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From Headlines to Supply Lines: Paradoxes in the Digital News Media Supply Chain

Derek Dubois¹  | Muhammad Hasan Ashraf²  | Mehmet G. Yalcin^{1,3} 

¹College of Business, The University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island, USA | ²Department of Management and HRM, College of Business, California State University Long Beach, Long Beach, California, USA | ³Management Information Systems, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakif University, Istanbul, Türkiye

Correspondence: Derek Dubois (derek.dubois@uri.edu)

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ABSTRACT

Supply chain management has traditionally focused on networks of decision-making nodes that manage the physical flow of goods. In recent years, attention has increased to service supply chains. One underexplored example is that of news media, which has undergone a profound transformation due to digitalization. News media is considered both a unique service supply chain in its own right and an enabler of operant resources of knowledge for supply chain managers across many industries. Paradoxical tensions in this supply chain can inhibit knowledge creation and effective decision-making. As such, this study employs paradox theory to catalogue critical, persistent tensions arising from the digitalization of news media. Leveraging a systematic literature review, we contextualize these tensions and further propose both/and solutions that reconcile persistent competing demands. The findings advance the discipline by establishing the news media service supply chain as distinct and extending paradox theory into this new context. In practice, we recommend various strategies (e.g., integrating digital-native workflows, strengthening verification processes, improving media literacy, and embedding transparent governance mechanisms) to help reestablish credibility. Doing so ensures stakeholders can facilitate more effective knowledge management and mitigate many of the impacts that news media have on broader physical/service supply chains.

1 | Introduction

At 5:30 a.m. on May 7, 2021, a Colonial Pipeline employee discovered a ransom note on a billing-system terminal (Srinivasan and Ni 2023). Hackers had infiltrated Colonial's network, prompting the shutdown of a 5500-mile pipeline supplying roughly 45% of East Coast fuel (Eaton and Volz 2021). It triggered widespread fuel shortages and panic buying across the Southeast United States (Hockstad et al. 2025). As physical fuel flows stalled, information flows accelerated. News organizations raced to explain the unfolding disruption in real time. They did this even as facts were still emerging. Outdated images circulated that misrepresented Americans "hoarding gasoline" (Dupuy and Swenson 2021); journalists increasingly relied on private digital data sources to frame outage narratives (Egan and Duffy 2021);

and social media intensified public anxiety through fear of missing out on what gasoline remained (Nawaz 2021). These dynamics reveal a deep structural tension within contemporary news media: the simultaneous need to deliver information quickly while also ensuring its accuracy and credibility. Digitalization has thus expanded the information ecosystem in ways that create competing demands and, therefore, persistent tensions.

In supply chain management (SCM), a nascent stream of service supply chain (SSC) literature foregrounds the intangibility, heterogeneity, and customer interaction associated with service exchange (e.g., Baltacioglu et al. 2007; Enz and Lambert 2023). News media represent a distinct SSC organized around the planning, sourcing, production, distribution, and consumption of news stories to engender knowledge/

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information (Aral and Dhillon 2021; Berry et al. 2006; del Águila-Obra et al. 2007). More specifically, within SCM, news supports governance and transparency (Damberg et al. 2022; Hartmann 2021; Shih 2022); shapes ethical behaviors like supplier monitoring (Lin and Xing 2024); serves as secondary data for scholarship (Craighead et al. 2016); but also disrupts supply chains (SCs) by amplifying misinformation (Cano-Marín et al. 2023; Mateska et al. 2024). However, to date, scant research has examined the holistic news media service supply chain (NMSSC) itself (Dubois 2024; Dubois et al. 2024). This gap is consequential. Paradoxical tensions within contemporary news media (i.e., speed versus verification) distort information. This further destabilizes a key input to the operant resources of knowledge and collaborative communication that SC managers rely on to guide effective decision-making (Richey Jr et al. 2011; Simon 2024; Ward, n.d.).¹

Digitalization has been positioned as a primary driver of deinstitutionalization of journalistic norms (e.g., Abbasi et al. 2024; Reese 2020). Digital transformation creates tensions between speed versus verification, interpretation versus objectivity, and outrage-driven engagement versus balanced reporting (e.g., Berry and Sobieraj 2013; Chatterjee et al. 2023; Pfaff et al. 2023; Schudson 2019). Failure to navigate these tensions successfully is evident in broad public sentiment. Only 31% of U.S. citizens currently view the news as credible (Fischer 2024). Trust erosion forms the sociocultural backdrop within which NMSSCs operate. Narrowing the focus to the relationship between an NMSSC and SCM yields important impacts. Chatterjee et al. (2023) demonstrate that when information is perceived as unreliable, behavioral responses such as hoarding, demand distortion, and reactive decision-making take hold. As digitalization lowers entry barriers for niche actors (e.g., Stroud 2011) and amplifies information volatility (Akhtar et al. 2023; Kar et al. 2023), the NMSSC must reconcile competing tensions. Surfacing paradoxical tensions at the core of the NMSSC is therefore essential to ensuring the proper flow of information in support of the effectiveness of SC managers (Kankam et al. 2023).

Paradox theory (PT) helps organizations navigate complex environments (Schad et al. 2017). Smith and Lewis (2011) define paradoxical tensions as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (p. 382). The authors categorize paradoxes into four types (i.e., *belonging, learning, organizing, and performing*) that erode value.² At the core of PT is the dynamic equilibrium model (DEM), which explains how organizations sustain performance by continuously cycling between opposing demands rather than attempting to resolve them outright. As such, PT advocates for both/and responses over either/or compromises (Smith and Lewis 2022). This theoretical lens has been adapted within SCM (e.g., Ashraf et al. 2022; Yalcin and Ashraf 2024). It has also been used to address tensions arising from digital transformation (e.g., Ashraf, Triki, and Yalcin 2025; Dieste et al. 2022; Smith and Beretta 2021). However, to date, PT has not been systematically applied to the NMSSC. Since the NMSSC is a platform-mediated, multi-echelon SSC containing persistent contradictions, it warrants a PT-based mapping. This builds on the work of Merkert et al. (2023), who acknowledge that today’s SC managers must adapt to digitalization

while managing paradoxes. Therefore, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1. *What key paradoxical tensions does the NMSSC face in navigating digital transformation?*

RQ2. *How can the NMSSC better navigate these identified paradoxical tensions?*

To address our RQs, we conceptualize and categorize salient paradoxical tensions arising from the digitalization of the NMSSC via a systematic literature review (SLR). Through our analysis, we highlight how digitalization-related disruptions create challenges in balancing consumer engagement with journalistic norms. Our findings reveal three prominent domains of paradoxical tensions in the NMSSC: *Industry Transformation, Erosion of Objectivity, and Consumer Recognition and Identity Expression*. Within these domains lie a host of tensions (i.e., legacy routines vs. digital-native workflows; norms of verification/neutrality vs. speed and personalization). We argue that such tensions collectively underscore the broader loss of consumer trust in news. For SCM, decision-making is undermined by any impairment of trust in knowledge/information produced through the NMSSC, which we argue enables important operant resources by ensuring proper information flows. Accordingly, we draw on PT and thus DEM to move beyond merely cataloging tensions. Instead, we aim to offer both/and mitigation strategies that help rebalance these competing demands. Such strategies should restore trust and better enable managers of broader physical/service SCs to grow operant resources.

