events. Within this coverage, the visual component has proven to be especially influential, as the imagery that accompanies disaster news has the power to evoke deep emotional responses, build empathy, and mobilize audiences in a way that words alone don't always achieve. Visual content has a great initial impact on the viewer, mainly due to the influence of social networks and the consumption of fast content.

**Visual content in disaster journalism also facilitates the transmission of information that could be difficult to explain in words.**

This point addresses the visual influence on disaster news, analysing how images and visual content not only serve as evidence of the magnitude of the event, but also serve as a narrative function that amplifies the impact of the information presented.

Images of destruction, human pain, and borderline situations are capable of leaving a lasting imprint on the collective memory, shaping the way viewers interpret events and respond to them. There is a fine line between reporting effectively and falling into the exploitation of human suffering, which invites us to reflect on the responsibilities of journalism in the face of the presentation of these images. Ethics in the exploitation of visual content related to disasters or catastrophic events is a point to address the way in which we consume content today, how companies or the media make exacerbated use of these images or videos. Visual content in disaster journalism also facilitates the transmission of information that could be difficult to

explain in words. For example, maps, graphs, and data visualizations allow the public to understand the geographic extent of the disaster or the levels of impact in different areas. In this sense, the images not only capture the devastation, but also contribute to the dissemination of key data about the emergency, providing context and depth.

In addition, in a world where social networks and digital platforms play a preponderant role in access to information, visual content becomes an important tool for news to spread quickly and reach global audiences. The visual nature of journalism amplifies the impact of information, making it more likely that people will share, comment on, and react to coverage of a disaster.

However, the importance of visuals in disaster journalism goes beyond its effectiveness in attracting attention. Its use also carries with it an ethical responsibility. Journalists must be aware that images can influence public perception and can sometimes reshape the disaster narrative. It is therefore relevant that they are used respectfully and accurately, avoiding sensationalism or exploitation of victims to generate impact. In the educational field, understanding these aspects of visual journalism allows future communicators to develop a critical and ethical perspective in the handling of images during crisis situations, ensuring that coverage is informative, truthful and humanely responsible.

Throughout this analysis, we will explore both the visual aspects that make media news visual content both powerful and influential, as well as the ethical tensions that arise in their use. The aim is to under-

stand how visual representations of disasters not only inform, but can also condition the way in which the public understands, remembers and reacts to these events. The objective of this chapter is based on acquiring the ability to understand, process and generate content according to the practices and ethical rules present in the mass media and the media in relation to disaster news, as well as to make a distinctive use of the content from a biased perspective and/or understand the legal and ethical consequences that are carried out. The effective application of visual content as an educational base is one of the main pillars of this point. On the other hand, also comprehensive understanding of disaster risks is essential to building resilience (UNDRR, 2023).

Journalists must be aware that images can influence public perception and can sometimes reshape the disaster narrative.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### The processes of reception of visual information

They refer to human psychological processes when receiving and processing the information that is displayed. On a visual level, a more direct transmission of information is perceived and in which the viewer does not necessarily have a developed capacity for written analysis.

### The visual message and its content

It is about the content itself that is transmitted and the importance of it. Some technical characteristics such as framing or the shot play a vital role if we talk about photography and video. It is not the same to capture an image from one perspective or another since what is intended to be shown may be different.

### Content typology

The type of content that is perceived or intended to be created, visually speaking, can be disseminated among three: photo, video, infographics and interactive formats

**Photographs:** Static images taken on the spot, analogue or digital. They can be made during the event itself or through a studio recreation. In addition, the possibility of editing them with photographic material or computer software should be highlighted.

**Videos:** All types of moving images, with or without sound, recorded in different formats and qualities. It is currently the most empowered type of content on social networks and the media. Like photographs, videos can also be subject to editing.

**Infographics:** These are multimedia graphic compositions that show specific data about a specific issue. Widely used by the media to visually display quantitative data.

**Interactive formats:** Content that uses audiovisual use in relation to direct user interaction. See virtual/augmented reality tools. Here the user can be part of the content itself, breaking the fourth wall, the one that separates the audience from what is happening on stage, figuratively speaking.

### Language and tone

The morphological elements that make up the message. Language and tone in visual communication are critical because they directly influence how the information presented is interpreted, understood, and reacted to. Unlike verbal or written communication, which is based on words and grammatical structures, visual communication employs images, colors, shapes, typographies, and compositions that, when properly combined, convey clear, effective, and emotionally powerful messages. However, these visual elements can also be ambivalent or misinterpreted if a coherent visual language and appropriate tone are not used.

Visual language refers to the codes, symbols, and conventions we use to represent ideas, emotions, and facts through images. This language has implicit rules, and while it is not "literal" like written language, it is composed of elements with cultural and contextual meanings.

Visual tone refers to the attitude or feeling that a piece of visual conveys, similar to tone in writing or spoken speech. In visual communication, tone is determined by the combination of several factors, such

as color choice, graphic style, lighting, level of detail, or composition.

Both are the tools that shape how an image is perceived, interpreted, and remembered. They are essential for directing the viewer's attention, evoking an appropriate emotional response, and ensuring that the message is communicated clearly and effectively. For visual communication professionals, understanding and mastering these elements is crucial to creating impactful and ethical visual pieces that achieve their goals in a precise way.

## Visual impact

It is the effect that the content has on the viewer, once it has been consumed by the viewer. Here all the above elements come into play, since the impact will be conditioned by the type of content, the message and the means used in its transmission. In turn, the perception of content by a given community (institutional, business, geographical) implies a variable perception based on one idea or another.

## Content diffusion

The trajectory and scope of content, mainly influenced by the means of information transmission. The means of information transmission have undergone a radical transformation with the irruption of social networks, where the concept of "virality" has taken on a central role. Unlike traditional media, where the dissemination of news was controlled by a limited number of channels, social networks allow any user to be a potential sender of content, which generates a constant and uncontrollable flow of information. Virality, characterized by the rapid and massive propagation of content, redefines the dynamics of information consumption, giving relevance to the immediate and the emotional over the profound and analytical. This evolution poses both opportunities and challenges, since although it amplifies reach, it also encourages the spread of misinformation and unverified news.

## Visualizing Disasters (for Social Memory)

Through the dissemination of images, videos and graphics of a disaster, a collective awareness is generated that not only sensitizes the population, but also influences social memory, that is, how a community remembers and processes tragic events over time.

Disasters or catastrophes are directly related in the collective imagination. Here the visual weight might be influential, in any of the media mentioned in the previous section. Visual coverage of disaster news plays a specific role in building the collective social landscape, as it allows shocking images and scenes of devastation to become shared symbols that shape society's perception and response to these tragedies.

Through the dissemination of images, videos and graphics of a disaster, a collective awareness is generated that not only sensitizes the population, but also influences social memory, that is, how a community remembers and processes tragic events over time. These images are engraved in the collective imagination and act as visual references that, over the years, serve to remember the magnitude of the event, the human suffering and the actions taken to face the crisis. As part of social memory, these visual representations also contribute to how future generations will under-

stand and learn from past disasters, influencing public policy, emergency response, and a sense of global solidarity in the face of similar crises.

Linking with technical aspects, we can say that certain elements such as the shot, focus or color help to strengthen a collective imaginary of a disaster or catastrophic event. Let's take the terrorist attacks from September 11, for example.

The exploitation of the images of the event by the media and have been engraved in a social memory that associates with extreme forcefulness certain patterns that resemble the event and that the collective imagination assumes. In this case, it can be the photograph capturing the silhouette of an airplane passing over a city, or an apartment complex, through an overhead shot. It is here that an event-image association is made, even if it has nothing to do with what happened.



**Image 1.** A plane flies over buildings. (Austin Zhang, work posted on Pexels)

The same happens with images associated with environmental catastrophes, such as floods or tsunamis.



**Image 2.** Floods in Wisconsin, USA 2018. (Author: Jim Jade, Unsplash)



**Image 3.** Floods in Bradford, UK, 2019. (Author: Chris Gallagher, Unsplash)

Although they are events that occur in different geographical regions of the world, and even in different years, the images are very similar. This also poses a potential risk when it comes to generating fake news, something very common in social networks where many news does not go through a verification agency as is the case in large press corporations. These images enjoy great media impact and are used in many cases to increase virality in digital media. In the flood photographs we have seen above; an example of fake news could be that the photographs may have been taken in places other than where they were actually taken.

Graphs and infographics are also useful to understand the magnitude of a disaster. Sometimes, data visualization provides the viewer with more information about an event than the images of the event themselves. On a quantitative level, infographics or graphs are the ones that can condense information in the best way on a visual level. Here graphic elements such as colours or shapes come into play to capture the information in the best possible way, so that the viewer acquires the message concisely, we will talk about this concept in more depth in the next point.

## Use of Visuals in Disasters

As described in previous points, the importance of visual communication in disaster journalism helps to better understand the magnitude of events, as well as to raise awareness and warn the population of future events. However, the use of visuals is not only limited to narrating the event that has happened (see the journalistic report) but also facilitates the quantitative understanding of the facts in data. Here we talk about the recipient as one of the elements that make up visual communication and that is fundamental within the journalistic panorama. Who is the message aimed at?, What type of audience is it intended to reach?, but without detracting from the main theme that is the message itself, What do you want to convey?

On the other hand, it is highly recommended to recognize that the type of audience also influences how images are selected and presented. Specialized audiences, such as academics, activists or humanitarian professionals, may require detailed graphics, interactive maps and visual data that allow them to understand the geographic extent of the disaster or the underlying causes of the event. On the other hand, for a general audience, images of victims, rescuers and the devastated environment often generate an immediate emotional impact and facilitate understanding of the urgency and gravity of the situation. This

implies not only ensuring that the information is accessible and understandable, but also ethical and respectful, considering that disaster images can be highly sensitive. For example, when targeting an international audience, visual reporting can highlight the scale of the disaster, mobilizing public opinion and generating global support. In contrast, for a local audience, visual communication may focus more on rescue efforts, community solidarity and practical information on available resources or safety measures.

Moreover, in a current media landscape dominated by social networks and digital platforms, visual journalism has ability to go viral quickly, amplifying its reach and influence. However, this also brings with it a greater responsibility on the part of journalists and other print and broadcast professionals: visual content needs to be carefully selected, avoiding the exploitation of suffering and maintaining an ethical approach that respects both victims and audience. At this point, and taking journalism as an ethical and professional basis, we can establish these three major fields in which the main use of visual communication focused on disaster journalism is made:

**1.Pure graphic activity**

**2.Data visualization**

**3.Signage**

## Pure Graphic Activity

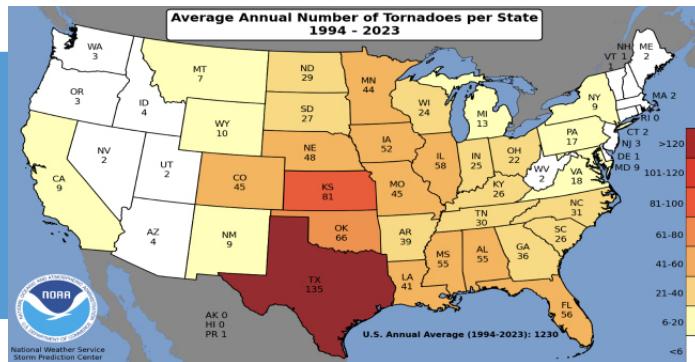
This refers to any graphic activity carried out by any professional (or not). Here we can include photography as a favourite activity in this field, from journalistic photography or advertising reportage to studio photography in other professional fields that may also be related to disasters, such as architecture.



*Image 4: Photo taken during the 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye. (Author: Doruk Aksel Anil, Pexels)*

## Data Visualization

All those graphic designs related to data visualization, from infographics to graphics of various types. They are mainly used by educational entities and the media. In turn, data representations help identify patterns, trends and correlations that may not be evident through textual analysis. In disaster journalism, for example, interactive graphics and maps provide a clear view of the magnitude and geographic scope of the event, improving decision making and informed audience response.



**Image 5.** (Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

## The Use of Signage in Disaster Situations

Signage plays a key role in the prevention and mitigation of disasters, both natural and man-made, by providing clear and accessible visual instructions in times of high stress. In emergency situations, people may experience disorientation or panic, so graphic elements such as evacuation signs, indications of safe areas and escape routes become vital tools for survival. Like the alphabet, the road code follows a similar logic in the design of signs, since the phonemes of the alphabet comply with two fundamental principles in terms of form and content: they are universally valid and condense information (Osnaya, S. 2020).

In the event of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis or hurricanes, well-designed and strategically placed signage makes it easier for communities, visitors and rescue teams to quickly identify where to go for safety, minimizing chaos and expediting evacuation from hazardous areas.



**Image 6:** Japanese poster showing emergency exits in case of tsunami evacuation (CC-0)

In addition to natural disasters, signalling is equally critical in emergency situations caused by human action, such as school shootings in the United States or bombings in war zones. In these cases, where danger can be unpredictable and arise suddenly, signals must be clear and universal so that all individuals, regardless of language or stress level, can understand and follow them.

Visual indications that guide to shelters or emergency exits, as well as safe meeting points, are essential to ensure that people move quickly and efficiently to protected areas, reducing the risk of casualties. The correct implementation of signage not only improves the safety of public and private spaces but also contributes to the creation of a culture of prevention and effective emergency response. The most effective disaster risk reduction measures enfold into day-to-day life and should become regular and accepted contributors to it (Kelman, I. 2024).

## Legal Boundaries in Disaster Imagery

The use of graphic resources in disaster journalism raises important legal questions that need to be carefully considered. Although this varies widely depending on the laws that prevail in the geographical area in which the photograph is taken, or the content is produced.

First, images may be subject to copyright, which means that their use by the media must comply with the limits established by intellectual property legislation. For example, the “right of quotation” allows the use of photographic works for analysis, teaching or research purposes, provided that certain requirements are met, such as proportion in relation to the original work and educational purposes. In addition, the law establishes that in some cases the reproduction of photographs to illustrate or complement a report may be permitted, provided that the source and the author’s name are indicated.

Another relevant aspect is the protection of the privacy of persons portrayed in situations of vulnerability, such as disaster victims. Images may include both protected works of art or architecture, as well as people who have a right to their own image. Therefore, journalists should obtain appropriate permissions before publishing photographs that include identifiable individuals, especially in sensitive circumstances. In addition, the misuse of images that reproduce dramatic situations could be considered a violation of the dignity of the people involved, so it is important that the media maintain an ethical approach to visual coverage of disasters.

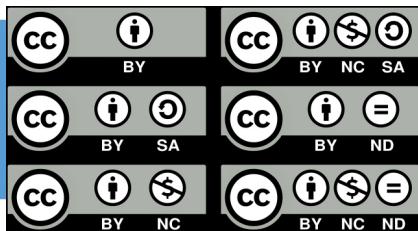
In terms of copyright, we can distinguish three types of licenses to be able to use any graphic material:

- Copyright © licenses
- Creative Commons licenses
- Public domain licenses

The content with copyright © is protected in its entirety for its use, so it belongs exclusively to the author or to those entities or persons to whom its exploitation has been assigned. Another of the tools in terms of rights that should be taken into account for the use and dissemination of graphic material at digital level, are the Creative Commons licenses. Creative Commons is a set of copyright licenses that allows authors to share their work in a more flexible way, facilitating the distribution and use of their works under certain conditions. These licenses give creators the ability to decide how their works be used, shared or modified without waiving all their rights.

There are several Creative Commons licenses, each with different terms of use:

**Attribution (CC BY):** Allows others to distribute, modify and use the work, even for commercial purposes, as long as credit is given to the original author.



**Attribution - Non-commercial (CC BY-NC):** Similar to CC BY, but use must be for non-commercial purposes.

**Attribution - No Derivatives (CC BY-ND):** You can share the work, but not modify it or create derivative works.

**Attribution - Share Alike (CC BY-SA):** Modification of the work is allowed, but any derivative works must be licensed under the same terms.

**Attribution - Non-Commercial - Share Alike (CC BY-NC-SA):** Same as above, but no commercial use is allowed.

**Attribution - Non-Commercial - No Derivatives (CC BY-NC-ND):** Allows the work to be shared non-commercially and without modification.

These licenses provide a clear framework so that photographs and visual materials can be used legally while respecting the author's wishes. On the other hand, understanding the correct use in the citation of images is also of utmost importance.

Finally, we highlight public domain works, those works whose copyright protection has expired. These works can be used without recognizing authority, without paying anyone and for any purpose deemed appropriate. At the educational or scientific level, to cite an image, an in-text citation and a corresponding reference entry are required. The reference entry should include:

- The creator of the image
- The year it was published
- The title of the image
- The format of the image (e.g., "photograph")
- Its location or link (e.g., a website, a book, or a museum)

The format varies depending on where you accessed the image from and the citation style you're using: APA, MLA, or Chicago. To include an image directly in the text as a figure, you will usually need to include a corresponding copyright/permissions statement.

Another aspect to take into account is the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and its conditions when working with certain graphic material, mainly those where minors are included. At the European level, Article 6.1 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) establishes the legal basis for the processing of personal data, including the publication of photographs of minors. For such processing to be lawful, it must be based on at least one of the following conditions:

**Explicit consent:** The minor must give his or her informed and explicit consent.

**Legitimate interest:** The publication of the photograph must respond to a legitimate interest that does not prevail over the rights and freedoms of the minor.

**Compliance with a legal obligation:** The publication is necessary to comply with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject.

**Performance of a contract:** The disclosure is necessary for the performance of a contract to which the child is a party. It is important that, in the case of minors, the minimum age is considered for them to be able to grant valid consent; on the other hand, the consent of the holders of parental authority or guardianship is required.

In addition, it is needed to assess the context and purpose of the publication, always ensuring respect for the dignity and rights of the child. The publication of images of minors without a proper legal basis may constitute a breach of the GDPR and national data protection legislation. When publishing photographs of minors, it is imperative to ensure that the processing of their personal data is based on one of the legal bases set out in Article 6.1 of the GDPR, with particular attention to consent and the minimum age required to give consent. On the other hand, there are some considerations to be taken into account when shooting footage at a disaster scene:

**Legal Regulations:** Depending on where the accident occurs, local laws may restrict the photography of accident sites, particularly if law enforcement is present. It's very important to familiarize yourself with the legal requirements of the area.

**Privacy Issues:** If people are involved in the accident, their privacy rights should be honoured. Capturing images of identifiable individuals without their consent could result in legal problems.

**Disrupting the Investigation:** Taking photographs could potentially interfere with law enforcement or emergency personnel as they manage the situation. It's important to avoid hindering their work.

**Safety Hazards:** Accident scenes can be dangerous. Always prioritize safety and that of others before trying to take any photos.

**Photography Purpose:** If the photos are meant for legal or insurance documentation, capturing the scene may be necessary, but it should be done lawfully and with respect for those involved. If journalists are unsure of the legal guidelines in a specific area, it's a good idea to check with local authorities.

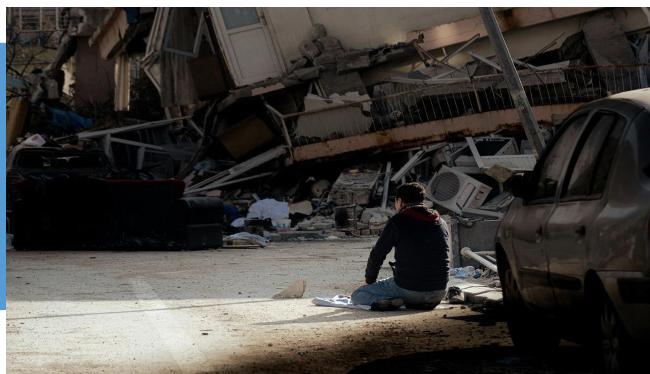
## Human Sensitivities in Disaster Visuals

One of the main sensitivities to consider is the dignity of the people portrayed. On many occasions, images taken in disaster situations may show individuals in moments of extreme vulnerability, facing loss, pain or helplessness. The photojournalist's work must be aware that each person is a human being with rights, and his or her image should not be used for sensationalist purposes or in a way that could dehumanize us. Photographs must respect the privacy and integrity of people, avoiding exploiting their suffering simply to generate an emotional reaction in the viewer.

Dignity is also compromised when images of people in disaster situations are taken without the explicit consent of the people affected, or when moments of extreme vulnerability are captured, such as when

victims are still in the process of being rescued or are in states of shock. To exemplify this, we can name numerous photographic works such as the photo of the napalm girl, taken by photographer Nick Ut in 1972, and how it became a powerful symbol of the horror of the Vietnam War and civilian suffering in wartime conflicts. The image shows Kim Phuc, a nine-year-old girl, running naked and terrified after a napalm attack, with severe burns to her body. This photograph had a profound impact on world public opinion and helped to raise awareness of the horrors of war, influencing the growing movement against military intervention in Vietnam. Its rawness and humanity made it an icon of photojournalism, underscoring the power of visual language to change perceptions and mobilize social action. The image is among the most recognized and celebrated works of photojournalism of the 20th Century (Associated Press, 2025).

It is suitable that photographers and photojournalists be especially careful in selecting the scenes they choose to show, as overexposure of these images can contribute to the objectification of the victims. As mentioned above, another relevant ethical issue is the representation of minors. Children, especially in disaster contexts, are particularly vulnerable subjects. Images capturing minors involved in tragedies must be handled with special care, as their inclusion may jeopardize their psychological well-being and, in some cases, their safety.



**Image 7:** Lament of a victim in one of the earthquakes in Antalya, Türkiye . 2023 (Author: Doruk Aksel Anil, Pexels)

It is remarkable that the media and photojournalists reflect on the impact that these images can have on minors, not only in the immediate future, but also in the long term, in their future lives. Child protection laws in many countries require careful handling of images involving children, so the consent of parents or guardians is important in these cases. The media exposure-distress association also appears to be cyclical over time, with increased exposure predicting greater distress and greater distress predicting more media exposure following subsequent tragedies (Holman et al, 2024).

In the case of high-impact scenes, such as lifeless bodies or situations of great suffering, photojournalism faces the challenge of showing the harshness of reality without falling into sensationalism. Although these images can be powerful and necessary to show the magnitude of a tragedy, they can also be extremely disturbing. The balance between the right to information and respect for the sensitivity of viewers is necessary. While explicit images can generate empathy and draw attention to the need for intervention, they also run the risk of being perceived as a form of exploitation of the pain of others.

Photojournalists play a potential role not only in documenting the facts, but in the way, society perceives and processes these tragedies. The choice of images, the way they are presented and the context in

which they are framed are decisions that can influence public perception of disasters and, ultimately, policies and responses to them. Therefore, human sensitivity in visual communication related to disasters is a commitment that must be maintained with ethical and professional integrity.

## Visual Content and Public Opinion Formation

Through the type of visual usage mentioned in this chapter, it is worth highlighting the importance of this content for the viewer to be able to draw conclusions and opinions. It is of utmost importance to inform the viewer honestly and for the viewer to have the initiative and personal ability to draw correct conclusions based on their own judgments and ideas. Public opinion is the set of attitudes, beliefs and perceptions shared by society regarding certain topics. In the field of disaster journalism, these opinions play an essential role, since they determine not only how news about catastrophic events is received and analysed, but also how the media and authorities respond to social expectations. For journalists, sociologists and researchers, understanding how public opinion is formed and evolves regarding disaster journalism is necessary to evaluate the impact of the information and the narrative that is generated. An increased understanding of journalists' working situation during disasters may also provide an increased understanding of how journalistic decisions are made, how the event is communicated and the final expression in the reporting from an event that meets the citizens and a media audience (Englund, 2018/2008).

Public opinion is shaped by various sociological and political factors that act simultaneously. Among these, the media stands out as one of the main actors that contribute to shaping collective perceptions in crisis situations. However, other factors such as cultural context, historical experience, political power structure and institutional trust also play a determining role. We will briefly discuss how these factors interact with the media to influence the way the public interprets and reacts to disasters.

### Sociological Factors That Influence Public Opinion

From a sociological perspective, public opinion does not arise in isolation. It is strongly influenced by the social structures and power dynamics that exist within a society. For example, access to information,

level of education and social cohesion are key factors. In disaster situations, the most vulnerable population, often have limited access to reliable media, which affects their perception and ability to react to information. Furthermore, collective experience and shared values within a society determine how threats and responses to crises are perceived. A clear example is how different cultures can react differently to a natural disaster. In some societies, there is greater trust in authorities and the media, while in others, mistrust can lead to greater speculation and spread of rumours, exacerbating panic or indifference.

*In the case of disaster journalism, the media can amplify certain narratives, which influences the way collective perceptions develop.*

In the case of disaster journalism, the media can amplify certain narratives, which influences the way collective perceptions develop. When deciding which news to cover and how to do so, the media select and prioritize certain aspects of the event, which can generate a more alarmist or, on the contrary, more com-

placent public opinion. In societies where there is a high penetration of social media, the role of citizens as co-creators of information is also relevant. Digital platforms allow the rapid circulation of data and opinions, but also the proliferation of disinformation and conspiracy theories, which can distort public perception of disasters. According to a study by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), disinformation on social media can have a significant impact on public perception during natural disasters, affecting the effectiveness of emergency responses (Pennycook & Rand, 2018).

## Political Factors in Shaping Public Opinion

As for political factors, disaster journalism is closely linked to political agendas and institutional responses. Governments, both local and national, and international organizations play a main role in how disaster information is handled. Authorities often seek to control the media narrative to minimize damage to their public image or to avoid panic, which can affect the transparency and accuracy of the information provided. This manifests itself through censorship, manipulation of figures or presenting government responses in an exaggeratedly positive manner. An article published in the journal *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* highlights that information management during disasters is a precious value due to maintaining public trust and ensuring an effective response (Perry & Lindell, 2003).

Public opinion can also be influenced by political polarization. In societies where there are tensions between different political factions, the media can become tools of propaganda, and news about disasters can be used to attack or defend certain political actors. This polarization directly impacts the public's perception of disaster management and can influence the collective response, from social mobilization to passivity or rejection of official guidelines. A study by Harvard University indicates that political polarization can affect public perception of disaster management policies, which in turn influences the effectiveness of government responses (Gollust et al., 2019).

## The Media as Intermediaries in the Formation of Public Opinion

Finally, traditional and digital media are the main intermediaries between disasters and the population. Through media coverage, narratives are constructed that not only inform but also shape the emotions and reactions of the audience. The choice of language, images and testimonies used in disaster coverage can influence the level of empathy or concern of the public, which in turn can generate social pressure on authorities to act quickly and effectively. According to a report by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the way the media reports on disasters can affect public perception and preparedness for future events (UNDRR, 2018).

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

The chapter highlights the significant role of visual content in disaster journalism, emphasizing that it is not merely an informative complement but also a powerful narrative tool that amplifies the impact of the information conveyed. Images of destruction, human suffering, and extreme situations serve as more than just documentation; they shape the collective memory of society, influencing how disasters are remembered and understood over time. Through visual representation, audiences are not only informed but also emotionally engaged, which plays a crucial part in how they process the aftermath of disasters.

A major focus of the chapter is on the technical aspects of visual messaging. Elements such as framing, shot composition, and angle play a vital role in how news is perceived by the public. An image taken from a different perspective can completely alter the narrative, affecting the viewer's interpretation of

the event. This extends beyond still images to include audiovisual formats. The chapter points out how modern disaster reporting has evolved with the increasing use of interactive formats, infographics, and digital graphics, which have become essential tools for helping audiences comprehend the magnitude and impact of a disaster. These formats allow for more dynamic and accessible storytelling, enabling viewers to visualize complex data in ways that text alone cannot achieve.

Another key topic covered is the ethical responsibility of journalists when dealing with sensitive visual content. Journalists must balance the public's right to be informed with the need to respect the dignity of victims. This ethical dilemma is particularly pronounced in the case of images that depict people in moments of extreme vulnerability or distress. The chapter emphasizes that these images should be handled with care to avoid dehumanizing the individuals involved or sensationalizing their suffering. Furthermore, special attention must be given to issues of privacy, especially when dealing with minors or victims who have not given consent to be photographed. Respect for human dignity and the ethical use of images are fundamental principles that professionals in visual communication must adhere to in disaster reporting.

Legal considerations are also discussed extensively, as the use of images in disaster journalism is subject to various laws and regulations. Journalists must navigate copyright laws, ensuring that they have the proper licenses to use photographs or video content. The chapter underscores the importance of understanding Creative Commons licenses, which offer flexible terms for the use of visual materials but also stresses the need to obtain explicit consent from individuals featured in images, particularly in vulnerable situations. This is especially critical when minors are involved or when the images are taken on private property.

The chapter concludes by discussing the profound social impact that visual content has on shaping public opinion. Beyond documenting the reality of disasters, images play a central role in how these events are understood, remembered, and integrated into the collective consciousness. Visual content influences public awareness and education about disasters, shaping how future generations learn from past events. By visually capturing moments of crisis, journalists contribute not only to real-time reporting but also to the long-term social memory of these events, influencing how society responds to and prepares for future disasters.

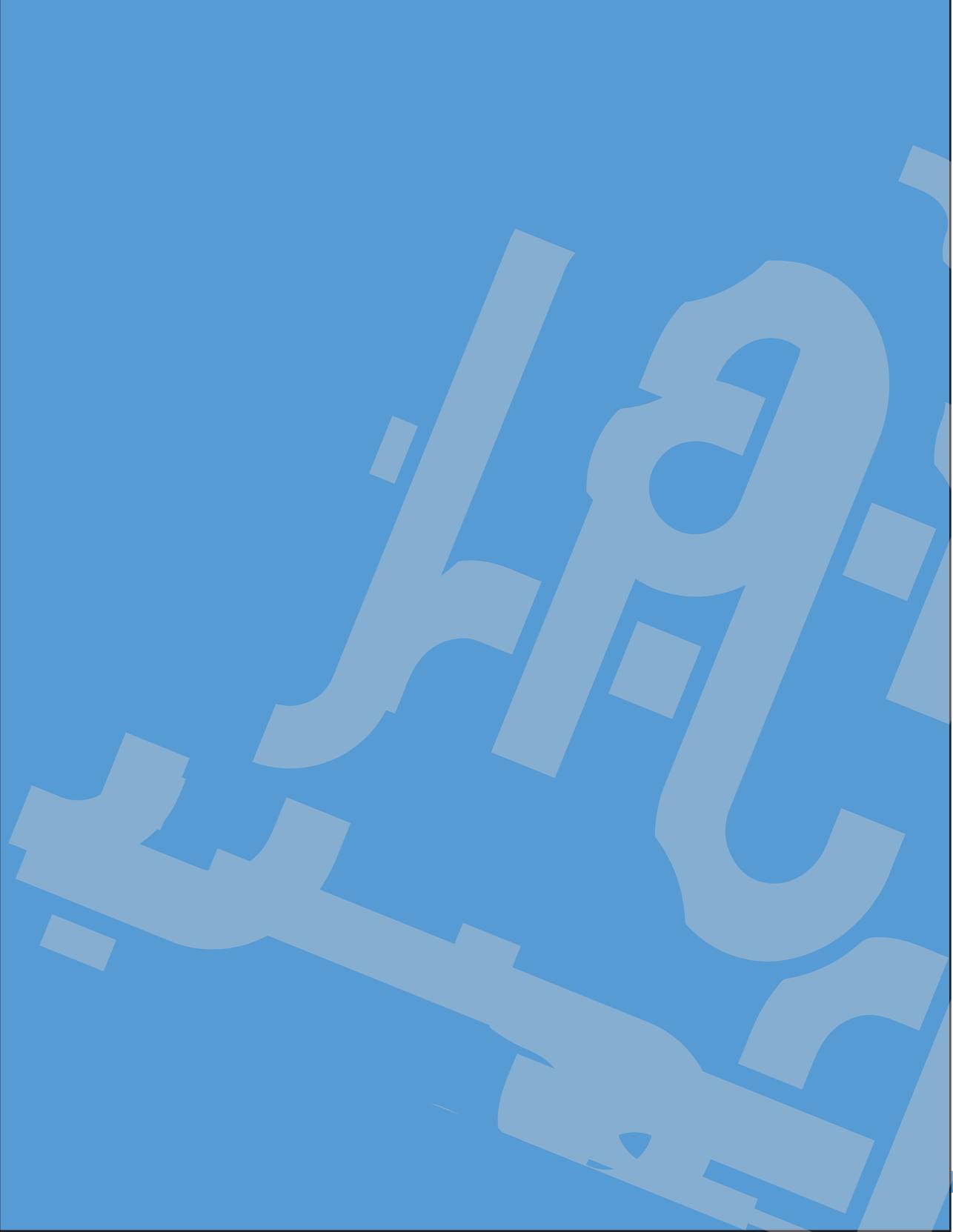
**Students can learn the importance of disaster images on formation of public and social memory about tragic disaster events.**

**Students can learn to take care when dealing with sensitive issues caused by disasters or sensitive images of human suffering.**

**Students can learn to minimize the risk of spreading false information and images on digital platforms and social media during disaster processes.**

**Students can gain knowledge about the importance and power of visual journalism in disaster processes and also learn to manage emotional reactions that play a key role in the formation of public opinion in disasters.**

**Students can have the necessary knowledge about data visualization as an educational tool and learn the areas of use of visual content such as infographics, charts and maps.**



## Self-Assessment

1 What is the main objective of visual content in disaster journalism?

- Sensationalism
- Capturing the public's attention without taking ethics into account
- Informing effectively and mobilizing the audience
- Showing shocking images without context

2 What ethical problem arises when using shocking images in disaster journalism?

- Technical difficulty in editing
- Dehumanization and exploitation of human suffering
- Lack of interest in the public
- Loss of valuable information

3 What effect do visual images of disasters have on collective memory?

- They help us quickly forget events
- They have no significant impact
- They shape the way society remembers disasters
- They only provide technical information

4 Which of the following sociological factors influences the formation of public opinion during a disaster?

- The structure of political power.
- Collective experience and shared values.
- Institutional trust.
- All of the above

5 What type of audience typically requires detailed graphics and visual data in disaster coverage?

- General public
- Specialized audiences, such as academics or activists
- Children and adolescents
- Social media users

6 What is one of the main risks of using disaster images on social media?

- Lack of visual quality
- Poor dissemination of information
- Spread of fake news
- Exclusive use by traditional media

7 Why is individual consent important in disaster images?

- Because it improves the quality of the image
- Because it is an ethical and legal requirement to respect your privacy and dignity
- Because it helps sell more publications
- Because it facilitates viralisation on social networks

8 What role do charts and infographics play in disaster journalism?

- Create decorative content
- Simplify the explanation of complex data
- Show expert opinions
- Avoid the use of shocking images

9 What approach should a journalist take when selecting images for disaster cover

- Sensationalist and emotional
- Neutral and ethical, respecting the victims
- Always looking for the most shocking image
- Prioritizing entertainment over information

10 What does the Creative Commons "Attribution (CC BY)" license allow?

- Share and modify the work, but only for non-commercial purposes
- Share and modify the work, as long as the original author is credited
- Use the work without mentioning the author
- Modify the work, but do not share it

## Answer Key

1.c, 2.b, 3.c, 4.d, 5.b, 6.c, 7.b, 8.b, 9.b, 10.b

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### Photo References

Chris Gallagher, UK. Work posted on Unsplash and Pixabay.

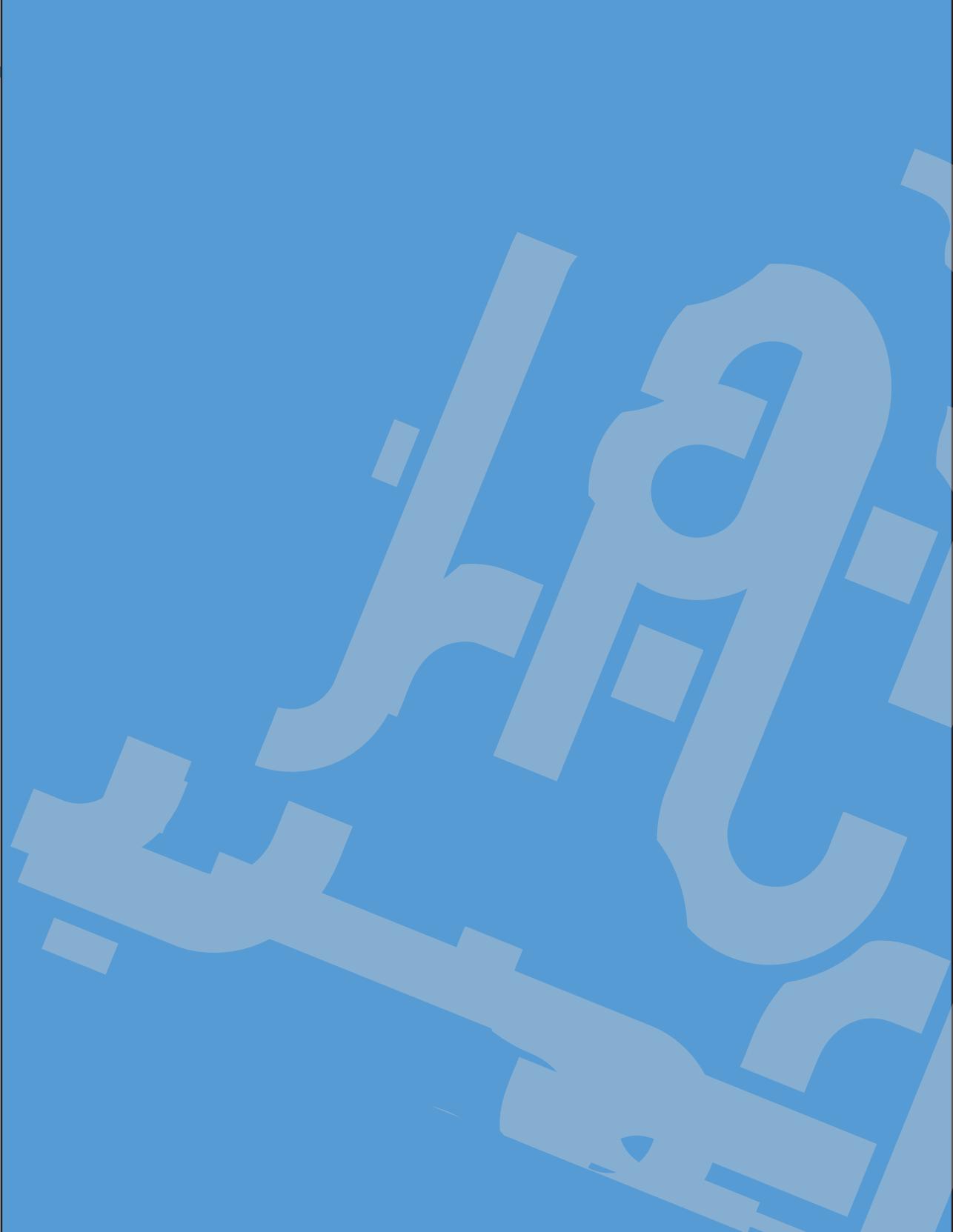
Jim Jade, USA. Work posted on Unsplash and Pixabay

Doruk Aksel Anil, Turkey. Work posted on Pexels

Austin Zhang, Work posted on Pexels.

