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# A STUDY TO ASSESS THE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM USERS TO PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTIC PHOTOGRAPHY

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## ABSTRACT

Digital communication has transformed journalism very swiftly, especially when it comes to reporting using pictures. Anyone may now take images of important events and post them immediately away thanks to mobile devices and social media sites. This is the case since news reporting these days depends a lot on photos sent in by individuals. The major goal of this study is to look at how important user-generated photos are in the field of professional news photography. This study examines the influence of user-generated pictures on the field of professional journalistic photography. The study used a quantitative and cross-sectional methodology to investigate the impact of user-generated photographs on professional news photography. The data collection method included the researcher using a structured survey to get information on the participants' replies. A purposive selection strategy was used to identify 500 skilled photojournalists from well-known Chinese media businesses in order to gather the data. The study's major results reveal that user-generated photographs have had a huge effect on professional journalistic photography and visual journalism as a whole. This transition has occurring because more people are becoming involved and newsrooms are working differently. The research also demonstrated that professional journalistic photography has been greatly affected by other factors, such as how rapidly photographs travel, the photographer's moral obligation, and the risk of distributing false information. Moreover, it is clear that user-generated photography has become an important part of visual information for modern news companies. So, professional journalistic photography in China may benefit by adhering to journalistic standards and selecting suitable user-generated images.

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**KEYWORDS:** Professional Journalistic Photography, Visual Journalism, User-Generated Imagery, Ethical Responsibility, Digital Communication.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in reliance on visual content as well as traditional news. While throughout time photographs have contributed substantially to how humans process important historical events (both emotionally and cognitively) over the last few generations they have become increasingly valuable as tools in journalism because they convey details for complex events that could not otherwise be fully described with words. Historically they were created by professional photojournalists working for large media organisations and governed by established guidelines for writing and ethical standards, as well as rigid parameters for technical quality. Consumers of these images, as well as those who view them via social media platforms, have generally trusted these images to be factual, accurate, and or authoritative evidence of what they are perceiving (Hua et al., 2024).

Over the last few years, the evolution of digital media has changed the atmosphere surrounding photojournalism due to the increasing popularity of digital photographs as well as the increasing number of mobile phones in use. Average people were using UGI to capture actions occurring in their local communities via photographs, and sending them to publications was commonplace. More often than not, these images were sent before professional journalism reached the location at which they had been taken. Consequently, news outlets started relying on images provided by the public as a way to enhance what they provide to the public in terms of image content, thus impacting greatly how news is produced, distributed, and consumed. This change created both new opportunities and challenges for professional photojournalism (Onwuliri, 2025).

On one hand, UGI allowed viewers to see events in real time from multiple perspectives and gave an almost instant overview of them which ultimately increased the number of ways to tell a visual story. On the other hand, UGI raises many important questions regarding the speed of image distribution; the possibility to disseminate misinformation; the ethical obligation to use caution when sharing; and the obligation to maintain visual quality standards. There is also much more competition between professionally shot and consumer-generated images because they can be disseminated so quickly through social media. Due to this level of competition, many people place greater emphasis on completing tasks fast versus ensuring that they gather and verify accurate information (Yamagishi et al., 2024). The

idea of edited photos or fake images has made it difficult for journalists to gain the public's trust. Photographs being changed adds to this problem. There are occasions when individuals won't permit the use of their photos, creating additional concerns for photojournalists. Better smartphone cameras have closed the quality gap between the amateur and the professional photographer. Moreover, the introduction of these cameras has made it much more challenging for photojournalists to uphold traditional photographic standards of quality and competence. These new ideas have also changed how photojournalists perform their duties and have generated additional avenues for photojournalists to respond to the continuously shifting media environment (Huang & Zheng, 2024).

Thus, the purpose of this research was to investigate how user-generated images affect professional photographers. The audience that would be receiving this research would be the journalist audience. Specifically, the areas of interest were how fast a picture spreads, how much risk there is of distributing false information, how one should conduct themselves in terms of ethical behaviour, and what are the standards for visual quality. The purpose of the research was to examine how UGI attributes influence professional messages, values, and behaviours in modern-day visual media. In order to accomplish the objectives of the research, a quantitative methodology was employed to identify a representative sample of photojournalists.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Changing how journalism operates has included changes to how photography and visuals are communicated through digital media; therefore, these changes mean that professional photojournalism has historically been considered an essential element of any reputable news source resulting in journalistic adherence to standards: Accuracy, objectivity, and ethical responsibility are standard practices for professional photojournalism to this day. Previously, photojournalists have worked according to established institutional guidelines, which allowed photojournalists to have editorial control over their own work, verify the accuracy of photographic evidence of their work, and hold themselves accountable for all photographic representations in accordance with the law (Khan et al., 2023).