This study makes several contributions. Theoretically, it positions the NMSSC as a distinct, underexamined SSC whose service offering enables critical operant resources for broader SCs. In doing so, we identify three domains of paradoxical tensions, thereby extending PT to a new empirical setting. Additionally, we demonstrate how Smith and Lewis’s (2011) DEM clarifies the cyclical balancing needed to navigate competing demands in digital, information-driven ecosystems. For practitioners, we link these insights to the challenges posed by polarization, misinformation, and technological change. Our analysis offers clear strategies for NMSSC leaders (i.e., acquiring digital-native outlets, strengthening verification workflows, improving media literacy, and embedding transparent governance mechanisms) to counter structural and identity-driven pressures. Together, our propositions provide a roadmap for managing tensions that threaten media credibility. Once addressed, we argue, this would further improve downstream SC decision-making across all physical and service SCs by reaffirming trust in a critical enabler of operant resources (i.e., Richey Jr et al. 2011).

This paper is organized as follows: first, we provide an overview of the nascent research on NMSSCs and introduce PT. We then present our SLR methodology and analyze the tensions identified within a robust data corpus. Finally, we evaluate PT’s insights on navigating paradoxical tensions, aiming to equip SC managers to address perceived incongruous goals and to rectify the loss of consumer trust that the industry has observed over the past few years.

2 | Background

2.1 | The News Media Service Supply Chain (NMSSC)

Though SCM has historically centered on product flows, SSCs are defined by their ability to deliver intangible outcomes co-produced with consumers. Those outcomes are shaped by inseparability, variability, perishability, and human interaction (Ellram et al. 2004; Giannakis 2011). Accordingly, SSCs require service-specific processes (e.g., customer/supplier relationship management) to organize the other critical SCM processes between decision-making nodes (Enz and Lambert 2023). Recognizing the limitations of product-centric models, SSC scholarship focuses on sector-specific designs. These designs emphasize role specialization and information-flow coordination (Baltacioglu et al. 2007; Enz and Lambert 2023). Within this perspective, news media can be considered as a SSC unto itself. This is consistent with research from Berry et al. (2006), Dubois (2024), and Graham and Smart (2010). Expanding on del Águila-Obra et al. (2007), we define the NMSSC as the network of actors (i.e., journalists, editors, platforms, distributors (legacy and digital), and consumers) that plan, source, produce, distribute, and consume a value-added service: the mediation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge/information for consumers.

Digitalization affects both the mechanisms of the NMSSC and its consequences. On the structural side, the NMSSC has expanded from linear channels (e.g., newspapers, television, radio) to include blogs, digital intermediaries, and social media (Artwick 2014; del Águila-Obra et al. 2007). The digital landscape provides services through multi-sided, always-on, interactive, and personalized flows (Berry et al. 2006; Irigoyen 2022; Reese 2020). Digitalization reduces physical constraints, increases both separability and transparency, and lowers entry barriers (Adornato and Lysak 2017). While legacy norms prioritized objectivity, balance, and public service (Aral and Dhillon 2021; Deuze 2005; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2021), digitalization reconfigures the SC with new norms such as speed, immediacy, and enhanced engagement (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017).

Digitalization also reshapes consumer behavior. Intensified competition from less rigorous/niche news operations weakens rigor (e.g., Fischer 2024; Hanitzsch et al. 2018; Moog and Slyuter-Beltrao 2001; Stroud 2011). Modern news increasingly leverages polarization and outrage rhetoric, reinforcing echo chambers (Berry and Sobieraj 2013; E. Klein 2020; Siddiqui and Singh 2016). In the NMSSC, this entails inviting consumer co-production of often-polarizing content (Huang and Heider 2007; Stroud 2011). Consumers co-create, curate, and share news, driven by self-expressive, altruistic, and social-status motives (Anderson et al. 2015; Bobkowski 2015; Kumpel et al. 2015). Consumer interactivity aligns closely with the service-dominant logic underpinning much SSC research (e.g., Enz and Lambert 2023; Richey Jr et al. 2011; Vargo and Lusch 2008). Figure 1 presents an illustrative example of a news organization's social media post, demonstrating how digitalization has reshaped NMSSC.³ Specifically, it highlights new metrics, the potential for near-unlimited reproducibility, and evidence of bidirectional flows that facilitate consumer engagement (Aubin and Liedke 2024).

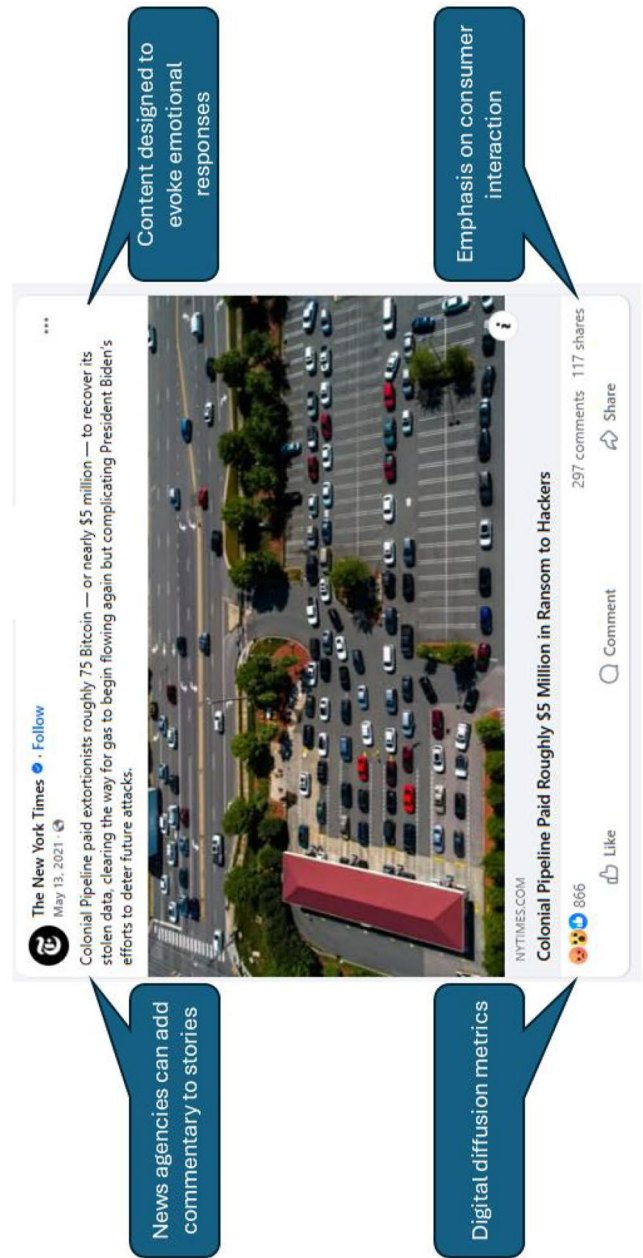


FIGURE 1 | How news is different today. *Source:* Facebook.com, annotated by authors.

As the Colonial Pipeline incident illustrates, digitalization renders the NMSSC paradox-laden. These tensions extend beyond journalism's internal processes. They also degrade the resources on which managers across physical and service SCs depend. These are referred to in SCM literature as operant resources (i.e., knowledge and collaborative communication) (Richey Jr et al. 2011). PT, therefore, provides a robust lens for contextualizing this issue.

2.2 | Paradox Theory (PT)

PT highlights that paradoxical tensions can either catalyze creativity or trigger defensive, short-termist responses that fuel “dark side” cycles (Berti and Simpson 2021; Schad et al. 2017;

Smith and Lewis 2011). Ultimately, it comes down to whether paradoxical tensions are surfaced and dynamically embraced. When ignored or neglected, persistent tensions erode decision quality and performance. This can lead to SC inefficiencies (Dieste et al. 2022). Instead, PT advocates cultivating virtuous cycles of acceptance and balance to sustain long-term success. Paradoxes manifest across four primary categories: *learning* (organizations must improve in the present while simultaneously pursuing future transformation needs); *performing* (multiple stakeholders impose divergent goals); *organizing* (the need to be both flexible and controlled); and *belonging* (competing identities, roles, and values) (Smith and Lewis 2011). To achieve virtuous cycles, leaders must cultivate a paradox mindset that embraces said contradictions (Miron-Spektor et al. 2018). Recommended behaviors include actions like acknowledging and reframing tensions as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Scholars have applied PT across various organizational levels, phenomena, and disciplines. For instance, PT has been employed to evaluate tensions arising from organizational transformation, particularly digitalization. Paradoxes tend to surface during periods of significant change (Smith and Lewis 2011). As such, digital technologies intensify interdependencies across organizational activities. This increases the pace and frequency of decision-making and amplifies paradoxical tensions (Mishra et al. 2025). Sheep et al. (2016) explore how tensions, contradictions, and dualities in innovation and change create complex interdependencies that organizations must navigate to sustain transformation. Berti and Cunha (2023) integrate trade-offs and dialectics. They highlight how power dynamics and systemic transformation influence organizational change. Dieste et al. (2022) map and categorize 23 organizational tensions that arise during Industry 4.0 transformation.