## LINKS

- <https://unsplash.com/es/fotos/coche-en-el-cuerpo-de-agua-4zxp5vlmvnl>
- <https://www.pexels.com/photo/low-angle-photo-of-airplane-flying-over-high-rise-buildings-2441844/>
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- <https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-sitting-on-street-after-earthquake-15861724/>
- <https://www.pexels.com/photo/demolished-buildings-after-calamity-15823381/>



# EMPATHY IN DISASTER REPORTING

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Yirii Bondar<sup>16</sup>



## EMPATHY IN DISASTER REPORTING

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Empathy for Disaster Journalists and Its Importance**
- **Empathy in News Production**
- **Crisis Intervention and Empathy**
- **Dramatization in Disaster News**
- **Rating Concerns in Disaster Reporting**
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## Introduction

When journalists use empathy, they not only report the facts, but also create a context that allows audiences to better understand what lies behind the numbers of loss and destruction.

Why is empathy important in a journalist's work? This question seems simple, but in the context of journalism, especially when covering disasters, the answer becomes much more complex. Today, journalism is at a crossroads between the need to provide truthful information, ethics and the ability to empathize. In a world where the news flow is moving at the speed of light, how can journalists maintain a balance between honesty, emotion and objectivity?

The world is getting complicated. Disasters - natural or man-made, local or global - have become an integral part of our reality. In such circumstances, the role of a journalist takes on a new meaning. It's not just about informing, but also about helping society understand, support and perhaps even change the course of events. Empathy in journalism is not a weakness, as some may believe. Rather, it is a tool that makes reporting more human and deeper. When journalists

use empathy, they not only report the facts, but also create a context that allows audiences to better understand what lies behind the numbers of loss and destruction. But empathy should not be an excuse to dramatize or manipulate emotions. It should be a guide to ethical reporting.

Journalism is more than a profession. It is a calling. And as technology and public expectations change, some things remain the same: truth, respect, humanity. Aspiring journalists should reflect on the fact that in the near future, public opinion and moods will be significantly influenced, among other things, by their words, photographs, videos, and other work. This represents considerable power, but also a significant responsibility. These are the principles that underpin this chapter, which will serve as a guide in the challenging world of disaster reporting.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Empathy

The ability to understand and share the feelings of another (American Psychological Association, 2023). It involves putting oneself into the other person's shoes and experiencing the world from their perspective. Empathy is a complex process that includes both cognitive and emotional components. Cognitively, it involves understanding another person's thoughts and feelings. Emotionally, it involves sharing those feelings.

### Journalistic ethics

Refers to the principles and standards that guide journalists in their work, ensuring responsible and ethical reporting (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014). It encompasses a wide range of issues, including accuracy, fairness, impartiality, accountability, and transparency. Ethical journalism seeks to balance the public's need for information with the potential harm that can be caused by the dissemination of information.

### Crisis intervention

A short-term, active, and directive approach to helping individuals who are experiencing an acute emotional crisis (James & Gilliland, 2017). It focuses on providing immediate support and stabilization, assessing the individual's needs, and developing a plan to help them cope with the crisis. Crisis intervention aims to restore the individual's pre-crisis level of functioning and to prevent further deterioration.

### Dramatization in the media

Refers to the use of techniques to make a story more exciting or interesting, often by exaggerating certain aspects or by focusing on the emotional or sensational elements (Silverman & Benoit, 2015). It can involve the use of vivid language, emotional imagery, and compelling narratives to capture the audience's attention and to create a sense of urgency or importance. While dramatization can be effective in engaging audiences, it can also lead to distortions and misrepresentations of reality.

### Stereotypes in journalism

Generalization or simplification of information about people or events that can create a biased perception of the audience (International Federation of Red Cross&Red Crescent Societies, 2023)

### Emotional burnout

A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged or excessive stress (Maslach, 2003). It is characterized by feelings of cynicism and detachment, a loss of personal accomplishment, and emotional depletion. Burnout can occur in any profession, but it is particularly common in helping professions, such as healthcare, education, and social work.

## Ethical visualization

The use of photographs and videos that respect the privacy and dignity of victims, avoiding the exploitation of their pain for sensationalism (Journalism Ethics, 2020).

## Contextualization of news

Refers to the process of providing background information, analysis, and perspective to help audiences understand the broader context and significance of a news event (Gans, 2004). It involves placing a news story within its historical, social, political, and economic framework, enabling audiences to make sense of the information and its potential impact.

## Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, such as war, natural disaster, or serious accident (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). It is characterized by intrusive memories of the event, avoidance of reminders of the event, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and hyperarousal.

## Active listening

A communication technique that involves fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just passively hearing the words (Rogers & Farson, 1987). It involves paying attention to both the verbal and nonverbal cues of the speaker, reflecting back what is being said to confirm understanding, and asking clarifying questions. The goal of active listening is to create a safe and supportive environment for the speaker to express themselves fully.

## Empathy for Disaster Journalists and Its Importance

**Empathy in journalism is the ability not only to see the suffering, but also to let it pass through you, to find the right words to convey it to the audience.**

do you approach this story so that it is more than a number in a report? And you have not experienced anything like this even close. Empathy in journalism is the ability not only to see the suffering, but also to let it pass through you, to find the right words to convey it to the audience (Code of Ethics of the Ukrainian Journalist, 2013).

The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics emphasizes that journalism should be honest and fair, and avoid sensationalism (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014). And the BBC, for its part, requires taking into account the impact on the characters in the story and the audience (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). This is especially important in conflicts such as the war in Ukraine, where journalists witness not only tragedies but also manifestations of human endurance and solidarity.

Given the caveats and limitations, the question arises - why should a journalist be empathetic? And there are several answers. First of all, empathetic reporting reveals the bigger picture: not just what happened, but how it affected people's lives (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). People feel when they are heard. This encourages them to be open, which enriches the material (Empathy and audience trust, 2020). In addition, an empathetic approach prevents the use of offensive or overly graphic material that could traumatize the audience or the subjects of the report (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). When you not only listen, but also understand, the report becomes much stronger. It touches the heart (Glück, 2023). In situations such as the war in Ukraine or the rocket attacks on Israel, it is important to avoid any simplification that could harm the victims or exacerbate conflicts (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019).

Although empathy is an innate human trait that varies from person to person, it—like emotional intelligence—can be developed and consciously applied within journalistic practice. A crucial first step is active listening: during interviews, listen attentively without interruption, and ask open-ended questions that encourage deeper reflection. Carefully consider the appropriateness of any video or photo, as over-dramatization can be detrimental to both audiences and the victims and their families, who are already experiencing immense hardship. Often, poignant details that capture the essence of the tragedy are

Empathy in disaster reporting is a critical aspect of modern journalism, as it allows journalists to create deeper, more human stories that go beyond simply reporting the facts. It serves as a bridge between the tragedy and the audience, helping to show the complexity of human experience. At the same time, empathy is not only a journalist's ethical duty, but also a key tool for building trust in the media, reducing harm and improving the quality of news.

Have you ever wondered why some disaster reports become the voice of human suffering, while others are just another information flow? The reason often lies in one word: empathy. In journalism, it's not just an emotion, but a tool that helps to change the way we look at events and bring them closer to the audience (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019).

Imagine you need to tell the story of a person who lost their home to an earthquake or artillery shelling. How

do you approach this story so that it is more than a number in a report? And you have not experienced anything like this even close. Empathy in journalism is the ability not only to see the suffering, but also to let it pass through you, to find the right words to convey it to the audience (Code of Ethics of the Ukrainian Journalist, 2013).

sufficient. Avoid the trap of stereotypes and resist reducing individuals in a story to a single role—victim, hero, or villain. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of people and the complexities of situations, journalists should refrain from judgment or excessive praise.

**Journalists should be mindful of the impact of their stories on the victims, their families and their audiences.**

Introspection also plays an important role. Have I violated any boundaries? Did my work help the audience to better understand, not just sympathize? (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019) It becomes especially acute in the context of covering, for example, war, where a journalist must take into account international legal and humanitarian aspects, as well as avoid hate speech (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019), regardless of whether he or she, as a citizen, belongs to one of the parties to the conflict or a third party.

Wars pose a particular challenge to journalists. In these conditions, empathy becomes not just desirable, but necessary to ensure an ethical approach. Reporting with empathy provides an opportunity to show the human stories behind the ruins of buildings and statistics (Glück, 2023). Journalists should be mindful of the impact of their stories on the victims, their families and their audiences. The BBC recommends avoiding excessive graphic content and ensuring that

content does not exacerbate trauma (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). At the same time, the SPJ Code emphasizes the importance of truthful reporting, even if it requires balancing truth and emotion (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014).

Empathy is not without its challenges. Constant contact with human tragedies is exhausting. SPJ advises: take care of yourself so as not to lose your professional objectivity (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014). Also, in the pursuit of ratings, newsrooms often demand sensationalism. However, it is important to remember that journalism is about truth, not entertainment (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). It follows that empathy does not mean dramatization. Avoid embellishment, stick to the facts (Meyer, 2016). Coverage of conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, requires taking into account cultural sensitivities and political realities, which complicates the work of journalists (Empathy and audience trust, 2020).

Empathy makes journalism not just informative, but transformative. When the audience feels that they are being shown real people, not abstract events, trust is built. And trust is the foundation of everything. “Be the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves,” advises the SPJ Code (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014). This is not only a call, but a duty of every journalist. Empathy helps to carry out this duty with dignity.

## **Empathy in News Production**

In a world where news often focuses on sensationalism and immediate emotional reaction, empathy is becoming a key element of responsible journalism. It allows us to move from dry facts to stories that reveal the true meaning of events, influencing the audience and forming a deeper understanding of reality. It is more than just understanding the experiences of others; it is the ability to transform compassion into deep and meaningful stories. Imagine a journalist covering the devastation after an earthquake: without

empathy, it's just dry numbers of losses, but with it, it is a story about a family trying to rebuild their lives amidst the rubble.

News has always been in the center of public attention. Its content is often based on the rule of three "news hitmakers": sensations, scandals, and death. These are the elements that grab the audience's immediate attention and set the tone for the news flow. However, they often divert attention from the essence of events, forming a distorted picture of reality. News feeds from news agencies that focus on truth and importance will never be as popular as sensational tabloid headlines. Responsible news requires a different approach - adherence to journalistic standards and ethical codes. Ethics and objectivity become the basis for delivering information that really matters to the audience.

Empathy also affects the process of creating news. A journalist who uses an empathetic approach starts with a deep understanding of the context. They pay attention to the cultural, historical and social aspects of the event. This helps to avoid stereotypes and superficiality. For example, in conflict zones where different sides use opposing terminology, a journalist must find a way to provide balanced coverage (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). When planning an interview, it is important to take into account the emotional state of the interlocutor. Empathy helps build trust, allowing you to get more honest and in-depth information. For example, instead of: "How did you survive the loss?", you can ask: "What helps you to keep going these days?" (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014). However, when using an empathetic approach to communicating facts through stories, it is important to remember that humanity in texts should not be manipulative; it is a way to help the audience understand how the event affects real people. For example, instead of general figures of losses, it is worth focusing on individual examples (Tees Research, 2020).

**Empathy-based journalism  
doesn't just tell stories - it  
changes mindsets and  
encourages action.**

Empathy in newsrooms should create an environment where journalists can work in accordance with ethical standards. For example, the Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists emphasizes the importance of respecting human rights and minimizing harm (Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists, 2013). The BBC's editorial guidelines emphasize that journalists should avoid sensationalism and strike a balance between truthfulness and sensitivity to victims (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). As the SPJ Code emphasizes: "Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should take responsibility for the accuracy of their work and thoroughly check information before publishing it" (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014).

Empathy in journalism faces several obstacles. These include the pressure of deadlines, as time constraints often force journalists to avoid complex and in-depth stories, focusing on superficial facts. And editorial influence, as some editorial offices may insist on sensationalism to increase ratings, which is contrary to ethical principles (Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists, 2013). And last but not least, it is emotional burnout - working with traumatic topics can be exhausting for journalists. This requires professional support and attention to self-care (Glück, 2016).

There are several simple but effective ways to integrate empathy into journalism. The first is the so-called "active listening". Listen not only to words but also to non-verbal cues. This helps to reveal hidden emotions and gain a deeper understanding of the interlocutor. Keep in mind the balance between

empathy and objectivity. Empathy should not overshadow the facts; it should complement the analytical approach (Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists, 2013). Last but not least, an equally important factor is the development of one's own psychological stability. Journalists should work on their own emotional endurance to avoid the aforementioned professional burnout (Glück, 2016).

News about tragedies often find themselves at the top of the news agenda, frequently without proper verification of the information. Editors, in a hurry to get the news out, rely on incomplete reports from government agencies or eyewitness accounts. This can lead to the dissemination of unreliable or emotionally manipulative materials. To avoid this, it is important for editors to follow a strict list of requirements. For example, enhanced fact-checking: every news item, especially in crisis situations, must be verified for accuracy, and therefore it is important to use several independent sources. Emotional pressure or sensationalized context alone should not influence the formation of conclusions in the news. Headlines deserve special attention, as certain words and phrases can create panic or cause prejudice if they are unbalanced. Last but not least, common sense and an adequate assessment of how the published information will affect the victims, their families and the audience are required.

Empathy-based journalism does not just tell stories - it changes mindsets and encourages action. And when the audience sees real people behind the statistics, they begin to understand more. How would you cover a story about the loss of a home due to a massive natural fire? Let this question remain open, encouraging each of us to be more attentive to the stories we tell. But it is also important to keep in mind that journalists must also be mindful of their ethical obligations. We must not cross the line into excessive dramatization or sensationalism.

## **Crisis Intervention and Empathy**

Crisis intervention is not just reporting from the scene, but a complex balance between ethics, emotions and efficiency. Journalists become key mediators between tragedy and society, providing not only information but also context that helps to understand the complexity of crisis situations. In crisis situations, journalism is a tool that shapes the ethics, structure and even the content of news. When the world is breaking down before our eyes, journalists become mediators between the tragedy and society. In this section, we will look at how journalists use empathy to intervene in crises, finding a balance between ethical standards, psychological resilience and public responsibility.

One of the biggest challenges for journalists in crisis coverage is to find a delicate balance between ethical standards, emotional engagement and efficiency. This task is becoming increasingly difficult in today's information space, where digital platforms create the pressure of speed and audience expectations. Journalism ethics requires not only adherence to the principles of truthfulness and impartiality, but also consideration of the emotional state of the audience. According to the Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists (Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists, 2013), journalists should avoid sensationalism and adhere to the principle of minimizing harm. But how to ensure this balance in practice?

Truthfulness of information is the basis of ethical journalism. Journalists should check every fact and put it in context to avoid one-sided coverage. For example, in the case of natural disasters, it is important to explain not only the extent of the destruction, but also the recovery efforts. Coverage of tragedies often includes the stories of the people who suffered the most. It is important to respect their privacy and not to use their pain as a means of attracting attention. The emotional aspect plays a key role in the perception of news. As already mentioned in the previous section, audiences better understand complex topics when they are presented through human stories. However, journalists need to find the line between evoking emotions and the risk of manipulation. Journalists who show empathy are able to better understand their sources and convey their experiences to the audience. For example, the story of a family that lost their home in a hurricane can become a symbol of hope and recovery. Developed emotional

**Journalists become key mediators between tragedy and society, providing not only information but also context that helps to understand the complexity of crisis situations.**

intelligence allows journalists to communicate more effectively with sources, understand their feelings and avoid moral damage.

Technological advances help journalists gather and transmit information quickly, but they also create risks of haste. The pursuit of exclusivity can lead to mistakes and loss of audience trust. Using digital tools to verify sources and information is an essential step in creating a story. During crises, journalists often work in real time. For example, the use of social media platforms allows them to quickly inform the audience, but requires special attention to accuracy.

Effective crisis storytelling often follows a general pattern, prioritizing human narratives, expert insights, credible sources, and emotional balance. Rather than presenting dry facts, these stories emphasize personal experiences. For instance, the narrative of an individual who lost everything in a flood can become

a powerful symbol of resilience. Experts, such as analysts, sociologists, psychologists, and rescue personnel, can provide context for complex events, fostering deeper audience comprehension. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the inclusion of epidemiologists was crucial for explaining the medical complexities of the situation. As stated in the Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists (Code of Ethics for Ukrainian Journalists, 2013), journalists are obliged to verify the authenticity of all materials. This is especially important in times of disinformation. The depiction of the horrific consequences of a disaster should be balanced with positive examples of assistance or recovery.

As stated in the BBC guidelines (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019), exaggeration and over-dramatization can lead to panic among the public. Reporting on the aftermath of a hurricane can focus on the destruction, but it is also important to show how the community is recovering. Reporting should also take into account the cultural and social characteristics of the region. For example, when covering disasters in low-income countries, it is important to avoid portraying victims as helpless. After the acute phase of the event, in addition to the recovery process, it is important to cover the lessons that society can learn from the tragedy.

Effective disaster coverage necessitates collaboration with several key groups. Local residents offer unique perspectives and valuable details, while rescuers and volunteers provide insight into the operational context. Academics and researchers contribute by explaining the causes of disasters and forecasting potential consequences. In the face of challenges, journalists should strive to create balanced narratives that reflect all relevant perspectives. This requires an ongoing commitment to factual accuracy, especially in the face of “breaking news” (Delbert, 2023). Journalists are encouraged to provide context and explanation to help the audience understand the significance of the issues being covered, promoting informed decision-making among viewers. Achieving this balance between ethics, emotion and effectiveness is an ongoing and dynamic process in journalism (Delbert, 2023). In a world where crises are becoming more frequent and widespread, the role of empathy in journalism will only grow. It remains the key to creating content that not only tells the story but also changes reality.

## Dramatization in Disaster News

Dramatization in disaster coverage is both a challenge and an opportunity for modern journalism. It attracts the attention of the audience by arousing emotions, but at the same time risks violating ethical standards. Dramatization in the news, especially in disaster coverage, generates ongoing discussions about the ethics and responsibility of journalists. This phenomenon, characterized by exaggerated or sensationalized depictions of catastrophic events, raises important questions about the balance between exciting storytelling and ethical reporting. How can the media engage audiences without sacrificing accuracy and respect for the victims? In this section, we will explore how dramatization shapes perceptions, the challenges it poses to journalistic ethics, and the opportunities for the evolution of journalistic practice.

Why do disasters attract our attention like a magnet? The answer partly lies in dramatization, a process that turns news into stories with an emotional charge (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). Imagine a report with the headline "Disaster of the Century!" or a video with tragic music accompanying the footage of destruction. Does not it seem like it is almost like directing? That is exactly how dramatization works: it arouses emotions, but it often jeopardizes the ethical standards of journalism (White, 2020). Dramatization creates stories that stand out among the information noise. However, in addition to attracting attention, it changes the perception of the audience. When we see destroyed buildings or hear a story about a loss, we are not just informed - we empathize. But how do we avoid turning news into a spectacle? This is where the ethical dilemmas begin (Effects of sensationalism in digital media, 2022). Historically, sensationalism in journalism has been used as a way to attract attention. Even the most horrific events in history were always accompanied by emotional headlines that aroused fear and compassion. But nowadays, with the proliferation of digital media, this trend has taken on new dimensions. Now, any event can instantly turn into a sensation, where manipulating emotions becomes more important than presenting facts.

Here is an example of how the media focused on the most dramatic moments when covering the war in Ukraine in 2022. From the first days of the Russian invasion, journalists from all over the world used images of destroyed houses, crying children, and the heroism of ordinary people. This approach simultaneously helped mobilize international support, but also sparked discussions about the ethics of such materials (Mammadzada, 2023). For example, in November 2022, when Ukraine regained control of Kherson, the media focused on emotional scenes of family reunions and tears of joy, leaving out more complex issues of rebuilding the city or the humanitarian crisis (Aiko, 2024).

Another striking example of dramatization was the coverage of the explosion of the Kakhovka reservoir by the Russian military in 2023. Initially, the media covered this event as an environmental disaster that would forever change the region's ecosystem, destroying biodiversity and making the land unsuitable for agriculture. However, a few months later, it turned out that the predicted catastrophe had not occurred. On the contrary, new flowering fields began to appear on the site of the reservoir, and nature gradually adapted to the new conditions. This example demonstrates how sensationalism in coverage can exaggerate the consequences of events, creating false impressions among the audience.

Did these reports help the global understanding of the conflict? On the one hand, they drew attention to the tragedy and made many viewers empathize. On the other hand, the overemphasis on the dramatic aspects could have created the impression that the war was just a series of emotional moments rather than a complex and protracted conflict. This approach also contributed to the emergence of "emotional fatigue" among the audience, which gradually lost interest in the topic (Beckett, 2022). The fundamental

principle of journalistic ethics is to minimize harm. This means balancing the public's right to know with respect for the privacy and dignity of individuals in tragic circumstances (White, 2020). Journalists must make informed decisions about publishing graphic images or confidential information that can have a profound impact on the lives of victims and their families.

Journalists are obliged to promptly and transparently correct any errors in their materials. This responsibility helps to preserve the integrity of the profession and helps to build public trust (Beckett, 2022). Media organizations are encouraged to implement internal review processes and editorial standards that ensure commitment to ethical practices and provide the audience with the opportunity to comment (Mammadzada, 2023). The BBC's editorial guidelines emphasize that images and language should be appropriate to the context and not cause undue alarm. This requires journalists to carefully analyze the potential impact of visuals on the audience, especially during crisis situations, to avoid increasing stress or panic (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). This is especially important when covering terrorist attacks or natural disasters, when the audience is already under stress.

Dramatic photos are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they can be a powerful tool for engaging audiences. On the other hand, there is a risk of exploitation of victims. For example, after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, some photos of orphans sparked public outrage because they were used without the families' consent. This demonstrated how important it is to take into account ethical aspects when creating materials that could potentially harm participants in events (Daniel, 2025).

During the coverage of the 2019–2020 bushfires in Australia, some media outlets focused mainly on dramatic images of the flames, without paying enough attention to the efforts of rescuers or the long-term environmental impact. This approach can lead to a simplified understanding of events by the audience and underestimation of important aspects of the disaster (Dunne et al., 2020). Journalists should take into account that dramatization can violate the rights of victims. Using their stories or images without consent can cause them additional pain. For example, in the coverage of the Malaysia Airlines plane crash in 2014, there were many examples when the personal data of victims were disclosed without their consent (Lim, 2020).

Innovations in the field of virtual reality will allow creating interactive reports that immerse the viewer in the events, helping to better understand their context. For example, in December 2024, a Florida judge, Andrew Siegel, used Oculus Quest 2 virtual reality glasses to recreate events from the suspect's point of view during a trial. This case is still considered unique in US case law (Daniel, 2025). However, it also creates risks of manipulation and requires strict ethical standards (Basera, 2023). In the end, dramatization in journalism is a controversial phenomenon. It can be both a source of inspiration and a tool of manipulation. Journalists should be aware of their responsibility and strive to create materials that not only inform, but also help society understand and solve complex problems.

## Rating Concerns in Disaster Reporting

When we talk about ratings in journalism, a simple but fundamental question comes to the surface: what really determines media success? This chapter explores the complex relationship between ratings and journalism quality, from its historical beginnings to the modern era of digital metrics. You will learn how global media outlets such as The New York Times and The Guardian balance sensationalism and ethics while winning international awards (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019).

Imagine the first newspapers published in the early 18th century. Back then, the only "rating" was the number of copies sold. However, with the development of television, radio, and now digital platforms,

the rating has become a much more complex concept, turning into a multifaceted indicator that includes views, likes, comments, and reposts. In the late 19th century, the phenomenon of the “yellow press” emerged. Newspapers such as Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World and William Hearst’s New York Journal used sensational headlines to attract attention. For example, dramatic news about shipwrecks or celebrity scandals became a major way to increase circulation. Even though these methods often ignored journalistic standards, they opened the way to a new form of interaction with the audience (The Pulitzer Prizes, n.d.)

With the advent of the Internet, ratings have undergone an even greater transformation. As journalism moved from printed pages to screens, it adapted to new metrics: click-through rates, average viewing time, and user engagement. This has led to the emergence of “clickbait headlines,” which often simplify complex topics to attract more attention. At the same time, the importance of quality content is growing, as international awards such as the Pulitzer Prize are still a significant indicator of success. Publications such as The New York Times or The Washington Post demonstrate how quality can coexist with high ratings (Zamith, 2020).

Research shows that more than 60% of users do not trust media that use clickbait headlines. For example, when covering natural disasters, such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, many publications focused on the sensational aspects of the tragedy instead of analysing the causes and possible solutions. Successful journalism projects often combine high quality and digital innovation, winning international awards such as the International Federation of Journalists or Peabody Awards (IFJ Ethical Journalism Initiative, n.d.)

“Is it possible to be popular while remaining honest?” Every journalist faces this question. Sensationalism, although it attracts an audience, carries the risk of losing credibility. How do you find this balance? People are drawn to dramatic stories. This is confirmed by cognitive psychology research: emotionally charged content activates more neural connections in the brain, making information memorable. In turn, this means that the audience prefers news that evokes strong emotions, even if it is not always objective or balanced. However, sensationalism without context can cause the opposite effect - disbelief, when the audience begins to perceive the media as manipulative. This creates a difficult dilemma for journalists: how to engage the audience while remaining true to ethical standards (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Codes of ethics clearly emphasize the need to avoid manipulation. For example, an article about a natural disaster should not turn into a “show”. Instead, it should focus on human stories that help the audience understand the scale of the tragedy and its consequences. Ethics requires accuracy, transparency and respect for the dignity of the victims. Journalists should adhere to the principle of “minimizing harm” by avoiding publishing content that may deepen the trauma of victims or contribute to disinformation (Code of Ethics of Ukrainian Journalists, 2013)

Sensationalism often crowds out empathy, but the latter is key to good disaster reporting. For example, instead of focusing on the number of casualties, journalists can tell stories of survival and recovery that inspire and stimulate support. Empathy allows journalists to establish a deeper connection with the audience, making news more relevant and influential. In addition, the use of empathy helps reduce the risk of sensationalism by focusing on human stories rather than shocking details. Successful cases, such as documentary projects that focus on the rehabilitation of victims, show how empathy can be a tool to increase ratings without violating ethical standards (Editorial code of practice and guidance, 2023)

Digital analytics has turned journalism from an art to a science. Data on clicks, views, and time on page have become the new indicators of success. But do these metrics reflect the real value of content? Imagine an editorial team analysing metrics and having to choose between an article that informs and one that can generate more clicks. The answer depends on the strategies of the publication, but the priority

of ethics should remain the foundation (Problems of Rating in Disaster Coverage, 2023). It is important to remember that respected media organizations with a global reputation and the confidence of millions around the world do not rely on clickbait tactics. This is, in fact, a key factor in their trustworthiness.

Few would deny that analytics can help improve content. For example, if the data shows that readers leave an article in the middle, this is a signal to the author that the text needs more specifics or an emotional component. Journalists who understand the audience through metrics have a better chance of creating not only popular but also useful content. The most successful publications use metrics as a guide, but not as the ultimate goal (Mammadzada, 2023). Focusing solely on numbers can distort editorial policy, but integrating ethical standards into the analysis process helps avoid manipulation. For example, platforms such as The Guardian use analytics to identify the topics that most concern their audience, but never compromise on truthfulness. This approach allows them to create content that simultaneously receives high ratings and maintains the trust of readers.

In crisis situations, journalists face a dilemma: should they be the first to publish or wait to check the facts? Mistakes can have serious consequences, such as in the case of fake news during Hurricane Katrina, which caused additional panic (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; Code of Ethics of Ukrainian Journalists, 2013). Journalists should focus on the human aspect of a disaster. For example, stories about heroism or recovery can help the audience understand the situation and inspire them to help. But this should not turn into “romanticizing the tragedy” (Problems of Rating in Disaster Coverage, 2023).

Empathy has a direct impact on ratings, as the audience responds to emotionally rich, human content. According to research, stories that demonstrate empathy attract more attention and stay in readers' memories longer. For example, reports on humanitarian aid or stories of survival in disaster zones can significantly increase audience engagement. Journalists can use empathy as a tool to create stories that emphasize the human dimension of events. This allows not only to draw attention to important topics, but also to promote social change by mobilizing the public to take action (Beckett, 2022).

## Current Examples and Case Analysis

**The World Pandemic.** COVID-19 has become a global crisis that has affected all aspects of human life. The pandemic has caused massive casualties, overcrowded hospitals, lockdowns, and economic hardship. The information space has become the main channel for communicating critical data, such as infection rates, protection recommendations, and personal stories of those affected. Global media, such as The New York Times, focused on the work of doctors through a series of reports from hospitals. The BBC developed interactive materials with mortality and vaccination statistics that combined numbers with personal stories. Some media outlets, such as BuzzFeed, focused on touching stories of families who had lost loved ones or those who had recovered but faced post-traumatic effects.

The use of graphic images of the deceased and seriously ill prompted strong reactions from some viewers, raising important ethical questions about the tension between the public's right to know and the need to respect the dignity of those affected. The rapid dissemination of information, particularly via social media platforms, occasionally resulted in the spread of misinformation. In contrast, reports featuring the experiences of nurses, doctors, and patients offered valuable insights into the human dimension of the crisis. Some journalists took the initiative to visit COVID wards, providing a firsthand view of the pandemic's realities while maintaining respect for patient privacy.

**Earthquake in Türkiye and Syria.** A magnitude 7.8 earthquake hit Türkiye and Syria in February 2023, killing more than 50,000 people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless. Dozens of cities were

devastated, and the humanitarian crisis caused an international outcry. Al Jazeera focused on human stories, covering the struggle for survival in the ruins. Reuters created visual reports that combined footage of large-scale destruction with emotional moments of rescue. The Guardian analyzed systemic problems, such as corruption in construction, which exacerbated the consequences of the disaster.

The graphic depictions of destroyed homes and bodies ignited ethical discussions regarding the treatment of victims. The urgency of real-time reporting frequently overshadowed the need for thorough analysis, occasionally resulting in the dissemination of unverified information. Despite these challenges, some journalists chose to focus on the narratives of survivors searching for their relatives amidst the rubble. The incorporation of direct quotes and personal confessions from victims allowed audiences to connect with the tragedy on a more personal level. The inclusion of expert commentary explaining the causes of the destruction contributed to a broader understanding of the underlying social issues.

**Heatwave in Spain and Italy.** In 2022-2023, Europe, in particular Spain and Italy, was hit by record temperatures of over 45°C. This led to thousands of deaths, large-scale forest fires, and serious problems in agriculture, energy, and tourism. *El País* focused on the environmental consequences of the heat wave, including problems with water supply and agriculture. *La Repubblica* told the stories of doctors who worked in overloaded hospitals and farmers who lost their crops. The BBC created interactive temperature maps and analyzed global climate trends.

The use of emotionally charged images of people suffering from the heat wave raised questions about privacy and avoiding sensationalism. Disinformation on social media, including exaggerated disaster scales, forced journalists to spend more resources on fact-checking. By using empathy personal stories of farmers and the elderly who were most affected helped the audience understand how climate change affects ordinary people. Interviews with doctors who worked in overheated conditions showed the reality of the consequences of the heat for the healthcare system. The journalists emphasized systemic problems, such as the lack of adequate infrastructure to deal with the effects of the heat.

**The War in Ukraine.** On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which became the largest war in Europe since World War II. The first weeks of the conflict were accompanied by massive bombings, the displacement of millions of people, and an acute humanitarian crisis. Coverage features. The Washington Post covered the stories of families fleeing the hot spots, including Kyiv and Kharkiv. CNN emphasized live coverage of the events, showing the destruction and fighting in real time. *Ukrayinska Pravda* told about the heroic stories of resistance of local residents and the military.

The constant use of victim and destruction imagery blurred the lines between ethical reporting and sensationalism. Social media, a source of vast but often unverified information, forced journalists to prioritize verification. Balancing global awareness of the tragedy's scale with respect for victims' suffering was a key challenge. Interviews with displaced individuals and those searching for loved ones humanized the conflict. Stories of volunteer assistance offered hope amid the devastation. This empathetic approach fostered trust with victims, leading to more in-depth reporting.

**The Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant Explosion.** On June 6, 2023, Russian troops blew up the dam of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant, causing a large-scale environmental and humanitarian disaster. This led to the flooding of large areas, the destruction of agricultural land and the loss of water supply for millions of people. Some international media outlets used sensationalized headlines, such as "The Dam Explosion That Will Drown a Nation". Some media exaggerated the consequences, claiming "irreversible loss of the ecosystem" without supporting scientific research. Videos showing the flooding went viral on social media, often without context or explanation.

A common problem was the use of shocking images of flooded villages without providing context or analysing the event's impact. Misleading headlines and social media posts inflated the disaster's magnitude. Too often, stories focused solely on destruction, omitting the personal narratives of those who had lost everything. Although sensationalism dominated much of the coverage, some media outlets, notably The Guardian, attempted to showcase the struggles of local communities to rebuild. Empathy was rarely seen, with interviews featuring victims describing their losses being a notable exception.

Spreading unverified information risks misinformation and heightened tensions. Graphic details, devoid of context, can traumatize audiences and violate victims' dignity. Journalists face the ethical challenge of reporting on atrocities. Some successfully communicated the human cost by focusing on victims' experiences and losses, helping audiences understand the tragedy's scale.

**Wildfires in California.** In August 2024, California once again faced large-scale wildfires that covered thousands of hectares, destroyed hundreds of homes, and led to the evacuation of thousands of residents. The situation was complicated by strong winds and high temperatures, which contributed to the rapid spread of the fire. Los Angeles Times published detailed maps of the fires, information on evacuation zones and resources for victims. The New York Times analyzed the causes of frequent fires in the region, including climate change and forest management. Local TV Stations provided round-the-clock coverage of the events, live reports from the scene and interviews with victims.

The difficulty lay in representing human suffering while upholding ethical standards and respecting privacy. Stories about families who lost their homes helped the audience understand the scale of the tragedy on a personal level. The publications covered the emotional state of people who were forced to evacuate and their difficulties with adaptation in temporary shelters. Some materials focused on the stories of local communities that united to help the victims.

**Ohio Railroad Disaster.** In May 2024, a freight train carrying hazardous chemicals derailed in Ohio. This led to a large-scale toxic leak, evacuation of the population, and serious environmental consequences. The Washington Post focused on analysing the impact of the accident on the environment and the health of local residents. CNN used aerial footage to show the scale of the disaster and interviewed government officials and survivors. NPR published reports on the problems of railroad transportation regulation in the United States.

How to show the scale of the disaster without exaggerating the risks, but also without downplaying them? Moreover, there is a need to quickly provide reliable information about safety measures for local residents but without violating their rights. In this situation journalists covered stories of families who lost their homes due to evacuation. Special attention was paid to emergency workers who worked in high-risk conditions. The materials included recommendations from doctors and environmentalists to protect the population from the effects of chemical contamination.

**Flooding in Southern Germany.** In June 2024, the southern regions of Germany, in particular Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, suffered from severe flooding caused by prolonged heavy rains. A state of natural disaster was declared in ten Bavarian municipalities. Rescue and evacuation operations were carried out in the affected cities, including Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm. In Pfaffenhofen an der Ilm, a firefighter was killed during the rescue operation. Deutsche Welle wrote that the news outlet promptly reported on the developments, providing updates on water levels, evacuation zones and safety measures. Süddeutsche Zeitung published reports from the affected regions, focusing on human stories and the impact of the disaster on local communities. ARD used video footage from the scene, showing the extent of the destruction and the work of rescue services.

The disaster underscored the importance of responsible reporting, particularly in depicting its impact on individuals without violating their privacy or dignity. A primary objective was to avoid over-dramatizing the situation, which could trigger public panic. To achieve this, journalists prioritized sharing the experiences and needs of displaced families. The dedication and challenges faced by rescuers and volunteers were highlighted through interviews. Furthermore, the coverage included guidance from psychologists on coping with the emotional aftermath of the disaster.

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

This chapter explores the role of empathy in journalism, particularly in disaster coverage. It emphasizes the importance of an empathetic approach to producing humane and responsible reporting that considers the needs of both victims and audiences. The chapter also examines the challenges posed by event dramatization, rating pressures, and ethical dilemmas. Finally, it discusses the BBC Editorial Guidelines and the SPJ Code of Ethics as guiding principles for journalists.

The author explores how an empathetic approach changes the process of news creation - from gathering information to writing texts and interacting with sources. Particular attention is paid to the challenges faced by journalists: deadlines, editorial pressure and the risk of emotional burnout. By providing examples and recommendations, the chapter emphasizes the importance of adhering to ethical standards and responsible reporting. It discusses how empathy becomes a driver for creating deep and meaningful stories, taking into account ethical challenges, emotional intelligence and technological capabilities. It illustrates the role of facts, human stories and collaboration with experts in helping journalists maintain high standards even in the most difficult circumstances.

In addition, the chapter analyses how sensationalism affects the perception of news, looking at historical examples and current challenges. Particular attention is paid to finding a balance between emotionality and accuracy, the need to minimize harm, and the use of new technologies to create in-depth and responsible reporting. The chapter offers practical recommendations and tools to ensure a balance between truthfulness, emotionality and objectivity. This section will be useful for both experienced journalists and beginners who want to work responsibly and effectively in the field of crisis reporting.

At the end of this chapter, students who will take this course will have the following achievements.

- **Students can understand the importance of the concept of empathy in disaster processes.**
- **Students can understand how journalists connect victims and audiences, providing deeper context beyond just reporting facts.**
- **Students can use empathy to minimize harm and create ethical reporting that does not exploit people's suffering.**
- **Students can integrate empathy into the process of gathering and processing information.**
- **Students can avoid sensationalism that distorts reality and undermines trust in the media.**

## Self-Assessment

1 What is empathy in journalism and why is it important in disaster reporting?

- Empathy in journalism is the ability of journalists to express their own emotions in reporting to make it more emotional and appealing to the audience.
- Empathy in journalism is a technique that allows journalists to use dramatic imagery to draw attention to disaster events.
- Empathy in journalism is the ability of a journalist not only to see suffering, but also to let it pass through them, to find the right words to convey it to the audience.
- Empathy in journalism is the avoidance of difficult topics in order not to traumatize the audience and the victims.

2 How does empathy help to avoid sensationalism in the news?

- Empathy allows journalists to heighten the drama of events to evoke strong emotions in viewers.
- Empathy helps journalists focus on human stories and context rather than shocking details, avoiding manipulation and exaggeration.
- Empathy leads journalists to remove the emotional component from their reporting to avoid emotional involvement.
- Empathy helps journalists to create sensational headlines that attract more attention from the audience.