The role of UGI has also changed how journalists report on an event. For example, the ability to capture and share UGI in real time using high-quality smartphone cameras has changed how news articles

are produced. UGI has also revolutionised photojournalism by enabling non-professional photographers to take photos that are just as clear, sharp, and high-quality as those taken by professional photojournalists (Lysenko, 2024). Today, UGI has become a critical component in the reporting process for many news agencies, as they strive to create a better sense of immediacy and increase their audience's engagement level with their articles. Several studies show that UGI facilitate rapid dissemination of visual information and offer additional visual perspectives to the audience, which were not previously found in traditional media (Ismail et al., 2025).

There are many issues with the ability of journalism to stay independent and credible in this digital era the most significant of these is the movement of UGC images between digital platforms. The rapid movement of UGC images from one platform to another has resulted in a significant shift away from the verification of images before usage, and towards the need to get the image into the public domain as fast as possible (Jena, 2024). The result in the increased likelihood of spreading misinformation by using images in this manner because the verification process has been bypassed. Most of the UGC content created is being created by individuals who do not have any type of professional training; hence, when using such material, it is unlikely that the traditional journalistic standards of professionalism, accuracy and responsibility will have been adhered to. Finally, despite the advances in technology for reproducing images, there are still question marks regarding the consistency and reliability of UGC images, and how closely at all, they adhere to the professional guidelines established by the journalism profession (Yamagishi et al., 2024).

In China, the media landscape has been heavily influenced by the widespread adoption of smartphones and the use of the many different services available on mobile devices. In addition, strict government regulations have made it difficult for professionals to verify images and monitor how they are using images created through UGI, as well as complicating the ethics of UGI compared to other forms of photojournalism (Meng & Zhang, 2022).

### 3. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to understand the effects of UGI on journalistic photography in today's digital world. The study focused on how the practices, integrity and standards of professional photographers are affected by the potential for misrepresentation inherent in UGIs. Now that many

news stories use images taken by everyday people, concerns are being raised regarding the truthfulness and authenticity of visual information. This research also aimed to examine how the presence of inaccurate information in user-submitted images affects the verification methods used; the editorial decisions made; and the overall credibility of journalistic products.

Additionally, this study gauged how professional photographers responded to the presence of altered or misleading images while still adhering to their own established ethical and professional standards. The research also examined how inaccurate information impacts other aspects of UGI, including the speed with which images are disseminated; the ethical responsibility associated with using UGI; and the criteria for judging visual quality; with the ultimate goal of changing the way professionals do their jobs. The research provide empirical evidence on how inaccuracy in user-generated images has had an impact on professional photography.

### 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of digital media and social networks on the production and sharing of visual content within journalism has been tremendous. Though UGI offers traditional media outlets with an opportunity to vet and use all that content, they would also consider using only UGI content if they felt that they produced sufficient versions for any given event. Researchers are also finding that the rise of UGIs contributes to a more host-based media model where audiences are engaged in participatory journalism vs. solely being passive consumers of information in the traditional sense through traditional media (Qu et al., 2025). Constantly connected devices such as smart phones have created a world where individuals can create, & distribute, their content faster than ever, has also significantly changed the manner in which traditional news organisations operate.

Digital media and social networking have given UGI the ability to circulate across multiple digital media platforms nearly instantly; therefore, this has also increased the speed at which news spreads and has increased the level of competition between media outlets (Hadland, 2025). Consequently, news organisations have had to recognise that the authenticity of UGI plays a significant role in their success in producing real-time photography of breaking news events (i.e., UGI being readily available to journalists has enabled them to have real-time photographic documentation of breaking news events). Furthermore, UGI has been seen as authentic

and as such, UGI content attract audiences and provide audience value and thus, be a greater influencer in forming or altering a person's opinion of an event or issue (Sánchez-Franco & Rey-Tienda, 2024).