PT has also illuminated tensions in SC decision-making. Ashraf, Triki, and Yalcin (2025) demonstrate how third-party logistics supervisors' paradoxical leader behavior facilitates employees' navigation of learning paradoxes. Others have examined paradoxes in supply base concentration (Yang et al. 2023); operational efficiency versus environmental sustainability (Prashar and Chaudhuri 2024; Zhang et al. 2021), and the evolution from legacy manufacturing to digital services (Toth et al. 2022). However, research on PT in the context of the NMSSC's digitalization remains scarce. One example is Bygdas et al. (2019), which highlights the persistent contradiction between print and digital production as news organizations balance traditional deadline-driven workflows with continuous digital updates. By applying PT to the NMSSC, we seek to uncover unique examples of tensions arising from digital transformation in an effort to (1) offer solutions to address trust deinstitutionalization in the NMSSC, and (2) to arm SC managers of broader physical and service SCs with an improved enablement of key operant resources.

3 | Methodology

This study surfaces paradoxical tensions arising from digital transformation within the contemporary NMSSC and highlights their implications for broader physical and service SCs.

It represents a second-stage conceptual analysis within a larger research project on the NMSSC (similar to work by Zhao et al. 2007). Our analysis draws on the structured methodological foundation of an a priori systematic literature review (SLR), which we summarize below.

The SLR follows Durach et al.'s (2017) six-step procedure and conducted a structured search across ProQuest, Scopus, and EBSCO at the intersection of “news media” and “supply chain/operations.”⁴ Keyword sets were adapted from Abbasi et al. (2024) and Zhang et al. (2021).⁵ We restricted results to English-language, peer-reviewed articles published from January 1, 2000 to May 31, 2025, a period that spans newsroom “tumultuous change” (Pavlik 2013) and the mid-2000s shift when “digital media changed journalism” (Silva 2019). Further exclusions when reading the articles required that they explicitly address news media planning, sourcing, production, distribution, or consumption. After screening, the final corpus consisted of 205 articles. Figure 2A,B detail the full, reproducible SLR protocol and article elimination results used to ensure appropriate validity and reliability. See Appendix S1 for the 205 articles derived from the SLR.

First-order codes were generated through open coding following constructivist grounded theory principles (Saldaña 2021). We aimed to capture end-to-end activities within the NMSSC and how its flows move through an increasingly digital media ecosystem. First-order codes privileged references to NMSSC practices (e.g., sourcing, planning, manufacturing, distribution, and consumption of news). This approach ensured consistency, transparency, and replicability across the data corpus.

The first-order codes were then organized according to the cited scholarship's characterization of NMSSC activities. Passages describing practices associated with pre-digital or institutional newsroom structures (e.g., gatekeeping, print routines, hierarchical editorial control) were coded as legacy (A). Passages emphasizing digitally enabled affordances (e.g., platform intermediaries, algorithmic curation, participatory production, networked amplification) were coded as digital (B). Passages that explicitly positioned legacy and digital logics in contrast were coded as A versus B to capture acknowledged tensions articulated within the corpus. Finally, a fourth designation captured practices that span both legacy and digital environments (e.g., rhetorical framing devices, interpretive commentary, structural bias) but have evolved in form or intensity in the contemporary NMSSC. These codes were labeled cross-format (C).

We then organized higher-level codes by theme and, ultimately, by paradox category. Tensions were identified by assembling legacy-oriented codes (A) and contrasting them with either (1) digital logics (B) or (2) cross-format practices (C) that intensify or reconfigure legacy norms in the digital era. This step included instances in which tensions were already explicitly articulated (A vs. B). Tensions were considered paradoxical when both poles remained simultaneously necessary to the NMSSC. Consistent with established qualitative approaches, the research team iteratively reviewed and compared codes for similarity and contrast, moving through successive levels of abstraction. This procedure mirrors hierarchical reduction techniques used in prior SCM thematic studies (e.g., Grover and Ashraf 2024). Across multiple

rounds of comparison, three clusters recurred. We interpreted these themes as stable organizing containers rather than idiosyncratic interpretations.

Tensions were treated as markers of paradox, using PT as a sensitizing framework (Smith and Lewis 2011). Finally, through iterative comparison of the empirical codes with the four paradox types (i.e., learning, belonging, organizing, and performing), we developed a coding architecture that captures persistent contradictions between legacy and digital logics across the NMSSC. Importantly, across the coding process, when discrepancies arose, the team discussed and compared interpretations,

iteratively refining the coding scheme until complete consensus was reached.

Consider the following example drawn from Domain 1: industry transformation. One first-order code read: “The mission of journalists is to ‘uncover facts, report on society’s institutions and present [...] a balanced account’ of issues” (Hartmann 2021). This text segment was then categorized as “Professional Journalists” and rolled up to “A. Legacy—Professional Roles & Characteristics.” Another first-order code read: “Citizen journalists are less likely to rely on official sources than their traditional counterparts and are more likely to reference sources