3 What ethical principles should journalists take into account when covering tragedies?

- Maximizing the emotional impact on the audience through shocking details and dramatic footage.
- Adhering to the principles of accuracy, minimizing harm, respecting the privacy of victims and avoiding sensationalism.
- Use graphic materials without restrictions to ensure that the audience fully realizes the scale of the tragedy.
- Preparing reports with an emphasis on finding fault and accusing certain individuals or organizations to create a scandal.

4 Which of the following sociological factors influences the formation of public opinion during a disaster?

- It can cause emotional fatigue in the audience and deepen the trauma of the victims.
- It helps journalists to create more powerful stories that make people act faster.
- It is a necessary tool for audience engagement, as it increases interest in news.
- It has little impact because journalists are simply reporting reality as it is.

5 How can journalists maintain their emotional health in stressful situations?

- Ignore your own emotions and focus exclusively on your work.
- Use emotional intelligence techniques, practice mindfulness, and set boundaries between work and personal life.
- Try not to participate in the coverage of crisis situations to avoid stress.
- Completely abstract yourself from the feelings of the victims to maintain your own psychological balance.

6 Why is the balance between ratings and content quality difficult to achieve in modern journalism?

- Viewers prefer in-depth analytical materials, so sensationalism does not affect ratings.
- Editorial boards often focus on digital viewership metrics, which encourages the use of clickbait headlines and emotionally charged content.
- High quality content always guarantees high ratings, so there is no contradiction between the two.
- Sensational content automatically inspires audience trust, which is why it is used in modern media.

7 Why is individual consent important in disaster images?

- Because it improves the quality of the image
- Because it is an ethical and legal requirement to respect your privacy and dignity
- Because it helps sell more publications
- Because it facilitates viralization on social networks

8 What role do charts and infographics play in disaster journalism?

- Create decorative content
- Simplify the explanation of complex data
- Show expert opinions
- Avoid the use of shocking images

9 What approach should a journalist take when selecting images for disaster cover

- Sensationalist and emotional
- Neutral and ethical, respecting the victims
- Always looking for the most shocking image
- Prioritizing entertainment over information

10 What does the Creative Commons "Attribution (CC BY)" license allow?

- Share and modify the work, but only for non-commercial purposes
- Share and modify the work, as long as the original author is credited
- Use the work without mentioning the author
- Modify the work, but do not share it

## Answer Key

1.c, 2.b, 3.c, 4.d, 5.b, 6.c, 7.b, 8.b, 9.b, 10.b

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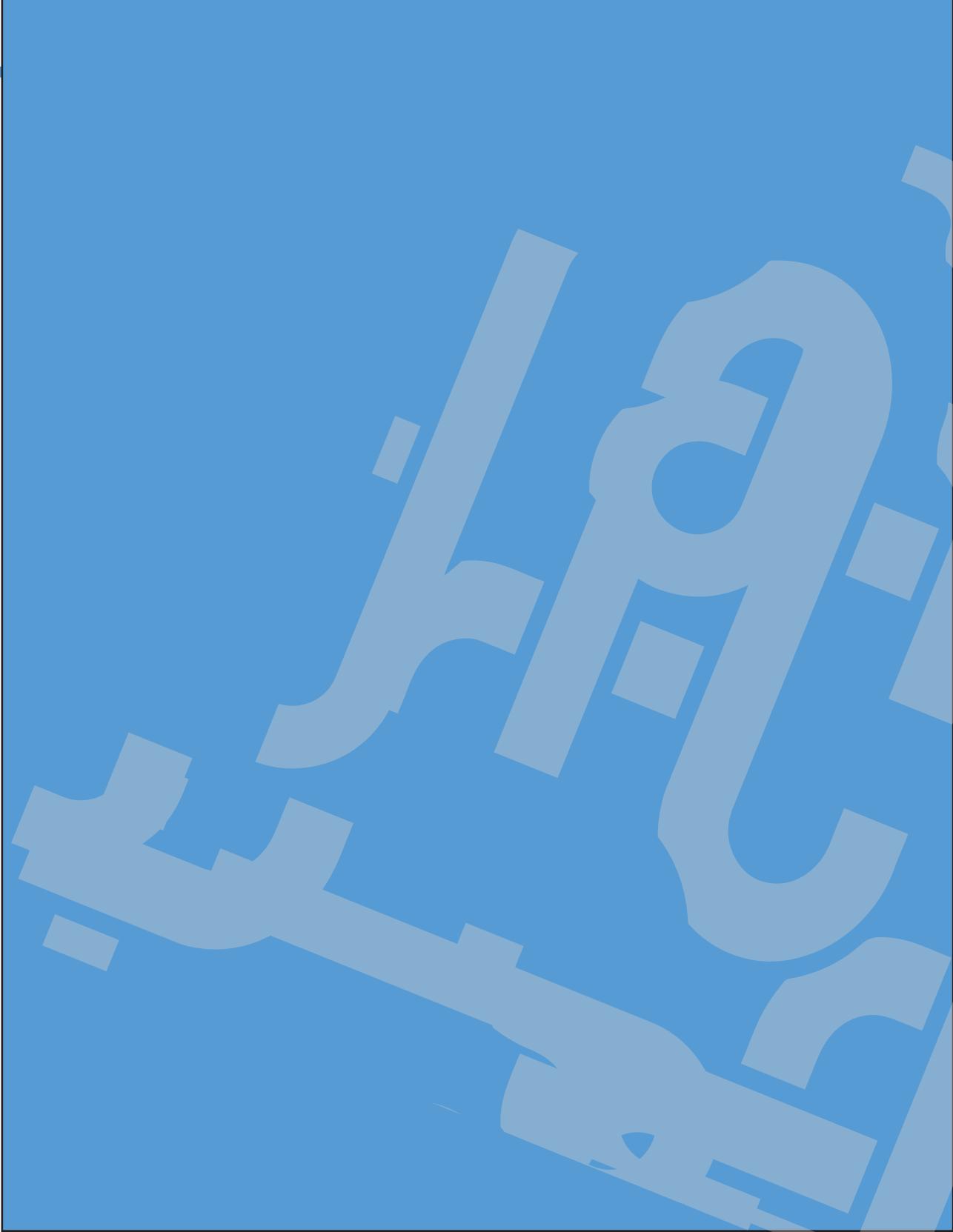
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# WRITING NEWS ABOUT DISASTERS

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# BOOK CHAPTER 10

## WRITING NEWS ABOUT DISASTERS

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **News Writing Techniques for Covering Disasters**
- **Structural Elements in Disaster News (Headline, Lead, etc.)**
- **The Use of Language in Disaster News**
- **Final Check of the Disaster Report**
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## Introduction

Informational genres of journalism are the most efficient and effective means of conveying information about disasters and other emergencies to the citizens of the country where the disaster occurred and to the international community. It is on the basis of news reports that the overall picture is formed, the scale of the event is emphasized, and the areas of support and assistance are determined. The work of a journalist does not replace the activities of official government agencies, but the media also disseminate government messages. The key mission of journalists in disaster situations is to fully and objectively inform the public, avoid approaches that increase panic or create a frivolous attitude, and through prompt and timely information, public attention and disaster response activities involving various actors, including international ones, focus on the key needs and problems in the disaster area.

Any emergency event has components that require an acute, immediate response, as well as those that require systematic, planned work to address the consequences of disasters. All of them are important for understanding the situation, but in their work, journalists should distinguish between the needs and focus the audience's attention on those aspects that can significantly improve the situation. In this paragraph, we will talk about the traditionally most operational genres of journalism - news and reportage, thanks to which the world learns about the disaster, the course of events, the conditions and possibilities of providing assistance and many other equally important things that need to be addressed quickly.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### News

A factual report of an event or issue that is of current interest to a significant number of people (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It is typically presented in a clear and concise manner, and it is intended to inform the public about what is happening in the world around them. News stories can be about a wide range of topics, including politics, business, crime, science, and technology.

### Reportage

The process of gathering information about an event or issue and then disseminating it to an audience through various media (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It involves investigating, interviewing, observing, and analysing information to create a factual and informative account. Reporting can be done in a variety of formats, including written articles, audio or video reports, and live broadcasts.

### Headlines

A title or brief summary of a news story, article, or other text that is printed in large letters at the top (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Its purpose is to grab the reader's attention and give them a quick idea of what the story is about. Headlines can be written in a variety of styles, from straightforward and informative to sensational and attention-grabbing. Originally a printers' term for the line at the top of a page containing the title and page number; used of the lines that form the title of a newspaper article from 1890, and transferred unthinkingly to broadcast media (Headline, n.d.).

### Dramatization in the media

Refers to the use of techniques to make a story more exciting or interesting, often by exaggerating certain aspects or by focusing on the emotional or sensational elements (Silverman & Benoit, 2015). It can involve the use of vivid language, emotional imagery, and compelling narratives to capture the audience's attention and to create a sense of urgency or importance. While dramatization can be effective in engaging audiences, it can also lead to distortions and misrepresentations of reality.

### The lead

The opening sentence or paragraph of a news story, designed to grab the reader's attention and summarize the main points (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The first paragraph or sentence of a news report, designed to attract the reader's attention and provide a brief summary of the main points (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

### Background

In journalism, "background" refers to information that provides context and depth to a news story, helping the audience understand the bigger picture and the significance of the events being reported (Pat-terson, 2017). It can include historical context, relevant statistics, explanations of complex issues, and insights into the people and events involved.

## International armed conflict (international armed conflict)

An international armed conflict (IAC) is a situation where two or more states resort to the use of armed force against each other (ICRC, 2024). It exists regardless of whether the parties recognize the existence of a state of war.

## State of war

A formal declaration by a state that it considers itself to be engaged in armed conflict with another state or states (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.). It is a legal status that has significant consequences, including the application of international humanitarian law and the activation of certain domestic laws.

## Aggression

A behaviour aimed at causing harm to another person or being, whether physical, psychological or social (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

## Non-international armed conflict (NIAC)

Also known as an internal armed conflict or civil war, is a situation where armed violence occurs within the borders of a single state, involving governmental forces and one or more non-governmental armed groups (ICRC, 2024). These conflicts often involve a complex interplay of political, ethnic, religious, or socio-economic factors.

## Combatants

A person who is a member of the armed forces of a party to an armed conflict, and who has the right to participate directly in hostilities (ICRC, 2024).

## Non-combatants

A person who is not a member of the armed forces of a party to an armed conflict, and who does not participate directly in hostilities (ICRC, 2024). This includes civilians, medical personnel, humanitarian aid workers, and journalists.

## War crimes

Serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) committed during armed conflicts. These crimes include grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols, and customary international law. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) defines war crimes as severe offenses such as wilful killing, torture, inhumane treatment, unlawful deportation, taking hostages, and intentionally directing attacks against civilians, humanitarian missions, or protected objects such as hospitals and schools.

## News Writing Techniques for Covering Disasters

A journalist should also understand that his or her news can be disseminated to a wide global audience, and thus draw attention to the event, and for some time shape the agenda for many people and organizations, so providing unverified, unofficial information is not allowed.

News reports are based on a traditional journalistic scheme, and the approaches and requirements for writing news are widely covered in special literature and recommendations for journalists from global broadcasters such as the BBC, regulated by standards and reflected in ethical codes (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). We will mention the main features of news reporting, but we will pay more attention to news about disasters and other emergencies, because such reports have their own peculiarities, and the degree of responsibility of the journalist who reports these news is significantly higher.

The traditional approach to writing news is to use the inverted pyramid formula, which is a special organization of the message structure, when the journalist presents the most important information at the beginning of the message, then the details of the event, possibly comments from participants or eyewitnesses, and at the end - additional information that can help the reader to understand the event more fully (Kovach, & Rosenstiel, 2014).

When preparing a news story, a journalist always operates with facts, and they are selected independently or from reliable sources, often reflecting the official (confirmed) position, but the facts and their sources should be carefully checked. The key feature of a fact is that it is cognizable through the senses. That is, what has happened can always be seen, heard, or recorded with a camera or TV camera. Evaluation of facts, their importance and significance are not the object of news journalism; the audience evaluates facts based on the journalist's reports. It is assumed that eyewitnesses' comments may contain assessments of what happened, so the journalist should be careful with quotes, involve competent and informed sources, because such assessments can become an expression of the audience's attitude to the facts described (Weishenber, 2011).

News occurs when new facts appear. When writing about disasters or other emergencies, the emergence of facts is obvious, but at the same time, facts have certain characteristics that journalists should take into account. First of all, it is worth paying attention to the scale of the emergency. News about a disaster, especially for people living near the place where it happened or more broadly in the disaster region, creates a situation of anxiety and uncertainty. A journalist at the scene may also have different psychological states, and therefore, while doing his or her work, must take into account his or her own subjectivity, pointing out the scale of the disaster situation, the threat of its spread to the local or regional level - it is necessary to have reliable measurements, primarily from official sources. Such sources can be disaster response structures, primarily headquarters or other disaster management structures, relevant public services, firefighters, medics, military and other structures.

As a reminder, official information and comments that define the position of agencies are published on official resources, provided through spokespersons or press secretaries, and are not always as prompt as a journalist would like. In such situations, it is better to indicate that official information will be provided

in the near future than to provide unverified information that may increase the level of anxiety. A journalist should also understand that his or her news can be disseminated to a wide global audience, and thus draw attention to the event, and for some time shape the agenda for many people and organizations, so providing unverified, unofficial information is not allowed.

These rules are defined by the standards of journalistic activity and apply in societies where there are no restrictions on freedom of speech and the political system provides for a wide range of democratic rights and freedoms. In other situations, official information may be incomplete or not timely, and in order to avoid panic and destabilization of the situation, official authorities may restrict access to information, as, for example, during the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant reactor, when a May Day demonstration was held in Kyiv a few days after the accident, the population was not informed about the possible consequences and threats, although the distance to the center of radiation damage was about 100 kilometers (Plokhy, 2018).

Along with official structures, information can be provided by non-governmental organizations and monitoring centers that monitor environmental or social processes, study the dynamics of natural phenomena or technical conditions with the help of sophisticated technological equipment and may be located outside the region or the country as a whole. The journalist should remember that his or her news may be the first or tenth in the discourse of information presentation of the event, but it will definitely not be the last, so it is better to present only verified information, leaving doubtful data to be confirmed and published in the next news.

It is also important to be wary of presenting data that may be restricted for security reasons, especially in areas of military conflict and natural emergencies that involve evacuation of the population. In particular, the indication or reference to precise addresses can be used by one of the parties to a military conflict to clarify the location of the damage, information about the resettlement of specific objects can attract the attention of thieves or other antisocial elements, so the dissemination of such information is regulated, sometimes at the level of not just recommendations, but legislation, and the journalist must fully comply with these requirements (Simpson, 2011).

Caution should be exercised in communicating the consequences of disasters for facilities that pose an environmental or other threat, such as hazardous chemical production facilities, fuel depots, or military depots - information about the possible consequences for the population as a result of the disaster zone spreading to such facilities should be carefully verified and officially confirmed to avoid panic. In most situations, the authorities are clearly aware of the possible threats, have plans and mechanisms to protect the population, and apply them promptly enough. Unverified and biased information can cause panic, which increases the number of victims and raises the level of anxiety in society.

Another important feature of preparing news about disasters is working with eyewitnesses: their vision and conclusions are not always objective, these people are usually under stress, may not distinguish between the individual and the general, confuse cause and effect, and are not able to navigate the situation. Therefore, along with eyewitnesses' comments, it is worthwhile to present comments from representatives of government services or structures working to eliminate the consequences of emergencies or protect the population from these consequences. The media audience has the right to receive accurate and reliable information about an event, and the degree of accuracy and reliability depends on the journalist's professionalism. In case of doubts or uncertainty about specific data, it is better to postpone reporting it for the next news items (UNESCO, 2017).

While preparing this text, a missile attack from Russia hit Lviv region, and a local Telegram channel provided very clear information that was consistent with the conditions of war and journalistic standards:

a short video (10 seconds) of the missile crater was filmed promptly, before official services and spokespeople were notified. The text that accompanied the video: "a huge crater caused by a missile hit in Lviv region". While we do not welcome the use of estimates in this news item (the word "huge"), we would like to note the professionalism of the journalists who reported the incident, did not provide any unverified information, and continued the topic in subsequent news items.

Traditionally, news should answer the questions "What?" ("Who?"), "Where?" "When?". Sometimes the answer to the question 'Why?' is added to this list. These components of the news text determine the techniques of writing a message and have their own peculiarities when reporting on disasters or emergencies. The key to such reports is answering the question "What happened?". In his work, a journalist should take into account not only the above-mentioned aspects, but also the attention to his message from the international audience, which is not mandatory, but possible, so it is worth operating exclusively with confirmed facts. It is considered acceptable not to emphasize the time of the event for regular news, because the key factor in the quality of the news is its promptness, i.e. the event is not too far away from the moment the news is published, and news agencies have standards for the time to prepare a report after the event, in some situations this time is measured in minutes. At the same time, when preparing materials about disasters, it is important to indicate the time coordinates of when the disaster occurred and how long it has been going on. This gives grounds for assessing the scale of the emergency and determines the directions of response to the event (Mencher, & Poindexter, 2018).

The answer to the question "Who" in disaster communications is not only the victims, but also the structures and people involved in the response or public safety. Identifying official or civil society organizations involved in the disaster not only meets the requirement of completeness of information, but also allows your colleagues and other organizations to receive information and direct assistance. It is also worth using comments from official representatives of the structures involved in localizing the disaster or eliminating its consequences. These comments reduce the level of anxiety, at least in a geographically broader context - at the level of a region or country. Journalists should remember that not all information available to them (even provided by official sources) can remain unchanged, so we recommend documenting not only facts but also messages for their own archive, as situations may arise that require confirmation or refutation of certain messages, and it is good that in the digital age it is enough to simply take a screenshot or photo and place it in a reliable cloud storage.

The last important element of the disaster news technique is the system of facts. In this sense, news is a more convenient way of presenting information than, for example, a report, because the sequence of presentation is dictated by the event and its reproduction while maintaining the effect of presence. In a news story, a journalist can structure the facts from more important to less impressive, identify facts of the first, second or nth level, and emphasize their importance, taking into account the needs of the audience. We also advise you to read the recommendations of the BBC and national journalistic unions and associations on covering national and international emergencies (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019).

Reportage is one of the most popular journalistic genres and, along with news, the most widely read. These genres have a lot in common: presentation of information based on the principle of an inverted pyramid, attention to the facts that form the basis of the message, reliability, accuracy and completeness of the facts - all these features are characteristic of both news and reportage. The peculiarity of a report is that it, firstly, conveys the atmosphere from the scene of the event, which means that the journalist is directly present at the scene of the disaster; secondly, the focus of the report is always on the person, his or her emotions and perceptions, which increases the requirements for the journalist's work, including the objective approach and the ability to avoid subjectivity (Pavliv, 2015).

The technique of preparing for a report has its own peculiarities, and the first thing to start with is to realize that the journalist has to understand the place and conditions in which he or she will work. This also includes personal safety and minimal provision for one's own needs, requirements for technical equipment and the ability to save and transmit footage, approvals and permits for work - first of all, accreditation if access to the emergency zone is restricted (and it is usually restricted), and compliance with other rules and requirements, which will be the subject of a separate section of our course (Foster, 2012).

The next stage is to define the idea and create a list of facts and situations that will be reflected in the report. The peculiarity of disaster reporting is that a journalist cannot always predict what exactly he or she will cover, so you should prepare for the fact that some facts and situations will be unplanned, commentators and eyewitnesses will be unpredictable. And getting comments from official sources will require additional efforts. A photo or video report will require special preparation, because the footage should not only reflect the event in full. It must also meet safety requirements and not violate the rights of third parties, including juveniles.

When preparing a report at the scene of an event, it is necessary to devote a significant amount of time to observing the situation and the people in it in order to be able to correctly convey the atmosphere of the event. It is appropriate to quote the opinion of Volodymyr Tarasyuk, a genre researcher and author of numerous reports: "Remember: any organized event or an ordinary, but attractive phase in the work is the result of the work of people who play a certain important role in public life. It does not matter who they are: a wise shepherd with a flock of sheep in the mountains, a tireless harvester in the steppe, a courageous firefighter at a fire station, a cold-blooded doctor in a surgical unit, or an energetic baker who also makes delicious bread with his or her careful hands. The important thing is to tell vividly about such workers, what they do; to convey the course of the event, empathizing with them, through appropriate reproduction with colorful details. A remark by Polish journalist and "king of reportage" R. Kapuscinski is appropriate here: "The text should be written in such a way that even those who know the topic perfectly are also surprised. And, of course, to do this, you need to spend a lot of time with the heroes of your reports." Do not spare extra minutes (and even hours) for this" (Tarasiuk, 2022).

An important feature of preparing a report on emergencies is to reflect the atmosphere in which the journalist works and which is felt at the scene. Along with the visuals, one should not forget about other factors that will affect the perception of the material: soundtrack that reflects the audio background of the event and the pace of the broadcast, and the dynamism of the coverage. The latter feature requires both special instructions from the media person and a willingness to convey information about the event in short phrases (as a rule, the dynamics of the activities of services and structures that eliminate the consequences of disasters is quite high, people working at the scene of emergencies or affected by them are emotionally excited). The readiness to maintain the chosen pace depends on the awareness of the situation and the ability to freely operate with a fairly large array of facts - in this case, a high pace of broadcasting can be maintained. If the journalist does not have such awareness, he or she can use the dynamics of changing the frame to achieve the intended effect.

Regarding the preparation of a report, we should emphasize the approaches and views of researchers that can be considered controversial, especially given the national standards of media practice: the qualification of types of reporting, including analytical and artistic journalism. These interpretations of reporting require separate training of journalists and their possession of certain skills. An analytical report is interpreted as a journalistic material in which the author compares (contrasts) facts, based on which he/she draws conclusions or pushes the audience to certain conclusions. To prepare for this type of report, a journalist must have a deep understanding of the topic, a sufficient set of facts and comments, taking into account that these may be opposing or simply different assessments of a disaster or emergency, and the comparison of these facts or comments is not always obvious. That is, this type of reporting

requires systematic analytics not only to draw conclusions, but also at the stage of selecting material and structuring it in the piece (Mencher&Poindexter, 2000).

Artistic and journalistic reporting focuses on creating a selected, sensual picture in the material. It is dominated by emotions, which are essentially also facts, but given the subject matter of our manual - disasters and emergencies - usually facts aimed at sympathy and empathy. It is worth emphasizing that emotions of gratitude, confidence in overcoming the disaster, and the reflection of the effectiveness of people and structures can be quite logical here, as all these elements create the atmosphere of the event, while not directly reflecting the journalist's assessment. And although the task of such materials is to reflect sensitivity with the help of facts, the journalist should be guided by compliance with standards and ethical principles. Russia's military aggression in Ukraine has led to the appearance of a large number of materials in which victims of minors appear in the frame, often without reserving their rights. Such actions of the journalist are intended to form sympathy among the audience, but we believe that it is necessary to adhere to ethical codes and standards in any situation.

The above general guidelines for reporting on disasters are not a complete and definitive list. Let's start with the requirement for journalists to coordinate their activities at the disaster site with the relevant authorities, of course, if this is possible; to take care of their safety; to take into account the peculiarities of working at the scene, including extreme ones; to professionally assess the facts, to take comments from official or sufficiently informed sources who are not casual eyewitnesses or victims; when working with eyewitnesses, it is necessary to take into account their emotional state and the ability to objectively assess the events.

## Structural Elements in Disaster News (Headline, Lead, etc.)

The most common and appropriate headline about a disaster or emergency is the so-called "news headline". This is the type of headline that contains information about the event, the fact of the disaster, figures or other data that make it possible to understand the scale of the event. Two key principles are important when formulating a headline: the facts should be verified or obtained from reliable (official) sources; the journalist should avoid excessive emotionality and the presentation of facts that can be interpreted ambiguously, pose a threat and influence the emergence of panic. The headline should also pay attention to the localization of the event, if it is relevant, and the information is presented for the first time in general or for the first time for the national media, as the material may be disseminated by international media, so it is important to clearly indicate the location of the emergency or disaster.

Another recommendation is to match the photo or other visual elements to the headline. By the nature of information perception, the headline and photo are the elements that first attract attention, usually the headline comes first, especially if it is posted in a news feed, while the mismatch between the headline and photo can be misleading or cause reactions, speculation and other flaws in the perception of the material that are not intended by the author (Associated Press, 2020).

The lead is the next sentence after the headline, which contains the main idea of the message, details and expands on the headline. As a rule, it is read immediately after the headline, and in video reports, it is voiced in the first phrase. The peculiarity of the lead is to give the audience an opportunity to understand the scale of the event, the place and time when it happened, and potential threats or consequences. In text messages, the lead is highlighted visually to separate it from both the headline and the main body of the message. Some researchers call the headline and the lead a headline complex, after which the communicator decides whether to read more about the news. The recommendations for preparing journalistic materials define the volume of a lead as a maximum of 30-40 words, but this applies more to

analytics, for informational messages the length of the lead should be significantly shorter, 10-15 words are enough to explain the information contained in the headline.

After the headline and lead, the journalist presents the main facts, comments and other information about the event. When preparing this information, it is recommended to follow the principle of an inverted pyramid, presenting more important information at the beginning, and comments and less important facts at the end of the message. It is important to adhere to the volumes recommended by the media for materials of this genre, as these requirements may vary in each case. The same requirements are used when preparing a report. Research and observations by scientists and editors prove (Dovzhenko, 2018) that in most cases, the news is not read to the end, the first few sentences are important, so the principle of the reverse pyramid ensures that the most important thing in the message is perceived, and therefore the idea of the material is conveyed to the audience.

Images, along with headlines, are often key elements that capture audience interest and attention. Several important guidelines should be followed when using images. First, any illustrations accompanying a news story must clearly indicate the source and respect copyright laws. Second, if an image published with the news does not depict the actual scene of the event, it is mandatory to clearly label the photo as illustrative. Third, images of children and adolescents under 18 can only be included in journalistic materials if two conditions are met: the images must not violate the rights of the children, and the journalist must have obtained consent for publication from their parents or guardians. While such photos are sometimes used illustratively - for example, to highlight violations of the rules of warfare or to evoke empathy - they can also be harmful to the children depicted, and their publication is therefore subject to specific regulations. Journalists should be mindful that any photo or video material can potentially violate an individual's privacy. Therefore, they must carefully consider the appropriateness of such images, keeping in mind that respecting personal privacy is a fundamental principle of media activity, as detailed in guidelines such as the BBC's Editorial Guidelines or other relevant national guidelines (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019).

Other restrictions on the use of visual materials are imposed by the conditions and situation of emergencies. For example, during armed conflicts, it is not advisable to detail the locations of weapons damage, indicate specific addresses, or publish information and images that could give an advantage to one of the parties to the conflict. Russia's war against Ukraine proves the importance and absolute necessity of this approach. Publishing images or texts that can be used to establish a location is not only prohibited by certain legislative acts, but such actions lead to additional victims. The history of this conflict knows of situations where information about the location of a missile or bomb strike, quickly disseminated on social networks or media, caused repeated strikes on the same location, resulting in an increase in the number of victims, often at the expense of firefighters, medics, police or the Ministry of Emergency Situations, who were eliminating the consequences of the previous strike.

A journalist should consciously choose sources of information and experts who comment on an event. Above, we have already talked about working with eyewitnesses and direct participants, about the need to take into account their emotional state and the objectivity of their assessment of the situation. Official sources and representatives of disaster relief headquarters provide more complete and reliable information, but you should take into account the degree of competence and integration of your expert into the situation. Such sources do not always have a sufficient level of knowledge about the situation. For example, medical professionals working on the scene and helping victims may not have information about the number of people who have been treated or killed in the disaster. Such information with a high level of reliability can be obtained some time after the event from representatives of the police or other authorities, such as a spokesperson for the disaster response headquarters, when this information is collected and verified. A journalist, like no one else, should understand that information is a product that

requires time, effort and adherence to technology, only then can we talk about the quality of this product (Boyd, 2007).

The background context of the message is optional, but is usually used when the situation is evolving and the audience may not have information about the previous state or situation of the disaster. The function of the background is to briefly introduce the situation and to evaluate the new event against this background. Therefore, the background should contain reliable, verified information that has already been published about the event (usually by the same media outlet or journalist). According to practitioners and scholars (Dovzhenko, 2018), the background is not always read by the audience, which does not negate the requirements for consistency and reliability of the information contained in it.

## The Use of Language in Disaster News

**Language is an important tool for reporting on disasters and their aftermath.**

Language is an important tool for reporting on disasters and their aftermath. Video and photo materials certainly provide us with visual evidence of events, but the content, importance, and specificity often depend to a greater extent on the journalist's command of the word and the appropriate and correct use of language tools. *Homo verbo agens* - man acts with words. First of all, it should be emphasized that information genres require journalists to avoid stylistically marked vocabulary in their materials, which demonstrates the journalist's attitude and assessment of the situation. This rule is due to the fact that the audience should form its own conclusion about the event based on the message, and the journalist should remain impartial.

At the same time, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to realize the declared impartiality in stories about disasters and other emergencies. In 2022, after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a discussion was held among journalism university profes-

sors and students about the use of language units that have all the signs of hate speech and hostility for materials about the course of military events, war crimes and the consequences of hostilities, including in situations where civilians suffered. A video address was delivered by Oleksandr Chekmyshev, a professor at the Institute of Journalism who specializes in the issue of compliance with standards and who at the time became a territorial defence officer. In the video (<http://journ.knu.ua/zhurnalistyka-pid-chas-vivyny/>), he emphasized that journalism during war is "completely different" and that it is not always possible to comply with standards, and he raised a number of issues that are still being discussed today. The video was viewed by more than 4,000 people, which is quite a lot given that the total number of students in Ukrainian higher education institutions studying journalism programs at the time was about 5,000 (Chekmyshev, 2022).

The requirements for journalists' speech should be formulated in several areas: First, journalists should avoid emotional and evaluative vocabulary, especially in news genres. Second, they must refrain from using hate speech and language that incites hostility. Third, adherence to stylistic requirements is essential, with a preference for short sentences and a consistent, logical flow of thought. Fourth, journalists should follow established rules for presenting digital and statistical data, using comparisons or providing

Journalists should avoid emotional and evaluative vocabulary, especially in news genres.

Journalists should carefully consider the peculiarities of using such terminology, taking into account ethical codes, standards and legislation governing the interpretation and definition of certain concepts.

nature that qualify the situation is actualized in speech or formed. In their work, journalists should carefully consider the peculiarities of using such terminology, taking into account ethical codes, standards and legislation governing the interpretation and definition of certain concepts.

It should be noted that during the military operations in Ukraine, the situation with the use of language units and compliance with standards, including the use of terms, has stabilized (Journalism standards during wartime..., 2023). In the professional environment, these issues remain relevant but to a greater extent for studying the situation and monitoring the dynamics of these processes at the national level.

clear explanations of values. Fifth, abbreviations and complex terms should be presented with accompanying explanations for clarity. Sixth, factual accuracy is paramount, with special attention given to the names of individuals, expert titles, and - crucially in cases of human-made disasters- the correct spelling of chemical names, compound names, or other elements related to the damage. Finally, accuracy in the use of terminology is essential (Buromenskyi, 2016).

It is worth noting that expressiveness and emotionality in the comments of victims or participants of events is allowed, but the journalist should take into account that his or her material may increase panic and uncertainty, and therefore be careful about the use of emotions in the material. The concept of accuracy in the material requires special attention. It seems clear and obvious to verify information about personal data and names, which are listed at number 6, but there is a range of other issues that require careful consideration by journalists.

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, there were numerous discussions and recommendations among Ukrainian media law practitioners and experts on the use of general terms that would allow writing about situations and consequences in accordance with standards and norms. In 2016, a manual for journalists was published with the support of the OSCE: "Journalism in Conflict, which contains a separate section on the terminology that should be used in materials" (Buromenskyi, M. et al., 2016). By these terms we understand such definitions as international armed conflict, state of war, aggression, non-international armed conflict, combatants, non-combatants, war crimes, etc

The use and application of these terms to describe the situation did not always correspond to the norm and interpretation of the situation by the legislation of European countries and international documents. This example proves that as a result of any emergency situation, a range of terms or names of a terminological

## Final Check of the Disaster Report

This stage of a journalist's work is important and necessary given the significance of the information disseminated, which can lead to a number of decisions and events for many people: both those at the disaster site and those organizing aid and support, including at the international level. The key stages of a journalist's review of a story are as follows: First, ensuring compliance with journalistic standards, especially regarding the accuracy, completeness, and reliability of information. Second, verifying adherence to ethical codes and norms. Third, checking the clarity and informativeness of the headline and lead. Fourth, assessing the relevance and appropriateness of the photo. Fifth, evaluating the appropriate use of language, as well as the consistency and logic of the presentation. Sixth, confirming the thoroughness of the background information. Seventh, determining the relevance to the needs of the audience, including accessibility of the presentation. Eighth, verifying compliance with the requirements of the media outlet's editorial policy, particularly concerning the protection of rights and privacy of the subjects of the material. And finally, considering the suitability of the material for distribution by other media, including international outlets.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of conditions that must be met before the material is published; in addition, the journalist must take care of the safety of the characters, especially minors, and ensure the consent of their parents or guardians, make sure that information about the location of the emergency does not harm those living at the scene or its participants; in addition, other aspects may arise, depending on the nature and course of events. The key aspect of a journalist's work at this stage is responsibility, both social responsibility for supporting and consolidating efforts to eliminate the consequences of the disaster and personal responsibility for the facts of the position and assessment that may be caused by the published material.

## Examples of Successful Disaster Journalism

We will begin this section with the story of Gareth Jones, the first journalist to tell the world about the artificially created catastrophe, the Holodomor in Ukraine. There are many studies about his activities and position, the Polish director Agnieszka Holland made the film Mr. Jones, and in Ukraine, the Gareth Jones Medal was established at the Institute of Journalism, which is awarded to researchers of the Holodomor, an artificial disaster that the journalist wrote about in the 1930s.(Kan, 2023). More information can be found on the BBC website.

To learn more about the most successful reports, you should familiarize yourself with national registers and indicators from the series "TOP X Disaster Stories" (Belousova, 2023), as well as the list of such disasters. The attention to regional aspects is due to the following factors: in these publications, you can see not only the success and significance of individual materials, but also feel the audience's reaction to the events, because it was thanks to views and comments that these materials made it to the national TOP. In addition, such materials show the peculiarities of the presentation structure and the journalist's language, which focused the audience's attention. In addition, it is worth taking into account the promptness of the material, the facts used by the author, and the distribution of the material outside the country or region. This experience will help identify and evaluate information requests on a national basis, reveal the subtleties and peculiarities of preparing such materials. There are also warnings: such materials will not always be fully compliant with standards and professional requirements, they may contain certain violations, such as the ethics of depicting minors, or (in military conflicts) hate speech. Therefore, the analysis of these materials should take into account the generally accepted rules and norms of journalist behaviour at the scene of an emergency.

**Journalists must be aware of their responsibility to society, avoiding the spread of information that could cause panic or misinformation.**

Successful disaster journalism is realized not only in the informational or analytical genres of the press or audiovisual communication media. Time is the most expressive factor that allows to realize the scale of a disaster and objectively assess its impact on social processes. Therefore, the list of examples of successful journalism should also include documentary books or collections of materials about the events that were published after some time and summarize the vision. Here, journalists often analyze the reasons for, and the feasibility of, certain measures, provide a carefully defined chronology, pay attention to the effectiveness of remedial actions, and characterize the participants in a fairly objective manner. In such materials, one can find a lot of eyewitness testimonies that are evaluated taking into account the time that has passed since the disaster and are a fairly objective reflection of those events.

Among the books worth reading are Dave Cullen “Columbine” (2019), Adam Higginbotham “Chernobyl. A History of the Disaster” (2019), Haruki Murakami “Underground” (2003), Sheri Fink “Five Days After the Disaster” (2023). We also recommend watching video reports about disasters that have gained a significant number of views around the world. The publications and materials listed above are not perfect in terms of different approaches to the theory of journalism, but they were recognized as quite eloquent by millions of audiences and therefore deserve to be studied to gain additional experience.

To summarize the above, we can outline a specific image of an ideal report about disasters of various origins. Accuracy and reliability are paramount, requiring thorough fact-checking of all information from various sources to avoid disseminating false or distorted data. Clearly referencing sources is crucial, especially for official statements, statistical data, and eyewitness accounts. Journalists should strive for objective coverage, avoiding emotionally coloured assessments and judgments. Completeness and comprehensiveness are also essential, covering all important aspects of the disaster, including causes, extent of damage, number of victims, rescue operations, and more. Presenting diverse viewpoints, such as expert opinions, eyewitness accounts, and government comments, is vital. Providing context for the events, explaining the disaster’s causes, potential consequences, and historical background, adds depth and understanding.

Efficiency and timeliness demand a rapid response to events, informing the audience promptly about the developing situation, and regular updates to keep them abreast of the latest changes. Accessibility and clarity are key, using simple, understandable language and avoiding jargon or complex grammar. Visualization through photographs, videos, infographics, and other visual aids makes the information more accessible and understandable. Finally, ethical considerations must be observed. Respect for victims and their families is crucial, avoiding excessive drama or sensationalism. Adhering to confidentiality principles and protecting personal information is vital. Journalists must be aware of their responsibility to society, avoiding the spread of information that could cause panic or misinformation. Adherence to these factors will help journalists create high-quality, responsible reports about natural or man-made disasters, benefiting society and contributing to recovery efforts.

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

News stories about disasters and emergencies have their own peculiarities, but are generally governed by the same norms, standards and codes of ethics as all news journalism. In this paragraph, we focus on a few important approaches for journalists to be prepared to write about disasters. A journalist should take care of safety. This rather broad aspect includes the safety of the journalist while preparing the material, the safety of his or her characters and those working at the disaster site. In addition, the issue of safety is usually interpreted more broadly and involves avoiding unnecessary tension in society and reducing the risk of panic. All these aspects are important in the work of a media professional and can be triggered even by a single news report if a journalist violates the rules and guidelines for preparing materials about disasters.

Professionalism, which we understand here as readiness to work in a disaster area, which is manifested in knowledge of the characteristics of the most likely disasters and the procedure for dealing with such emergencies (fires, natural disasters, man-made disasters, military conflicts); possession of journalistic tools (knowledge of how to write/record and professional technologies and features of using professional tools); psychological readiness and resilience; readiness to take responsibility for working in emergency conditions.

Social responsibility - the journalist's awareness of the consequences of his or her work for many people, both in the emergency area and in a much broader context, given the possibilities of the digital world. The social function of journalism is most pronounced in situations where people's lives depend on the work of a journalist, when, based on publications, fellow citizens and people from other countries receive reliable and complete information that enables them to make decisions and guarantees basic human values.