The increased speed of image distribution has introduced significant challenges to professional journalism. With journalists constrained by timelines to quickly publish photos and images, many scholars believe this clashes with traditional verification practices, wherein there may be insufficient time for thoroughness. Additionally, the exponentially growing number of unverified images provides the opportunity for misinformation to be published prior to the image being verified, creating the potential for dangerous misinformation (Ren & Dan, 2022).

Additionally, numerous research studies have recently shown a large number of image circulation has significantly affected how professional photographers communicate their work (photojournalism) due to an increase in photojournalists being required to provide a quick response to stories by balancing responding quickly to the urgency of immediate publication with the established ethical, accuracy, and quality standards associated with being a photojournalist, and that new ways to communicate will continue to impact all professionals as they continue to convert from long-established reporting to real-time reporting while maintaining and supporting their own credibility. Finally, the changing media landscape has demonstrated the need to develop modern frameworks to provide solutions for the many issues that affect photojournalists as a result of rapidly sharing images and other visual content that currently exist (Ye, 2025).

## 5. RESEARCH QUESTION

- What is the influence of potential for misinformation in professional journalistic photography?

## 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 6.1 Research Design

The researcher used a quantitative methodology for the analysis of the inquiry. The researcher used SPSS 25 for data analysis. The researcher used the odds ratio and 95% confidence interval to evaluate the magnitude and scope of the statistical link. When p-values are less than 0.05, the results are statistically significant. The descriptive analysis also helped people understand the most important elements of the information.

### 6.2 Sampling

The study used a purposive sampling technique to get samples from suitable individuals. The researcher used Rao-Soft software to ensure the inclusion of 473 persons in the sample. The researcher sent out 550 questionnaires in all. Out of them, 537 were sent back, and 37 were not counted because they were not complete. The ultimate number of samples is 500.

### 6.3 Data and Measurement

The research used a questionnaire survey as the primary data collection technique. The poll included two parts: (A) basic personal information and (B) a 5-point Likert scale for how they felt about the features of both online and offline channels. The researcher gathered secondary data from several sources, mostly from internet websites.

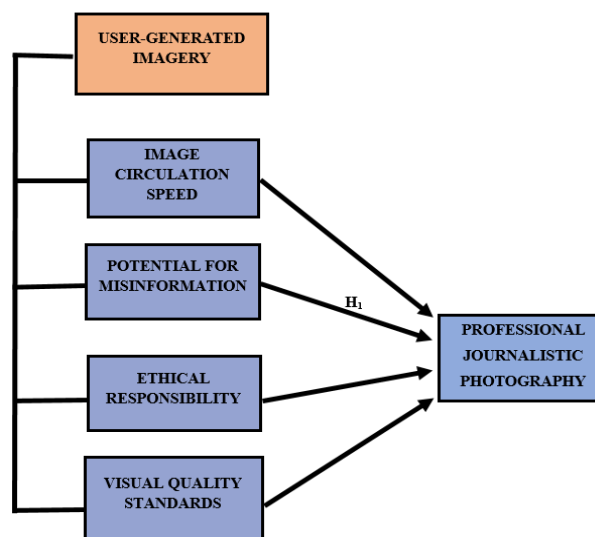
### 6.4 Statistical Software

The researcher utilised SPSS 25 and Microsoft Excel to do a statistical analysis of the study's data.

### 6.5 Statistical Tools

The researcher used descriptive analysis to understand the fundamental attributes of the collected data. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and factor analysis (FA) were also performed to check for validity.

## 7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



## 8. RESULT

### • Factor Analysis

The purpose of FA is to identify hidden variables within observable data. When there aren't any clear

visual cues or diagnostic criteria, tests generally employ regression coefficients. The main goal of modelling is to find weak points, rule violations, and connections. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test is used to look at a lot of datasets from regression studies. In short, the findings show that the theoretical model and the parameters utilised to make predictions are correct. The data can exhibit signs of being duplicated. Also, making the size smaller makes it easier to understand the information. KMO produces a number that is between 0 and 1. The KMO value tells that an acceptable sample size is between 0.8 and 1.

Kaiser believes these are the limits that are okay: Kaiser has established the following standards for approval:

A score of 0.050 to 0.059, which is extremely low and below average. Most of the time, the intermediate grades are between 0.70 and 0.79.

On the quality point scale, it got a score of 0.80 to 0.89. In the range of 0.90 to 1.00, they are very excellent.