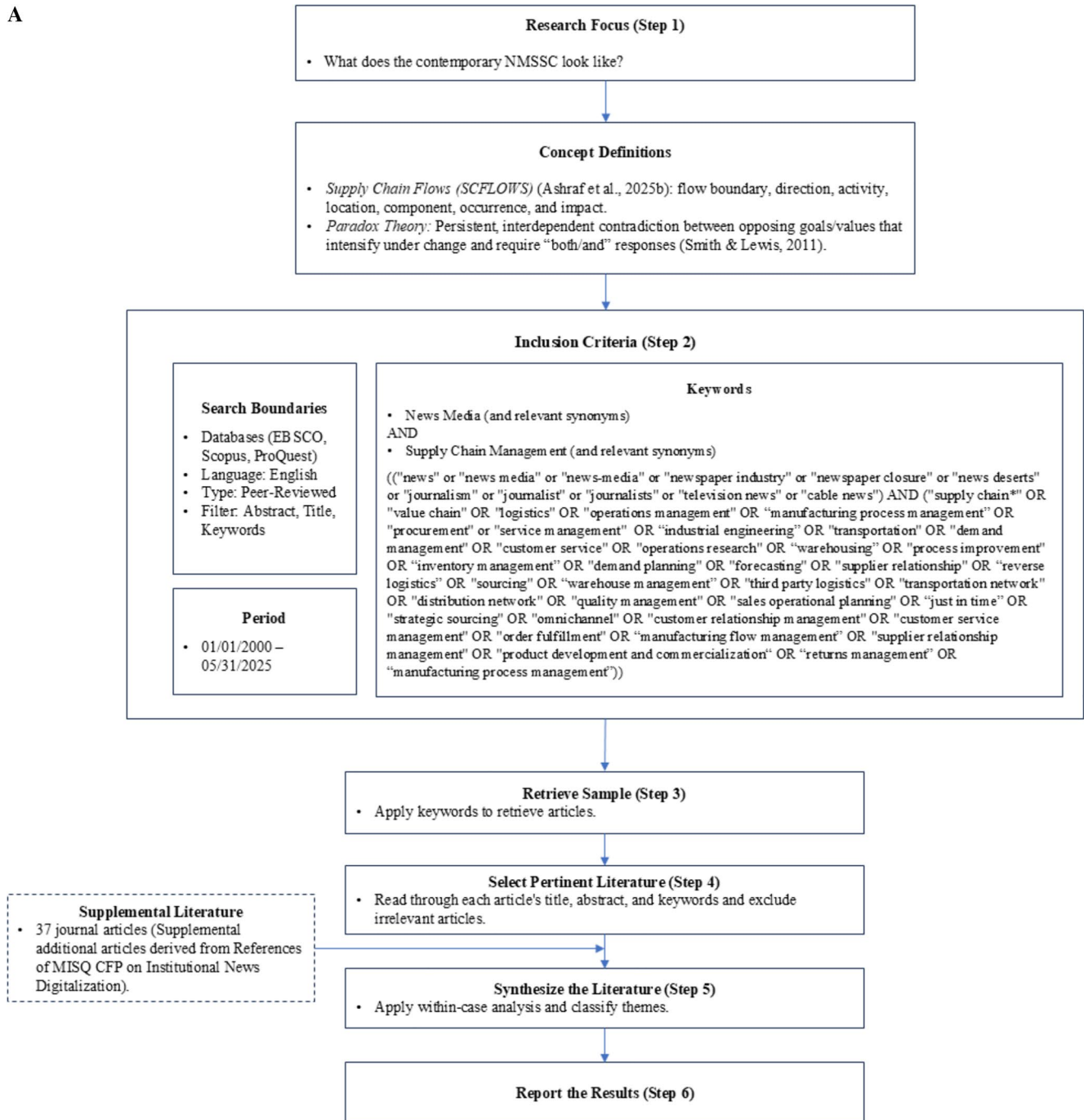


FIGURE 2 | (A) SLR process. *Source:* Authors, adapted from Durach et al. (2017). (B) SLR filtering criteria. *Source:* Authors conducted for a broader research project.

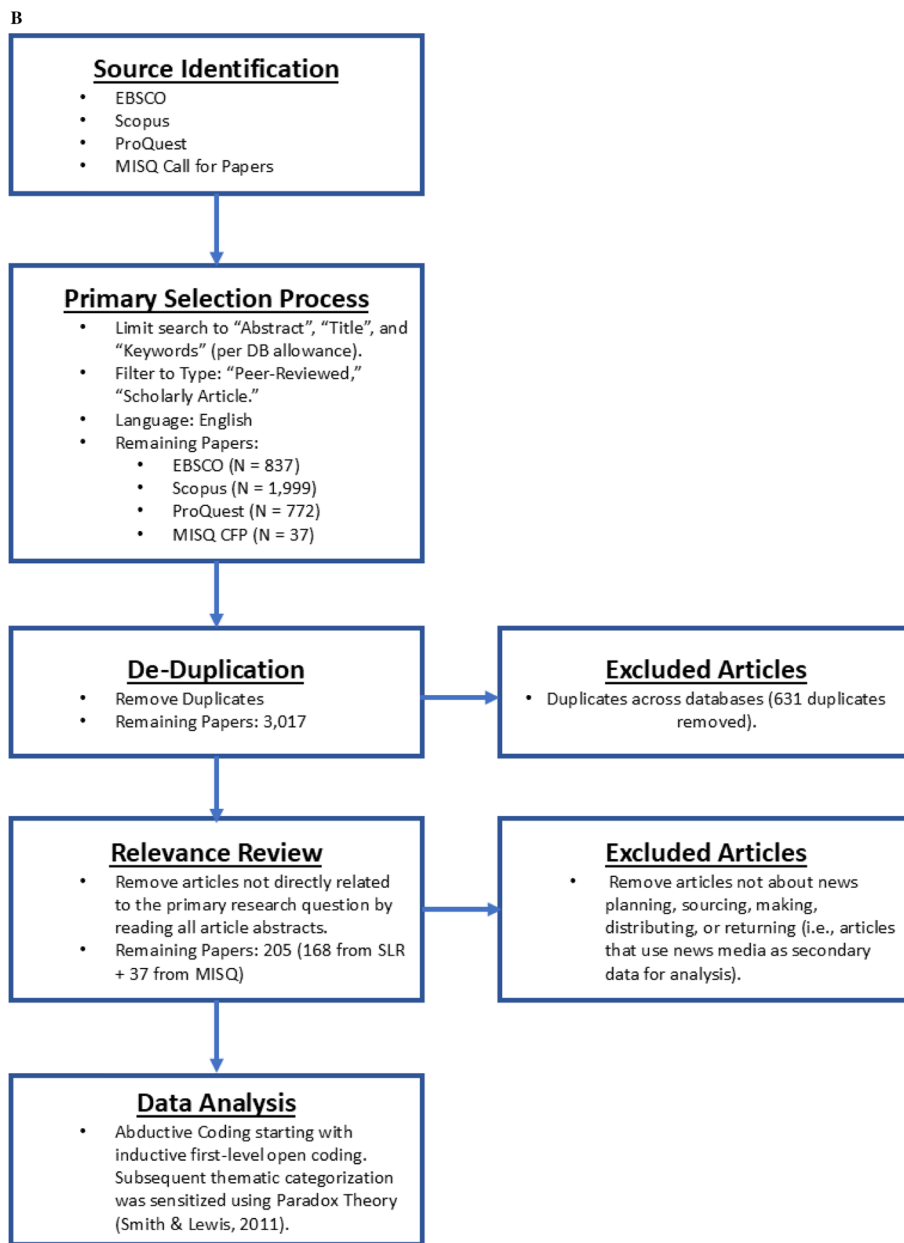


FIGURE 2 | (Continued)

with more diversity and varying viewpoints” (Cox et al. 2024). This text segment was then categorized as “Citizen/Amateur Journalists” and rolled up to “B. Digital—Digital Roles & Characteristics.” Although distinct, both codes capture interdependent understandings of who participates in news production. We therefore considered them as opposing poles within a belonging paradox. The unit of analysis for code abstraction was not tied to specific news stories from media outlets, but rather to extant scholarship from the SLR. See Appendix S2a–c for the full codebook.

Our coding ultimately revealed three overarching domains in which paradoxical tensions consistently occur: *industry transformation*, *erosion of objectivity*, and *consumer recognition and identity expression*. According to Dieste et al. (2022), categorizing paradoxes is an essential first step for their eventual management.

4 | Results

The underlying 205-article corpus spans journals across operations and SCM, journalism, media studies, and information systems. The literature reflects the growing influence of news media on organizational behavior and SCs, with a noticeable acceleration in publications after 2020. Only 25 of these articles explicitly reference the term “supply chain.” This underscores the limited extent of the field’s conceptual engagement with news media to date and the necessity of a cross-disciplinary data corpus.

We now present emergent paradoxical tensions from the data. Our analysis identifies three overarching domains that encompass these tensions. See Table 1 for a mapping of each of the three domains to their four paradoxical categories and associated definitions.

TABLE 1 | Overarching domains and paradoxes within the NMSSC.