News about disasters usually has a significant number of views and shares, making the journalist well known and raising the ratings of publications, but it is much more important that thanks to the work of a journalist, people can save their health and lives, avoid losses, find a way out of difficult situations based on timely information, believe in recovery after a disaster and find opportunities to actively participate in post-disaster life.

At the end of this section, students who will take this course will have the following achievements.

- **Students can analyse news focused on disaster events in detail.**
- **Students can perform technical and structural audits of disaster news.**
- **Students can perform editorial control of disaster news.**
- **Students can publish information using various media platforms and other sources and involve audiences in discussions on important issues.**
- **Students can communicate effectively with audiences to ensure the formation of objective public opinion and the strengthening of society.**



## Self-Assessment

1 Which of the following elements does a news story NOT contain?

- Headline and lead
- Comments from victims, witnesses, officials and other sources
- The journalist's conclusions
- Background.

2 What is the most important characteristic of a disaster news story?

- Promptness of the information
- Display of comments from participants
- Reflection of facts
- The news should be accompanied by a visual (photo or video)

3 What is the difference between a news item and a report?

- A news item is shorter and can be more immediate.
- The news does not require the personal presence of a journalist, the information can be obtained through digital technologies.
- The news can be based only on the reports of official sources and spokespersons.
- All of the above.

4 In which situation should a report be preferred to cover a disaster?

- The report has been ordered by the editorial office
- You are better at writing this genre than others.
- You are on the scene.
- Your readers don't know anything about the disaster yet, and you can report on it in detail. can report in detail and in full.

5 What are the requirements for sources of information when writing a disaster news story?

- Journalists should only talk to those affected by the disaster.
- Information should be gathered from sources encountered at the scene.
- Information should be obtained from sources whose competence can be established and confirmed by the journalist.
- Only official sources and spokespersons should be used.

6 Which of the following should not be included in a good disaster headline?

- Information about the nature of the disaster or the type of disaster.
- The date and time of the disaster.
- The journalist's impression of the disaster.
- Information about the location of the disaster.

7 What should be the image in a news story about a disaster?

- Any image is allowed
- The journalist sets the requirements for the images in the news
- The journalist is guided by laws and ethical codes, paying special attention to the dissemination of sensitive content and images of minors.
- The journalist coordinates visual content with the authorities coordinating the disaster response.

8 What features of language use in disaster news should a journalist consider?

- The journalist's speech should be free, appropriate to the situation and his/her feelings.
- The journalist should use only the language of the official style, to avoid additional assessments and comments.
- The journalist's speech should be based on professional standards, and the journalist cannot use emotionally evaluative vocabulary in his/her text
- The journalist should use comments and assessments that contain scientific substantiation of the emergency event and thus ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information reported.

9 What is the threat of journalist's emotionality when covering disasters?

- Emotionality can create panic.
- Emotionality can lead to misconceptions.
- Emotionality can alter the perception of the magnitude of an event and affect objectivity.
- All of the above.

10 What data should be taken into account by the algorithm for verifying a disaster report before publication?

- Accuracy of proper names, place names, dates, times and other objective facts
- Relevance and completeness of the event coverage
- Ethical aspects of professional standards and compliance with the law.
- All of the above

## Answer Key

1.c, 2.c, 3.c, 4.c, 5.c, 6.c, 7.c, 8.c, 9.d, 10.c

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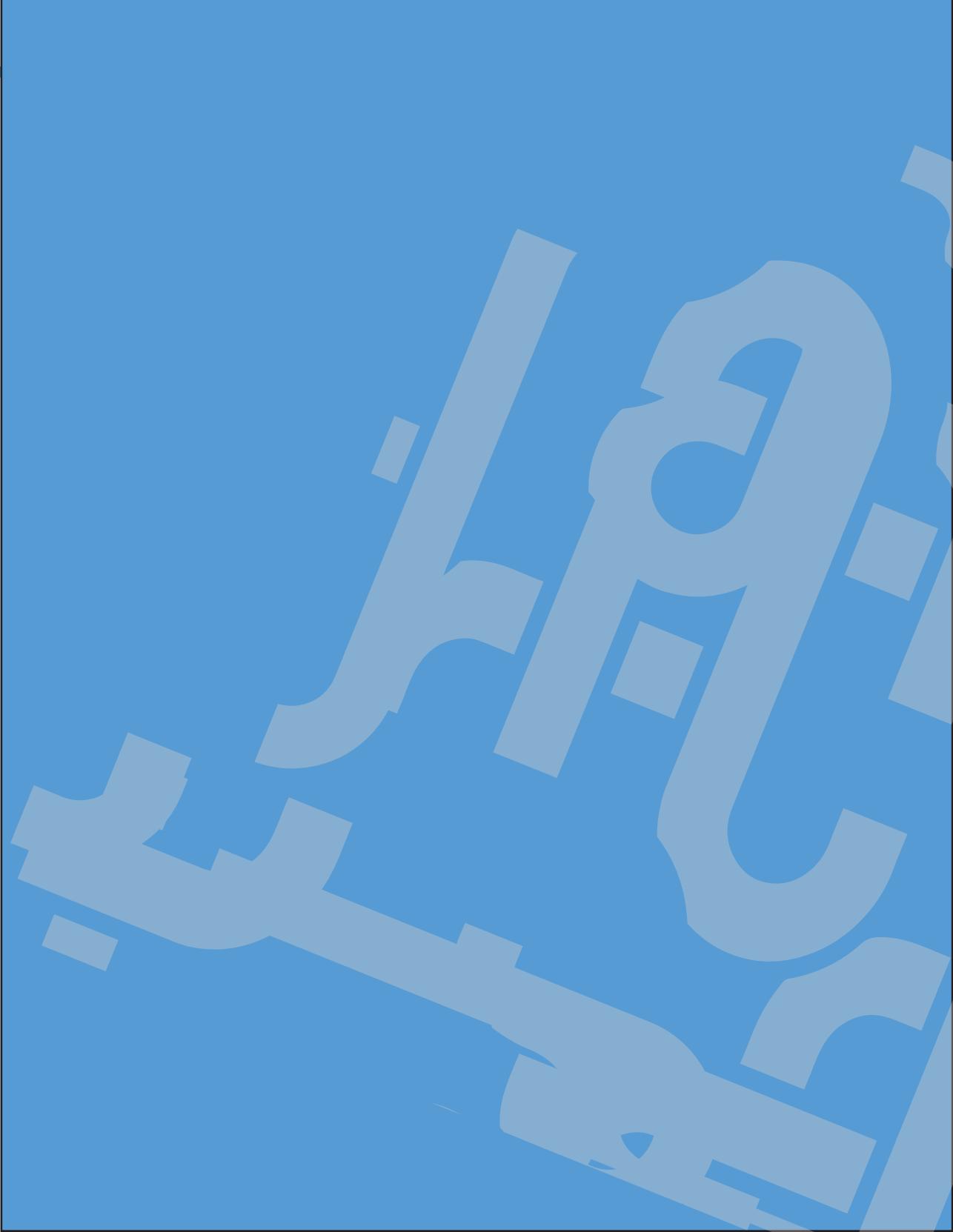
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# EDITORIAL OVERSIGHT IN DISASTER REPORTING

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# BOOK CHAPTER 11

## EDITORIAL OVERSIGHT IN DISASTER REPORTING

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Content Review of Disaster News**
- **Structural Review in Disaster News**
- **The inverted pyramid and the 5W + 1H**
- **Source Verification in Disaster News**
- **Ethical Oversight in Disaster News**
- **Legal and Ethical Responsibilities in Disaster Journalism**
- **Visual Review in Disaster News**
- **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**
- **Self-Assessment**
- **References**



**In the face of events of the magnitude of a disaster, editorial supervision should not only fall on the editor of the media; the reporter should be the first editor of his or her own work.**

## Introduction

Disasters due to natural or human causes are events of maximum public interest, which is why their journalistic coverage demands a higher degree of responsibility than that of reviews or news that saturate the mass media and do not require investigative, reflective and on-site reporting work, as is required in disaster coverage.

In the face of events of the magnitude of a disaster, editorial supervision should not only fall on the editor of the media; the reporter should be the first editor of his or her own work. This is even more so in the case of small media outlets or freelance journalists, as they often do not have an editor.

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction through its guide “Disasters seen through a lens” (Leoni, B., Radford, T., & Schulman, M., 2011), at the editorial level, recommends that the media should have an internal policy on disaster coverage and journalists

specialized in the subject, something that is usually only applied in large media; have a plan to issue early warnings; allow time, space and resources for research on the causes of the disaster; and “understand the role you can play in policy changes” in covering a disaster (p.86).

A good starting point for the coverage of these events begins with a conversation between editor and correspondent to discuss elements such as the language to be used; the angle from which the topic will be approached; the magnitude of the disaster and its impact on public opinion; the type of stories to be told; a review of previous disasters in the area or disasters of similar characteristics in other parts of the world; content to be produced (news, reports, chronicles, interviews, data visualization and any other product); exchange of sources and contacts such as local authorities and institutions dedicated to the prevention, study and mitigation of disasters; allies of the media and journalists in the area. Often this conversation cannot take place face to face in an office, but it can take place via telephone or video call while the correspondent is preparing to travel to the scene or during the trip.

Covering a disaster is one of the greatest professional and, of course, personal challenges a journalist faces. Despite the dynamism of reality itself and the lack of knowledge of what new events may occur in the middle of the coverage, in scenarios where reality surpasses fiction, keeping in mind the fundamentals of journalistic ethics and the news fact are key elements.

One of those fundamentals is to stick to the 5Ws + 1H. In situations of distress or uncertainty, the public looks to the journalist for answers to understand what is happening and to think about the consequences. These are usually complex answers, so the criterion that all news should clearly state the 5W + 1H (who, what, where, when, why and how) should be maintained. Answering these questions will bring the journalist closer to verifiable facts and further away from imprecise messages or loaded with value judgments.

The verification of the information gathered, data and sources, along with adherence to the ethical practice of journalism committed to respecting the humanity of the victims and other people involved in a context of commotion such as a disaster, maintaining the confidentiality of sources if necessary in case of risk and safeguarding their integrity, are non-negotiable acts.

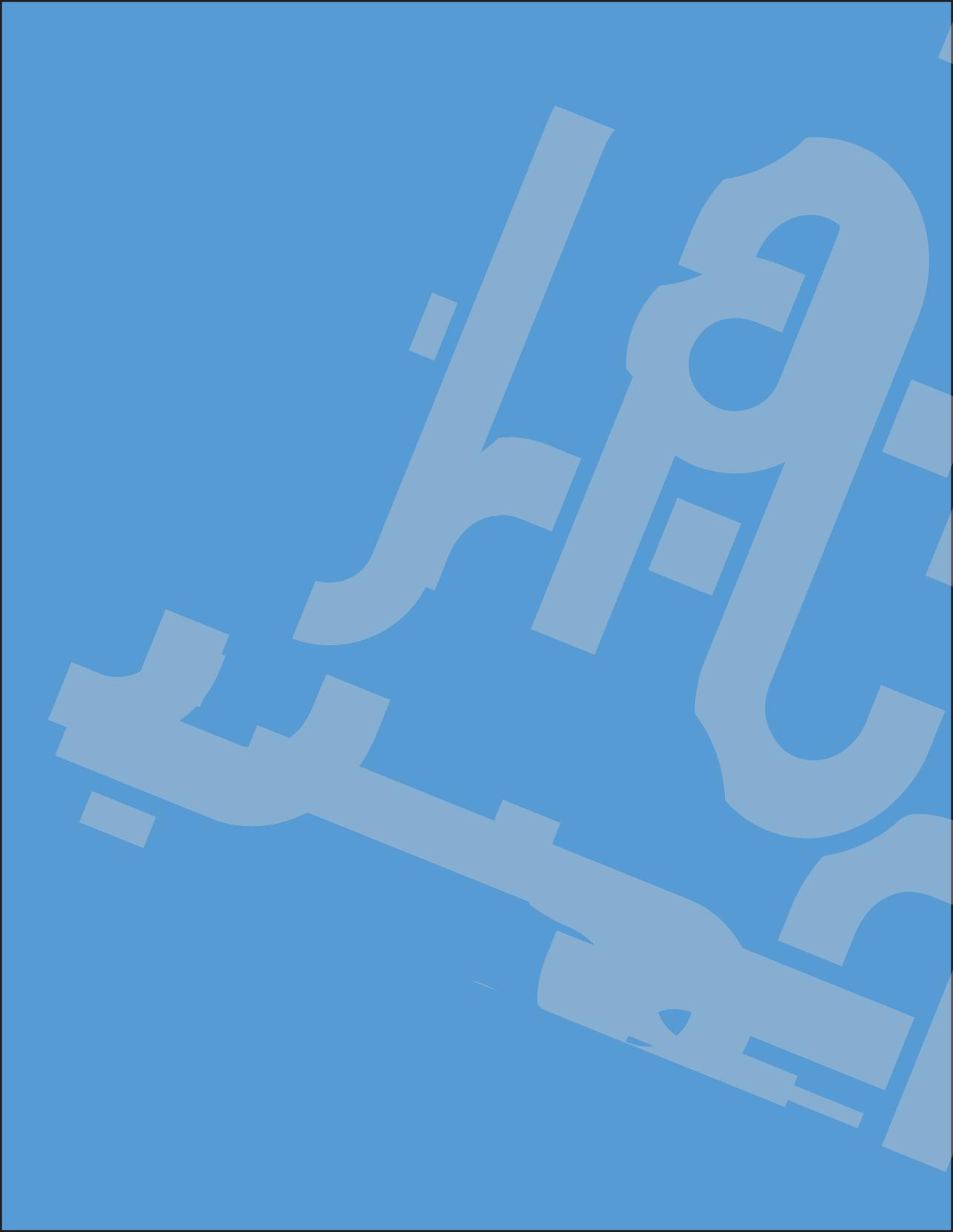
The verification of the information gathered, data and sources, along with adherence to the ethical practice of journalism committed to respecting the humanity of the victims and other people involved in a context of commotion such as a disaster, maintaining the confidentiality of sources if necessary in case of risk and safeguarding their integrity, are non-negotiable acts.

The news that aims only to produce viral content on the Internet and social networks, rather than to provide timely responses or to make events of extreme importance visible, as well as the sensationalist headline or clickbait for digital media, which along with the desire for personal recognition of editors and reporters, are unethical behaviours from which a journalist will not easily escape when incurring in these bad practices. Ethical and serious work in the coverage of a disaster is recognized by public opinion, but unethical actions are also strongly repudiated by audiences.

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## Key Concepts

This section will define six terms that cut across the content of this chapter. We refer to: veracity; fact-checking; primary sources; value judgments, public interest and empathy.

### Truthfulness

It is the attachment that any type of journalistic information of a news or reportage nature must have to real facts that are verifiable. It is authentic information without traces of manipulation and that has been ethically obtained through live or documentary sources.

### Fact-Checking

It is a practice within journalism that consists of corroborating the accuracy and veracity of the information before its publication. This process implies contrasting the data obtained, being cautious and not taking for granted that the information is reliable, even if it comes from official sources. This is even more important in a disaster scenario, an idea that is developed throughout this chapter.

The diversity of sources is in itself an exercise in verification, since it will be possible to measure whether the information is maintained or whether it changes drastically. In the case of disparity between sources, these should be clearly shown to the audience so that they can compare them and draw their own conclusions. Another option is to publish based on the authority of the source. These practices will give credibility to the journalist and the media.

### Primary source

They are the first means of direct or first-hand information to which a journalist goes to collect data about an event. There are other types of sources, which can also be primary, such as: original documents, testimonies, research results or any other evidence. In journalism, primary sources are fundamental to guarantee the accuracy and authenticity of the information.

### Value judgments

These are evaluations that a person makes based on his or her beliefs, principles or subjective criteria. It is the representation of an ideal that may or may not be opposed to another idea or act from a personal position. In journalism, it is essential to distinguish between objective facts and value judgments in order to maintain impartiality. The subjective load of value judgments biases any content.

### Public interest

Public interest is a common space that surpasses private interest and that can only be understood through democracy. In anti-democratic societies, the public interest will always be subordinated to the ideology of the power in power. This is why journalism is uncomfortable, persecuted or censored in authoritarian regimes, since in those models there is no room for free thought and denunciation, values inherent to journalism. The ability to disclose a fact that concerns society as a whole is a function of journalism that comes about thanks to the shared notion of public interest. In particular, information that contributes to the transparency of the socio-political and economic events of a nation, social control, the search for solutions and conscious decision making by citizens. Another characteristic of journalism is to have the responsibility and criteria to be able to justify the investigation and publication of certain sensitive issues, but of public interest, which are essential for the community.

## Empathy

It is the ability to understand and share the feelings, thoughts and experiences of another person. In journalism, empathy allows journalists to put themselves in the place of the other, a way to connect with their sources and audiences, to establish a more human communication that will be reflected in the construction of better stories and more interesting content for the audience.

And in the case of moments marked by a disaster, empathy gives recognition to the victim from the understanding of the internal and external conflict they live, the vulnerability and uncertainty to which they are exposed, a factor that demands respect and compassion from the journalist during their coverage.

## Content Review of Disaster News

Content review is one of the most important phases of disaster coverage. Whether it is done by an editor or by the reporter himself before publishing his work. It is a task that does not end with the publication, because of the relevance that a disaster has in any society, the evaluation of the contents must be continuous and that includes reviews after the dissemination of the material. This block can be divided into three points of interest: style, accuracy and privacy.

### Style

Regardless of the format, the editing process is evaluated to maintain a style that adheres to good journalistic practices. Clarity and conciseness of content are key points for a good result. In the case of a news item, the title and lead must be coherent and must convey the main ideas of the news item.

The spelling, syntax, narrative temporality, handling of cited sources and data related to figures must also be checked, in order to avoid confusion or inaccuracies regarding dates and times.

Unsubstantiated assertions and speculations should have no place in a journalistic product dedicated to a disaster. This is avoided by not using imprecise and generic terms; not modifying textual or indirect quotations without consulting the original source; not altering the meaning of the information; not transmitting contents about which there are doubts and which have not been verified; not making unfounded accusations and not putting the privacy and integrity of the sources at risk (Agencia EFE, 2022).

As a guide, the Spanish news agency EFE, in its style manual, shares a list of questions that can be of great help if they are answered at the time of editing:

- Do the ideas of the lead and the headline coincide and are they the most interesting in the news?
- Does the headline have all the articles, is it understood without the lead and is it the right one? ....
- Is the news correctly placed in time ("this Tuesday" ...)?
- Is it understood and does it have a clear and adequate structure?
- Does it answer the basic questions of the news? Are the what, who, where, when, how and why clear?
- Is it respectful of the indications on the treatment of sensitive issues?
- Is it correct from the point of view of spelling and syntax?
- Are quantities, percentages and sums, proper names and their repetitions correct?
- Are sources well identified and statements supported by quotation marks?
- Is there sufficient background and documentation, are there inaccuracies (some, many, rumor conditions of the type I might approve...)?

Are there unsubstantiated allegations or compromised mentions of entities or individuals?

Is the version appropriate for its intended audience? (Agencia EFE, 2022, p. 188).

## Accuracy

The handling of sensitive information in the context of a disaster entails a responsibility that makes the difference between coverage that is valued by audiences or rejected by public opinion in general. The origin of this information is the live or documentary sources, which is why each source must be clearly identified, especially in situations where there may be different versions and figures that oppose each other. For example, in the case of fatalities, during the first few days the data on victims and damage caused may be discrepant and inaccurate among different sources. In this case, it is necessary to work with a range, identifying the source of the lowest and highest figures. If this is not the case, the most authoritative source should be used (BBC, 2019).

The English news network BBC, in its editorial guide (2019), highlights a neuralgic point in the coverage. If so, if the journalist or the media is censored or coerced to disseminate or withhold certain information related to the disaster, it is a situation that must be made known openly and clearly to the audience so that they are aware of the problem and how it conditions the journalistic exercise and the information they receive. In addition to using respectful language, in order to speak of accuracy, it is a priority to use objective terms based on facts and that do not include any type of value judgment.

## Privacy

Respect for privacy is an element that cannot be lost sight of when reviewing content. Disasters generate victims and both the journalist and the media must be guarantors of respect for the integrity and suffering of these people and under no circumstances must they encourage a state of re-victimization. This precaution is even more important when we are talking about minors and people in vulnerable situations.

Just as when the source of the information is a person or a group that, due to reprisals, justified or not, asks the reporter not to reveal his or her identity, both the journalist and the editorial team cannot reveal the identity of the source.

Before publishing photographs and videos of disasters, it must be assessed whether these images may affect the victims. From an editorial point of view, certain content, of a graphic nature and not suitable for all audiences, may be justified as being of public interest. This is justified but should not compromise the dignity of the victims.

This caution and prudence is what differentiates between revealing and necessary content, as opposed to sensationalist content. The same applies to the use of hidden devices in order to obtain informative material, these practices are only justified for reasons of public interest that can be demonstrated (The Guardian, 2023). And in the event that the journalist, the editor, the media or the audience detects an error in the information disclosed, and in fact there is such an error, responsibility must be assumed openly and an apology must be requested if the situation warrants it.

## Structural Review in Disaster News

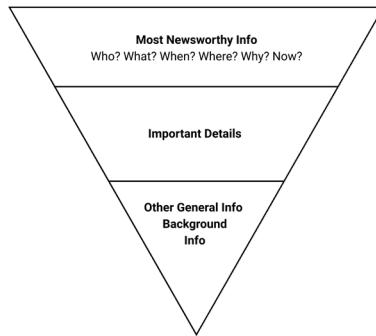
The structure of a news story, even though we are in a digital era with new narratives, has not changed much since its inception in terms of its mission: to inform in a timely and truthful manner.

In disaster conditions, in which the first hours may be marked by telecommunications failures depending on the magnitude of the damage, along with the explosive virality of rumors and fake news on social networks, the news demands immediacy.

### The inverted pyramid and the 5W + 1H

The inverted pyramid is a methodology designed for the construction of news that was adopted, in the middle of the 20th century, in the style manual of the Associated Press news agency under the requirement of the associated newspapers of: "just the facts, please" (Sánchez, J.F., 1993).

The structure suggests that the base of the pyramid should be at the top and should show the most interesting information through the title, subtitle and the lead is a brief description or summary that answers six questions 5W + 1H (who?, what?, where?, when?, why?, how?), then the body of the news and finally minor details (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. The inverted pyramid*

Note. "Inverted pyramid (journalism)" by Wikipedia.org, 2025 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Inverted\\_pyramid\\_2.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Inverted_pyramid_2.svg))

What is the importance of the 5W + 1H? It is a method that is easy for audiences to understand, since each question has its own reason for being. Who: shows the people, groups or organizations that are the protagonists of the news; What: it is about making known what happened, the event itself; Where: indicates the place where the events took place; When: frames the news within a time or moment, a date or an hour; Why: explains the causes of the event; and How: describes the way or process in which the events took place (Melvin Mencher, 2011; Herrscher R., 2009).

Although the inverted pyramid was designed for newspapers, it is currently valid for both print and digital media. The difference with these times, in addition to the digital leap and the consumption of content on screens, is the demand for greater immediacy and depth. A depth that is sought in the body of the news, through hyperlinks to other texts, images or videos that contextualize the information and offer a greater understanding of the news (Ramirez Gelbes, S., 2016).

The journalist's work cannot cause additional harm to the victim, and this starts from the language used and how it is used.

## Language

As mentioned in the "Content review of disaster news" block, the language of a news item must be precise and clear. Communicating and providing information of interest is a professional responsibility, but reporting in the midst of a scenario of shock and grief such as a disaster becomes a public service. So the language and tone of the news must match the moment.

The BBC (2019) notes that the news must strike a balance between information and compassion. The public interest and the dignity of the people affected must be in the same balance. The journalist's work cannot cause additional harm to the victim and this starts from the language used and how it is used. The news message must reflect a careful and sensitive tone to the emotional state of the collective affected by the disaster.

These precautions must be present from the first line of the text, that is: the title. It is just as delicate to publish a headline with unsubstantiated information as it is to publish a headline with a message that has nothing to do with the content of the news item. Bad practices, such as those described above, in addition to promoting disinformation, may foster unjustified distress in society, when the objective in a shock scenario should be to offer reliable information and avoid the propagation of rumors.

But in the case of audiovisual language, the risks and responsibilities in the coverage of a disaster are greater. The risks do not only stem from the reporter's physical integrity, but also from his or her criteria and responsibility not to cross a line that is difficult to appreciate: to what extent is it pertinent to publish an image that may hurt susceptibilities.

What divides the perception of a pertinent content from a grotesque one? What is the level that should not be exceeded when reporting a human tragedy? These questions can only be answered by being on the scene, observing what is happening, listening to the people affected and their demands, as well as exchanging ideas with the editorial team who may have a more focused view from afar.

A case that reflects this is Russia's invasion of Ukraine since 2022. Specifically, the attack on a maternity hospital by Russian forces in 2022. Mstyslav Chernov, Evgeniy Maloletka and Vasilisa Stepanenko are three reporters from the international agency Associated Press (AP), all three are Ukrainians, and were in that city at the time of the attack, being the only international reporters covering the massacre.

Their work together with journalist Lori Hinnant, earned them a Pulitzer Prize that we recommend to review. From this reportage and all the material obtained, the documentary "20 days in Mariupol" was made, winning international awards such as an Oscar.

The Kremlin thought that if there was no news, no one would know (ICFJ, 2022). The Russian propaganda said that their attacks did not target civilians and, even less, a motherhood, but the images and testimonies captured by these reporters showed the opposite. To the point that, because of their work, they became a Russian military target. They came to expose their lives, in the midst of the chaos and bombings, every time they searched for an area with a telephone signal so they could send their material to the agency and let the world know what was happening.

In this context, the documentary shows how in the midst of the destruction and massacre, the victims ask the reporters to please record everything, to continue recording no matter how hard it was (Chernov, 2023).

The language of the coverage and the tone was set by the victims with their demands, no more and no less: to show the reality of the moment as they record it. A reality such as a mass grave of children killed by Russian bombing or doctors trying to save the lives of children and pregnant women (<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-maternity-hospital-pregnant-woman-dead-c0f2f859296f9f02be-24fc9edfca1085>).



**Figure 2.** Devastation in Bucha, Ukraine

Note. "Devastation in Bucha, Ukraine" by rawpixel.com, 2022 (<https://www.rawpixel.com/image/6918365>)

Despite the request of most of the victims who asked them to record everything, some asked not to be recorded. The reporters made sure that these people did not appear in any of their content.

But even outside Ukraine, and even when faced with editing the footage, Chernov said that his biggest challenge was to find a balance. His intention was to show the experience of victims on the ground in an objective way, which meant having to show traumatic and devastating experiences. But he did not want to use a language that by showing strong images would normalize the war because he considers that war is something horrible, nor did he want to show a light version of the war and he wanted to be respectful and delicate towards the victims (Francis, 2023).

The work of these reporters, shows many things, but one of them is that the management of language in the coverage of a disaster needs constant questioning in order not to lose that balance that hangs by a thread. A search for balance that is maintained in the heat of the facts, in the field, and then at the time of editing.

### Reporting Techniques

A first approach to measure what information is of interest to the media's audience in relation to the disaster is to review the search trends in Google Trends, filtering by country and, if possible, by the region or city of the event. If the main searches are related to the disaster, offering information and answers about what the audience is worried about will be a good step. Once on the ground, it is recommended to remain calm; create clear, precise and compassionate content; and carefully select the words used in the news, in order to avoid generating panic (Potter, D. & Ricciardi S., 2009). A determining factor in disaster coverage is the understanding of the context. It is a scenario where anguish and possible traumatic events can alter the psychological normality of the affected people, so the reporter must be aware and act from empathy (Healey, J., 2022).

By empathizing, the journalist can grasp the situation better to obtain interviews and information, since the victims will perceive the journalist's respect for their situation and will understand the reporter's work. When requesting interviews with people who may be direct victims or who are susceptible to the disaster, it must be clear that they should not be pressured to grant the interview, much less harass them with calls, messages through social networks or emails and, even worse, remain in their home if they request the abandonment of their property before, during or after the interview (BBC, 2019).

Encouraging contact with affected people and community leaders, from transparency about the journalistic work that the reporter fulfills and the information they need, will allow them to have access to first-hand data and stories. This figure of a key contact in the field, in ethnography, is known as the gatekeeper. A person who will open the doors to the reality that the journalist must interpret and explain, in addition to being a key informant. An exercise that will make it easier for the reporter to understand the context surrounding the disaster and that will guide him/her to obtain valuable information of public interest is to ask a series of questions proposed by Rowan Philp (2023) before and during the coverage:

- Was the catastrophe aggravated by human action, before and after the event?
- Could the catastrophe have caused leaks or toxic contamination in nearby places?
- Did the death toll increase due to corruption or cronyism?
- What does the data say about problems in emergency management agencies or disparities in disaster relief?
- What public health threats could trigger the initial disaster?
- Who is profiting from the disaster?

## **Source Verification in Disaster News**

Taking into account the surprise and shock generated by a disaster is something that should not be overlooked when processing the information gathered. Even more so in the first hours after the disaster. The first reports and testimonies should be reviewed with special attention. For example, the numbers of people killed and injured are often inaccurate in these initial moments. It is therefore recommended to mention if the figures are preliminary and to attribute them to their source, preferably an authoritative source (BBC, 2019).

This also happens with the first testimonies of the victims, a part of them will be correct and others may be loaded with inaccuracies and exaggerations without any ulterior motives on the part of the interviewees, simply humans in the midst of such a situation of stress and anguish may be overcome at an emotional level, which may alter their perception of how the events actually happened.

Official bulletins, even if the source is authoritative, should also be cross-checked with first-hand accounts and reports from non-governmental organizations. This also applies to content that is multiplied by social networks, with real images or videos and others not, so to publish images or photos of any user, these should be verified with caution (The Guardian, 2023).

User-generated content	Images	Videos
Provenance: Is this the original file of the content?	Identify the author/submitter of the image.	Are we familiar with this account?
Source: Who uploaded the content?	Corroborate the location, date and approximate time the photograph was captured.	Have the account owner's content and posts been reliable in the past? Where is the account registered?
Date: When was the content created?	Confirm that the image is what is suggested or labeled.	Where is the person who uploaded the video based, judging from the account history?
Location: Where was the content created?	Obtain permission from the author/submitter to use the image.	Are the video descriptions consistent and mostly from a specific location?
		Are the videos dated?
		If the videos in the account use a logo, is that logo consistent throughout the videos?
		Does it match the avatar on the YouTube or Vimeo account?
		Does the account copy videos from news organizations and other YouTube accounts, or does it only upload user-generated content?
		Does the uploader write using identifiable slang or dialects in the video narration?
		Are the account's videos of consistent quality (In YouTube, go to Settings and then Quality to determine the best quality available)?

Table 1. Fact-checking.

Note. Own creation. "Verification handbook : an ultimate guideline on digital age sourcing for emergency coverage" by Silverman, C., 2014

Along with human casualties, in disaster situations, one of the first victims is accuracy. Calls and the proliferation of messages through social networks to both the media and their reporters are frequent reactions. Journalists should be skeptical in these cases, even if people claim to be eyewitnesses, their testimonies should be corroborated by asking questions that verify the proximity of that person to the scene and the news itself (Potter, D. & Ricchiardi S., 2009).

At the editorial level, there is a list of questions that, when answered by the journalist and the editor, allow knowing if the content has been verified and can be published. A table has been designed with questions from the manual Verification handbook : an ultimate guideline on digital age sourcing for emergency coverage (Silverman, C., 2014).

And although in these times the greatest concern regarding source verification comes from digital content, in disaster coverage, information coming from official sources should not be taken for granted. In 2017, Mexico was rocked by two earthquakes that caused heavy damage in the capital and several other states. One of the main television networks, Televisa, offered intense coverage for a day and a half, announcing the presence of The Mexican Navy on the premises of a school to rescue a girl named Frida Sofia from the rubble. The collapse of the school was real and there were injuries.

As the work of the Marines progressed, Televisa reported that the rescue of the girl was close. Then, in a live broadcast to the whole country, a Navy spokesman announced that no one was alive, but that there had never been any contact with a girl named Frida Sofia.

A situation that represented a hard blow to the credibility of Televisa and, especially, to the reporter who covered the event, Danielle Dithurbide. The reporter insisted that her source was the Navy and although Navy spokespersons publicly contradicted themselves, the damage to the journalist's credibility had already been done. And in a globalized world, after an earthquake of great magnitude with heavy material damage and human losses, what becomes the news of the moment in the national media, in turn, is news in the international media.

At first, hope was spread, amidst the national commotion, for the rescue of a surviving girl, but soon after the information was corrected. We can see the example of how the BBC, from the information generated in Mexico, showed both situations. The information that emerged at the beginning (<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-41346787>) and the outcome of the news (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-41359331>), and this happened with many other international media.

The truth is that there was no verification of any kind by the Televisa reporter, nor by the television channel. At no time did they bother to seek testimonies from neighbors, to investigate about Frida Sofia's parents or relatives; they were satisfied with the unofficial information from a military source, they were not cautious, nor did they contrast the information with other sources (Tirzo, 2017). For more information on what happened, at a journalistic level, with the propagation of the false news of the girl trapped in the rubble and her rescue, see this audiovisual report from the Spanish section of the Al Jazeera channel (AJ + Español, 2018).

## Ethical Oversight in Disaster News

Coverage of natural or man-made disasters requires a high degree of ethical sensitivity, since they involve human tragedies, loss of life and situations of great social impact. Journalism and those who practice it, both reporters and editors and media managers, must be guarantors of the truthfulness of the information disseminated and of respect for the humanity of the victims and other people affected. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defends the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas but, at the journalistic level, as reflected in the Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ, 2019), information must be based on verifiable facts and these must be faithfully reproduced, without distortion or suppression of essential data.

The gathering of information by the journalist must also appeal to ethical methods. The reporter should use fair methods to gather data, images or testimonies, avoiding invasive techniques such as hidden recordings, except in exceptional cases of public interest. It is unethical to pressure anyone to give testimony; respect for people's privacy and the moment that passes because of the disaster are non-negotiable. A balance between informing the public and protecting those affected must be prioritized, avoiding images or graphic descriptions that may revictimize or cause unnecessary harm (BBC, 2019). An information published without journalistic treatment, gives space to disinformation, to rumors, so time and immediacy are not justifications for these failures. Because the next step can be the creation of sensationalist or alarmist headlines and notes, which means an unethical conduct no matter how correct or not the coverage has been up to that moment.

But when error knocks on the journalist's door due to misfortune, lack of experience or simple human error, timely rectification is an obligation. In disaster coverage, where initial information can change rapidly, journalists must correct inaccuracies explicitly and transparently. This principle is essential to maintain the trust of the audience, who will always value accountability and timely correction of any errors.

## Legal Oversight in Disaster Reporting

The good journalism during disasters helps protect people's rights and stop misinformation from making things worse.. Reporting on catastrophic events requires balancing the public's right to information with legal responsibilities, including accuracy, privacy protection, and compliance with regulations. Misinformation can fuel panic, obstruct rescue operations, and violate victims' rights. The rise of social media has expanded legal accountability beyond traditional media, making it essential to examine disaster reporting through ethics, privacy, and journalist protections.

## Legal and Ethical Responsibilities in Disaster Journalism

Disaster journalism carries significant legal and ethical responsibilities. The coverage of catastrophic events must ensure the accuracy of information while protecting victims' privacy and complying with regulations on the dissemination of sensitive data. Misinformation in emergency situations can lead to social panic, hinder rescue efforts, and violate fundamental rights, making it crucial for media outlets and journalists to adhere to strict professional standards.

The legal obligation of the media to provide accurate and verifiable information is particularly critical during emergencies. The spread of false or misleading data can escalate fear and obstruct response efforts.

Misinformation in emergency situations can lead to social panic, hinder rescue efforts, and violate fundamental rights, making it crucial for media outlets and journalists to adhere to strict professional standards.

Beyond ensuring accuracy, journalists must also navigate the legal implications of reporting on disasters.

For instance, during the Valencia tragedy in Spain in November 2024, rumors about victims in the Bonaire parking lot highlighted the dangers of misinformation in critical moments. These incidents underscore the need for rigorous fact-checking and responsible reporting, as even minor inaccuracies can have widespread consequences. Ensuring the reliability of disaster coverage is not just an ethical responsibility; it is a fundamental legal requirement to maintain public trust and prevent unnecessary harm.

Beyond ensuring accuracy, journalists must also navigate the legal implications of reporting on disasters. In some jurisdictions, defamation or the dissemination of false information, even unintentionally, can result in lawsuits or legal action against media organizations.

This places an additional burden on journalists to verify sources meticulously, cross-check reports, and avoid speculative conclusions. In legal terms, negligence in disaster reporting can be as damaging as intentional misinformation, making professional diligence essential.

Another crucial factor is the role of governments and institutions in shaping the legal framework for disaster reporting. While press freedom is a fundamental right, some authorities may use crises as justification for imposing restrictions on media coverage. Emergency laws or censorship regulations can limit journalists' ability to report transparently, often under the guise of maintaining public order. Understanding the balance between responsible reporting and resisting undue governmental control is vital for maintaining both ethical standards and the public's right to information.

## Privacy Protection and Accountability

The balance between the right to information and the protection of individuals' privacy is a key challenge in disaster coverage. Journalists often handle sensitive details about victims and those affected, requiring careful consideration to avoid infringing on personal rights or exposing individuals to additional risks. The publication of personal details without proper consent can lead to severe consequences, including legal repercussions for media outlets and harm to those involved. Upholding ethical reporting practices ensures that the dignity and security of affected individuals remain a priority.

Beyond protecting privacy, accountability in information dissemination has become increasingly important, especially with the rise of social media. In some EU countries, including Spain, regulations

mandate that both traditional media and influencers rectify false or inaccurate information. This policy seeks to ensure that information shared during crises is verified and reliable, preventing the spread of misleading narratives that could worsen an already critical situation. The growing influence of digital content creators means that responsibility for information accuracy extends beyond professional journalists. Influencers and social media figures also play a role in shaping public perception and must be held to similar standards of accountability. An additional complexity arises when reporting on minors and particularly vulnerable groups. While disaster journalism often highlights human suffering to contextualize the event, the portrayal of children, refugees, or the elderly in distress requires extreme caution. Ethical guidelines suggest that images or interviews involving these groups should not only have consent from guardians (where applicable) but also be framed in a way that respects their dignity and does not exploit their pain for dramatic effect. Ensuring privacy protection extends beyond merely avoiding explicit identification—it includes considering the psychological and emotional impact on those affected.