Table 1: The KMO and Bartlett's Test KMO test and Bartlett's Sampling Adequacy reveal a score of 0.917.

Here are the results of Bartlett's test of Sphericity: With 190 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000, the estimated chi-square is 6648.237.

**Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test.**

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.917
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6648.237
	df	190
	Sig.	0.000

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity also showed how important the correlation matrices were in general. The KMO test states that the sample adequacy value is 0.917. The researchers used Bartlett's Sphericity test to get a p-value of 0.00. Because Bartlett's Sphericity test gave a significant result, the correlation matrix cannot be thought of as a normal correlation matrix.

#### ❖ *DEPENDENT VARIABLE*

##### **Professional journalistic photography:**

"Professional Journalistic Photography" is the area of photography that educated photojournalists do as part of their work. They take, make, and show pictures as part of their work. This kind of photography is an important aspect of how news is shown since it shows events as they happen, gives viewers more information about social, political, and

cultural concerns, and shows accurate information. Along with casual or amateur photographers, photojournalists have set rules that professional photojournalists must follow while taking, verifying, and sharing pictures for use in news stories. For photojournalists to be effective, they need to know more than just how to take pictures. They also need to know how to tell stories, how to look at things from many angles, and how to figure out what makes something newsworthy (YUSOF et al., 2024).

Professional photojournalism must also follow the rules of authenticity. To check the authenticity of a photograph, researcher need to make sure that it shows real events without changing the image. Professional photojournalists must follow ethical rules that say they must respect the people they picture, have their permission, and not cause damage. The professional photojournalistic photography also shapes the audience's perception of events and lends credibility to the reported photos via the use of established standards. Professional photojournalistic photos also make the newspaper more credible by following defined criteria and professional standards, which keeps extraneous influences out of the newspaper (Thomson, 2025).

#### ❖ *INDEPENDENT VARIABLE*

**User-generated imagery:** UGI is visual content such as photos that were created or captured by non-professional individuals and subsequently shared (as opposed to being created by trained journalists/media organisations). The emergence of user-generated visual content as an important part of the digital media environment coincided with the proliferation of smartphones, social media, and internet connectivity. Non-professional digital image creators began taking and posting photos in real time and sharing them via social networking sites, text messages, or other online communities (Li et al., 2024).

Unlike professional journalistic photographs, which are normally produced within a pre-defined formal editorial framework and are guided by established journalistic standards, user-generated photographs can vary significantly in terms of all of the following: quality; accuracy; and ethics. Nonetheless, UGI provided immediate and first-hand visual documentation of some events when there are no professional journalists present. Therefore, UGI was an important source of information about breaking news, crisis situation, or public events. Although this increased public participation in creating news and providing different points of view, it raised many issues

regarding misinformation, lack of fact-checking, and ethical responsibility. In spite of these issues UGI was becoming a more prominent factor in news generation (Aboalghanam *et al.*, 2025).

## • FACTOR

### ◇ Potential for misinformation:

Misinformation is potential visual content (especially images) could share incorrect; misleading; and inaccurate information with its audience. User-generated images and digital journalism contain a risk of being misinterpreted; manipulated; taken out of context; or intentionally altered prior to being shared on media platforms. Due to the rapid rise of social media combining real-time content delivery, this possibility created critical challenges in visual communication today. UGI have been created and distributed without typical means of verifying or oversight when produced by professional journalists. Because of this, they are at a significantly greater risk for inaccurate or misleading images to be widely circulated before the image has been authenticated. There are several other factors that allow for the proliferation of misinformation including (but not limited to) the application of editing tools, use of misleading captions and lack of context (Miró-Llinares & Aguerri, 2023).

Fast-paced news environments offer great opportunities for the dissemination of misinformation due to the high demand for immediate visual content compared to the lower demand for verification of that content. This can distort the public's understanding, create inaccurate narratives, and-in finally- result in a loss of confidence in journalistic practices. As a result, it has become a significant impediment to the professional practice of Journalistic Photography. Thus, photographers and journalists are required to build into their overall approach to photography and journalism, strategies that emphasise a commitment to rigorous verification and ethical obligations (Aïmeur *et al.*, 2023).