Domain	Paradox category	A tension between...
1. Industry transformation	Belonging paradox	Legacy news media supply chain actors versus newer, digitally oriented roles that expand who counts as a journalist and what constitutes a newsroom.
	Learning paradox	Time-bound, infrastructure-heavy legacy formats/technology versus flexible, always-on digital formats/technology that require continual adaptation.
	Organizing paradox	Advertising-driven legacy models versus emerging digital and hybrid revenue models in a strained labor capacity and burnout environment.
	Performing paradox	Journalism's civic mission (i.e., public interest, democratic engagement) versus digital-era demands for speed, constant output, and platform competitiveness.
2. Erosion of objectivity	Belonging paradox	Professional identities built around autonomy and authority versus digital-era identities that blur who is recognized as an "objective" reporter.
	Learning paradox	Traditional fact-centered norms of objectivity versus the framing practices (emotional, narrative, strategic) now required to hold audience attention.
	Organizing paradox	Newsroom structures designed to maintain standards of independence, versus digital production systems reliant on aggregation, syndication, and mediation.
	Performing paradox	Journalism's provision of verified, credible information versus the digital environment's erosion of trust.
3. Consumer recognition and identity expression	Belonging paradox	Legacy norms where satisfaction is linked to stability, versus digital environments where satisfaction increasingly comes from identity expression and outrage.
	Learning paradox	Mainstream, one-way diffusion models versus digital practices that require significant changes to habits, routines, and distribution.
	Organizing paradox	Legacy production and digital processes that demand interactivity, co-creation, versus platform-mediated responsiveness.
	Performing paradox	Journalism's traditional performance indicators versus digital metrics centered on engagement, sharing, and network reach (which are linked to the amplification of outrage and misinformation).

4.1 | Domain 1: Industry in Transformation

Tensions arising from the NMSSC's digital transformation align with Smith and Lewis's (2011) claim that significant change often surfaces latent paradoxes. Here, *belonging* paradoxes capture tensions between legacy SC actors and newer, digital-native actors that expand who counts as a journalist and what constitutes a newsroom. Legacy actors (i.e., professional journalists, editors, and news firms) remain central (e.g., Andrews and Caren 2010; Conway-Silva et al. 2020), while citizen/amateur journalists, digitally fluent reporters, and efforts to diversify newsrooms introduce new identities and expectations (e.g., Cox et al. 2024; Rodgers and Thorson 2003).

Learning paradoxes concern tensions between time-bound, infrastructure-heavy legacy formats/technologies and flexible, always-on digital formats/technologies that require continual adaptation. Legacy channels (i.e., print, radio, and television), along with supporting infrastructure such as airwaves and cable wires, still anchor production and distribution (e.g., Bail 2012; Gingras 2013). These now coexist with blogs, online news, podcasts, and AI-driven tools and platforms that reshape newsgathering and workflow (e.g., del Águila-Obra et al. 2007; Ibrahim et al. 2021). The extant literature consistently notes cultural resistance to change and the risks that automation

and algorithms pose to human-centric roles (e.g., Anderson et al. 2015; Artwick 2014; De Haan et al. 2022).

Organizing paradoxes reflect tensions between advertising-driven legacy business models and emerging digital and hybrid revenue models. These tensions manifest as strained labor capacity and burnout. Cost pressures and operational restructuring have reduced newsroom size and organizational slack (e.g., Angelucci and Cage 2019; Aral and Dhillon 2021; Bonfiglioli and Cullen 2017). Digital strategies now emphasize alternative/hybrid revenue streams, convergence, and paywall/subscription approaches (e.g., Aral and Dhillon 2021; Gonzalez-Tosat and Sadaba-Chalezquer 2021). User-generated content has become a monetizable input (e.g., Cox et al. 2024). This increases workload and stress across reduced staff, pulls in consumers as co-producers, and contributes to underreporting in resource-constrained environments (e.g., Boehmer et al. 2019; Dietrich and Eck 2020).

Performing paradoxes involve tensions between journalism's civic mission (i.e., public interest, democratic engagement) and digital-era demands for speed, constant output, and platform competitiveness. On the legacy side, the NMSSC is expected to provide public value and support democracy (e.g., Anderson et al. 2015; Atton and Wickenden 2005). In practice, these

expectations intersect with digital-native pressures for 24/7 flows of information, online immediacy, heightened competition, and platform disruption and disaggregation (e.g., Adornato and Lysak 2017; Cox et al. 2024; Miranda et al. 2016).

For example, CNN+'s rapid launch and shutdown exemplify pushes to innovate in digital spaces rather than sustain quality journalism in legacy environments (Rizzo 2022). These disruptions also reverberate through broader physical/service SCs. *The Providence Journal*, a regional U.S. newspaper, recently announced it was closing its long-standing production facility, cutting 136 jobs, and losing a critical single-source flexographic printing plate. This forced corporate owner Gannett to reconfigure production to new locations outside of the paper's readership community (Perry 2024). Put differently, what may begin as a digital strategy ends as a logistics challenge. Production footprints shift, routes are redrawn, and those material changes feedback to reset the NMSSC's architecture.

4.2 | Domain 2: Erosion of Objectivity

Objectivity serves as journalism's core anchor, even though it only became a dominant norm in the 20th century (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2021). Today, that standard is increasingly strained by polarized media ecosystems, niche outlets, citizen journalism, and the rapid circulation of misinformation (Reese 2020). These shifts place legacy journalistic values (i.e., verification, balance, independence) into direct tension with digital-era dynamics that reward personalization, emotional appeal, and ideological alignment (Stroud 2011).

Belonging paradoxes emerge as professional identities built on autonomy, authority, and institutional legitimacy. These identities intersect with digital-era ones that destabilize who "counts" as a journalist. Traditional reporters and editors still rely on professional norms to signal objectivity (e.g., Cox et al. 2024), yet citizen journalists, social media creators, and reflexive, image-based reporting practices are not necessarily beholden to these same norms (e.g., Atton and Wickenden 2005; Duffy et al. 2018).

Learning paradoxes reflect tensions between fact-centered norms of objectivity and contemporary framing practices that rely on emotional, narrative, or strategic angles to hold audience attention. Legacy journalism emphasized verification and balanced representation through gatekeeping routines (e.g., Andrews and Caren 2010). Across both legacy and digital formats, however, rhetorical and thematic framing has emerged as more pronounced. These approaches shape stories around ideological and organizational preferences (e.g., Gibson 2023). Journalists must therefore learn how to engage audiences without undermining the very standards they claim to protect.

Organizing paradoxes center on tensions between newsroom structures designed to preserve independence and the digital production systems that now rely on aggregation, syndication, and platform mediation. Traditional editorial workflows were built to ensure ownership over sourcing, verification, and

oversight (e.g., Adornato and Lysak 2017). These coexist uneasily with digital intermediaries and churnalism practices that decouple authorship from accountability and dilute control over the news product (e.g., Diel 2017).

Finally, *performing* paradoxes occur when journalism seeks to provide verified, credible information in an environment marked by erosion of trust, institutional skepticism, and political polarization. The long-standing aim of producing authenticated, credible news (e.g., Duffy and Freeman 2011) now confronts digital conditions that accelerate distrust (Barnoy and Reich 2023), threaten democratic deliberation (Bradshaw et al. 2020), and amplify structural biases tied to elite power and partisan identity (Artwick 2014).

Fox News provides a vivid real-world case. After President Biden's 2020 election win, former President Trump alleged widespread fraud. The cable news network amplified baseless claims about Dominion Voting Systems to retain partisan audiences even as insiders called the allegations "insane" and "absurd" (Durkee 2023; Lemire 2022). Nearly 800 news segments (outputs of their NMSSC) implicated Dominion (Tulbert et al. 2023). Meanwhile, internal rifts emerged between the decision desk, which called the presidency for Biden, and executives wary of alienating Trump supporters. Reporter Kristin Fisher's evidence-based critique drew rebuke from leadership, including CEO Suzanne Scott (Folkenflik 2023). Dominion's \$1.6B defamation suit later revealed private admissions that contradicted on-air content. These back-and-forth dialogues proved the pressure to provide narrative/emotional content that met consumers' expectations was weighted over reporting objective facts at a pivotal historical moment. This ultimately culminated in Fox's \$787.5M settlement with Dominion in April 2023 (Myers et al. 2023).