Moreover, accountability extends to the accuracy of multimedia content. In the digital age, images and videos can be easily manipulated or taken out of context, leading to the spread of false narratives. Journalists must take extra precautions when sharing visual content, ensuring that materials are properly sourced, authenticated, and used in an appropriate context. Ethical journalism demands that responsibility for content extends to every aspect of reporting, from textual accuracy to the integrity of the images presented to the public.

## **Journalists' Rights and Legal Safeguards**

While journalists have a duty to provide accurate and ethical coverage of disasters, they also face significant risks in the process. Covering crises can expose them to legal threats, including false accusations or legal actions that could lead to criminal convictions. It is essential for them to be well-informed about their rights and the legal protections available to them. Awareness of national and international laws governing press freedom and reporting in emergencies allows journalists to carry out their work responsibly while safeguarding their professional integrity. In addition to legal risks, reporting in disaster zones poses physical dangers that require journalists to adopt security measures. High-risk environments demand proper training in safety protocols to minimize exposure to threats such as unstable structures, hazardous conditions, or hostile situations. The protection of journalists is integral to ensuring independent, transparent, and ethical reporting in disaster situations.

Ultimately, accuracy of information, privacy protection, and compliance with rectification rights are key to ensuring legally responsible coverage. Media organizations and individual journalists must uphold these principles to contribute to ethical and transparent reporting. By doing so, they help prevent the harmful effects of misinformation while respecting the rights of both the public and those directly affected by disasters.

## **Visual Review in Disaster News**

The visual dimension in disaster coverage is crucial to ensure the veracity of images and videos, protecting public confidence and the integrity of information.

### **Nature of Visual Information in Disasters.**

During catastrophic events, images and videos become primary sources of information. Their rapid dissemination on digital platforms increases the risk of manipulation or decontextualization, as happened with the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria in 2023, where misleading visual information circulated.

## Challenges in Visual Content Verification.

Digital manipulation and pressure to publish quickly make verification difficult. The use of edited images or images of previous events as if they were current can distort public perception and affect decision making.

## Tools and Techniques for Visual Verification.

To meet these challenges, journalists must employ specialized tools such as InVID, Amnesty International's YouTube DataViewer and Google Reverse Image Search. These allow analysing metadata, tracing the origin of images and verifying their authenticity.

## Visual Verification Training.

Ongoing training in visual verification is essential. Training programs on visual misinformation and verification tools can improve information quality. Collaboration with experts and sharing best practices strengthen verification capabilities.

## Impact of Visual Misinformation on Society.

False images can alter public perception, generate panic and divert resources. In natural hazard emergencies, visual media (images, videos) document and convey the possible risk, impact, and severity of the hazard. Issues arise when the visuals being circulated, at scale and speed, are manipulated, fake, or are from an unrelated event or location. (Dootson et al., 2021)

## Media Responsibility in Visual Dissemination.

The media should implement strict verification protocols and foster a culture of skepticism towards unverified information. Transparency in the verification process and a willingness to correct errors are critical to maintaining public trust.

## Collaboration with Digital Platforms and Audiences.

Digital platforms and audiences play a key role in the fight against misinformation. Platforms can provide verification tools, while the audience can help report suspicious content. Media education and critical thinking are essential to detect misleading information.

## Case Studies and Lessons Learned.

Analysis of past events, such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005, show how visual misinformation affected public perception and government response. These cases highlight the need for more rigorous verification protocols and cooperation between media, authorities and digital platforms.

## Future Challenges and Technological Evolution.

Advances in artificial intelligence and image manipulation, such as deepfakes, complicate the verification of visual content. Journalists must stay up-to-date on the latest tools and methodologies to meet these emerging challenges.

Visual review is an essential part of disaster journalism. Implementing good verification practices, continuous training, and collaborating with digital platforms and audiences are key to combating visual misinformation and ensuring credible journalism in critical times.

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

Disaster journalism requires a high level of editorial responsibility, as covering catastrophic events demands accuracy, ethical sensitivity, and a commitment to truthfulness. Journalists must balance the urgency of reporting with the need for careful fact-checking, ensuring that their coverage does not contribute to misinformation or public panic. Editorial oversight plays a crucial role in maintaining high journalistic standards, with guidelines emphasizing adherence to the 5W + 1H methodology, ethical information gathering, and the avoidance of sensationalist content. The credibility of a journalist and their media outlet depends on verifying sources, ensuring impartiality, and maintaining empathy toward victims.

Another key aspect of disaster reporting is content review, which encompasses style, accuracy, and privacy. The responsibility of journalists extends beyond the moment of publication, requiring ongoing evaluation of reports to correct inaccuracies and prevent ethical violations. The importance of language in disaster coverage is also emphasized, as it must be precise and sensitive to the victims' circumstances. Moreover, verifying multimedia content is essential, as images and videos are powerful tools that can either inform the public responsibly or spread harmful misinformation. Journalists must exercise caution when using visual materials to ensure they reflect reality without exploiting human suffering.

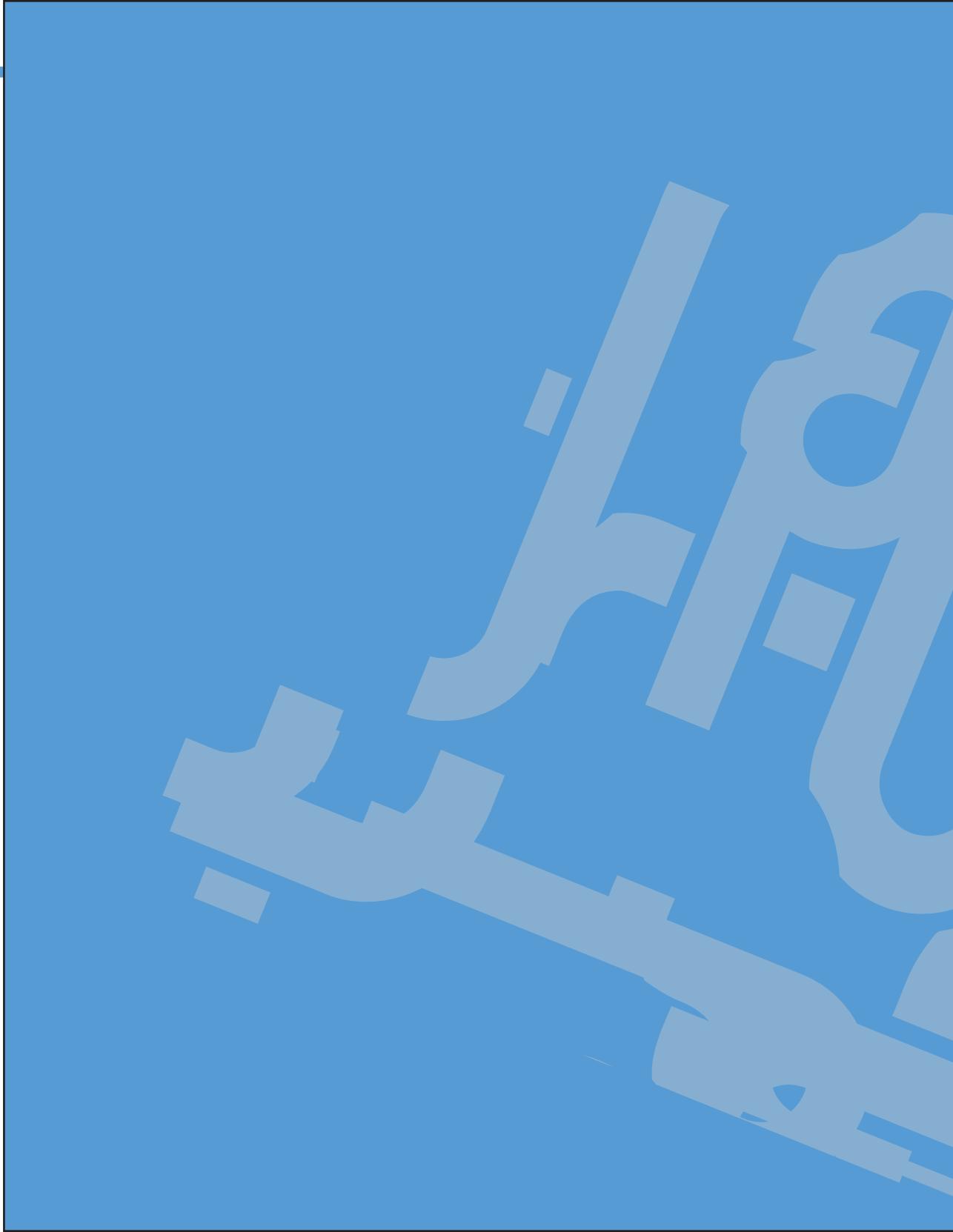
Finally, the text highlights the ethical and legal challenges in disaster reporting, particularly the risks of misinformation, privacy violations, and inadequate source verification. Cases such as the false reporting of "Frida Sofia" during Mexico's 2017 earthquake illustrate the consequences of failing to confirm facts rigorously. The role of social media in modern journalism has also expanded legal and ethical responsibilities, making it necessary for journalists to stay informed about verification techniques and digital forensics. In this evolving landscape, upholding professional integrity and ethical standards is crucial to maintaining public trust in disaster journalism.

### Learning Outcomes

Although it may seem obvious, it is not always so, and one of the main lessons that this chapter seeks to convey is the importance and the need for ethical and responsible journalism in disaster coverage.

Journalists must navigate complex challenges, including misinformation, privacy concerns, and legal constraints, while ensuring their reporting serves the public interest. The text emphasizes the necessity of thorough fact-checking, transparency, and sensitivity in covering traumatic events, highlighting how ethical lapses can lead to severe consequences for both journalists and affected communities. By adhering to best practices in content verification, source credibility, and multimedia accuracy, journalists can provide accurate and compassionate reporting that upholds professional standards.

Additionally, the text underscores the evolving nature of media accountability in the digital age. With social media accelerating the spread of both reliable and false information, journalists must adapt to new verification tools and maintain rigorous editorial oversight. Ethical considerations, such as respecting victims' dignity and avoiding sensationalism, are fundamental to maintaining journalistic credibility. The responsibility of disaster reporters extends beyond informing the public; it involves safeguarding truth, fostering trust, and ensuring that media coverage contributes positively to disaster response efforts rather than exacerbating chaos and fear.



## Self-Assessment

1 What editorial method does the UN recommend to ensure accuracy in disaster coverage?

- Exclusive supervision of the editor
- Implementing early warning plans
- Use of short headlines
- Delegating to non-specialized journalists

2 Which of the following questions is not part of the 5W + 1H?

- Who
- Why
- What
- Whose

3 What should be avoided in disaster coverage according to good editorial practices?

- Consultation of multiple sources
- Omission of verified data
- Empathy towards victims
- Prior preparation

4 When receiving unofficial information from government sources or branches of government, what should be done?

- Publish immediately
- Information from the authorities is always truthful.
- Unofficial declarations cannot be verified.
- Cross-check information with other sources.

5 What should be the focus of the language used in disaster coverage?

- Sensationalist and direct
- Clear and compassionate
- Technical and detailed
- Neutral and dispassionate

6 According to the chapter, what characterizes a primary source in journalism?

- Personal opinions of the journalist
- Persons or documents directly related to the facts
- Viral news on social networks
- Information published by other media

7 What should a journalist do if he/she detects errors in the information disclosed during disaster coverage?

- Ignore errors
- Correcting them in a transparent manner
- Minimize their importance
- Hide the sources of errors

8 What is the purpose of verifying visual content before publishing it?

- To increase the speed of publication
- To ensure the authenticity of information
- Improve the aesthetics of the article
- Avoid conflicts with authorities

9 In the midst of covering a disaster on the ground, what is more important?

- Prioritize immediacy over accuracy
- Avoiding direct interviews
- Use sensationalist techniques
- None of the above

10 In a disaster context, which of these options represents a good ethical journalistic practice?

- Revealing the identity of sources
- Publishing without verifying the information
- Not revealing the identity of sources
- Pressuring potential interviewees

## Answer Key

1.b, 2.d, 3.b, 4.d, 6.b, 7.b, 8.b, 9.d, 10.c

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# REDACTION IN DISASTER NEWS

Abdulkadir GÖLCÜ<sup>22</sup>



# BOOK CHAPTER 12

## REDACTION IN DISASTER NEWS

- **Introduction**
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- **Headlines and Titles in Disaster News**
- **Textual Coherence in Disaster News**
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## Introduction

The 21st century is called the “Information Age” or the “Digital Age”. In this century, information and technology have been put at the service of people and have played an influential role in the world order. This situation constantly bombards people with information. The continuous and intense flow of information has significantly affected media organizations and the field of journalism. In fact, journalism, which initially functioned as news production and news distribution, has transformed into a form of rewriting news, purifying news from unnecessary information, reorganizing news, and ensuring ethical rules in news with the development of communication technologies and news consumers becoming news producers at the same time. This situation has highlighted the importance of the editing process, which is the process of rewriting news, reorganizing news, complying with news ethics, and controlling the length and content of news in journalistic activities.

In this chapter, the importance and necessity of the editing process in disaster news, which is the reporting of natural and man-made disasters that have occurred and are likely to occur in every period of history, both in the world and in Türkiye, has been emphasized. In the study, various concepts related to news and reporting have been explained.

Topics such as the use of titles and headlines in disaster news, textual coherence, disaster news writing techniques, visual coherence, AI-generated news and the importance of editing in disaster reporting were discussed. In the section, information is provided about the necessity of editing media content, specifically about disaster news, and the duties of editors in the news.

## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### News

A current event or discourse that affects people's lives or new information obtained about an existing event, organized in accordance with the rules of journalism and communicated to the public is considered news. Regardless of the medium for which it is made, news must be based on accurate information, be up to date, and written in clear and concise language. News texts must be written in an accurate and impartial style, in the form of short and simple texts containing new information (Anadolu Ajansı, 2018, s. 26). The reason for the emphasis on simplicity in news writing is that readers, listeners and viewers of all levels of education can easily understand and draw conclusions when they read, listen and watch the news (Tokgöz, 2017, s. 158). In addition, attention should be paid to highlighting issues of public interest or those likely to become so in the news and to arousing curiosity and interest. Accuracy, reality, objectivity, meaningfulness, precision, speed, consistency and credibility are the qualities that the news should have.

### News Headlines

News headlines, which are the basic criteria and essence of a news story, are short and interesting sentences that indicate to readers what they will be informed about and summarize the news. News headlines should be simple, understandable and contain creativity that arouses curiosity in the reader to read the news. News headlines are classified as banner headline, main headline, subheadline and subheaders. The headlines used in the news must definitely convey judgment (Yüksel, 2018; Hossain, Arafat, & Hossain, 2021).

### Visuals in News

News visuals are used to show the reader the event, subject and people in the narrative of the news. The main function of the visual elements used in the news is to support the news text. Photographs, cartoons, tables, graphics, infographics, logos and illustrations are used as news visuals. Visuals in news are elements that define the news in news texts, support and strengthen the narrative and facilitate the comprehension of the subject for the reader, listener and viewer (Yüksel, 2018, s. 96). News photographs, which are the doors to the news, have a stronger feature in spreading the message than words. Because the fact that photographs have a universal language also increases the importance of visuals in the news (Oparaugo, 2021, s. 97).

### Textual Cohesion

Writing news texts in accordance with grammar rules such as tense use, subject-verb agreement, narrative forms, sentence structure and order, and the narrative flow and logical cohesion of the subject explained in the news text includes textual cohesion. The subject conveyed to the reader in the news text should be written in a semantic and logical integrity. Writing the news text by taking into account the news writing rules and news values creates cohesion in news texts. Similarly, there should be cohesion between news headlines, spot, introduction and news text (Türkben, 2018; Dahl & Fløttum, 2017).

## Style in News

In news writing, the presence and use of language rules, basic principles and requirements of journalism together is evaluated as the style of the news. The style of the news includes simplicity, precision, liveliness, directness, originality, clarity, essence-focused, accuracy and focusing on the subject. In news writing, the good and correct use of language (verbs, adjectives, predicates, adverbs, grammar rules, etc.), word order and expression affect the style of the news (Tokgöz, 2017, s. 309).

## Editing

The process of correcting spelling, style and grammar errors in written texts such as news, books, magazines, etc., and making the texts simpler, more understandable and professional is called editing. People who perform this process are called editors. Editors read texts, correct grammar rules and spelling errors, and eliminate inconsistencies in the text. Editors generally perform the process of ensuring fluency and correcting semantic errors in written texts. Editing and proofreading should not be confused. Because editors only check the spelling rules and semantic flow of texts and do not make major changes to the content of the text. However, in the proofreading process, proofreaders can perform operations such as adding, removing and reconstructing the content of the text (Atam, 2024).

## Redaction

The process of rewriting a written news text without changing its original form and making corrections on it with a new understanding and style is called redaction. The purpose of redaction, which is the combining and rewriting of news on the same subject taken from different sources, is to make the news simpler and more understandable for the target audience without changing the essence of the previously written news or changing its content (MEBa, 2013, s. 3). Redaction is done to write new news from different sources and scattered information, to re-edit written news, to create a new news text by bringing different news together. The process of redaction, known as the rewriting of an article or news, emerged as a result of newspapers competing with each other in terms of speed before World War II. In order for reporters in the field to come to the news center and not to waste time in turning the information about the event into news, they would send the information to the center by phone and the redactors in the center would turn this information into news. The editing process is crucial, as it involves adhering to the key elements of the news, removing unnecessary information or data that may distract the reader, listener, or viewer and reduce the impact of the topic, and ensuring that the news is written and delivered promptly. Therefore, the editing process is not just rewriting the news. It is a very important, difficult and expert-level task that includes many processes (Narmanlioğlu, 2019).

## Redactor

A person who corrects the content of the written news text in many ways and prepares it for publication is called a redactor (Yüksel, 2018, s. 52). Redactors do not only rewrite and correct the news. At the same time, redactors have important duties such as editing the news, checking the integrity of the news, adjusting the length of the news, providing retrospective follow-up of the information in the news, correcting narrative errors and incorrect expressions, ensuring image-text harmony in the news, detecting and removing advertising content from the news, correcting semantic errors, and monitoring and ensuring adherence to ethical principles in the news. For this reason, redactors are called the unnamed heroes of the news, who ensure that the news matures and is ready for publication (Narmanlioğlu, 2019).

## Headlines and Titles in Disaster News

The warnings emphasized on news headlines are doubly important in periods when all kinds of information and content are taken into consideration, both socially and individually, such as during disaster periods.

There are many news components in the reading of news by readers. Among these components, news headlines, which are considered as the showcase of the news, come to mind first. This is because headlines and titles are the main elements of the news in newspapers, magazines and online platforms. In fact, news texts are evaluated as a summary of the events experienced in society, and news headlines and titles are evaluated as a summary of the news (Narmanlioğlu, 2019, p. 3). News headlines and titles are effective in making the decision to read the news. For this reason, there should be harmony between the words used between the news headline and the news text, the person and the event it refers to.

For example, the headline of the news item published by the local newspaper of Hatay, Antakya, Özyurt, after the February 6 earthquake, "The Red Crescent Returned to Winter!" leaves a question mark in the minds of the reader. Because the introduction and text of the news item discuss the Red Crescent aid after the February 6, 2023 earthquake and emphasize that the status of the aid will change depending on the weather conditions. Here, the news item may have an interesting quality, but there is uncertainty. In such cases, editors are effective at every stage of the news item, from its title to its content.

The expressions used in news headlines are also very important. Because news headlines, as the showcase of the news, attract the attention of readers and are more memorable. In fact, the expressions used in news headlines should not be of a nature that accuses or alienates the person, region or situation in the news. Particular attention should be paid to the use of the expression "victim" in news headlines used in disaster news. During periods when people are more sensitive, such as during disaster periods, manipulation-inducing, discriminatory/polarizing headlines in the media should be avoided. Because such situations in the news may cause the reality of the disaster's size and the process experienced to be lost.

The warnings emphasized on news headlines are doubly important in periods when all kinds of information and content are taken into consideration, both socially and individually, such as during disaster periods. Therefore, the determination and confirmation of news and headlines in the media during this period requires more attention. In this process, the editing process of news headlines requires both compliance with the basic principles of journalism and attention to the sensitivity of the process.

## Textual Coherence in Disaster News

It has been stated before that the editing process in news is not limited to correcting spelling and punctuation errors. As redesigners of written news, redactors make certain adjustments regarding the use of words and expressions in the news, the events, people and institutions they refer to. At the same time, how the event or the person in the news is described in the news text is also a very important is-

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sue. Especially in news genres such as disaster news, where personal and social sensitivity is quite high, the expressions and words used in the news should be carefully selected.

The descriptions used in news about various natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, fires, tsunamis, apocalypse, and victims, can make the news more eye-catching or emotionally impressive. However, they can also cause the news to be perceived as an alienation towards the people, region, or situation. The use of words, adjectives, and adverbs that are effective in people's emotional worlds of making sense of the disaster should be done with care. Therefore, during the editing process, editors should be careful to use the relevant words within the narrative the news intends to convey (Tokgöz, 2017).

monitoring the use of foreign words and incorrect expressions. Because using words that are in accordance with spelling rules, understandable and plain, makes it easier for readers, listeners or viewers to understand the news. At this point, news texts must definitely undergo editing in terms of narrative errors in order to achieve semantic harmony. This situation is even more important in disaster news. Serving news texts full of incorrect word usage and spelling errors that have escaped the attention of reporters who want to provide the fastest and most up-to-date news without going through editing makes it difficult for the target audience to be credible and understandable. In addition, it causes the institution and reporter who write the news to compromise their prestige. For this reason, editing news texts is important in terms of both the textual harmony of the news and preventing violations of ethical rules (Narmanlıoğlu, 2019). For example, failure to maintain impartiality during disaster processes can lead to panic and chaos. Using sensational, manipulative and exaggerated expressions in the news text can cause unnecessary panic and anxiety by exaggerating the size of the disaster. Similarly, underestimating the size and effects of the disaster can create a false perception for citizens. It can cause citizens affected by the disaster to feel neglected, leading to negative emotions and a reluctance to take necessary precautions in the future. Therefore, all these variables should be taken into consideration by editors during the editing process of the news.

## Reporting Techniques in Disaster News

In communication tools such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, etc., how it will be reported is as important as what will be news. Because each news text has its own unique news structure, narrative style and technique. The writing technique and language of the news are related to the news reporter's writing technique and mastery of the news writing language as much as the event itself. The writing structure of the news is created in the reporter's mind during the collection of news information.

The most important reason why a reporter cannot create a structure in his or her mind regarding the news is that they do not follow the agenda. A news reporter who constantly follows the agenda and the

developments that are taking place can create the news structure quite easily and quickly. However, a reporter who does not follow the agenda cannot decide which subject should be highlighted in the news and has difficulty in creating the news. Therefore, both reporters and editors need to follow the agenda for the correct structure in the news. News texts should have an objective, understandable and fluent structure (Tokgöz, 2017).

The oldest and most commonly used news writing technique in news editing is the Inverted Pyramid Rule. Because this rule is the most practical and useful writing technique for newspapers, magazines, the internet or agencies that produce news for these publications based on reading or writing. In this technique, information about the news is hierarchically ranked from the most important to the least important according to its news value. In this technique, where news is written with the summary introduction technique, the most important information is presented in the news introduction in the form of a summary. Information considered less important is given in the following paragraphs. News written with the inverted pyramid rule has 5Ws (what, where, when, why, who) and 1H (how) in the introduction. News that contains the answers to 5Ws and 1H in the introduction of the news are considered successful news editing (Anadolu Ajansı, 2018).

Another news writing technique is the Quadrilateral (Square) Technique. The quadrilateral (square) technique, which is more preferred in cases where a subject is discussed rather than an event, is used in cases where the information to be reported is of equal importance. In the quadrilateral (square) technique, the details of the news are included in the body of the news in equivalent paragraphs in the form of quadrilateral blocks on top of each other. The purpose of this technique, which is used to fit the news into a meaningful framework, is to make it difficult for the reader to understand the whole news without reading the whole news since the information is of equal importance. In the quadrilateral (square) technique, "subheadings" are placed between paragraphs and transition sentences are written to connect the topics between paragraphs. For example, this technique is used in writing news that introduces historical places or describes meetings and symposiums organized on different topics (Yüksel, 2018). Although news writing techniques are included in the news editing of reporters, news editors also perform the final check of the news. Reporters may make mistakes in the editing of the news due to their motivations such as following the event and publishing the news more quickly. In such cases, the editor redoing the editing of the news along with the writing of the news and makes the news ready for publication. The responsibility of the editor increases especially in news that develops suddenly and has a high social impact such as disasters, accidents, attacks, explosions. Various errors may occur in the writing of the news due to variables such as the temperature of the event, the expectations of the media outlet, and speed. In addition to spelling and punctuation errors, the editor should also check the presentation of the citizens affected by the event in the news. The editor should use his/her competence and awareness in points such as the spelling of the name and surname of the person in the news and the exclusion of the names of those under the age of 18 from the news.

## Visual Harmony in Disaster News

Visuals used in news, especially photographs, are important tools for reporters to convey the truth. News visuals are complementary parts of the news text that convey information that cannot be explained in words or writing. While photographs have an important place in newspapers, visuals are seen as the news itself on television. Because photographs increase the reality and accuracy of a news story and ensure that readers or viewers trust the information given in the news. Photographs, which are a means of recording information, allow the news to be perceived more easily than written text. The main purpose of news photographs, which are witnesses to the event and documents of the news, is to convey visual information to the reader. For this reason, content takes precedence over aesthetics and technique in

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asters. In fact, sometimes a news photograph taken about an event somewhere in the world makes us share the pain or happiness of a geography and its people that we do not know at all. News photographs allow readers and viewers to empathize with those affected by the events. The value of news photographs is determined by the criteria of impact, proximity, timeliness, conflict, extraordinariness, fame and emotion (Anadolu Ajansi, 2018). It is also very important to proofread visual materials that complement news texts. When proofreading a news story, the proofreader must also take into account the visuals belonging to the news. Among the duties of proofreaders are to check the compatibility of the people or places mentioned in the news story with the visual, to check whether the events or situations discussed in the news story are included in the visuals, and to check whether the visuals comply with ethical principles (Narmanlioğlu, 2019).

The visual materials used in the news complement the news and increase its comprehensibility. However, in order to increase the impact of the news, attention should be paid to the violations of journalistic ethics and especially children's rights in news photographs. To increase readership, disaster news content often includes raw images of citizens emerging from the rubble, as well as poignant, sad, and striking images of children. However, when we look at the news, we see that unethical publishing is exhibited, where ethical values and principles are put in the background. Contents targeting citizens' emotions are highlighted in disaster news. Discourses such as "horror, panic, anxiety and hope, miracle, record" are used in these news. Newspapers and television channels that also construct news visuals on the basis of the news text are exhibiting an example of journalism far from objectivity in this sense (Basmaci, 2023).

## Artificial Intelligence and Redaction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the ability of a computer or a machine that works with the help of a computer to model human intelligence and to derive meaning, reason, generalize, and learn by taking into account past experiences like a human. Computer systems that can perform tasks that require human intelligence, such as visual perception, recognition, speech, decision-making, and translation between

news photographs. Because a good news photograph visually presents the information the reader needs to know about the news (Alemdar & Uzun, 2019). For this reason, the visuals used in the news, the title of the visuals and the photo captions should be compatible with the news text. This harmony is effective in ensuring the comprehensibility of the news.

In news in visual, audio and written press, visuality is important as an element that supports the news as well as increasing the comprehensibility of the news. With developing technologies, visuals such as figures, tables, graphics and infographics are used in addition to photographs as visual materials in the news (Narmanlioğlu, 2019). According to art historian Felix Hoffmann, an effective news photograph can change the way readers, listeners or viewers think and comprehend. News photographs are the most powerful products that have the ability to reflect and embody the human dimensions of disasters, especially in dis-

languages, are called artificial intelligence. The agreed point about artificial intelligence is that it is a computer system that has the learning ability of the human brain. The logic of artificial intelligence is the idea of turning machines into structures that learn, decide, and predict like humans. Artificial intelligence was developed to imitate the functions of the human brain and model them on machines (Yilmaz, 2011). With the introduction of artificial intelligence technology into our lives, it has affected the media field as well as many other fields. Artificial intelligence is seen as one of the important technologies that provide an environment for major changes in the content production and distribution of the media and shape the future of the media industry. Artificial intelligence is actively used in the media field because it provides advantages in terms of speed, efficiency and cost in the collection, organization, creation, distribution, dissemination and consumption of information. Artificial intelligence is used in areas such as news production, content production, management and editing, data analysis and audience behaviour in the media. The use of artificial intelligence in the media provides advantages such as increasing the speed and diversity of content production, offering personalized content, reducing the cost of content production, and reducing the need for manpower in media organizations. However, as in every case, the use of artificial intelligence in the media also has disadvantages. With the decrease in human intervention in content production by artificial intelligence, concerns arise about the impartiality and transparency of the content produced. In addition, we encounter problems such as the fake and manipulative nature of the content produced with deepfake technology. Because with deepfake technology, people's voices, faces and movements are used in a way that is most suitable for reality through artificial intelligence technology. In such a formation, reporting something that the person in question would never say in reality can have negative consequences for the person in question and can also create a huge social impact and chaos by misleading the public (Era Medya, 2024). This can be prevented by expert redactors and editors in the media making final checks and edits on written or created content.

A study was conducted by Columbia University Journalism School on "artificial intelligence in news and how artificial intelligence will reshape journalism" by obtaining opinions from 134 news workers and 36 industry, policy, academic and technology experts from 35 news organizations. According to the Tow Report, which includes the results of the research, media organizations stated that they use artificial intelligence because it reduces costs and increases content efficiency due to market pressures stemming from the financial difficulties of the sector, for competition centered on digitalization. However, the report also concluded that artificial intelligence causes problems such as unreliability of its outputs, ethical and reputational damages caused by incorrect outputs, and affecting professional norms, resistance of news workers and audience preferences. At the same time, news organizations benefit from artificial intelligence products and technologies of large technology companies such as Google, Amazon and Microsoft. This situation causes a difference between the use of artificial intelligence technology by large and well-resourced news organizations and the use of this technology by smaller news organizations.

The high cost pushes most news organizations to use other platforms with lower costs. On the other hand, the complexity of AI technology risks keeping news organizations dependent on technology companies by increasing their control over news organizations. In addition, the lack of transparency in AI technologies and the limitations on journalists' authority over content raise concerns about biases and errors in journalistic output, copyright, and various forms of harm (Columbia Journalism School, 2024). It is emphasized that GhatGPT and Deepfake applications, which are among the artificial intelligence technologies, have provided a great change in the media sector. However, it should be known that these technologies also bring about reliability and ethical problems in information, which are the basic values of journalism. Content created with GhatGPT, a chatbot with natural language processing ability, and Deepfake, which creates the closest fake image to reality, can cause distrust of content, disinformation and manipulation in the media sector. Because it is questionable whether these tools use accurate and reliable information and carry the risk of misleading the target audience. In the news produced by artificial intelligence for new media, there are headlines with provocative, sensational, intriguing and exaggerated

expressions to increase the click-through rate. It is known that artificial intelligence technologies do this to attract readers or viewers to click-bait (Kırak & Özkoçak, 2023).

The use of artificial intelligence technologies in the field of journalism has generally had negative consequences such as taking away the duties of journalists and rendering them dysfunctional, increasing the production of fake and disinformation-filled news, violating journalism ethics, and increasing ethical problems by pushing people to think biasedly (Gül, 2024). In addition to these, artificial intelligence negatively affects people by becoming dependent on technology giant companies and therefore harboring certain ideologies, causing copyright infringement due to the content produced, and manipulative information. This negativity can again be prevented by editors or redactors. For example, Microsoft has written news for the news site MSN using an artificial intelligence application. However, this application has started to automatically gather fake news from the internet for news writing. It has been seen that these fake contents that are gathered to the site are about extremely fantastical subjects and that images of mythical creatures are used. Again, a fake news about Elon Musk's private life was published on the MSN site and this news was removed from the site shortly after. Similarly, it has been revealed that the technology site CNET secretly uses artificial intelligence in news writing and that the economic news that is printed is full of false information. CNET has admitted that it uses artificial intelligence in its news and it is known that the organization has lost prestige due to false news (NewslabTurkey, 2025).

Artificial intelligence technology is also used in reporting events that deeply affect society, such as disasters. The news content written by artificial intelligence about the disaster can create news by pulling all kinds of information about the disaster on the internet. By using this technology to create the image that completes the news text, instead of real images related to the disaster that really exists and affects society, the use of images and content created by artificial intelligence can negatively affect the public's perspective on the event and the psychology of those affected by the disaster. In addition, using existing information from artificial intelligence to write news causes the risks of the disaster not to be foreseen in the content of the news. Again, the fact that the speed of advancement and the effectiveness of technology are not the same in every news organization, especially local news organizations, can constitute an obstacle to providing up-to-date and accurate information about the disaster. Although artificial intelligence technologies seem to have taken over the duties of media workers and rendered them dysfunctional, the human brain, expertise and reasoning power are still needed to check whether the content prepared by these technologies is accurate and reliable, to check the compliance of the content in the news with ethical rules, to use copyrighted images, and to prevent false and misleading information. For this reason, it is emphasized that media content should be checked by editors and proofreaders.

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

In this section, the importance of news, which is evaluated as a summary of developments in people's lives, and the components such as headlines, visuals, writing techniques, textual harmony and style that make up the news are discussed specifically in the context of disaster news. Disaster periods are the periods when people are both most vulnerable, panicked and anxious, and in need of news the most. Media organizations are responsible for conveying developments regarding disasters to the public, especially in their news content, from the fastest and most reliable sources. However, while fulfilling these responsibilities, they should take into consideration ethical rules and principles, especially journalistic values, and avoid making mistakes such as alienating people affected by the disaster by portraying them

as victims, defenceless, or destitute, or resorting to sensationalism, exaggeration, and aggravation. They should provide the information they want to provide in news texts, especially in news headlines, from clear, simple, clear, understandable, and reliable sources. Similarly, ensuring harmony between the news text and the news visual is important in terms of the impact of the news.

News photographs, which are considered as evidence of the news, can be stronger than news texts in terms of concretizing the dimensions of the disaster experienced by readers and empathizing with people affected by the disaster. For this reason, news visuals have a complementary quality to the news. As with other elements of the news, attention should be paid to situations that will cause legal problems such as news value and ethics, human rights, and copyright in news visuals. Again, recently, there are advantages and disadvantages in media organizations due to the use of artificial intelligence technologies (ChatGPT, Deepfake, etc.) in news writing, which have affected the whole world. In addition to reducing the time and cost of news writing, these technologies have negative outcomes such as writing news using false and fake information and serving it. Fake and false information found in news texts negatively affects both the reliability and prestige of the media organization and can cause chaos in society.

The points emphasized above reveal the importance and necessity of the editing process in news writing. Because the editing process in news writing is not only correcting the spelling errors of the news. Editing covers an important process such as organizing the semantic flow of the news content, increasing the comprehensibility and readability of the news, eliminating unnecessary information and words.

Moreover, checking the accuracy of the information in the news, ensuring visual and text compatibility, and removing ethical violations and copyrighted elements from the news are other important processes in editing. For this reason, the editors who perform the editing of the news should be people who have worked in the sector for many years, who know both news writing and legal processes, who are researching and renewing themselves. In order to prevent disinformation and fake news in the field of journalism in today's world equipped with technology and where unlimited information flow is experienced, it is definitely recommended that media organizations have experienced editors and editing processes.

At the end of this chapter, students who will take this course will have the following achievements.

- Students can conduct assessments of texts produced for disaster news**
- Students can select visual elements according to the news topic**
- Students can make grammatical adjustments.**
- Students can have knowledge about editing and proofreading.**
- Students can understand the importance of proofreading in disaster news.**
- Students can have awareness about the words and visuals used in disaster news.**
- Students can understand the advantages and disadvantages of using artificial intelligence technologies in media organizations.**



## Self-Assessment

1 Which of the following cannot be said for the editing process?

- Reconstructing a written news story
- Creating a new news story by bringing together information from different sources
- Writing a new news story from scattered information
- Sticking to a single source and event

2 Which of the following is not one of the functions of news visuals?

- It prevents the reader from getting bored
- It supports the news text
- It facilitates the comprehensibility of the news story
- It increases the impact of the message given by the news story

3 Which of the following statements regarding the editing process is incorrect?

- Cleaning the news text from unnecessary information and data
- Facilitating the distribution of the news
- Correcting spelling errors in the news
- Rewriting the news

4 Which of the following is not among the duties of the editors who proofread and control the news?

- Finding the news topic and gathering information
- Ensuring image-text compatibility in the news
- Detecting and removing advertising content from the news
- Supervising and ensuring adherence to ethical principles in the news

5 Which of the following should be considered in news stories in the media during disaster periods?

- The news should be emotionally appealing
- Using words and images that will describe the disaster in the most striking way
- Transferring all kinds of information obtained to readers/viewers without verifying it
- Providing the news without alienating or manipulating the people affected by the disaster

6 Which of the following is not one of the benefits of the editing process in disaster news to news receivers and the news institution?

- Preventing the spread of false or fake news
- Protecting and increasing the reliability of the institution in receiving information
- Causing the news to be announced to readers late
- Preventing violations of ethical rules

7 Which of the following is not one of the reasons for using visuals in disaster news?

- To reflect and embody the human dimensions of the disaster
- To ensure empathy with people affected by the disaster
- To increase the readability of disaster news
- To detail the dimensions of the disaster's impact with visual elements

8 Which of the following statements is not among the points to be considered when using visuals in disaster news?

- Paying attention to aesthetic aspects rather than journalistic conventions
- Protecting human rights and journalism values
- Ensuring that the subject or readers are not negatively affected by the visual
- Protecting ethical values and principles

9 Which of the following is not among the advantages that artificial intelligence technologies provide to media organizations and journalism?

- It has provided speed and variety in news production
- It has increased content production and reduced employee costs
- It has provided analysis of data and audience behaviour
- It has made media organizations and journalism dependent on technology

10 Which of the following is not one of the situations where GhatGPT and Deepfake artificial intelligence technologies require editing in the preparation of disaster news?

- Checking the compliance of disaster news content with ethical rules
- Preventing the use of copyrighted visuals
- Announcing developments regarding the disaster in the fastest way
- Preventing the spread of false and misleading information

## Answer Key

1.d, 2.a, 3.b, 4.a, 5.d, 6.c, 7.c, 8.a, 9.d, 10.c

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# COUNTERING DISINFORMATION IN TIMES OF DISASTER

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# BOOK CHAPTER 13

## COUNTERING DISINFORMATION IN TIMES OF DISASTER

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **What is Disinformation?**
- **Dissemination of Disinformation in Times of Disasters**
- **Effects of Disinformation in Disasters**
- **Social Media as a Source of Disinformation**
- **Strategies to Combat Disinformation in Disasters**
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Journalists' acting within the framework of ethical rules facilitates the public's access to reliable information in times of disasters.