### • Relationship between Potential for misinformation and Professional journalistic photography

There was an important relationship between misinformation and professional photojournalism, as digitally based platforms changed the nature of news journalism and how news is produced. User generated images were increasingly used in news production which affected the accuracy of the image and thus affected the standards associated with

professional photojournalism practices. Professional photojournalism is grounded in the values of accuracy, verification and ethical responsibility and the rise of unverified images challenged these values. The increased potential for misinformation from the use of altered, miscaptioned or taken out of context images, led to changes in how professional photojournalists selected and utilized images for news reporting. As a result of the large numbers of altered images being published, professional photojournalists began using strict standards for verifying images including extensive cross-checking of sources, validating images and ensuring that proper context is provided before images are published (Thomson *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the role of professional photojournalists began to expand from just capturing images, but also to evaluating and verifying visual content coming from external sources before publication. The presence of misinformation had an impact on the credibility and trust that professionals place in journalistic photography. The publication of inaccurate or misleading photographs, through no fault of the organisation, had the potential to damage the reputation of the organisation and ultimately reduce public confidence in visual journalism. Thus, maintaining high levels of accuracy and ethical responsibility became critical in distinguishing professional work from user-generated content (Mortensen *et al.*, 2023).

As per the previous discussion, the hypothesis was developed with the purpose of investigating the significant connection between the potential for misinformation and professional journalistic photography.

- *“H01: There is no significant relationship between potential for misinformation and professional journalistic photography.”*
- *“H1: There is a significant relationship between potential for misinformation and professional journalistic photography.”*

Table 2: H1 ANOVA Test.

ANOVA					
Sum					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	39588.620	194	5655.517	1055.922	.000
Within Groups	492.770	305	5.356		
Total	40081.390	499			

The study presented substantial findings. Statistical significance is achieved with a p-value below 0.05 and an F-value of 1055.922. This denoted that the null hypothesis has been rejected, and the alternative hypothesis, **“H1: There is a significant**

relationship between potential for misinformation and professional journalistic photography", has been accepted.

## 9. DISCUSSION

The outcome from the study showed that UGI has had a significant impact on the profession of journalistic photography and, more importantly, it has impacted how journalists can access and utilise images in a time of misinformation. The growing publically published images being used as news has presented unique challenges to traditional journalistic practices that were rooted in verification, accuracy, and ethical responsibility prior to this time. The statistical evidence strongly affirmed there was an association between the risks of misinformation and the integrity of professional journalistic photography, and thus the development of misinformation presented a substantial influence on the conduct of professional journalism.

As a result of finding non-credible, manipulated and taken out of context images, photojournalists were forced to develop stricter methods of verification for validating images prior to publication. Photographers were required to put more time and energy into confirming that the images were truthful prior to publishing and had transitioned from the act of producing photographs to producing and confirming content. With the increased circulation of UGI images prior to publishing, journalists felt tremendous time constraints to publish images, which caused conflicts between "time" and "accuracy."

The results also showed that spreading false information directly affects how credible and trustworthy professional journalists are in the media. Even if they didn't want to, using deceptive photographs might hurt the reputation of news companies and make people less trusting of them. This immediately led to the maintenance of ethical

standards and the importance of professional integrity being greater than it had ever been before. The study showed that UGI gave journalists a lot of chances to report in real time, but it also meant that they had to deal with new problems by improving their verification procedures and keeping up with journalistic standards.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The study's results led to the conclusion that the photography techniques of professional journalists were greatly affected by the photos taken by users. This was especially important in the area of spreading false information, which is hard to achieve. The findings indicate that the dissemination of inaccurate information adversely affects the credibility of visual journalism overall, as well as the verifiability of processes, ethical accountability, and the overall integrity of visual journalism when these elements are collectively assessed. Even while the UGI made it simpler and faster to get news, it also caused a lot of difficulties that needed to be fixed very carefully in order for them to work.

After reviewing the study's data, the researchers concluded that professional photojournalists are needed to reconcile the competing needs of speed and accuracy, as well as the needs of ethical standards. To keep up with the fast-changing world of digital media, there were a number of things that needed to be done. Two of the most important things that needed to be done were to make verification procedures stronger and to protect professional ethics. The purpose of doing this exercise was to learn how to adjust to the world around people in a good way. Because of this part of the scenario, the UGI continued to be an important tool for contemporary journalism. To utilise it effectively, it was necessary to do it in a responsible and critical way within the context of professional frameworks.

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