4.3 | Domain 3: Consumer Recognition and Identity Expression

Customer orientation is essential to SCM (Mentzer et al. 2001). In traditional SCs, satisfaction reflects measurable performance (i.e., defects, timeliness, efficiency) (Fawcett and Swenson 1998). In SSCs, this could mean reflection of co-created, experiential value (Song et al. 2016). Satisfaction is tied to the perceived value of an informational product relative to its cost (Voss et al. 2008). However, in the NMSSC, the ecosystem increasingly privileges ideological resonance and identity-driven dimensions such as outrage over journalistic rigor (Anderson et al. 2015; Berry and Sobieraj 2013).

Belonging paradoxes capture tensions between legacy norms that tied satisfaction to stability and authoritative representation, and digital environments in which satisfaction stems from recognition, identity expression, and outrage. Legacy sourcing practices frequently over-indexed elite voices and marginalized others (Artwick 2014). By contrast, digital-native processes expand representation and create visibility for communities historically absent from mainstream coverage (Deavours et al. 2024). Satisfaction, therefore, has shifted from being grounded in long-standing authority to being grounded in identity alignment/inclusion.

Learning paradoxes reflect tensions between one-way, mainstream diffusion models and digital-era practices that depend on interactive and emotionally charged modes of circulation. Legacy organizations measured reach through circulation or viewership. Conversely, digital news relies on clicks, shares, comments, and algorithmically mediated spread (e.g., Larsen 2017). This alters consumption habits (e.g., Alvarez-Urbe et al. 2023) and positions audiences as active co-creators of news value (e.g., Belair-Gagnon et al. 2017). Identity triggers like outrage and sensationalism now function as diffusion accelerants. This helps content break through crowded digital ecosystems (Bail 2012).

Organizing paradoxes involve tensions between legacy production routines (i.e., fixed deadlines, routinized workflows, professionalized sourcing) and digital systems that prioritize interactivity, real-time co-production, and responsiveness. Traditional routines such as “feeding the beast” to meet overnight deadlines or adhering to sourcing rituals (e.g., Artwick 2014) coexist now with digital demands for omnidirectional flows (e.g., del Águila-Obra et al. 2007). Contemporary news is expected not only to inform but also to interpret, comment on, and sustain identity-laden narratives that often hinge on outrage (Gonçalves 2024).

Finally, *performing* paradoxes highlight tensions between journalism’s traditional performance standards and digital metrics that reward engagement, amplification, and emotional reaction. Historically, news performance aligned with governance-oriented functions to provide authoritative information flows (e.g., Anderson et al. 2015; Boykoff and McFeely 2024). Digital environments complicate these goals. Misinformation, platform dynamics, and crowded multi-actor ecosystems obscure information flows and dilute accountability (Flavián and Gurrea 2009). Performance is now assessed through sharing, superdistribution, and social media interactivity (Sacco and Bossio 2017). Here, outrage can outperform accuracy.

A range of SC disruptions illustrates how identity-driven news flows, such as the use of outrage rhetoric, spill over into broader physical and service SCs. In agriculture, misinformation and attention cycles on digital platforms fuel market speculation, distort risk assessments, and heighten volatility (Akhtar et al. 2023; Kar et al. 2023). During the 2007–2008 food crisis, Western media narratives framed China and India as culprits for rising food prices, shaping geopolitical discourse and policy responses through “uncritical circulation” of crisis stories (Gong and Le Billon 2014). More recent work links spikes in fake-news searches to disruptions in food production and distribution (Konstantakis et al. 2023). As Benson (2011) notes, misinformation can lead to governmental overreaction and public panic, harming producers, retailers, and vulnerable populations alike. These examples demonstrate how outrage-amplified media ecosystems (i.e., the contemporary NMSSC) can inadvertently destabilize SCs far beyond.

5 | Discussion

Prior research shows that digitalization can generate paradoxes in organizing, attention, and knowledge sharing (Smith and

Beretta 2021). In our results, persistent tensions manifest across three domains (i.e., *industry transformation*, *erosion of objectivity*, and *consumer recognition and identity expression*) and are associated with several adverse outcomes. First, journalistic rigor and credibility erode with digitalization. The current emphasis on news media’s speed, immediacy, and engagement amplifies the spread of misinformation (e.g., Akhtar et al. 2023). Prior literature (e.g., Kar et al. 2023) indicates that compromised information flows exacerbate broader physical and service SC impacts. Second, the NMSSC faces organizational strain due to reduced labor capacity, intensified competition, and shifting revenue models (e.g., freemium, subscription, platform monetization) (Boehmer et al. 2019). This results in weakened financial stability for the NMSSC. These pressures are exacerbated by shifting consumer habits and the growth of digital intermediaries and churnalism (e.g., del Águila-Obra et al. 2007; Goyanes 2015). Third, identity-based content such as outrage rhetoric reshapes the NMSSC’s product/service offerings, privileging us-versus-them narratives over accuracy (Berry and Sobieraj 2013). These dynamics erode trust and compromise the NMSSC’s ability to enable operant resources across broader SCs (Richey Jr et al. 2011).

Having categorized several tensions and articulated their outcomes, we now draw on Smith and Lewis’s (2011) DEM. DEM advocates cyclical, balancing responses to sustain performance. Otherwise, failure to surface and embrace paradoxes risks yielding defensive actions that perpetuate tensions and stifle creativity (Smith and Lewis 2011; Tsoukas and Cunha 2017). Using the DEM approach, we offer four propositions to address these adverse outcomes.

One mitigation strategy is to acquire digital-native firms that integrate digital tools with high-quality journalism (Aubin et al. 2023). Over the past decade, smaller digital-native outlets have balanced a digital focus with expectations for solid, unbiased reporting (Wu 2025). Boutique brands staffed by highly-trained journalists (e.g., *Axios*, *Punchbowl*, and *Politico*) have proliferated alongside legacy firms (C. Klein 2024; Piore 2022). Legacy conglomerates have taken notice: Axel Springer acquired *Politico* for more than \$1 billion (Lee 2021), and there is speculation that the *Washington Post* will acquire *Punchbowl News* (Flynn 2024).⁶ Such partnerships exemplify Both/And solutions within the DEM, integrating agile, niche (and digital-native) news agencies to complement traditional portfolios and balance disruption with enduring demand for credible, high-quality reporting (Wu 2025). Acquisition enables legacy organizations to internalize digital agility while preserving established cultures of journalistic norms. This leads us to our first proposition:

P1. *Legacy NMSSCs may acquire digital-native, niche-focused news outlets to better navigate the paradox of digital transformation; therefore integrating digitally fluent talent with adaptive workflows and established journalistic practices. This integration would strengthen digital audience growth and revenue stability compared to relying solely on internal digitalization efforts.*

Second, erosion of journalistic objectivity has intensified in the digital era. Algorithmic curation and engagement-driven content increasingly prioritize ideological polarization over verification, neutrality, and balance (Coddington and Molyneux 2024). A

clear illustration emerges from pandemic-era disruptions in the consumer goods sector. Misinformation-triggered panic buying catalyzes logistics bottlenecks, labor shortages, and classic bull-whip dynamics across SC tiers (e.g., Kar et al. 2023). To counter these effects, Akhtar et al. (2023) propose an AI/ML workflow that ingests multi-source streams to classify false information before it reaches decision-makers, offering a “gate” control-tower process. Complementing this, Chatterjee et al. (2023) demonstrate that firms’ technological competence moderates the disruption–performance link and recommend additional technological enablers (e.g., blockchain) to restore information integrity and mitigate demand shocks. Such tools serve as a form of quality control and move paradox management from idea to practice. Viewed through an SCM lens, this means conceptualizing journalistic verification as an operational buffering capability. By detecting and throttling misinformation upstream, the NMSSC can prevent defects (e.g., the perpetuation of false/misleading information), thereby reducing downstream operational losses. In these cases, it must be clear that AI is not replacing judgment, but complementing verification. Human experts working alongside advanced technology embody the paradoxical mindset. Hence, we offer proposition 2:

P2. *The NMSSC must actively challenge misinformation by detecting it early in the SC. This can be accomplished through digital technologies like AI/ML. By balancing journalistic neutrality with audience expectations, the NMSSC can foster improved credibility and public trust, thereby reestablishing legitimacy.*

The third paradoxical domain examines tensions within the NMSSC’s changing relationship to consumer recognition and identity expression. In the digital media economy, emotionally charged and sensational content reliably boost audience metrics (Miranda et al. 2016). However, dependence on such framing erodes trust and propagates misinformation. One mitigation strategy is media literacy, designed to equip individuals to evaluate claims, strengthen civic engagement, and resist misinformation (Bulger and Davison 2018). Additionally, media literacy increases skepticism toward hyper-partisan content and improves source discrimination (Ashley et al. 2010; Lyons et al. 2024). News organizations can operationalize media literacy through curricula, interactive tools, and consumer partnerships. Broader physical/service SC managers can do the same. Prior SCM research demonstrates that improving digital and information literacy enables SC managers to critically evaluate information, reduce uncertainty, and better integrate digital tools with human judgment when managing complex disruptions (Kurnia et al. 2022). Here, media literacy transforms SC consumers from passive to active participants in maintaining information quality. In digital ecosystems, verification can be distributed more diffusely across the SC.

Notably, this strategy serves as a low-tech complement to implementing the digital tools to flag misinformation discussed in the prior proposition and to reposition SC managers to seek more trustworthy news sources. Digital-native outlets such as *Axios* and *Punchbowl News* demonstrate that concise, high-quality reporting can be financially viable without relying on sensationalism. *Axios*’s “Smart Brevity” approach advances a “just-the-facts” writing style to eschew partisan noise (Malone 2022). These models suggest clarity, brevity, and factual rigor as

alternatives to identity-based engagement. Media literacy creates the conditions for a virtuous cycle by enabling audiences to remain participatory and emotionally invested without relying on rhetorical styles such as outrage as the primary driver of satisfaction. This leads to greater integrity, consistent with DEM’s call for cyclical balancing of competing demands. Thus, our third proposition:

P3. *The NMSSC (and other impacted SC managers) must implement media literacy initiatives and alternative content models to address tensions tied to consumer engagement. By balancing audience retention with journalistic integrity, the NMSSC can reduce dependence on identity-driven content (e.g., outrage rhetoric) while maintaining viability and credibility.*

We must also consider higher-level policymaking and governance. Digital transformation is a delicate balancing act. Evidence indicates that while digital subscriptions may increase for a news agency, financial sustainability remains uncertain because investments in technology, staffing, and distribution systems may outpace revenue growth (Lozić and Čiković 2021). These considerations are valuable. They concern how crucial SC flows (e.g., financial, human, and information flows) must adapt amid digital transformation as the NMSSC evolves beyond legacy production and distribution networks (Ashraf, Yalcin, and Hos 2025). For example, expansion across diverse NMSSC platforms through “transmedia” storytelling can accelerate consumer growth. That said, it also introduces vulnerabilities in verification and control (Moloney 2020). Consequently, scholars argue that trust in a digital NMSSC depends on governance structures, ownership transparency, and clear professional norms (Robinson et al. 2021).

From a policymaking standpoint, organizational pressures intersect with broader systemic threats, including media capture (where media outlets are co-opted by political or economic elites) and the proliferation of MDM (misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation) (Herrero-Beaumont 2022; Wardle and Derakhshan 2017). A regulatory response increasingly emphasizes certification, trust labels, credibility indicators, and governance disclosures. Importantly, while these may be imposed externally, they can also be operationalized internally when governmental policymaking falls short. For instance, newly emerging roles for “public editors” within NMSSC organizations function as in-house accountability mechanisms that scrutinize journalistic performance and signal legitimacy to consumers (Nolan and Marjoribanks 2011). Ultimately, transparency emerges as a foundational mechanism for reconciling innovation with credibility in the digital environment. This leads to our final proposition:

P4. *The NMSSC must formalize verifiable journalistic standards through roles and processes dedicated to accountability (i.e., clear ownership disclosure, trust indicators, independent oversight, and public accountability roles). Such structures enhance legitimacy and reinforce professional norms through digital transformation.*

Figure 3 presents our conceptual framework. Moving left to right, post-digital conditions in the NMSSC give rise to specific domains that breed paradoxical tensions. While we highlight

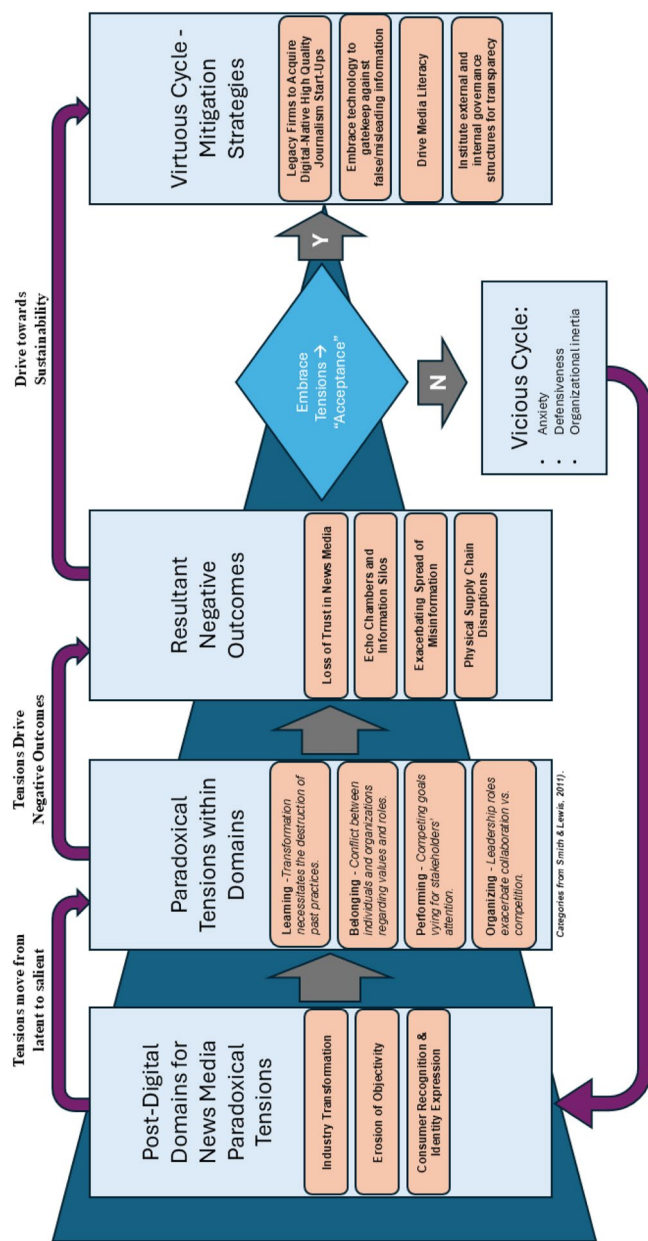


FIGURE 3 | Conceptual framework. Source: Authors.

three domains (*industry transformation, erosion of objectivity, and consumer recognition and identity expression*), we do not claim they are exhaustive. Our SLR shows that digitalization surfaced these tensions, shifting them from latent to salient (Smith and Lewis 2011). These tensions, in turn, generate the adverse outcomes we document, inspiring our four propositions. Following the DEM, we argue that NMSSC leaders should adopt a paradoxical mindset (Miron-Spektor et al. 2018) and pursue creative both/and strategies that enable virtuous cycles, thereby mitigating adverse outcomes and improving performance (Smith and Lewis 2022).