## Introduction

Countering disinformation in times of disasters is one of the most critical factors of crisis management. While natural disasters expose societies to a big flow of information, they also increase the speed of the spread of false or misleading information. This disrupts crisis management by making it difficult for the public to reach true information. In times of disasters social media stands out as one of the fastest and most effective tools to share information. But these channels are also the platforms where disinformation spreads the most.

False information, intentionally or unintentionally, spreads fast and takes precedence over official statements. For example, in disaster areas unconfirmed information such as that "aid teams have not arrived" or that "a new disaster wave is expected" can lead to fear and chaos in public. Therefore, it is a vital responsibility to confirm the accuracy of the information that spreads in social media. Because disinformation in these times leads to panic and insecurity in public,

disrupts search and rescue efforts and prevents the effective response of the public authorities. In this framework, journalists and media outlets have a great responsibility in terms of conveying accurate and confirmed information in times of disasters. In case of a disaster at the national, regional and global level, journalists should carefully evaluate their news sources, should avoid speculative information and should produce content that will raise public awareness. They should also do awareness-raising activities that address how disinformation spreads in times of crisis and the effects such false information have on public. Journalists' acting within the framework of ethical rules facilitates the public's access to reliable information in times of disasters. Countering disinformation in times of disasters is one of the fundamentals of an efficient crisis management. Conscious use of social media, fast and transparent communication by public authorities, responsible actions by the journalists and raising the public's digital literacy minimize the effects of disinformation.

## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Disinformation

False and misleading information which are intentionally generated or spread in times of disasters, threatening the public safety and making crisis management difficult.

### Crisis Communication

The communication strategies and methods developed to ensure that true information is spread in a fast and reliable way in disasters.

### Social Media

Digital platforms that accelerate the dissemination of information in times of disasters but also lead to fast circulation of disinformation.

### Algorithm

Awareness-raising processes ensure that individuals identify true information, distinguish disinformation and turn to reliable sources in times of disasters.

### Media Literacy

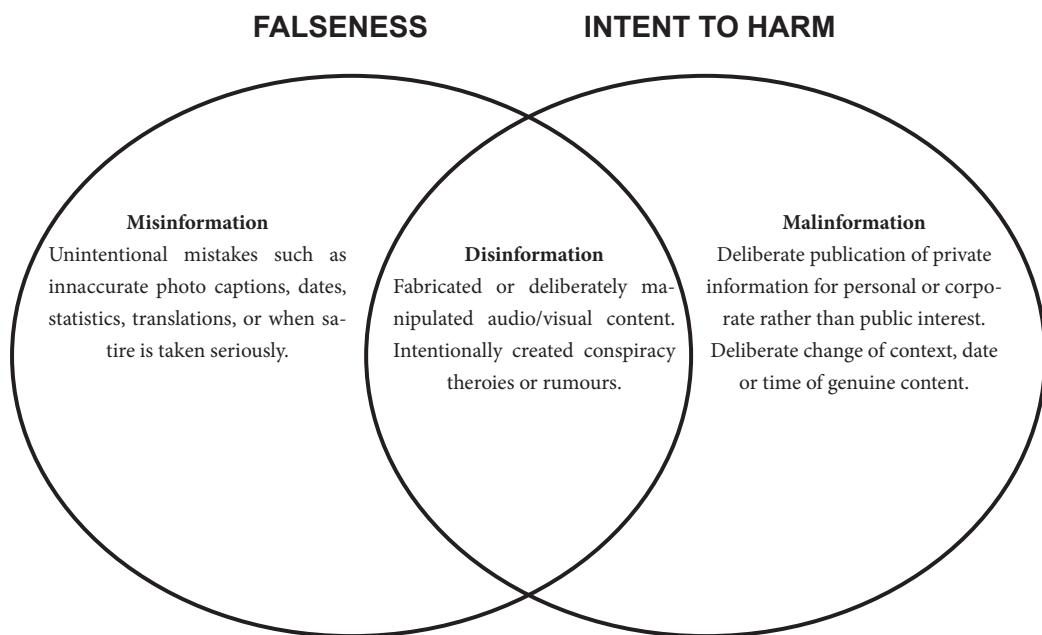
Automatic systems that analyze various factors to determine the content that users encounter. These algorithms determine which content will be shown to more people by evaluating the interaction ratios, likes, comments and shares.

### State and Institutional Response

The verification efforts and informative mechanisms are carried out by the public authorities and media outlets to counter disinformation in times of disasters.

## What is Disinformation?

There are many concepts used for false information, unreal information or half-truths. These include “disinformation”, “fake news”, “false news”, “digital misinformation”, “rumour” and so forth. To define disinformation, which is the principal subject of this chapter, any false, inaccurate or misleading information which is designed, presented and introduced to deliberately do harm or gain benefit can be defined as “disinformation” (Kapantai et al., 2021). In the report prepared by Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications Center for Countering Disinformation, disinformation is defined as an “umbrella concept” in which false news and information are used deliberately. (Guide to Countering Disinformation, 2023). Today with developing technology, any false information whether it is intentional or not can become a tool for disinformation. It is inevitable that disorderly information shared in different media channels reach a big audience directly or indirectly (Bostancı and Aksüt, 2023: p. 61). Wardle and Derakhshan, who address disorderly information that arises from disinformation efforts, use the concept of “information disorder” to describe the state of false and misleading information. They define this concept in three different types and differentiate them based on their levels of harm and inaccuracy (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017, p.5).



Source: (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017)

## Dissemination of Disinformation in Times of Disasters

Disasters are sudden and destructive events that affect human societies deeply. Earthquakes, floods, fires and other natural disasters can lead to loss of lives, injuries and widespread material damage. Access to true information during such events is vital. However, in times of disasters, the dissemination of disinformation becomes inevitable in chaotic settings that arise with panic, fear and uncertainty. In academic literature, studies on the dissemination of disinformation in disasters make some suggestions by putting forward the negative impacts that disinformation has on disaster management, public health and safety. For example, Hunt et al. (2020) examine the use of machine learning to support the effective monitoring of informative news in times of disasters and the efforts of public institutions to minimize the spread of false information. On the other hand, Pelen and Gölgeli (2022) state that today every smart device and social media application have their own decision-making mechanism. The autonomous display of the information spread in an unhealthy way through these applications is controversial and that the dissemination parameters of these false information have a potential to be developed through network models.

The spread of disinformation during disasters has become an increasingly concerning issue in recent years. Traditional media, social media platforms, and even interpersonal communication play a role in the spread of disinformation. During such situations, social media users tend to share information at higher rates, which plays an important role in informing the public (Xie et al., 2017). For example, after the major earthquakes affecting 11 provinces in Türkiye on February 6, 2023, false information such as "the dam burst" or "the volcano erupted" spread on social media. These types of shares caused fear and chaos among people who were already in a state of panic (Serin and Ünlü, 2024, p. 12). This situation demonstrates that unverified information circulated without questioning the source, as well as deliberately produced false information, causes significant confusion on social media during these moments (Koçyiğit, 2023, p. 68).

There are many reasons for the spread of disinformation during disasters. These include panic and fear, lack of information, mistrust, manipulation, and propaganda. Disaster victims can more easily believe incorrect information when they are in a state of uncertainty and fear. Additionally, the chaotic flow of information during a disaster leads to information gaps and mistrust. The spread of disinformation during disasters also has serious consequences. False information endangers people's safety, hinders relief efforts, increases social polarization, and causes economic damage. Preventing the spread of disinformation during disasters requires a multifaceted approach. Some important steps that can be taken to reduce the impact of disinformation and enhance society's resilience against disasters include: ensuring access to accurate information, promoting media literacy, holding social media platforms accountable, implementing legal regulations, establishing verification platforms, and fostering international cooperation.

**Information Activities:** Accurate and up-to-date information regarding disasters should be effectively shared with the public. In this context, social media and traditional media channels can be used effectively. Access to accurate information from reliable sources during a disaster is of vital importance.

**Media Literacy:** It is important for individuals to develop skills to critically evaluate information and detect disinformation. In addition, journalists should receive training on ethical principles and verification methods in disaster reporting.

**Responsibility of Social Media Platforms:** Social media platforms should take a more active role in preventing the spread of disinformation. Detecting and removing content containing disinformation, in-

forming users, and highlighting reliable sources are among the measures that platforms can take.

**Legal Regulations:** Legal regulations can be made to prevent and punish the spread of disinformation. However, it is important that these regulations are carefully crafted to avoid restricting freedom of expression and leading to censorship.

**Verification Platforms:** Verification platforms operated by public authorities or trusted organizations at national, regional, and global levels can be used to check the accuracy of suspicious information.

**International Cooperation:** Combating disinformation in disasters requires international cooperation. Countries can prevent the cross-border spread of disinformation by sharing information and developing joint strategies.

## Effects of Disinformation in Disasters

Especially with developments in communication technologies, crisis periods such as disasters are times when high-tempo information flow occurs, thus resulting in an increase in disinformation activities (Guide to Countering Disinformation, 2023, p. 66). The spread of disinformation during critical events such as disasters can have serious consequences due to the damage it can cause to trust and the danger it poses to public health and safety. Especially in the digital age, crises are increasingly accompanied by “info-demics,” which makes it difficult for citizens and crisis response institutions to achieve “mutual situational awareness” (Shahbazi and Bunker, 2024, p.1). Today is referred to as the age of “information disorder” by Wardle and Derakhshan (Chaves & Braga, 2019, p.478). According to Wardle, there are 7 types of ‘distorted information’ that can be expressed as the implementing agent of disinformation (Wardle, 2018, cited in Heuer and Glassman, 2023, p.1).

These are:

- misleading content
- false connection
- false context
- manipulated content
- completely false fabricated content
- fake content that imitates real sources
- satire

It is argued that the elements of information disorder should be considered separately as implementing actors, messages, and interpreters (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017, pp. 22-23). Accordingly, implementing actors refer to the people who produce the message, transform it into a media product, distribute it to the public, and their promoters. The message refers to the format, character of the communication, and thus the type of disinformation. Finally, interpreters will consist of the victims of the crisis, the audience, and the authorities who are expected to manage the process. It would be appropriate to consider the impact of disinformation in disasters separately for each of the elements mentioned above. When considered from the perspective of implementing actors, disasters as a crisis situation represent a good “opportunity” for actors to succeed. Indeed, the most basic need in disaster and crisis environments is establishing correct communication (Dalaylı, 2024, p.505), and it is clear that the potential damage to infrastructure and hardware equipment during disasters can trigger certain communication problems in the chaotic environment caused by disasters.

Crises provide opportunities for practitioners to succeed in their activities, with the following objectives (Guide to Countering Disinformation, 2023, pp. 67-68).

- To break social resistance and mislead citizens by increasing fear and anxiety
- Influencing informed decisions by preventing access to accurate information
- To undermine trust in state institutions by creating the perception that the state's crisis-fighting apparatus is inadequate
- Reducing the effectiveness of search and rescue and relief efforts

From the perspective of interpreters, disinformation directly harms victims and the work of institutions and organizations that will fight against disasters. In the processes of combating disasters, untrue disclosures may cause fear or panic by causing negative emotions among the public, make the coordination of disaster response efforts difficult, and lead to negative interventions in disaster management processes. "This situation obliges crisis management organizations trying to eliminate the effects of the disaster to fight against misinformation" (Guide to Countering Disinformation, 2023, p.66).

On the other hand, it is stated that in a risk society, the crises to be experienced can become a "legitimacy problem" against those who govern (Bilgin, 2020, pp 134-135). According to Habermas, moments of crisis are a state of failure in which beliefs in leadership, social order and traditional values are questioned; therefore, the masses can become unmanageable and social conflict becomes difficult to control and prevent (O'Connor, J. 1987, p.3). Governance, already difficult, can be set up for failure through disinformation activities, exacerbating existing chaos, turmoil or conflict and making democracies ungovernable.

## **Social Media as a Source of Disinformation**

Historically, news and alerts concerning natural disasters and crises were disseminated predominantly through television and radio broadcasts. However, with the advent of digital technologies, novel platforms have emerged, thereby enhancing emergency communication and warning systems, rendering them more expeditious, dependable, and efficient. In the contemporary era, social media emerged as a potent instrument for augmenting awareness and enhancing the efficacy of emergency response initiatives (UNDP, 2024).

In the contemporary communication landscape, social media platforms have emerged as a prominent domain characterized by the proliferation of information and the dissemination of disinformation. A salient distinction between social media and traditional media lies in the absence of editorial oversight, which enables the instantaneous and unfiltered circulation of content. In contrast to the editorial processes employed by traditional media, such as news verification and editorial oversight, social media platforms lack such mechanisms, resulting in a lack of content control for users. This dynamic environment has led to a situation where individuals no longer merely consume content but also act as active producers of it.

The rapid dissemination of information shared on social media platforms presents a multifaceted challenge. On the one hand, accurate and useful information can reach a vast audience with immediacy. However, the same platform also facilitates the spread of false or deliberately misleading content at the same velocity, potentially causing significant harm. A significant factor contributing to this information pollution is the tendency of users to share content they have read without verifying its accuracy. This phenomenon, driven by the rapid propagation of disinformation, not only leads to the unwitting sharing of misleading information at the individual level but also paves the way for more organized efforts to deliberately spread misinformation (Jeyaraman et al., 2023).

In the context of crisis and disaster, the responsibility for accurate information does not lie solely with individuals; media organizations and social media platforms also bear significant responsibility.

affect not only the perception of individuals but also the social order.

The digital landscape has accelerated the spread of disinformation, a deliberate effort to manipulate users, it is often propagated by bots and automated accounts. This highlights the need for stricter content moderation and comprehensive algorithm audits. The algorithmic structures of prominent social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X (Twitter), and YouTube prioritize content that generates high engagement, regardless of its accuracy. This has led to the rapid dissemination of misinformation. The role of bots and automated accounts in the propagation of disinformation is also noteworthy. Consequently, there is an imperative for a comprehensive audit of social media algorithms and the implementation of more robust content moderation practices (Yu et al., 2024).

In today's world, it is imperative for individuals to be cognizant of disinformation, a crucial step in combating the proliferation of information pollution and deliberate misleading content. This is particularly salient during periods of crisis or disaster, when the rapid propagation of misinformation can engender anxiety and panic within the populace, thereby impeding relief and response efforts. Consequently, it is imperative for individuals to be cognizant of the issues that must be addressed when utilizing media and social media platforms. This is crucial for ensuring social solidarity and facilitating access to accurate information. In the context of crisis and disaster, the responsibility for accurate information does not lie solely with individuals; media organizations and social media platforms also bear significant responsibility. The dissemination of inaccurate information has the potential to erode social trust and disrupt public order, not only on an individual level but also on a broader societal scale. In this regard, both individuals and institutional actors must adhere to specific guidelines when disseminating information (İletişim Başkanlığı, 2024, s.11):

**Verification of Images and Videos:** It is imperative to verify the currency of shared content and refrain from disseminating images of events that are no longer current.

**Geolocation Check:** It is imperative to verify the geolocation of information, ensuring its accuracy and authenticity. It is imperative to ascertain the veracity of information or visuals by confirming their provenance from the region where the incident occurred.

Furthermore, a phenomenon known as confirmation bias has been observed to make people more likely to share content that is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs. Disinformation is a deliberate and calculated effort to manipulate users (Yu, 2024). A recent report by Zignal Labs and Harris Poll (Kanski, 2017) explored people's information consumption habits and how this contributes to the spread of fake news. The research shows that people do not verify the accuracy of news they see on social media platforms. This suggests that when a viral post goes viral, most people do not take the time to fact-check it. Randy Brasche, Vice President of Marketing at Zignal, notes that fake news is a manifestation of digital warfare used to discredit and vilify. Disinformation is observed to intensify on social media platforms, especially during times of crisis and emergencies. During such periods, unverified news, manipulative images, and speculative content circulate rapidly, making it difficult for individuals to access accurate information. This situation can negatively affect not only the perception of individuals but also the social order.

**The Importance of Official and Reliable Sources:** Information regarding disasters and crisis situations should be obtained from public institutions and reliable official sources.

**Precaution Against Conspiracy Theories:** It is imperative to exercise caution against conspiracy theories. Recognizing the potentially devastating consequences of disasters, a cautious approach is warranted, particularly in the face of claims lacking scientific substantiation. The insights of experts should be given due consideration.

**Accuracy of Aid Calls:** the accuracy of aid calls is paramount. Help messages of uncertain or unverified origin should not be disseminated. The dissemination of misinformation has the potential to impede the effective coordination of relief efforts.

**Awareness of Bot Accounts:** It is crucial to be cognizant of the potential for disinformation propagated by bot accounts. It is imperative to be cognizant of the potential for misleading content disseminated through bot accounts and to exercise caution in regard to such campaigns.

The rapid and effective dissemination of disinformation underscores the pivotal role of social media users' digital literacy in navigating the information landscape. Users must adopt critical thinking skills to assess information, verify its credibility, and exercise greater responsibility in sharing content. Furthermore, social media platforms should enhance their mechanisms for verifying information to ensure its accuracy and reliability.

## Strategies to Combat Disinformation in Disasters

Providing accurate and fast information flow in disaster situations is critical for the public to make the right decisions.

Disinformation during disasters can mislead the public, complicate crisis management and lead to serious social problems. Therefore, it is critical to ensure accurate information flow and prevent disinformation during disasters. Hence, it is vital to focus on strategies and methods to combat disinformation in disasters. Providing accurate and fast information flow in disaster situations is critical for the public to make the right decisions. Crisis communication strategies are the first step in combating disinformation. Effective crisis communication includes the following basic principles:

**Providing fast and accurate information:** On the one hand, social media allows experts to quickly share accurate information about risks; on the other hand, it also paves the way for non-experts to spread misinformation about the crisis and increase anger (Malecki, Keating, & Safdar, 2021). Accuracy of information is crucial both in the first moments of a disaster and in

its aftermath. Not only accurate information needs to be shared quickly, but also when, where and from which sources the information was received needs to be clearly stated.

**Transparency:** Authorities should build trust by providing accurate information to the public. In this context, transparency will help rebuild trust (Zheng, 2023) and prevent the spread of disinformation to a large extent.

**Consistency:** It is of great importance to provide consistent information to the target audience on time during a disaster (Evans, Hammersley, & Robertson, 2001). Therefore, statements made through different communication channels should be consistent with each other and conflicting messages should be avoided.

## Active Use of Official Information Sources

In times of disaster, the public needs official sources they can trust for accurate information. It is crucial for policymakers to develop specific strategies against the dominance of digital platforms (Horowitz et al., 2021), which are the main disseminators of fake news. Official institutions responsible for disaster management should prioritize fast and accurate information sharing. Official sources play a critical role in preventing disinformation. The following points should be considered for the effective use of these resources:

**Emergency Communication Channels:** Fake news emerging during disasters is a major threat to health policies, national and international security (Gradon et al., 2021). State institutions, municipalities and emergency management units responding to disasters should actively use media channels. Official websites, social media accounts and mobile applications are effective in this process.

**Coordination and Communication:** Effective coordination should be ensured between official institutions, as well as cooperation with local governments and civil society organizations. By establishing a common communication network, misinformation can be quickly corrected.

**Establishing Reliable Information Sources:** All disaster-related developments should be shared only from official and reliable sources. The role of these official sources of information as primary sources is critical (Ailakhu, 2025) and ensures that the public has easy access to information.

## How to Respond Quickly to Misinformation

In times of disaster, the rapid spread of misinformation can increase social panic. The impact of misinformation can be reduced by verification organizations that can quickly detect and correct false information (Bragazzi & Garbarino, 2024). In combating disinformation, misinformation can be quickly detected as follows:

**Use of Verification Tools:** During crises caused by natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes or earthquakes, a large amount of unverified information can spread rapidly through social media (Singh, et al. 2020). Online verification tools should be used to detect misinformation. These tools lend credibility to information and prevent the spread of misleading content.

**Content Correction and Response Mechanisms:** When misinformation is detected, accurate information should be quickly corrected and shared from official sources. This prevents the public from making wrong decisions based on misinformation.

**Public Engagement:** Correcting misinformation and sharing accurate information can be done through direct interaction with the public. This interaction can be increased through social media.

**SPOTLIGHT:** The Center for Combating Disinformation (DMM) is a unit within the Presidency's of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications established to combat fake news.

**SPOT STATEMENT:** Anadolu Agency launched the AA Confirmation Line to combat misleading content and information pollution.

## Community-Based Strategies and Public Awareness Raising

The circulation of misinformation about disasters on social media not only creates anxiety and fear, but can also lead to wrong decisions about disaster preparedness and resilience building. Efforts to prevent the spread of misinformation about disasters through social media are of great importance, especially as an issue that needs to be considered by stakeholders in communities (Asteria, et al. 2023). Community-based strategies are important to combat disinformation in disasters. Community preparedness for disasters and access to accurate information can be ensured in the following ways:

**Collaboration with Community Representatives:** Disinformation can be prevented by collaborating with trusted community members such as local leaders, health workers and teachers. For strategies to be successful in combating digital disinformation, there needs to be full harmony and cooperation between users, government agencies, the private sector and civil society organizations (Koçyiğit & Koçyiğit, 2024: p.146). They can be effective tools for sharing accurate information.

**Awareness Campaigns:** Awareness-raising campaigns can be organized on how the public can access accurate information in disasters and how to protect themselves from disinformation. These campaigns can be conducted through local media channels and social media platforms.

**Education Programs:** Media literacy training for disasters can be provided through schools, community centers and non-governmental organizations. Training materials can be prepared for society to access information more easily. Media literacy contributes to the fight against disinformation by providing the ability to identify false information and question its accuracy. Both children and adults should have the opportunity to develop media literacy skills that will enable them not only to analyze and evaluate media content, but also to enjoy the different aesthetic experiences offered by each type of media (Uyar, 2020; Andersen, Duncan, & Pungente, 1999: pp. 142-143). This skill will be able to encourage the public to avoid sharing misinformation and disseminate accurate information.

In summary, analysing societal vulnerabilities to misinformation, disinformation and fake news is of great importance for future steps (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024). Combating disinformation, especially in disasters, is possible through rapid access to accurate information and rapid correction of misinformation. Effective crisis communication strategies, digital verification tools, strengthening official sources and direct communication with the public play a critical role in preventing disinformation. Proper implementation of these strategies ensures that the public has access to accurate information and makes sound decisions. Moreover, media literacy is an important tool in combating disinformation in disasters. Providing the public with skills on how to access accurate information, how to recognize misinformation and how to consult reliable sources is a fundamental strategy in the effective fight against disinformation. Training and awareness raising activities are of great importance for more effective use of these skills in times of disasters.

## The Role of Media and Journalists in Disasters

Communication has a very important place in the regular maintenance of social life. At every stage of life, the exchange of news is a need in the communication provided both between individuals and among groups that are more crowded. This need gains more importance especially in times of disaster.

Obtaining information about the consequences of a disaster—which may occur at any time and place, whether natural, technological, or human-induced, and which causes physical, economic, and social losses for all or certain segments of society, disrupts normal life and activities, and exceeds the coping capacity of the affected community—is essential. Providing the necessary assistance and managing the aftermath is only possible through the effective use of communication channels.

Disaster Management is the planning and management starting from the diagnosis of this process that makes it difficult or eliminates the society to live in a healthy and balanced environment (Toprak Karaman, 2016:2). The aim of disaster management is to direct all the means of the state and even the society, especially the institutions in charge of combating the disaster, towards the aim of eliminating the effects of the disaster. A chaotic situation emerges after the occurrence of disasters. This chaotic situation reveals the necessity of disaster managers to make right decisions in a very short period. In this process, disaster managers have to communicate intensively with different points of the disaster area. For this reason, communication is considered among the indispensable elements of disaster management (Bozkurt and Demir, 2023:27).

## Media in Disasters

Media plays a role in informing the public about natural disasters before and after natural disasters, in awareness raising activities, in establishing communication between the authorities of official institutions and the public, and in reducing material and moral losses caused by disasters. At the same time, it conveys warnings to the public during and after the disaster, ensures that the event and its dimensions are understood, informs the public after the event and even contributes to the individual and society to overcome the shock and learn lessons. The media performs these tasks through various contents such as news and programs, columns, contributions, commentaries and editorials in newspapers, television, radio, internet, social media (Toker, 2016:255). Media plays an important role in issues such as raising awareness of the society about disaster risks, minimizing the effects of disasters, taking precautions related to disasters before the disaster occurs; and after the disaster occurs, it plays an important role in the context of information activities to be carried out in order to eliminate the panic environment that will occur in the society and to protect citizens from the effects of disasters. At this point, thanks to its advantages, the media can reach a large segment of the society at the same time and become a guide (Bozkurt and Demir, 2023: 28).

Whether the media receives information from official channels, unrealistic rumours or the spokesperson of the crisis management team, it can provide the necessary channels for the intensive and rapid dissemination of this information to the public (Toker, 2016:258). Therefore, crisis periods such as disasters are very risky periods for both the society and the media. Despite this risk, people need information at a high level in this period, which offers plenty of material in terms of news. However, in this process, visual media organs think about rating and print media think about circulation. Of course, being in such a concern is not in accordance with ethical values and professional values. Making publications with commercial concerns is nothing but turning the crisis into an opportunity. In the context of media functioning, it is in a very important position at such a point of sensitivity (Kütükoğlu, 2021:221)

Individuals affected by disasters need to rely on a range of news and information sources as the disaster unfolds and in its aftermath. The use of news sources, including local newspapers, radio or television, is vital. News sources support disaster planning and response and provide disaster-related information (Ewart, 2020, p. 68 as cited in Kütükoğlu, 2021:222). At this point, it is very important that the information to be provided is conveyed by official institutions. Because the media should act as a bridge between the authorized names, disaster victims and the public, and inform the public in the most accurate way. At the same time, the media should stay away from agitation in disaster news where drama content given too much (Kütükoğlu, 2021:213).

While the need for accurate information and its rapid circulation increases in disaster processes, the speed and flexibility provided by social media are of vital importance in crisis and disaster situations (Zincir and Yazıcı, 2013:78 as cited in Toker, 2016:153, Soydan-Alpaslan, 2014:60-62). For example, after

the devastating earthquake in Kobe, Japan in 1995, many internet developers were directed to create pages showing casualty lists, organizations that can make charitable donations and damage photos (Holtz, 1999: 203-204 as cited in Toker, 2016: 269), while a section called "Earthquake Message Line" was launched on the web pages of national newspapers such as *Hürriyet* and *Sabah* from the second day of the Marmara earthquake in 1999, allowing people to call their relatives and publishing the names of the dead and injured. From this point of view, during the Marmara earthquake, the press undertook important functions in the dimension of social responsibility beyond journalism and took part in coordination (Kadıbeşgil, 2001: 20 as cited in Toker, 2016: 267-268). With the increasing number of consumers using the Internet more intensively, the interaction provided by social media in the 2011 Van Earthquake in Türkiye increased sensitivity and enabled the society to organize, especially aid campaigns (Soydan and Alpaslan, 2014: 639).

In the 2012 Hurricane Sandy, which was the largest hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic Ocean and caused hundreds of deaths and 200 thousand people to be left homeless, the electricity was cut off and transportation facilities were restricted, and according to the US Federal Emergency Management Agency, twenty million tweets were sent and thus, disaster victims were reached and relief efforts were coordinated (Mavi, 2020 as cited in Bozkurt and Demir, 2023: 28). The most important example of the use of social media in disasters in recent years was seen in the Kahramanmaraş earthquake that occurred on February 6, 2023. After the earthquake, citizens trying to communicate with their relatives in the disaster zone through social media and disaster victims trying to reach the units responding to the disaster actively used social media. In a study conducted by a research company on media during the disaster period, it was revealed that 73% of the citizens followed the situation in the earthquake zone via social media and the preferred social media platforms were Instagram (74%), Twitter (X), Facebook and Youtube, respectively (Bozkurt and Demir, 2023:29).

Individuals who become active users in extraordinary situations are willing and volunteer to access information through social media platforms. This desire increases exponentially during natural disasters, social events, and other crisis moments. This can be expressed as an advantage for information-providing institutions. It is important for the announcements made through official channels to reach the target audience during crises, to find instant response in them, and for this information to be distributed to their environment by other users, both in terms of managing the crisis and accessing accurate information during crisis times. However, this situation also has a disadvantage. Especially in cases such as social events and natural disasters, social media causes an excessive increase in content such as disinformation and fake news. (Koçyiğit, 2023:69). Particularly during crisis periods, it is necessary to be conscious against disinformation, knowing that information pollution is increasing on social media and that the virtual environment is used quite effectively for provocation purposes, in cases such as any terrorist act, natural disaster, or social event (Correct Journalism and Media Ethics, 2023:82). In order to prevent the spread of unfounded news and information on these platforms; maintaining information flow through reliable channels by official sources, immediately exposing unfounded news, and thus meeting the information needs of society is the right approach for healthy disaster communication (Ergin Çağatay, 2024: 164).

In this regard, important state institutions in the field of communication continue their fight against disinformation. In this context, in addition to legislative proposals and amendments to other laws, the Center for Combating Disinformation was established under the Presidential Communications Directorate in August 2022. This unit publishes weekly bulletins to combat disinformation, identifies disinformation-related content and leading that accurate information is shared with the public. The institution, which seeks to present the difference between correct information and misinformation to the public in an effective and convincing way through weekly disinformation bulletins, aims to provide accurate information to the

public by publishing these bulletins on a daily basis during natural disasters such as earthquakes and extraordinary events, and aims to effectively combat disinformation. In addition, Anadolu Agency Fact Check Line Twitter account also identifies false news and information through its Twitter account and produces content to share the correct information with the public. Within this context, these practices carried out by institutions are important in terms of combating disinformation in times of crisis. Especially in cases such as social events and natural disasters, in order to prevent the excessive increase in content such as disinformation and fake news on social media, it is important for the statements made through official channels to reach the target audience, to find an instant response in them and for this information to be distributed to their environment by other users, both in terms of managing the crisis and accessing the accurate information in times of crisis (Koçyiğit, 2023: 69-75).

## Role of Journalists in Disasters

**The journalist's witnessing of a disaster encourages the audience to take action in response to situational or structural violence and suffering.**

In the face of any extraordinary event that risk societies are exposed to, it is undoubtedly the duty of journalists to access and publicize information on the relevant subject. In addition to the prominent areas of journalism related to types of disasters such as disaster journalism, earthquake journalism, climate journalism, war journalism, etc., it is possible to count the types of journalism that define more specific areas such as risk-oriented "preventive journalism" or "constructive journalism" based on a positive and solution approach in the news under the title of "disaster journalism". Within the scope of this journalism, both journalists and news organizations undertake various tasks such as warning about disasters that occur and affect people, evaluating the importance of disasters, and assisting in recovery. Perhaps the most fundamental of the important functions that journalists and news organizations play a role in is to convey all kinds of warnings that may cause a disaster before the disaster and to report about the event by explaining what

happened (Kütükoğlu, 2021: 220; Koç Akgül, 2024: 488-489). Therefore, journalists' disaster preparedness processes should be improved and they should be well-equipped to fulfil such an important task. It should not be forgotten that journalists who witness disaster events are at risk of psychological, emotional and physical injuries.

The element that distinguishes disaster news from other news is the obligation of journalists to maintain uninterrupted impartial and objective news production by struggling with the potential of being a disaster victim and the difficult living conditions despite the trauma they witness. The journalist's witnessing of a disaster encourages the audience to take action in response to situational or structural violence and suffering. Naturally, this also entails a moral responsibility (Pantti, 2019: 155 as cited in Koç Akgül, 2024: 498). Accordingly, the opinions of journalists who specialize in disaster reporting and have worked in different disaster situations in different regions based on their experiences are very important in terms of the practicality of the subject. In their advice on disaster reporting, three international journalists who have worked for the BBC in the UK, NHK in Japan and the Times in Nepal, both earthquake countries, agreed that the first rule of investigative journalism in the aftermath of disasters is "accurate information" and emphasized the importance of being able to meet one's own needs in the disaster zone, finding and

**Journalists play an important public service role as they are considered to help people understand and cope with stressful and dangerous events during disasters.**

presenting data, even if it is difficult, and collaborating with experts. Natalia Antelava, editor of Coda Story, who worked for many years at the BBC, said that disaster reporting is even more necessary today as the internet has brought the world closer; Kunda Dixit, editor of Nepali Times, said, "When the ground shakes, rumours, unconfirmed information and forecasts spread because social media is not very understandable; Yoi-chiro Tateiwa, editor of the 'Nuclear Watch' program at the Japanese state broadcaster NHK, agreed that data can show what people cannot see; researching whether adequate warnings and preparations have been made, demystifying the data, becoming technically self-sufficient (power supply, WiFi, food, security, etc.), avoiding herd psychology, remembering what is forgotten, following the issue even after readers and viewers start to get bored if the post-disaster period may last long, and not chasing big headlines (journo.com.tr, 2025).

In this respect, it is accepted that journalists play an important public service role as they are considered to help people understand and cope with stressful and dangerous events during disasters. The warnings and information contained in the news are also shared through different communication tools and channels. Therefore, it seems possible for the readers to learn the right practices for saving lives in disaster preparedness and response and to contribute to the risk reduction process. This approach clearly supports the argument that journalists have a critical role in preventing disaster damages (Koç Akgül, 2024:498).

## Case Studies

Disinformation, which is used to erode the stability of states and their institutions by manipulating public opinion with false and fake news, is one of the most important concerns of democratic countries. At the end of 2019, both information flow and disinformation accelerated worldwide with the intense need for communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in the world at the end of 2019 and whose effects spread for 3 years. From the source of the virus to the reliability of vaccines, from the correct use of masks to the number of patients and deaths, there has been disinformation on a large amount of information. In the fight against disinformation for the public's right to receive accurate information, public interest and public health, states as well as technology companies, civil society, verifiers and academic institutions have important duties (Ministerio De Asuntos Exteriores, Union Europe Y Cooperacion, 2025). Looking at the recent disasters in the world, many examples of disinformation were encountered during the 2019-2020 black summer fires in Australia, the 6 February 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes in Türkiye and the 2024 dara flood disaster in Spain.

### The Case of 2019-2020 Black Summer Fires in Australia

The Black Summer fires, unprecedented in intensity and scale, raged across Australia for nine months between 1 July 2019 and 31 March 2020. During the 2019-2020 season, approximately 7 per cent of New South Wales (NSW) was burnt, often with multiple simultaneous fires across the region. The total area burnt by Black Summer bushfires was more than four times the area of woodland burnt in a normal bushfire season (NSW, 2021).

During the bushfires in Australia, misinformation was spread through hundreds of thousands of posts on social media. Outdated photos of survivors and inaccurate fire maps were posted as authorities battled the flames in fire areas across the country. There were numerous posts on social media claiming that arson was the major cause of Australia's catastrophic bushfire season. However, the majority of these are unsubstantiated claims.



**Image 1.** Social media post that 200 arsonists were caught and that the fires were not caused by climate change

### False claims about arsonists

The news of the arrest of arsonists in official statements provided the basis for the disinformation that all fires were started in this way. False claims about arsonists were shared almost 100,000 times on Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, with a potential reach of 2.8 million accounts, fuelled by news reports containing 'some truth'. This was used to deflect the online debate about the cause of the fires away from the impact of climate change.



**Image 2.** News image of Australian police saying arsonists and lightning caused the fires

**Image 3.** A social media post saying that arsonists started the fires

### The Case of 6 February 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes in Türkiye

In 2023, Türkiye experienced two very large earthquakes, which were labelled as the catastrophe of the century. On 6 February 2023, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake occurred at 04.17 in the morning with its epicentre in Pazarcık district of Kahramanmaraş and another 7.6 magnitude earthquake occurred at 13.24 in the afternoon with its epicentre in Elbistan district of Kahramanmaraş. The occurrence of two earthquakes of this magnitude on the same day is unprecedented in history. 6 February 2023 earthquakes are distinguished from other earthquakes by the fact that the earthquake occurred at a close depth and had a devastating effect as well as a very wide impact area. These earthquakes affected 11 provinces, 124 districts (about 110 thousand square kilometres) and about 14 million people. This corresponds to the total surface area of Germany.

During the period in question, while all state institutions were working to save the lives of those affected by the earthquake and to provide assistance to the survivors, a large number of disinformative news emerged through social media.

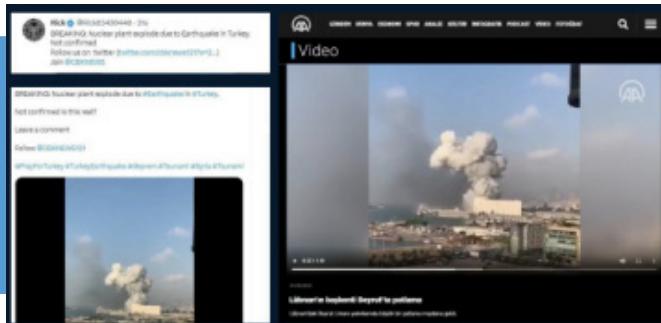
### Claim that 'Cracks formed in Atatürk Dam after the earthquake'

Some social media accounts claimed that 'cracks occurred in Atatürk Dam after the earthquake'. The Vice President of the Republic made a statement after the earthquake, stating that the entire region was checked in relation to all our dams and that there was no problem in any dam except Malatya Sultansuyu Dam. Şanlıurfa Governorate, Malatya Governorate and Birecik District Governorate made statements on their official social media accounts that there were no problems in other dams in the region.

**Image 3.** Examples of social media posts claiming that cracks have appeared in Atatürk Dam

## Claim that 'Nuclear Power Plant Exploded During Earthquake in Türkiye'

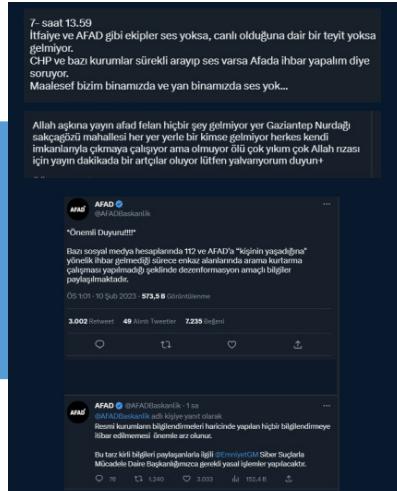
Some social media accounts shared the footage, claiming that 'the nuclear power plant exploded during the earthquake in Türkiye'. However, the alleged images belong to the explosion that occurred on 4 August 2020 at the Port of Beirut in Lebanon. The Lebanese General Directorate of General Security stated that the explosion, which killed 218 people, was due to 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate confiscated years ago and stored in the port. There are no active nuclear facilities in Türkiye and no damage has occurred at the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant under construction.