6 | Conclusions

Writer James Baldwin once observed, “If you can describe it, you can control it, and if you can control it, you can outwit it. You can

get beyond it” (Amoeba 2019, 8:05). PT advocates for Both/And in a world of persistent tensions (Smith and Lewis 2022). Our introduction highlighted the ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline. However, the contemporary SCM climate is replete with myriad examples of the news media’s impact on SC decision-making, including the crisis caused by the Ever Given’s blockage of the Suez Canal (Paris 2021) and panic buying resulting from a baby formula shortage (Pisani 2022). How news frames events matter, and the approaches to news creation have been upended with digitalization. As media journalist Dylan Byers remarks, leaders at legacy institutions such as *The Washington Post* and *CNN* are scrambling to move beyond linear news: “the ship is either sinking or heading for an iceberg” (Heilemann 2024, 17:55). In January 2025 Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced the end of the platform’s fact-checking role, conceding “more harmful content will appear” even as he framed the change as pro-free speech (Duffy 2025; Jingnan et al. 2025). Choices like these exemplify either/or responses.

With only 31% of U.S. adults expressing trust in news (Fischer 2024), addressing tensions is essential for media credibility and for downstream SC outcomes, including panic buying, stockouts, and governance challenges (Akhtar et al. 2023; Kar et al. 2023; Hartmann 2021). By adopting receptive mitigation strategies, leveraging technology responsibly, and exercising visionary leadership, stakeholders can cultivate media literacy, strengthen verification and accountability, build inter-organizational collaboration, and improve governance structures. We contend that this is an important lesson not only for managers operating within the NMSSC but also for all SC managers. Improved trust and reliability of news flows mean stronger operant resources for overall SCM decision-making.

6.1 | Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study makes significant theoretical contributions. First, it broadens the scope of SCM to the underexplored SSC domain of news media. Although historically overlooked by SCM research (e.g., Dubois 2024), the NMSSC’s impact as a unique SSC and a primary enabler of knowledge resources for broader SCM warrants focused, theory-driven attention. Additionally, by embedding PT within this context, we identify three prominent domains of tensions that shape the evolving NMSSC. Mapping the tensions across domains extends PT into a new empirical domain and demonstrates its explanatory value for information-driven service ecosystems. Third, by situating tensions within Smith and Lewis’s (2011) DEM, this study demonstrates how cyclical responses help organizations balance competing demands and foster adaptability. This aligns with contemporary research suggesting that succeeding in today’s “new normal” requires SC leaders to develop strong digitalization/transformation capabilities and explicit “managing paradox” skills, using decision frameworks to navigate trade-offs, such as balancing agility/responsiveness (Merkert et al. 2023). The study’s resulting propositions make clear that the NMSSC illuminates how end-to-end SC activities may be reconfigured in digitalized ecosystems.

From a practical perspective, we outline implications for various NMSSC stakeholders. For newsroom leaders, challenges

include the effects of polarization, misinformation, and technological change on the NMSSC. Our comparison of digitally native and legacy outlets illustrates how organizations can better reconcile financial imperatives with their societal role. Mergers and acquisitions of niche, digitally native entities offer one viable strategy for legacy firms to sustain credibility while embracing digital transformation (Gezgin et al. 2017). We further emphasize the importance of cognitive reframing because structural inequalities shape responses to paradoxes within the NMSSC (i.e., development of paradoxical mindsets). For downstream SC decision-makers, these same challenges shape the quality of the operant resources on which they depend. Reliance on the NMSSC, therefore, necessitates greater awareness that speed and visibility may not correspond with accuracy or neutrality. Here, improved literacy is key. Lastly, for policymakers, our findings indicate the need for more robust governance. Transparency requires formal roles and standardized journalistic routines. Industry leaders and regulators should both treat governance in the same manner as cybersecurity or quality assurance. Establishing independent review functions creates long-term stability and rebuilds trust. Both/And solutions can transform inherent contradictions into opportunities for growth and support a more adaptive and sustainable media ecosystem.

6.2 | Limitations

This study should be interpreted within several boundaries. First, the analysis is conceptual. Although the resultant propositions are grounded in a systematic review of extant scholarship, they are not empirically tested here. As such, causal pathways linking PT, information credibility, and downstream SC outcomes must be validated through quantitative or field-based inquiry. Through this SLR, we theorize implications for SC managers without directly observing managerial cognition or decision-making processes. Second, the SLR primarily reflects scholarship situated in a U.S. context. The NMSSC and corresponding consumer trust dynamics likely vary across sociocultural contexts. Accordingly, paradoxical tensions and mitigation strategies identified here may differ in other regions of the world. Finally, in line with qualitative coding, this study prioritizes analytic generalization over statistical generalization. This is intentionally in the service of theory elaboration; as a result, we are unable to specify the nature of effects or behavioral responses.

6.3 | Future Research

Future studies can directly test our propositions by examining how the mitigation strategies we identify shape perceived trust and efficiency of the NMSSC. Archival analyses, field experiments, and survey experiments are well-positioned to assess how both-and balancing influences consumer trust, verification transparency, and operational stability. Qualitative approaches (e.g., newsroom ethnographies, case studies) can reveal how paradoxical mindsets diffuse across teams and organizational layers. Additionally, scholars might further investigate whether similar paradoxical tensions exist in broader media/digital SSCs. Building on PT's notion of nested and

knotted tensions (Cunha and Putnam 2019), future studies can also model how tensions interact. Although our coding identified numerous paradoxes, it does not claim to be exhaustive. Empirical approaches (i.e., focus groups or Delphi studies) can validate and extend this set. Finally, because the NMSSC enables operant resources such as knowledge and collaborative communication (Richey Jr et al. 2011), SCM researchers should quantify how disruptions in media trust propagate into downstream SC decision-making.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Endnotes

- ¹ An example of SCM decision-making reliant on news media: The U.S. administration's 2025 tariff actions disrupted domestic SCs (Miller et al. 2025). One logistics software firm, profiled in *The Wall Street Journal* (Vartabedian 2025), now “scans over 104 million sources (i.e., news, social media, wire services) for various types of potential disruptions” (KXAN 2024). Modern SCM depends on both legacy and digital news flows to sense and respond to volatility.
- ² Over time, PT has evolved to include additional complexities, such as intersecting and expanding categories (Keller and Chen 2017). Our approach opts to utilize the well-established foundation in Smith and Lewis's (2011) seminal work.
- ³ The figure is used for illustrative purposes to highlight digital engagement structures rather than to evaluate the editorial position of the outlet.
- ⁴ Prior methodological research demonstrates that Scopus provides extensive coverage of journals across the social sciences (Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016). ProQuest and EBSCO complement this coverage by offering depth in communication, journalism, and other interdisciplinary domains central to the study of news media (Bennett.edu n.d.; EBSCO n.d.).
- ⁵ Abbasi et al. (2024), a recent MIS Quarterly call for papers on digitalization in news media, provided the foundational news media terms. We extracted and expanded the keywords from their reference lists into a comprehensive synonym list. For PT, we drew on the vetted keyword set from Zhang et al. (2021) and adapted and extended it with terms such as “supply chain” and “value chain” to ensure broad, inclusive coverage.
- ⁶ As of early 2026, The Washington Post's organizational restructuring and subscription losses have challenged the legacy firm's turnaround. The pursuit of strategic acquisitions/partnerships with digital-native outlets is uncertain (Sullivan 2026).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Appendix S1:** SLR results. Derived from larger NMSSC Conceptualization Project. **Appendix S2a:** Codebook for Domain 1: Industry transformation. **Appendix S2b:** Codebook for Domain 2: Erosion of objectivity. **Appendix S2c:** Codebook for Domain 3: Consumer recognition and identity expression.