**Image 4.** Social media posts claiming that a nuclear power plant exploded in Türkiye

**Claim that 'Search and Rescue Operations are not carried out unless the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) is notified that "the person is alive"**

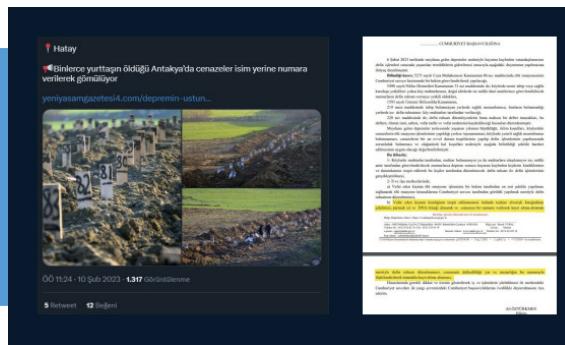
Some social media accounts claimed that 'Search and rescue operations are not carried out in the debris areas unless 112 teams and AFAD receive a report that "the person is alive"'. The teams have made all necessary interventions to the debris even in the absence of notifications. It has been announced to the public that no information other than the information provided by official institutions should be relied upon.



**Image 5.** Social media posts claiming that no intervention was carried out unless there was a report

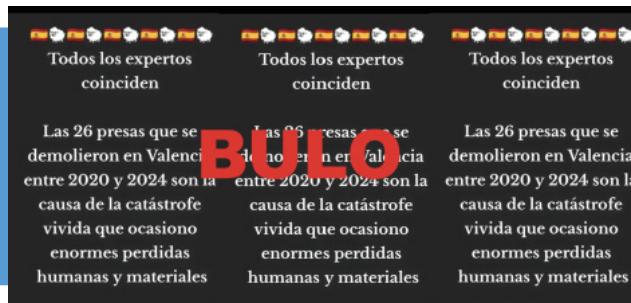
## Claim that 'In Antakya, Where Thousands of Citizens Died, Bodies Are Buried with Numbers Instead of Names'

The claim shared by some social media accounts that "In Antakya, where thousands of citizens died, bodies are buried with numbers instead of names" was also reported in the press. However, due to the devastating impact of the earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş, the bodies of those who lost their lives were identified in the fastest way possible and their bodies were delivered to their relatives immediately. Bodies whose lifeless bodies were found during search and rescue operations and whose identities could not be determined were recorded by taking photographs suitable for identification, taking fingerprints and DNA samples and assigning a number to the body. The bodies were buried after a burial license was issued and the place and cemetery where the body was buried were associated with this number and recorded in a report.



## Claim that '26 Dams in Valencia were Demolished by the Government between 2020 and 2024'

Claim that DANA's damage is caused by the government's systematic destruction of dams was shared on social media with sharings such as "All experts agree. The 26 dams that were demolished in Valencia between 2020 and 2024 are the cause of the catastrophe that led to massive human and material losses." However, in reality, no dams, reservoirs or dykes were demolished between 2018 and 2024 in the valleys affected by DANA or in the area affected by DANA in Valencia.



**Image 7.** Social media post claiming that the cause of the disaster was the dams previously demolished by the government

## Claim that 'Video Said to Be of a Dam in the Valencian Community Releasing Water to DANA'

A video was shared on social media showing how the opening of the sluice gates of a dam said to be in the Valencian Community caused floods in October and November 2024. In reality, however, the video was first shared in September 2024 by a Facebook user living in India.



**Image 8.** Social media post claiming dam gates opened

## Claim that 'Military and Civil Guard Hide 10,000 Bodies in Valencia'

A post saying that "Military and civil guards are 'losing' bodies 'to avoid being counted' and the Navy is dedicated to 'patrolling the shores of Valencia, collecting or burning bodies'. "There are actually 10,000 deaths" was circulated on social media. This disinformation claimed that those killed by DANA in Valencia were being hidden. However, this claim is not substantiated by the testimony of any soldier or official, a video on the subject, or a record of the deaths or funeral transportation.



*Image 9. Social media post claiming that the bodies are being hidden*

## **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**

While disasters accelerate the flow of information, they also pave the way for the spread of false and misleading information. Disinformation, defined as the act of deliberately producing and disseminating false or misleading information, is of critical importance in times of crisis. Social media platforms, in particular, have become the most popular channels for the rapid dissemination of information and the dissemination of misleading information. Since algorithms prioritize content with high engagement, misinformation can reach large audiences.

The environment of panic, fear and uncertainty during disasters accelerates the spread of fake news and misleading information. Panic, lack of information, insecurity, manipulation and propaganda are among the most important reasons for the spread of disinformation in disasters. Information pollution increases as the society tends to share rapidly spreading information without questioning in times of crisis. Disinformation disrupts search and rescue efforts, creates distrust among the public and makes crisis management difficult. This situation negatively affects crisis management and makes it difficult for public institutions to respond effectively. Misinformation can lead to social polarization, making post-crisis recovery difficult, and can influence economic decisions, causing supply chain disruptions and mis-allocation of resources.

Crisis communication strategies play an important role in preventing disinformation during disasters. Authorities should inform the public from reliable sources by providing fast, accurate and transparent information flow. At the same time, official information sources should be actively used, misinformation should be quickly corrected, and social media platforms should strengthen their control mechanisms. Journalists should act responsibly in disaster reporting, avoid speculative news and ensure the dissemination of accurate information. The role of the media is to raise awareness before disasters, inform the public during disasters and contribute to social recovery after disasters.

Academic studies recommend the use of machine learning and digital verification tools to monitor and control the spread of disinformation in disasters. In addition, the dissemination of accurate information through trusted individuals such as local leaders, health workers and teachers strengthen the fight against disinformation in times of crisis. In conclusion, combating disinformation in disasters is possible through rapid access to accurate information, increasing media literacy, social media platforms taking responsibility and effective use of crisis communication strategies.

- Students can comprehend the differences between misinformation (false information), disinformation, and malinformation (malicious information) and relate these concepts to their effects in disaster processes.
- Students can analyse how misinformation spreads during disaster processes and which factors contribute to the increase of disinformation.
- Students can learn effective crisis communication methods, they can explain how accurate information can be spread during disaster processes and how disinformation can be prevented.
- Students can evaluate how social media platforms' algorithms facilitate the spread of disinformation and assess possible measures to counter this issue.
- Students can understand how government institutions combat disinformation during disasters and the role of official information sources in crisis management.
- Students can learn how individuals can develop media literacy skills to access accurate information during disasters and distinguish disinformation.
- Students can explain the necessity for journalists to act responsibly during disasters and the importance of ethical journalism principles in crisis situations.
- Students can compare how disinformation affects disasters on a global scale and the strategies applied in the fight against disinformation in different countries.
- Students can understand how individuals, media organizations and government agencies can collaborate to increase public access to accurate information during disaster processes.

## Self-Assessment

1 Which of the following is one of the main reasons for the spread of disinformation during disaster processes?

- Lack of coordination among official institutions
- Panic environment and lack of information
- Sharing only verified information on social media
- People not following the news during a crisis

2 Which of the following best defines the concept of misinformation?

- Deliberately produced and disseminated false information
- Accurate information whose context is intentionally changed with malicious intent
- Incorrect information that is spread accidentally, without intention
- Information shared by government institutions

3 Which of the following is the main reason why social media platforms increase the spread of disinformation?

- Users only following reliable news sources
- Algorithms promoting content with high engagement
- Social media only featuring accurate information
- Official statements being made through social media during crises

4 Which of the following is the most effective strategy to reduce the negative effects of disinformation in disaster processes?

- Official institutions providing transparent and quick information
- Social media users sharing every news they see
- Receiving information only from traditional media during a disaster
- Journalists spreading speculative news more widely

5 Which of the following is not among the ethical principles journalists should adhere to during disaster processes?

- Being responsible for providing accurate information to the public
- Avoiding speculative and sensational news
- Sharing information verified from official sources
- Disseminating unverified information to the public

6 What is the key difference between disinformation and misinformation?

- Disinformation is intentional, while misinformation is unintentional
- Misinformation is intentional, while disinformation is unintentional
- Disinformation only appears in digital media, while misinformation appears in traditional media
- Misinformation does not contain false information, while disinformation does

7 Which of the following institutions play an active role in combating disinformation during disaster processes in Türkiye?

- Turkish Disaster Information Bank (TABB)
- Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)
- Center for Countering Disinformation (DMM)
- Press Advertising Agency (BIK)

8 Which of the following could be an example of malinformation (malicious information)?

- Spreading false information about aid organizations after a disaster
- Disclosing private information about the disaster without pursuing public interest
- Providing false information about the aid reaching the disaster area
- A journalist sharing an incorrect date related to the disaster

9 Which of the following is not one of the societal impacts of disinformation?

- Increasing social polarization
- Misleading economic resources
- Hindering the flow of information
- Hindering rescue operations

10 Which type of disinformation is most commonly encountered on social media during disaster periods?

- Manipulation of government statements
- Baseless claims about the disaster
- Spreading verified news to a wider audience
- News about complete internet access disruption in disaster areas

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## Answer Key

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1.b, 2.c, 3.b, 4.a, 5.d, 6.a, 7.c, 8.b, 9.c, 10.b

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# JOURNALISM IN THE HEALING OF DISASTER WOUNDS

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# BOOK CHAPTER 14

## JOURNALISM IN THE HEALING OF DISASTER WOUNDS

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Making Needs Known in Disaster Areas**
- **The Motivation to Survive in Disaster Areas**
- **The Impact of Journalism on Social Solidarity After Disasters**
- **Public Diplomacy in International Media During Disasters**
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## Introduction

Working as a journalist in a disaster zone is both a challenge and a privilege. It is a test of resilience, objectivity and the ability to remain true to ethical standards even when the world around you is falling apart. But it's also a privilege to be able to be the voice of those who have lost everything and help the audience understand why their support matters. The real challenge is to put the public's interests first, finding a balance between the need to inform quickly and the need to verify every fact. After all, the job of a journalist is not just to convey a picture of chaos, but to create a bridge between the victims and those who can help. Every report is an opportunity to do more than just tell a story; it is a chance to make a difference, even in the most difficult circumstances.

This chapter explores the important role of journalism in disaster recovery. Journalists not only inform the public about events, but also influence public opinion, mobilize resources and promote social solidarity. The chapter analyzes the relationship between journalism, government policies and civil society in overcoming the consequences of disasters. The author also discusses the challenges that journalists face in their work, such as the spread of disinformation and pressure from political forces. This chapter will be useful for media researchers, journalists, and anyone interested in social recovery after disasters.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Disaster Zones

Geographical areas that have been significantly impacted by a natural or human-caused event that has caused widespread damage, destruction, loss of life, and disruption to normal functioning (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, & Davis, 2004). These events can overwhelm the capacity of local communities to cope, requiring external assistance for recovery and rebuilding.

### Informational Needs

In the context of journalism, refer to the specific information requirements of audiences to understand and engage with news and current events (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). These needs are not static and can vary depending on the individual, the community, and the specific event or issue being reported. Journalists play a crucial role in identifying and fulfilling these needs by providing accurate, relevant, and accessible information.

### Basic Needs

The fundamental requirements necessary for survival and a life with dignity (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1990). These needs are universal, inalienable, and essential for the realization of all other human rights.

### Adaptation

In psychology, adaptation refers to the process by which individuals adjust to new or changing circumstances, environments, or stressors (Lazarus, 1993). This involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioural adjustments aimed at maintaining psychological well-being and equilibrium in the face of challenges.

### Social integration

The process by which individuals or groups become full and equal members of a society, participating in its various aspects and contributing to its development (Parsons, 1951). It involves the establishment of social bonds, the sharing of common values and norms, and the access to opportunities and resources.

### Solidarity

A sense of unity or shared interests, purposes, and sympathies, binding individuals or groups together (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It often involves a willingness to act together to achieve common goals or to support those in need.

### Soft power

The ability to obtain desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2004). It arises from a country's culture, political ideals, and policies, which can be attractive to other nations and peoples.

## Making Needs Known in Disaster Areas

Journalists can help by highlighting stories that unite the community, such as those of volunteers assisting others or individuals who have managed to rebuild their lives after loss.

A disaster drastically alters the structure of human needs, returning it to the base of Maslow's pyramid. In the first hours and days after an event, physiological needs - such as food, water, warm clothing, and medical care - take precedence. Safety becomes equally important: people seek shelter from natural disasters or military actions, striving to protect their loved ones. Journalists can serve as liaisons between the affected and humanitarian organizations, informing them about where to find shelter, when help will arrive, and which hotlines are available. For instance, platforms like local radio stations, social media, or messaging app chats become channels for rapid communication. Timely and accurate information can save lives (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019; CJE, 2013).

Disasters not only threaten physical survival but also disrupt social connections. People need support, a sense of solidarity, and the opportunity to express their emotions. Journalists can help by highlighting stories that unite the community, such as those of volunteers assisting others or individuals who have managed to rebuild their lives after loss. Such materials not only inspire but also provide psychological support to those in a state of uncertainty. Research emphasizes the importance of empathy in journalism as a tool for strengthening the emotional resilience of the audience (UNESCO, 2017; Glück, 2019). In disaster situations, information becomes a critical resource. The affected want to know what is happening, which subsequent actions are safe, and how to protect themselves and their loved ones. Journalists can create informational blocks that include verified news, expert advice, and survival recommendations. Information about safe zones, sources of drinking water, or evacuation routes should be accessible and understandable to everyone, regardless of their digital literacy. It is especially important to consider the needs of vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities (SPJ, 2014; IFJ, 2020).

People affected by disasters often seek to have their stories heard and their issues acknowledged. Journalists can become a platform for expressing these stories, helping to draw attention from society and humanitarian organizations. For example, during the 2010 Haiti earthquake coverage, it was the eyewitness accounts that allowed the international community to understand the scale of the tragedy and quickly organize assistance. At the same time, ethical principles must be followed: protecting the privacy of the subjects and avoiding sensationalism (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019).

Journalism in disaster conditions presents not only physical and emotional challenges but also a constant struggle to maintain truthfulness and objectivity. Several key threats can arise. First, information distortion is common, as chaotic dissemination can lead to inaccuracies. Overly emotional reporting or misinterpretations can cause panic or distrust. Journalists must maintain objectivity, even under pressure for sensationalism (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019). Second, unreliable sources often proliferate in crises, including rumors, social media, and unverified testimonies. Thorough verification, including consulting independent experts and analysing official reports, is crucial (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019).

**Journalism in disaster conditions presents not only physical and emotional challenges but also a constant struggle to maintain truthfulness and objectivity.**

adhere to safety protocols and collaborate with local organizations (CJE, 2014).

SPJ, 2014). Third, journalists may face an inability to verify information personally due to restricted access. In such cases, it's vital to indicate preliminary data and reference primary sources (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019; Glück, 2019). Fourth, deliberate misinformation can be a problem, with interested parties potentially misleading journalists to manipulate public opinion. Critical thinking is essential to avoid disseminating false information (CJE, 2014; IFJ, 2020). Fifth, subjective hysteria and accusations from victims, who may be in shock, require journalists to show empathy while avoiding manipulation, recognizing the potential subjectivity of such testimonies (IFJ, 2020). Sixth, moral and ethical challenges arise frequently, particularly regarding the publication of traumatic photos or testimonies. Ethical considerations are paramount to avoid re-traumatization (BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2019; SPJ, 2014). Finally, physical danger is a constant threat in disaster zones, requiring journalists to

## The Motivation to Survive in Disaster Areas

**Journalism can show that even in the darkest corners of human experience there is a spark that can ignite the fire of hope.**

When it seems that all is lost, it is then that stories appear that make us wonder: how does light appear in the darkest moments? This light is people who find the strength to move on, to help others and inspire new life. The journalists who capture these moments create something more than just news - they build a bridge between tragedy and hope. In 2022, when the war in Ukraine destroyed many homes, one story captured the world's attention. In the city of Irpin, a group of volunteers not only helped evacuate people, but also organized a makeshift kitchen in a shelter. Amidst the destruction, they cooked hot soup and distributed it to those in need. This action became a symbol of care in the most difficult times (Lysykhkina, 2024).

Such stories not only tell about the events, but also inspire. They demonstrate that even in the worst of circumstances, humanity finds a way to manifest itself. When a journalist finds himself in a disaster zone, he faces a choice: to create a shocking story or to find a ray of hope in the chaos. Inspiring stories usually start with ordinary people. Think of the villager who, against all odds, stayed in his village to feed his neighbors. Or the woman who organized volunteers to clear the rubble after an earthquake. Aren't these heroes worth telling about? In February 2023, after the catastrophic earthquake in Türkiye, the story of a small community in the city of Kahramanmaraş moved the world. A local farmer who had lost his home used the remains of his harvest to prepare hot

Journalism in disaster zones has the power not only to inform, but also to motivate people to act.

meals for neighbors and rescuers. His small gesture of kindness became a source of inspiration for thousands of people who saw him as a symbol of indomitable spirit (Kurenkova, 2023).

What makes such stories important? They don't just inform - they evoke emotions. They give viewers a sense that there is always room for kindness in the world. A journalist who knows how to find such stories becomes a bridge between tragedy and recovery. Several key elements make these stories resonate. First, find unexpected details. People do not want to see only the scale of the destruction; they want to know how someone found a way to cope. For example, a man who grew flowers on the site of a destroyed house demonstrates that beauty can be born even after a disaster. Second, tell about ordinary heroes. These can be volunteers who rescue animals or doctors who work without sleep to help those who were injured. Why are these stories so inspiring? Because

they show that everyone can become a hero. Third, emphasize moments of unity. Tell how the community came together to build a new playground or how children organized a fundraiser to help the victims. Fourth, focus on action, not regret. Replace phrases such as "they lost everything" with "they found a way to rebuild everything." This creates a powerful emotional effect. Fifth, visualize emotions. Show the smiles of those who received help or the hands of volunteers working together. These images stay in the memory.

Journalism has the power to change the world. But it's not enough to just talk about the facts. You need to dig deeper - to find those moments that impress, make you think, and most importantly, give people faith. Journalism can show that even in the darkest corners of human experience there is a spark that can ignite the fire of hope. Why do some stories stay with us forever? Because they resonate with our own aspirations and emotions. Journalism in disaster zones has the power not only to inform, but also to motivate people to act. These stories have three key elements. A character: a person or group of people who acts against the odds. A conflict: a difficulty that needs to be overcome. A solution: how they managed to change the situation for the better.

Here are some practical tips for journalists. First, pay attention to details. Details create emotional depth. For example, a story about a child who lost a favorite toy but received a new one thanks to volunteers makes the story more relatable. Second, don't be afraid to show weakness. Sometimes even failures can be a source of motivation if you show how a person found the strength to get up after a fall. Third, involve the audience in the action. Include information on how viewers can help, whether it's by donating, volunteering, or simply spreading the story. Fourth, use emotional footage. Images or videos often convey more than words. Use visuals that emphasize strength and unity. Journalists have a unique opportunity to mediate between events and society. By telling a story of hope, they help heal wounds and restore faith in humanity. The next time you see a disaster, think: what story can you make of it as a light in the darkness?

## The Impact of Journalism on Social Solidarity After Disasters

Social development and democratic processes empower the state, governmental institutions, the public, public organizations, and other social structures to actively participate in post-disaster recovery efforts, driven by social solidarity and the integration of societal action. Moreover, such activity has a pronounced subjective character, i.e., these subjects form and implement initiatives that are integrated into the system of disaster response measures and are responsible for the effectiveness of their actions. The most general example of such solidarity during Russia's war against Ukraine is the functioning of numerous volunteer organizations and funds to support the armed forces, which consolidate and direct the efforts of citizens and solve many large and small problems of supplying military units - from household items to vehicles and drones. The existence of social solidarity during disasters and in the aftermath of their consequences demonstrates the high democratic maturity of society and its readiness to elevate the needs of the national level above personal needs.

Conceptually, social integration processes are defined as sufficiently influential means for the development of political systems, social movements and social progress in general. Researchers qualify social integration as follows: the concept of social integration in its most general form reflects the processes of convergence, connection, and unification of various social elements into a single whole, as well as a certain state of the social system achieved as a result of the deployment of these processes. First of all, integration reflects social processes that lead to the establishment of stable relations between social groups, classes, communities, between all elements of society, processes aimed at strengthening cooperation between them, thus forming a coherent social system.

Deep processes of integration take place at the level of interaction between social groups, communities, institutions, norms, values, interests, forming a social order. At this level, integration is supported and reproduced by the mechanisms of social institutions: economic, political, social, cultural, etc. (Zlobina, et al. 2016). In this context, it should be understood that integration processes are manifested at the level of common thoughts, views, beliefs, but are not limited to this: they are manifested in joint activities that have or should have a conscious focus on social development, in addition, social integration forms and presents a system of social values for certain periods of society's development, due to the circumstances of this development and the possible dynamics of social change. As a result, it is obviously that "The most important and least theoretically understood in relation to the processes of integration in society is the phenomenon of social responsibility, which is defined by the authors as the willingness to socially recognize the consequences that have occurred as a result of a decision made by the subject. To analyze a social situation, it is important not only to assess the willingness to recognize the consequences, but also the willingness of the subject to make a decision in a situation of choice" (Zlobina, et al. 2016). Social responsibility is realized in specific results of activities, from the results of political choices to the level and extent of social support that is manifested in society as a result of emergency events. Any large-scale disasters or hostilities lead to an increase in the number of IDPs or refugees, for example, in Ukraine, after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, such people received the status of "internally displaced persons". Along with the support from the state, these people, especially in the first months of the full-scale invasion, received significant support from communities and individuals, which is evidence of social solidarity and the system of values and orientation of society towards direct assistance. These trends have not disappeared today, and this is a sign of the stability of the value system and the dominance of ideas of support and indifference in society.

It is important to consider social solidarity not only in the vector from the community or organization to the individual, but also in the opposite direction, when individual personality traits that result from the growth (socialization) of a person in society become the basis for integration processes. This position is

advocated by O. Palahniuk in her study, pointing out that “social solidarity is a specific property of society that arises spontaneously or in a controlled manner on the basis of integration of personal potentials of solidarity of the majority of its members, which leads to convergence of social processes on a common goal and forms cohesion at the level of large groups. It is established that solidarity as a cohesion of large groups makes it possible to effectively solve problems and achieve the goals of sustainable development; that there is a need for a new view of the concept and mechanisms of solidarity, due to the fact that many phenomena of modern solidarization processes cannot be explained only on the basis of classical theories of solidarity.

The concept of “new solidarity” is defined as a generally accepted one that loses its territorial and class bias and no longer reproduces a permanent commonality of interests and values” (Plagniuk, 2021). The approach of this study gives grounds to talk about solidarity in a context wider than the borders of a state or territory, i.e. international solidarity or solidarity based not on the value system of a particular society, but on universal humanistic values. These features and phenomena are actively manifested during disaster relief, when many people, organizations and social groups from different countries provide support and assistance. We will discuss this in more detail in the next paragraph.

From the perspective of covering social solidarity after disasters and in order to eliminate their consequences, journalists should focus on the contexts of social responsibility, because this moment determines not only attitudes and indifference, but also often acts as a motivator for actions and deeds that support victims, initiatives that ensure the restoration of material losses, social support and other important measures to eliminate the consequences of disasters. Researchers define social responsibility “as a mechanism of self-management of individuals, groups and communities of people in society, as a means of ensuring the reproduction and maintenance of stability of a certain type of social relations” (Zlobina, et al. 2016). It should be noted that the phenomena of social responsibility in the solidarity of society around the processes of overcoming disasters can become the basis for journalists to prepare not only information genres, but also analytics and journalism, because such phenomena clearly determine the effectiveness of the position of a person or group of people, society as a whole, are the result of social harmonization processes, and reflect social values.

It is worth noting that along with scientific research on social solidarity, projects and programs are being implemented to shape the practical implementation of the phenomenon. One of the most widespread and youth-oriented programs is Erasmus+. The content of the Erasmus+ programs' activities is primarily volunteer work: “Volunteer teams in priority areas are projects that support volunteer activities carried out by young people from different countries who come together to express solidarity by implementing short-term activities that address common European challenges in policy areas defined annually at the EU level” (European Solidarity Corps., 2023). Another indication of the importance of these programs is their focus on real support for victims of disasters: the Erasmus+ European Solidarity Corps program sets the following as its first priority: “1. ASSISTANCE TO PERSONS FLEEING FROM ARMED CONFLICTS AND OTHER VICTIMS OF NATURAL OR TECHNOLOGICAL DISASTERS” (European Solidarity Corps., 2023). Journalists who write about disaster recovery can also participate in Erasmus+ programs, gain new knowledge and skills, access to information systems at the European Union level, gain new experience and develop competencies necessary for professional activities.

This paragraph would be incomplete if we did not touch upon the social responsibility of business in the system of disaster management and other emergency situations. The issues of corporate responsibility of business are sufficiently researched and presented in scientific papers, practical recommendations, thoroughly discussed at seminars and trainings on business development and are a significant component of social processes. The textbook for future businessmen defines social responsibility (as part of social solidarity) as follows: “Social responsibility is an integral element in the macro-system of

person-state-society. Social responsibility is an element of social existence, it is directly social in nature and emerges with the birth of human society. From its very inception, this phenomenon is designed to perform an important social function - to regulate the behaviour of people and institutions of the economy and society" (Chuprina, 2023).

Further, the authors of the manual point out that the interdependence of social activities is growing in importance, as the role of interdependence of people and society is growing, and therefore, business participation in social processes implies a willingness to take responsibility for certain aspects of social processes and situations. Business participation in disaster recovery processes manifests itself in a large number of aspects, from direct financing of specific needs to creating jobs for victims, providing them with long-term material and/or social support, not only restoring destroyed or damaged facilities, but also creating new opportunities and prospects using its own resources or through the integration of a wider range of participants, including communities.

Coverage of the role of business in disaster recovery sometimes raises issues of compliance with standards, as it can be perceived as hidden advertising, while journalists should strive to report the reality objectively and therefore take a responsible approach to their professional duties. The authors of the guide are aware of cases when information about business support for the restoration of a damaged facility (the Ohmadyt Children's Hospital in Kyiv, which was damaged by rocket fire) triggered a number of initiatives from other companies and organizations that contributed to the funding of the response and recovery process. There are many such examples that demonstrate the existence of a system of social solidarity in society and the readiness of society to effectively support effective disaster recovery initiatives.

## Public Diplomacy in International Media During Disasters

The international community provides significant support during disasters and in the process of eliminating their consequences. Today, thanks to the media and social media, information activities in this area have significantly intensified, and the speed of information and, as a result, the efficiency of the world's response to any emergency has increased. The world is getting closer, and its support for the victims is becoming more targeted and effective.

Along with the official channels formed by diplomatic services, public diplomacy operates. The basis for the formation of these processes and the very foundation of public diplomacy is international cooperation in the area of interaction between social groups and communities, public figures and representatives of culture, active citizens, athletes and other actors of international activity. Traditionally, the concept of public diplomacy is considered in the context of the so-called "soft power", a concept developed by the American political scientist J. Nye Jr. The concept is based on the ability to achieve the set results of international cooperation through the actualization of culture and values along with political actions. For this concept, systematic and consistent information activities aimed at informing the international community about the country's achievements and values are important, resulting in the formation of image components that, unlike propaganda, create an objective and unbiased picture of social development in information presentations of social achievements. The key understanding of public diplomacy stems from the perception of it as a means by which countries can tell about themselves, reflect social progress and achievements not only through official sources of international communication, but also through the consolidated efforts of the public (Nye, 2014).

Along with the term public diplomacy, the term "public diplomacy" is used, and it is assigned the same functions and positioned in the same way in shaping the international image of the country. For example,

the published strategic concept of public diplomacy of Ukraine contains the following description of activities in this area: "Public diplomacy is an integral part of the state's strategic communications. Public diplomacy is a system of measures through which the state communicates with the public of other states and influences the formation of public opinion in other countries to promote its national interests and achieve foreign policy goals. The tools of public diplomacy allow to significantly expand the audience reach, build new partnerships, and engage representatives of areas outside the sphere of influence of official authorities (non-governmental organizations, businesses, think tanks, educational institutions, youth, opinion leaders, and individuals)" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2021).

Thus, we realize that public diplomacy is largely defined as a process of systematic and consistent informing of the international community, long-term interaction between elites of countries and social institutions, and the establishment of horizontal ties between elites and socially active citizens or organizations. Public diplomacy researcher Yulia Lysenko points out another feature of this activity: "The target audience of public diplomacy is both foreign governments and the elite, as well as the general public, representatives of the media, culture, art, and academia. Today, the attitude to public diplomacy as a means of solving problems that have already appeared is recognized as a mistake. Public diplomacy is a preventive mechanism in a state's foreign policy. In today's globalized world, public diplomacy is engaged not only by the state, but also by all other actors of social and political life: public organizations, NGOs, individuals, and many others" (Lysenko, 2019).

In situations of disaster response and relief, this reputational capital of a country significantly affects the implementation of support mechanisms, influences the scope and efficiency of assistance, and makes it possible to convey information and launch processes of social international support immediately after a disaster or in the process of its unfolding. A journalist should focus on the main actors in the field of public diplomacy and perceive them both as a source of information for preparing a story and as a means of conveying information to the international community. It should be noted that such ties developed by public diplomacy take a long time to form and often open up as many opportunities as the official channels of diplomatic services.

Understanding public diplomacy as a long-term, mostly systematic communication process of international communities, we should emphasize the need for journalists to study and use this experience in their professional activities, especially when it comes to covering the results of disasters and informing about the elimination of consequences and recovery after a disaster, because it is important not only to fully reflect the support of the victims and the country as a whole, but also to show international cooperation, stimulate such activities and inform the society. The realization that, along with official government channels, support and assistance comes from NGOs, volunteers, and various types of support centers created by people in other countries, greatly contributes to the consolidation of the international community and stimulates integration processes, and substantively signifies European values and principles of democratic participation, which has a positive impact on the society experiencing the disaster. These features are also important because today, as a result of rapid technological progress and the development of communication technologies, access to information for people and communities is becoming more rapid, and the completeness and accuracy of the coverage of events is becoming more realistic due to the ability to transmit photos and videos from the scene. In fact, some researchers, such as Iryna Sukhorolska, point to the development of technology as one of the key reasons for the strengthening of public diplomacy processes: "The main factors that have had the greatest impact on the formation of the new public diplomacy are the spread of new technologies and the increase in the number and importance of international non-governmental actors." (Sukhorolska, 2015). All these features point to the need to use the resources and potentials of public diplomacy to cover disasters, and no less consistently when covering the results of recovery and elimination of the consequences of disasters. To do this, a

journalist must be aware of the social paradigm of international communication processes in his or her country, on the one hand, and understand the nature of public diplomacy, on the other. Scientists identify several features of public diplomacy that are crucial at the current stage of society's development: "Openness and democracy; departure from superficiality; increasing role of values; transformation into a level playing field between different participants; dynamism and unpredictability.

Taking these features into account can significantly increase the effectiveness of public diplomacy strategies, and ignoring them, on the contrary, will turn any such strategy into an ineffective copying of the patterns of communication with foreign audiences inherent in past decades" (Sukhorolska, 2022). These features naturally arise from the essence and functions of public diplomacy. Openness and democracy are the result of the processes of realization of the right to freedom of speech and participation of a large number of actors in the process, who realize their communication needs (position their results and meanings, convey their visions). The same factor affects the dynamism and unpredictability of public diplomacy. Moving away from superficiality and increasing the role of values are becoming classification features of public diplomacy as a result of informing the international community about results or intentions.

The analysis of sources and the current situation suggests that public diplomacy is not regulated by diplomatic protocol, and therefore opens up more opportunities and connections for effective cooperation; on the other hand, this type of activity does not involve conceptually approved agreements or rules, so where there is no formally updated agreement (as in diplomacy), values and openness come to the fore, and the use of modern communication tools and technologies makes it possible not only to increase the efficiency of information exchange.

Public diplomacy also functions thanks to the principles and concept of international solidarity; these principles make it possible to direct the efforts of countries towards integration and create a basis for mutual understanding and unification of efforts of the international community in solving local and global problems, including disaster relief. Scholars consider the principles of international solidarity to be the key and fundamental means of developing international unity. For example, a study of the concepts of European solidarity outlines the following qualifying characteristics of this phenomenon: "The principle of solidarity is enshrined in the founding treaties of the European Union. In particular, Article 2 of the TEU states that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, in particular those of persons belonging to minorities. The same article states that the values are common to all member states in a society of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men. The next article of the same treaty (Article 3.3 of the TEU) emphasizes that the European Union supports the economic, social and territorial unity of the EU Member States and solidarity among them. Therefore, we can talk about solidarity in several dimensions, for example, when it comes to cooperation between states in the immigration field. For example, Article 80 TFEU states that the implementation of the EU's common immigration policy shall be governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibilities, including financial consequences, between the Member States. If necessary, EU acts adopted in accordance with the founding treaties contain appropriate measures to implement this principle" (Mushak, 2020). European Union legislation clearly defines the areas of international cooperation in the humanitarian sphere, which entails processes and results that directly affect recovery from disasters and emergencies, enable the protection of refugees, and create conditions for integration processes.

The media, including international ones, by performing the function of informing, significantly enhance these processes and stimulate public diplomacy and international communication to address various

problematic situations, primarily support during and recovery from disasters. Studies of international solidarity define the conditions for the functioning of this instrument of international cooperation through the conditions and nature of the international solidarity process, and it is important to understand that the process of solidarity of society within a country or nation is a necessary and natural prerequisite for international solidarity.

For example, Jörg Löschke's study identifies four components of solidarity: "The first element involves the provision of mutual assistance and support. The second element characterizes solidarity through the presence of special features that distinguish it from international solidarity. The third component is the identification of members of a particular association on a voluntary basis, which is characteristic of solidarity. Finally, the notion of solidarity includes moral components that must comply with the general standards and morality of the international community" (Löschke, 2015). Integration processes in society during disaster recovery are becoming more relevant and visible, and this should be the focus of journalists' attention, as it contributes to the recovery and reduction of traumatic social effects in the process of such recovery.

## Reconstruction Efforts After Disasters

Disaster recovery is a process that takes a considerable amount of time, sometimes decades. It involves consolidating the efforts of the government and society not only to overcome the material consequences, but also to set social priorities and develop key ideas for public discussion and perception of the situation. Every country that has faced natural or man-made disasters, military conflicts or other emergencies develops a range of special programs and measures aimed at overcoming the consequences of catastrophic events. Such actions are reflected in the country's legislation, so a journalist should use these resources to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of measures, the extent to which legislation is articulated in society, primarily through the activities of the media, sociological institutions and services that measure public attitudes to phenomena, the positions of politicians, public and cultural figures, which significantly affect the formation of the focus of social attention.

The activities of the government and society aimed at recovery from disasters largely depend on the peculiarities of the organization of social life that are laid down a priori, we are talking about the readiness of the social management system to overcome emergencies of any nature. This applies not only to economic or political stability, but also to the consolidation of society around key social issues, the functioning of social response tools and instruments, even public trust in government institutions, a high level of democracy, and, above all, a model of ensuring freedom of speech and independent media. These tools are actualized in the event of emergencies and largely determine the efforts that can be made to overcome the consequences of disasters and trauma.

Journalists, by the very nature of their profession, should clearly navigate this paradigm, informing society about the effectiveness of government actions, the activity of social organizations, and the opportunities that open up for citizens to address the consequences of disasters. It will be difficult for a journalist to provide timely and reliable information if he or she does not have knowledge of the country's social protection system and does not monitor the dynamics of changes in this system in a particular country where a disaster has occurred. It is important to reflect not only the effectiveness but also the efficiency of efforts to overcome the consequences of disasters, based on an understanding of the country's system for overcoming such consequences.

It would be inappropriate to say that the model of consolidating efforts to address the consequences of disasters or emergencies adopted in a particular country is perfect or functions perfectly. Even in times of calm social progress, the processes of supporting people in difficult life circumstances do not work properly in every case. During and after emergencies, these problematic aspects are exacerbated, can become more or less widespread, and therefore require special and balanced attention from journalists. The key principle of a professional approach for a media professional here is not to harm those trends and processes that make life easier for victims of disasters or lead to consolidation of efforts to eliminate such consequences.

It should be recalled that journalism has the function of covering socially significant facts and trends, and that journalists' activities are aimed at covering social problems and the results of their solution, so these features should be taken into account when preparing a story. A media professional must understand the peculiarities of the manifestations of the particular and the general, the systemic and the individual and, on the one hand, become a bridge between government agencies, NGOs, business, international organizations of various kinds and society in covering disaster relief efforts. On the other hand, based on the vision of the social protection system in the country, its changes related to specific actions aimed at eliminating the consequences, it should objectively articulate partial and systemic problems and facts, and draw the attention of all participants to the phenomena that need to be addressed. In most countries, the media system enjoys a high degree of public trust, and the activities of journalists have a significant impact on social processes, which increases responsibility for materials and makes it necessary to take seriously the verification of information, the ways and forms of its expression, and the means of emphasizing certain events or facts. In the situation of consolidating efforts to overcome the consequences of disasters, all participants in this process depend on journalists: government agencies, NGOs and activists, and international organizations convey their positions and report to society through the media system, because even official statements and releases gain mass appeal after they are published in the media system. On the other hand, the specific or more systemic needs of society to address the consequences of disasters, which can be met by the state or volunteer or international organizations, are also articulated in the media. Therefore, as always in journalism, it is necessary to study the problem in depth and maintain a balance of opinions, to be able to distinguish the individual from the general, the promising from the desirable, etc.

To partially illustrate these points, let us consider the situation of social protection and consolidation of society's efforts after the Chernobyl accident in Ukraine. More than thirty years have passed since the disaster, so we can outline a long period of time and briefly identify the key issues. The first thing worth mentioning is the existence of a system of state support, i.e. special laws and regulations aimed at eliminating or minimizing the consequences, including the existence of state recovery programs.

The consequences of the Chornobyl nuclear power plant accident were and continue to be eliminated at the level of two state structures - the Soviet Union and Ukraine (at least on the territory of independent Ukraine, which suffered the most from the consequences of the explosion). Thus, the problem has survived at least 1 state and is being solved by another, more than a dozen governments have not completely solved it, and statistically, today the solution to this problem is coordinated by a number of laws and regulations. In the most accessible resource for the population - the Ukrainian segment of Wikipedia - we find the following information on social protection of the population from the consequences of the disaster (Social protection, 2024) social protection of the population is implemented in 4 laws, a Presidential Decree, 5 resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers, several court decisions, including 2 decisions of the Supreme Court. This is a serious practice and a demonstration of the state's efforts to overcome the consequences of the disaster. On the other hand, such a wide range of official decisions demonstrates the complexity and ambiguity of the problem, thus proving the need for social articulation of the state's

efforts and integration of the efforts of the government and society in overcoming the consequences of emergencies (Plokhii, 2018). An important conclusion from this short example is that the attention of society is equally focused on overcoming the actual physical consequences and on creating an environment of social support and ensuring its functioning. These aspects - material resources and social articulation - are important components of eliminating the consequences of emergencies and disasters, and journalists' attention to them is necessary, as they are important evidence of the effectiveness of the efforts made. As a rule, there is a separate problem of social perception of the disaster itself, its consequences, and the ways and means of recovery after it. It is important to separate genuine trends from isolated and socially unjustified content, particularly in terms of ideological, political or social PR. For a country that has experienced or is experiencing a catastrophe, war, or other emergency, it is important to have a social awareness that things will never be the same as they were before, but that the situation will improve in the future. This focus on improving the situation in the future often becomes the basis for information campaigns or even manipulations, in particular, involving the mass audience. Therefore, media outlets should be careful about fact-checking, competence of sources, and balance of opinions when presenting information.

Analysing the model of state social support in the above-mentioned example of the Chornobyl disaster, we find an analytical note by the National Institute for Strategic Studies of Ukraine with an interesting observation: "The social monitoring conducted in Ukraine has determined that it is impossible to reduce the policy of overcoming the consequences of the Chornobyl disaster to social assistance alone. It has been shown that in many cases this leads to the exclusion from the sphere of active life of a large number of citizens classified as victims, and in some cases to their social degradation" (Ivanyuta, 2021).

This observation is interesting in the context of consolidating efforts to overcome the consequences of disasters in the context of involving victims in active social life, forming support strategies that would focus not only on addressing material needs, either one-time or systematically, but also form trends towards integrating people into social processes, articulating social perspectives and their place in the social paradigm. Given that the creation of a social product, economic development, or social development in general is impossible without the participation of specific people and the effective involvement of human potential, the importance of journalists' works in articulating actions aimed at overcoming the consequences of disasters is extremely important.

The problem of overcoming the consequences of disasters and natural disasters, military actions and processes resulting from the introduction of martial law is focused on the following key areas: restoration of material resources, restoration of human potential (including the return of refugees and their adaptation to new material and social conditions); formation of social support policy and its perception, strategic planning to eliminate the consequences and its assessment in society. All of these areas are widely covered by the media, provoking discussion in society, sometimes heated, and being a source of political struggle and ideological statements, which once again emphasizes the importance of journalists' compliance with standards of practice and codes of ethics, principles of freedom of speech and ensuring the public's right to receive complete and reliable information from unbiased sources.

Let's look at several aspects of the social positioning of Russia's war against Ukraine in the Ukrainian media system, which reflects the moods and expectations of different social groups. Although the war is not over yet, some efforts are being made to eliminate the consequences of this war even now, when the active phase of hostilities is ongoing. In this case, the initiative of the President and the government to create a Ministry of Ukrainian Unification, which was announced by the President and stated by government officials and experts, is indicative. The functions of such a ministry include the development and implementation of measures aimed at the return of refugees, which entails a social debate covering a

range of issues: social protection and prospects of such people, their safety, ability to work and ensure a sufficient level of satisfaction of their basic needs, participation of the international community in these processes, demographic problems and their solution, educational prospects for refugee children upon return to Ukraine, social perception and possible conflicts between those who lived during the war in the Ukraine. Social discussion, supported by the media, is quite heated, often reflects radically different views and perspectives, is used to form pictures of the country's future in a wide ideological field, and sometimes, instead of consolidating society, contributes to the formation of models of the future that are contrary to the state's approach and not marked by processes of stable social development.

Of course, the world community will be able to see and analyze the real outlines of such measures and strategic programs after the active phase of the war is over, but the contexts and ideas created and actualized in society will not disappear by themselves, especially those that envisage negative scenarios, and, moreover, are aimed at millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war around the world; these ideas and meanings can significantly affect the vision of the future in Ukraine after the war. Of course, the real outlines of such measures and strategic programs will be seen and analyzed by the international community after the active phase of the war is over, but the contexts and ideas created and actualized in society will not disappear by themselves, especially those that envisage negative scenarios, and, moreover, are aimed at millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war around the world, and these ideas and meanings can significantly affect the vision of the future in Ukraine after the war.

Consolidating efforts to recover from disasters is an important area of activity for modern journalism. With the development of technology, the possibilities of attracting not only national but also global audiences are growing, which entails the actualization of broader contexts and meanings, forcing journalists to look for ways to attract the attention of this global audience and broadcast problems and facts in the context of information requests that are formed at the supranational level, because even the smallest story can be picked up and spread to audiences of millions. Therefore, it is important to realize the role of journalism not only in informing and shaping public opinion, but also in reflecting trends to democratize the debate in society. In this sense, reports and other materials that present facts become an effective means of focusing the efforts of the state and society in overcoming the consequences of emergencies and disasters.

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

A journalist in a disaster zone is not just an observer but also a bridge between the victims and the world. By adhering to standards of truth, empathy, and responsibility, a journalist can not only inform but also change reality, helping people in the most challenging moments of their lives. Disasters, both natural and human-made, shatter lives and communities, leaving behind a trail of destruction and despair. In the aftermath of such events, journalists play a crucial role in informing the world, bearing witness to the devastation, and helping to rebuild shattered lives.

This chapter analyzes the impact of media on recovery after disasters and emergencies, focusing on social solidarity and the role of media in shaping and supporting these processes. Particular emphasis is placed on the formation of social responsibility of a journalist, defining its nature and mechanisms of implementation in professional activity. The authors highlight not only professional but also humanitarian needs of actualizing social solidarity, in particular, identified in the priorities of Erasmus+ projects. As a

result, the peculiarities of international cooperation and support in post-disaster recovery processes are considered in detail: the essence of public diplomacy is thoroughly defined, the key indicators of the impact of these processes on the formation of social support are established, and the place of journalism in the processes of ensuring public diplomacy is outlined.

The paragraph concludes with an analysis of the role of media activity in consolidating efforts to overcome the consequences of disasters, where the topics and issues that may be in the focus of journalistic attention and determine the effectiveness of the media professional's activity for the processes of social integration and solidarity in order to recover from emergencies are outlined. It delves into the multifaceted aspects of covering disasters, starting with the fundamental task of making needs known. Explores how journalists can effectively communicate the urgent requirements of affected populations, ensuring that aid and assistance reach those who need it most. And also examines the ethical considerations involved in portraying human suffering, emphasizing the importance of respecting the dignity of victims while conveying the urgency of their plight.

At the end of this chapter, students who will take this course will have the following achievements.

-  **Students can create content that highlights the impact of disaster journalism on social solidarity.**
-  **Students can understand and explain how disaster news contributes to social cohesion.**
-  **Students can know who to use international media to promote aid and cooperation.**
-  **Students can understand the socio-psychological effects of disaster news.**
-  **Students can understand the significance of disaster news in fostering social solidarity.**

## Self-Assessment

1 What is social integration and how does it manifest itself?

- Specially organized activities of public organizations aimed at uniting citizens;
- Specially organized activities of cultural and artistic leaders, specially organized activities of cultural and artistic leaders aimed at uniting citizens;
- Processes of convergence, connection, integration of different social elements that form a specific state of the social system;
- Specially organized activities of political parties and individual

2 How can a journalist consider the phenomenon of social solidarity in their work?

- Identify and direct the processes of social solidarity through publications;
- Disregard the processes of social solidarity, as they are in any case realized in journalism without the participation of the journalist;
- Use the phenomenon of social solidarity as a model of social interaction and support, shared responsibility for effective social solutions;
- Be guided by the recommendations of state authorities and subordinate institutions to carry out such activities.

3 Is corporate social responsibility a state-regulated obligation?

- No, it is exclusively a social initiative of business;
- Yes, the state defines such activity as mandatory;
- Yes, the state establishes special conditions and funding amounts for such activity;
- No, this activity is regulated by social institutions and non-governmental public organizations that form a redistribution of requirements.

4 What is public diplomacy?

- The state involves the public sector in political and economic activities;
- Political leaders create initiatives for the social sector;
- International activities of civil society activists to strengthen the country's image in the international community;
- Citizens' participation in diplomatic activities.

5 On what principles does public diplomacy function?

- On the basis of the provisions on the diplomatic service;
- On the basis of internal regulatory documents of countries;
- Based on the principles of international solidarity, enshrined in relevant agreements, such as the founding treaties of the EU;
- Based on the resolutions of the UN General Assembly.

6 What values are international solidarity and public diplomacy based on?

- Political values of the state
- Religious values
- EU values
- Values of transnational corporations

7 How does a journalist consider the activities of the authorities and society in situations of overcoming the consequences of disasters?

- Listens to official reports and is guided by them;
- Makes official requests and takes them into account in his/her work
- Studies and utilizes public reactions to such actions.
- Studies and summarizes his/her personal experience, the experience of colleagues and the principles of the state leadership's response to disasters.

8 What are the typical issues in disaster recovery stories?

- Sensationalized topics
- Issues and topics on the edge of standards and ethics
- Restoration of material resources, human potential, social support
- Issues and topics aimed at an international audience

9 What do you see as the prospect of using modern digital technologies in covering disasters and recovery from them?

- Opportunities for prompt and accurate reporting
- Capturing and documenting the effects of disasters
- Dissemination of information in the global media with the preservation of the authorship of materials and copyrights
- All of the above options.

10 In your opinion, what is the social responsibility of a journalist when reporting on a disaster?

- A journalist should take into account the expectations of the audience and social moods
- The journalist should provide video and photo evidence of the disaster
- The journalist must comply with laws, professional standards and codes of ethics.
- The journalist may not pay attention to this aspect because he or she is the one who forms public opinion.

## Answer Key

1.c, 2.c, 3.a, 4.c, 5.c, 6.c, 7.c, 8.c, 9.d, 10.d

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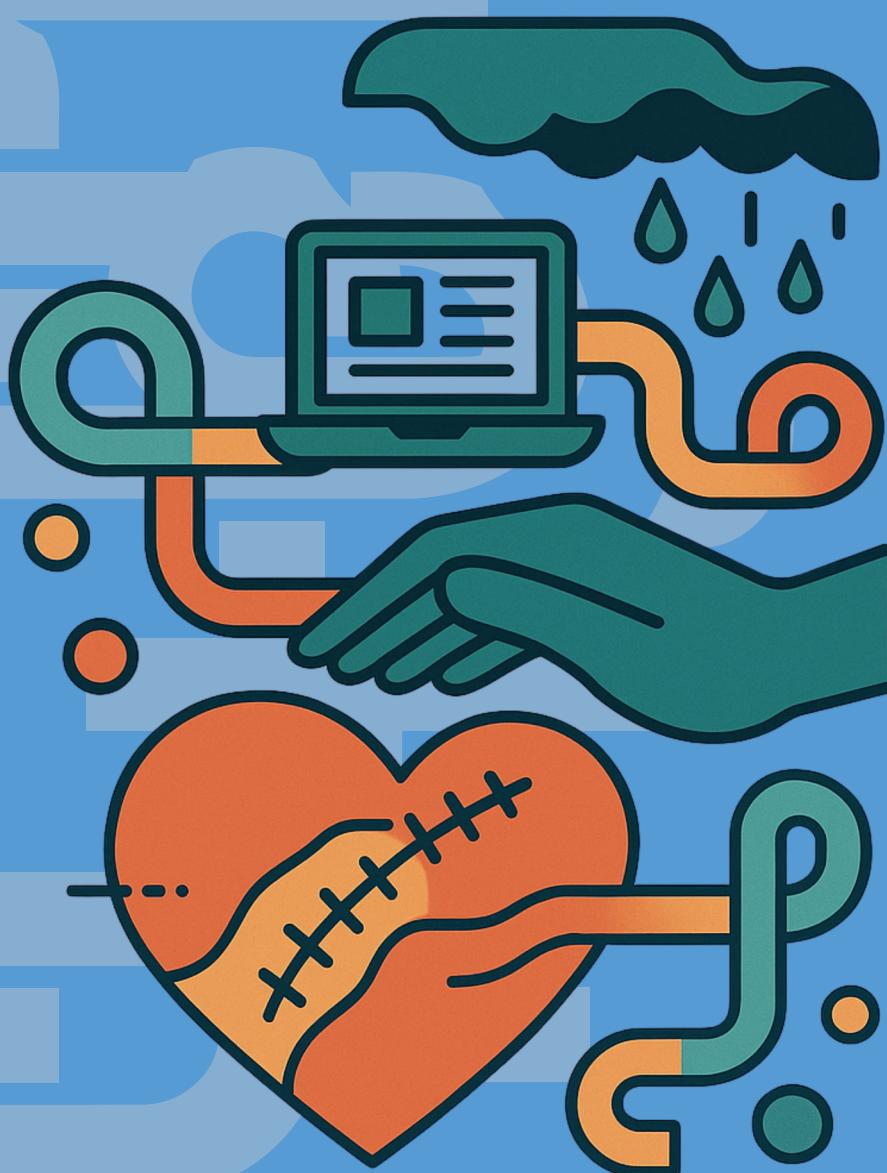
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# USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN DISASTER JOURNALISM

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# BOOK CHAPTER 15

## USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN DISASTER JOURNALISM

- **Introduction**
- **Key Concepts**
- **Emergency Alert Systems**
- **Social Media**
- **Drones and Satellite Imaging**
- **Internet of Things (IoT)**
- **Data Analysis and Mapping**
- **Mobile Applications**
- **Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes**
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## Introduction

In an era of escalating global crises, the integration of technology into disaster journalism has become indispensable. Information and telecommunication technologies (ICT) empower journalists to report on disasters more accurately, swiftly and effectively. From real-time updates during earthquakes and floods to in-depth analyses of pandemics and wars, technological tools bridge critical information gaps during emergencies.

This chapter delves into the transformative role of technology in disaster journalism, exploring innovative tools and techniques that enhance the dissemination of life-saving information. By examining real-world applications of emergency alert systems, social media, drones, satellite imaging, data analysis, mobile applications and the Internet of Things (IoT), the chapter underscores the synergy between journalism and technology in fostering resilience and informed decision-making.

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## Key Concepts

To support a better understanding of the topic addressed in this chapter, key concepts are explained below. Familiarity with these concepts will not only help clarify the subject matter but also facilitate comprehension of the chapter's learning outcomes and highlight the importance of empathy in disaster contexts.

### Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Technologies that facilitate communication, information sharing and data processing, including the Internet, mobile devices, specialized software and wired/wireless telecommunication systems, which are crucial for maintaining connectivity during disasters.

### Real-Time Reporting

Immediate dissemination of information to the public is a cornerstone of disaster journalism, ensuring that communities are kept informed and safe during crises. This process involves several crucial elements that work in tandem:

Live updates, often provided through social media platforms, websites and broadcast media, enable individuals to receive real-time information about evolving situations. Video coverage, whether from professional journalists or citizen reporters, brings a visual immediacy to the reporting, helping audiences understand the gravity of the situation. Instant alerts through mobile devices, SMS notifications and emergency apps serve as a direct line of communication, often including actionable advice such as evacuation routes, shelter locations or health precautions.

### Basic Needs

The fundamental requirements necessary for survival and a life with dignity (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1990). These needs are universal, inalienable, and essential for the realization of all other human rights.

### Data-Driven Journalism

Utilizing data analysis and visualization to provide insights into disaster scenarios allows journalists to transform complex datasets into clear, compelling narratives that resonate with audiences. By integrating data from diverse sources, journalists can work together with a range of other professionals (from graphical designers to web developers) to reveal patterns and trends that might otherwise go unnoticed. Interactive visualizations, such as heat maps and dashboards, help make these datasets accessible to a broad audience, empowering both decision-makers and the public to respond more effectively.

### Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

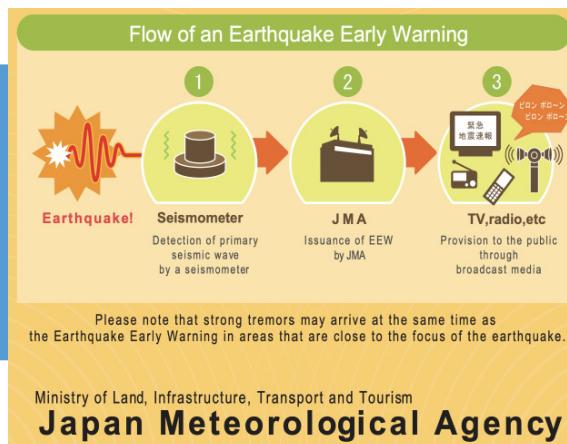
Tools for mapping and analysing spatial data enable visualization of affected areas and assessment of impact. Journalists (again, in close cooperation with other IT professionals) can layer multiple data sets, such as population density and infrastructure locations, to determine where aid is most needed. The ability to visualize spatial data not only enhances storytelling but also fosters greater public understanding of the scale and implications of disasters.

## Internet of Things (IoT)

IoT applications in disaster journalism include monitoring environmental conditions and tracking emergencies in real-time through network of interconnected devices. For example, IoT sensors deployed in wildfire-prone areas can provide data on temperature, humidity and wind patterns, enabling journalists to report on fire risks and issue timely warnings. By grounding disaster journalism in these concepts, journalists play a pivotal role in ensuring technology is utilized in the best possible way, working closely with technology experts and decision-makers. This requires a solid understanding of both the possibilities enabled by IT and its limitations and risks. Not differently from how fire fighters are always ready to jump into work as the need arises, disaster journalists must be familiar enough with these tools (and keep up with emerging ones) in order to be able to play their role swiftly when disaster strikes.

## Emergency Alert Systems

Emergency alert systems play a pivotal role in disaster preparedness and response. These systems provide early warnings about imminent threats such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and terrorist attacks, enabling individuals and communities to take preventive measures. Journalists often collaborate with these systems to amplify warnings and guide public behaviour. In the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami, the Japanese Meteorological Agency's early warning system issued alerts through mobile networks, television broadcasts and sirens. Journalists translated these alerts into actionable advice for global audiences, emphasizing evacuation procedures and safety guidelines.



*Image 1. An excerpt from the informational leaflet of the Japanese Earthquake Early Warnings system, available in English at <https://www.jma.go.jp/jma/en/Activities/EEWLeaflet.pdf>*

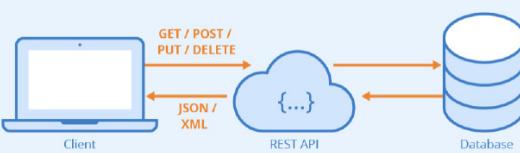
In Germany's 2021 floods, journalists worked with alert systems like Nina and Katwarn, which issued warnings to communities in the path of severe flooding. These tools were integrated with live broadcasts and online updates to reach affected areas promptly.

The Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system in the United States allows journalists to relay critical information about hurricanes and wildfires. During the California wildfires, for example, these alerts informed residents about evacuation zones, enabling timely responses.

In countries with advanced intelligence capabilities, real-time alerts based on intercepted communications or satellite data have been used to inform journalists and the public of impending missile strikes or military escalations. The web site Rocket Alerts (<https://rocketalert.live/>), created and maintained by a small team of volunteers, provides real-time information about red alerts in Israel, querying data directly from the government's early-warning system to produce new historical data and other insights.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, epidemiological data from countries like Italy and South Korea allowed journalists to inform the public about the necessity of lockdowns, mask mandates and social distancing. These reports were often based on real-time infection rates and hospital capacity metrics, helping shape public behaviour to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Emergency alert systems are increasingly leveraging multi-platform approaches to ensure maximum reach. Social media integration, app-based notifications and SMS-based alerts are common strategies. As in the case of Rocket Alerts above, media commonly create their own visualizations, analysis and narratives by fetching data from official sources, harnessing the increasing standardization of communication protocols for information systems on the Internet. A notable example is the REST (Representational State Transfer) architectural style for the World Wide Web, by which a computer can easily query information from a remote database using the same type of messages used to load web pages and upload social web posts (Shikha, 2024). The REST API in between the two sides provides a clear specification of what information can be queried, with whichever options. The responses are formatted in universally-supported formats like JSON and XML. Technologies like these are lowering the barriers for citizens to engage in disaster journalism (Götz, 2023).



*Image 2. A simple diagram of REST technology (Author: Seobility - License: CC BY-SA 4.0)*

A significant challenge arises when people do not believe or pay attention to the alerts, often influenced by counter-information circulating on social media. This issue became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where misinformation and scepticism about government directives led to resistance against health measures. Similarly, during disasters, mistrust in official channels can result in delayed or inadequate responses from the public, magnifying the impact of the crisis (Karanasios, 2022). In the Valencia floods that shook Spain in October 2024, the polarized political scene and an ideological background against climate change led numerous authorities and citizens to ignore the warnings issued by national and regional meteorological agencies, thus aggravating the casualties and damage. The general population's poor understanding of statistics and probability plays against the agencies' reputation, in as much as warnings that do not end up in catastrophes are perceived as nuisance, amplified by both traditional and social media reporting dire impacts on commercial activity, tourism and even mental health.

These dynamics underline the need for journalists to actively counteract misinformation and rebuild trust in emergency communications, serving as a bridge between authorities and the public. Basic understanding of science, mathematics and cognitive bias are important assets to avoid inadvertently becoming a generator or spreader of damaging content.

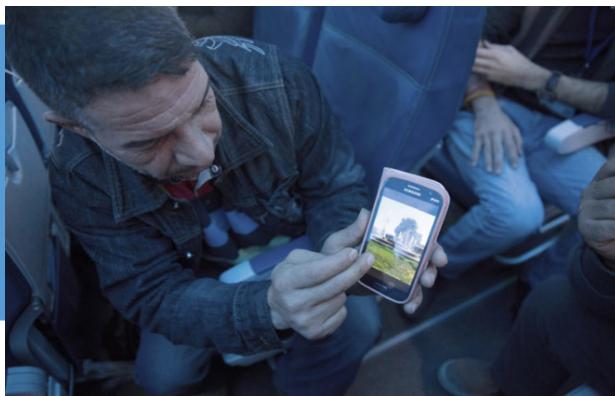
## Social Media

Social media platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok are tools that disaster journalists must understand not merely as common users, but as professionals who recognize them as complex environments where phenomena of information and misinformation propagate. They facilitate real-time updates, crowd-sourced reporting and community engagement. These platforms also enable journalists to monitor public sentiment and identify emerging issues during crises.

During the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Twitter became a lifeline for survivors and responders. Hashtags like #HaitiEarthquake trended globally, enabling the aggregation of critical updates and calls for assistance. Journalists used these platforms to share information about relief efforts and connect affected individuals with resources.

In the Australian bushfires of 2019-2020, journalists used Facebook Live to broadcast evacuation routes and firefighting efforts. These live streams were particularly valuable for reaching isolated communities that lacked access to traditional media.

Citizen journalists during the Syrian Civil War utilized platforms like YouTube and TikTok to document atrocities and human rights abuses, ensuring global awareness of the conflict. These platforms were also vital for refugees attempting to keep in touch with family and friends dispersed across the globe. Social media provided a way for displaced individuals to share their status and seek assistance, while journalists amplified these stories to draw attention to the humanitarian crisis.



*Image 3. A Syrian refugee shows his hometown on his phone while enroute to Canada. (Author: IOM / Muse Mohammed - License: CC BY-NC-ND)*

In Turkey, social media platforms played a significant role in disseminating information during the 2020 Izmir earthquake. Residents used Twitter to report damages and request assistance, while journalists amplified these reports to draw global attention to rescue efforts.

Once again, the use of social media in disaster journalism comes with challenges. Misinformation and fake news can spread rapidly, necessitating robust fact-checking mechanisms. Tools like Google Fact Check Explorer and the Verification Handbook for Disasters and Emergencies are essential resources for journalists navigating these platforms. The announcement in January 2025 that social media platforms like Facebook, X and Instagram end third-party fact-checking and content moderation is a break-up with relatively long-standing practice in social media, generating substantial debate (Oxford, 2025).

## Drones and Satellite Imaging

Drones and satellite imaging have revolutionized disaster journalism by offering unparalleled access to affected areas. These technologies enable journalists to gather visual data that would otherwise be impossible to obtain, especially in inaccessible or dangerous zones. Drones can provide close-up views of disaster zones, capturing high-resolution images and videos that convey the scale and impact of the event. They are particularly useful for assessing damage to infrastructure, identifying survivors and

tracking the progression of events. Satellites, on the other hand, offer macro perspectives, mapping large-scale damage across regions, which is vital for understanding the broader context of a disaster and planning response efforts.

### Examples

During the 2015 Nepal earthquake, journalists used drones to document collapsed buildings, landslides and relief efforts. The aerial footage provided a comprehensive view of the devastation, helping audiences and relief organizations understand the situation.

In Hurricane Harvey (2017), satellite imagery supported flood mapping and damage assessment. Journalists used these visuals to highlight the severity of the disaster and advocate for increased relief funding.

During Greece's 2021 wildfires, journalists combined drone footage with ground reports to provide a vivid portrayal of the devastation, emphasizing the urgency of global climate action (Associated Press, 2023). Similarly, during the 2023 wildfires in Canada, two drone companies collaborated to deliver swift damage assessment data and thermal imaging, helping decision-makers identify potential hazards (McNabb, 2023).



**Image 4.** A Police Technology Officer demonstrates a DJI Matrice drone with thermal imaging capabilities for fire prevention and other uses. (Public domain - License: CC0)

Drones and satellites also contribute to investigative journalism in disaster scenarios. For example, during the Amazon rainforest fires in 2019, satellite imagery revealed patterns of illegal deforestation and arson, prompting international scrutiny. The rapid advancement of drone technology has also become evident in ongoing conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, where drones have been used not only for military purposes but also to document the impact on civilian infrastructure and humanitarian conditions. Autonomous robots, capable of entering burning buildings or navigating under rubble to locate survivors, are beginning to play a role in disaster scenarios, too, just like various types of beacons are being deployed to assist in these operations, guiding responders through hazardous environments and enhancing the precision of search-and-rescue missions. In disaster-stricken areas where traditional communication infrastructure is damaged or non-existent, ad-hoc networks of mobile devices and low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite networks like Starlink can provide the backbone for the exchange of information between drones, robots, the rescuers' mobile phones and the Internet as a whole (Lu et al., 2020). Self-configuring, wireless nodes that establish dynamic communication links, enable first responders and affected communities to maintain local connectivity without relying on fixed infrastructure.

Meanwhile, satellite constellations offer high-speed, reliable Internet access, allowing emergency teams to coordinate rescue operations, access real-time data and communicate with command centres globally (Davis, 2022). Together, these technologies can ensure uninterrupted information flow, support crisis mapping, facilitate medical assistance and enhance overall disaster resilience, ultimately saving lives and expediting recovery efforts. They can certainly expand the scope of disaster journalism, providing unparalleled insights into both the causes and consequences of catastrophic events.

## Internet of Things (IoT)

The Internet of Things (IoT) is a compendium of technological knowledge, specifications and designs that aim to support a vast network of interconnected devices that collect, exchange and process data through the Internet. These devices, embedded with sensors, actuators and communication modules, are designed to autonomously monitor, analyse and respond to their environment without requiring constant human intervention. They operate on top of the communications infrastructure enabled by the technologies mentioned in the preceding section: drones are usually equipped with devices compliant with the main IoT communication protocols, just like mobile towers and portable satellite-based hotspots. In this regard, technologies like LoRa and LoRaWAN have improved data transmission speeds and reliability in disaster scenarios, with remarkable performance in terms of battery life, power usage and cost (Carreras-Coch et al., 2022). Knowing which technologies are available in a disaster area ensures that both journalists and emergency responders maintain the ability to communicate, coordinate and disseminate vital information even under challenging circumstances.

Advancements in technology have led to the development of smaller, more energy-efficient sensors, expanding their range of applications. Innovations in micro-electromechanical systems, materials science and photonics have enabled the miniaturization of sensors, while improved battery designs offer greater energy density, allowing devices to function for extended periods. Additionally, sensors can incorporate energy-harvesting technologies such as solar, thermal, and vibration-based systems, enabling them to operate autonomously in diverse environments (León Ávila et al., 2025). Examples cover wildfires, floods, epidemics, eruptions, etc.:

IoT sensors detect fire outbreaks and monitor air quality. Journalists may use these data to warn communities about health risks and evacuation needs.

IoT-enabled water-level sensors provide real-time updates on river levels and rainfall. These data help journalists predict flood risks and guide public responses.

Wearable devices track health metrics, offering insights into the spread of diseases like COVID-19. Journalists can use this data to highlight trends and advocate for preventive measures.

In Europe, IoT-enabled weather monitoring systems were crucial in identifying early signs of the 2021 Belgium floods, allowing journalists to report on vulnerable regions before the disaster fully unfolded.

During the Mount Agung eruption in Indonesia (2017), IoT sensors monitored volcanic activity, providing journalists with timely updates to inform the public. However, gathering data through sensors is only part of the equation. Implementing software-driven solutions that leverage artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning is a promising avenue for analysing reliability and ethics (Fournier-Tombs et al., 2023; Marwala, 2024).

Overall, these technologies are most effective when journalists, working alongside technical experts, ensure that the data are contextualized, accurate and relevant for decision-making and public understanding. The disaster journalist, then, becomes a bridge between the collection of critical data and their actionable use.

## Data Analysis and Mapping

By integrating datasets from diverse sources, journalists can provide requirements to web development experts and graphic designers, collaborating in the creation of visualizations that enhance public understanding and decision-making.

Data analysis and mapping technologies enable journalists to present complex disaster scenarios comprehensively. By integrating datasets from diverse sources, journalists can provide requirements to web development experts and graphic designers, collaborating in the creation of visualizations that enhance public understanding and decision-making. In this joint effort, journalists can take the lead in defining the narrative and data needs, ensuring that the final product effectively communicates the disaster's scope and impact.

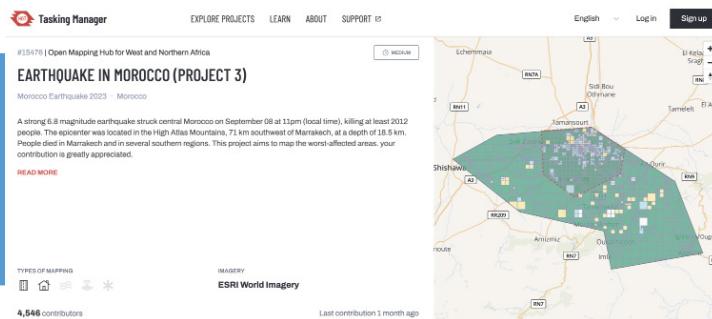
### Examples

The Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 Dashboard provided real-time global data on infections, deaths and recoveries during the pandemic. This resource became a critical tool for journalists, enabling them to report on trends and disparities in impact, becoming a key tool for the decision-making of many governments around the world.

During the 2018 Kerala floods in India, GIS (Geographic Information Systems) tools helped journalists map flood-prone areas and identify vulnerable communities. These maps informed both local populations and authorities about potential risks.

In North-African and Middle Eastern conflict zones, data analysis has been used to track displacement patterns, highlighting the humanitarian needs of refugees (Carrette, 2019). The World Bank's Towards Zero Stunting project, for example, addressed this challenge in Djibouti, a small country with an estimated 100.000 migrants in transit every year that also hosts about 30.000 refugees from some of its neighbours, especially Yemen and Somalia. Geospatial mapping, satellite imagery and machine learning allowed the project's team to determine the location and catchment areas of primary, secondary and tertiary health facilities and posts throughout the country,

Open data initiatives enable humanitarian, development and community organizations to work together in making informed, context-aware decisions in numerous contexts, that the disaster journalist can support and disseminate further. The collaborative mapping projects managed by the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (<https://www.hotosm.org/>), for example, leverage real-world data from OpenStreetMap to strengthen disaster preparedness, response and recovery.



**Image 5.** The collaborative mapping project at [hotosm.org](https://hotosm.org) for the earthquakes near Marrakech (Morocco) in 2023.

Similarly, data visualization platforms like Tableau, Microsoft Power BI and Flourish have become integral to disaster journalism. They allow journalists to create interactive charts, heat maps and infographics that convey the severity and scope of disasters, in a much easier way than possible one decade ago.

GIS tools and resources should be developed and maintained proactively to prepare for future disasters.

Journalists can also bring attention to specific areas to help make the most of early emergency systems, ensuring resources and efforts are focused where they are needed most.

Mapping areas prone to floods, earthquakes or other crises in advance can help prevent significant damage by identifying vulnerable zones and implementing pre-emptive measures. This proactive approach ensures that journalists and emergency responders have access to critical spatial data when a disaster strikes, enabling quicker, more effective responses. Journalists can also bring attention to specific areas to help make the most of early emergency systems, ensuring resources and efforts are focused where they are needed most.

voluntary efforts are some challenges that the disaster journalist must learn to face in the near future.

## Mobile Applications

Mobile applications designed for disaster response offer journalists unique opportunities to gather and disseminate information efficiently. These apps provide real-time updates, communication tools and access to critical resources. They are not only vital for on-the-ground reporting but also act as a bridge between affected populations, authorities and the broader audience. Apps now integrate geolocation, multilingual capabilities and interactive maps to provide dynamic, context-specific information. For example, they can overlay evacuation routes on real-time weather conditions, providing journalists and responders with actionable intelligence to inform the public effectively.

Moreover, they empower journalists to bridge communication gaps in disaster zones by acting as intermediaries between affected populations and authorities.

Apps also allow reporters to collect on-the-ground data, share localised alerts and ensure marginalized voices are heard. Multilingual apps can help journalists reach diverse communities with language-specific updates, fostering inclusivity in disaster communication. In addition, these tools can be integrated with geotagging capabilities to provide precise locations for emergency response, further enhancing their utility in coordinating rescue and relief efforts.

### Examples

Ushahidi, a crowdsourcing platform, enabled journalists during the 2010 Haiti earthquake to map crisis zones based on SMS and social media inputs. This tool ensured efficient resource allocation and situational awareness.

Zello, a walkie-talkie-style communication app, proved invaluable during the three major hurricanes that made landfall in the US in 2017: Harvey, Irma and Maria. Journalists used Zello to coordinate with responders and share updates with affected populations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, apps like Aarogya Setu in India and COVID Alert in Canada allowed journalists to monitor infection trends and report on government responses.

## Chapter Summary and Learning Outcomes

Technological advancements are reshaping disaster journalism, enabling faster, more accurate and impactful reporting.

Technological advancements are reshaping disaster journalism, enabling faster, more accurate and impactful reporting. Emergency alert systems provide timely warnings, social media fosters community engagement and tools like drones, satellite imaging and IoT devices offer unprecedented access to data and visuals. Data analysis and mobile applications further empower journalists to deliver actionable information to affected communities.

The foreseeable role of the disaster journalist is not just to use these tools but to understand their possibilities, limitations and associated risks. Journalists must be aware of how ICT can be both a solution and a challenge, particularly in environments where misinformation and technical failures can undermine their effectiveness. It is essential for journalists to work closely with technology experts and decision-makers, collaboratively defining requirements, identifying needs and issuing warnings when necessary. By pro-

viding informed insights, journalists can shape how these tools are deployed, ensuring they serve the public interest while mitigating risks. As ICT evolves, its integration into disaster journalism will continue to enhance the field's effectiveness and reach. The transformative potential of these tools underscores the importance of training journalists to navigate technological innovations effectively, ensuring that disaster reporting remains a cornerstone of public service. The human aspect remains a key concern, not

only in relation to the acquisition of skills for effective exploitation of the technologies, but also to the reliability, quality and trust of the information that is gathered and disseminated, as we have entered an era in which political and ideological stances often take precedence over the traditional public interest and safety (Wen, 2024).

At the end of this chapter, students who will take this course will have the following achievements.

- Students can collect information in disaster processes using technological resources.**
- Students can produce content and news effectively by utilizing technological devices.**
- Students can use the opportunities provided by technology effectively in news and broadcasting processes.**

The foreseeable role of the disaster journalist is not just to use these tools but to understand their possibilities, limitations and associated risks.



## Self-Assessment

1 Which of the following best describes the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in disaster journalism?

- ICT is used exclusively for broadcasting traditional media reports.
- ICT facilitates communication, data processing and information sharing, making real-time disaster reporting possible.
- ICT is only beneficial for government agencies and emergency responders.
- ICT eliminates the need for journalists in disaster coverage.

2 What is one of the main advantages of real-time reporting in disaster journalism?

- It prevents disasters from happening.
- It ensures that emergency alerts are only delivered to government officials.
- It provides communities with immediate updates, helping them respond effectively.
- It allows journalists to delay the reporting process until all details are verified.

3 How do Geographic Information Systems (GIS) contribute to disaster journalism?

- They provide social media trends related to disasters.
- They enable journalists to visualize affected areas and assess impact using spatial data.
- They replace emergency alert systems.
- They help journalists create fake disaster scenarios for better engagement.

4 What is one key challenge associated with social media in disaster journalism?

- Social media are too slow to provide useful information.
- Social media platforms cannot be accessed during disasters.
- Misinformation and fake news can spread rapidly, requiring journalists to verify facts.
- Social media eliminates the need for traditional journalism.

5 Why are drones considered valuable tools in disaster journalism?

- They allow journalists to avoid entering dangerous zones while capturing aerial footage.
- They replace the need for ground-level reporting.
- They only provide entertainment value.
- They can be operated only by government agencies.

6 How do emergency alert systems help in disaster journalism?

- They allow authorities to keep disaster information secret from the public.
- They enable journalists to receive and disseminate crucial warnings, guiding public behaviour.
- They eliminate the need for live reporting during disasters.
- They provide journalists with opinion-based alerts instead of factual updates.

7 What role does the Internet of Things (IoT) play in disaster journalism?

- It ensures all online articles are automatically translated into multiple languages.
- It enables real-time monitoring of environmental conditions through interconnected sensors.
- It replaces journalists by generating automated news reports.
- It only benefits emergency responders, not journalists.

8 Which technology is often used for data visualization in disaster journalism?

- Blockchain networks
- Online video games
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and interactive dashboards
- Handwritten reports sent by mail

9 How do mobile applications benefit disaster journalists?

- They allow journalists to send pre-written articles without real-time updates.
- They help journalists collect and share real-time data, coordinate with responders, and provide critical information to affected populations.
- They reduce the number of social media posts made by journalists.
- They are only useful for entertainment and do not contribute to crisis reporting.

10 What is one of the main concerns regarding the use of AI in disaster journalism?

- AI is too slow to analyse data.
- AI can sometimes generate unreliable or ethically questionable conclusions.
- AI prevents journalists from reporting on disasters.
- AI eliminates the need for emergency response teams

## Answer Key

1.b, 2.c, 3.a, 4.b, 5. b, 6.b, 7.b, 8.b, 9.a, 10.b

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## TEXTBOOK



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