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THE INFLUENCE OF USER-GENERATED IMAGERY ON PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTIC PHOTOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

Digital communication has quickly changed journalism, particularly when it comes to visual reporting. Mobile devices and social media platforms have made it feasible for anybody to shoot and share pictures of news events right away. This is the situation since news reporting nowadays relies heavily on photographs supplied in by people. The primary aim of this research is to investigate the significance of user-generated photographs in the domain of professional news photography. This research ascertain the impact of user-generated photographs on the domain of professional journalistic photography. The research used a quantitative and cross-sectional technique to examine the influence of user-generated photos on professional news photography. The data gathering technique included the researcher using a structured survey to gather information on the participants' responses. To collect the data, a purposive sampling methods was employed to choose 500 professional photojournalists from well-known Chinese media companies. A statistical analysis method was employed to look at the data that was collected. The main findings of the study show that user-generated images have changed professional journalistic photography and visual journalism as a whole in a big way. This change has happened because of better audience participation and changes in how newsrooms work. The studies also showed that other things, such how quickly photos spread, the photographer's moral duty, and the chance of spreading misleading information, have had a big effect on professional journalistic photography. Further, it is evident that user-generated photography has become a crucial element of visual information for contemporary news organisations. So, it is likely that professional journalistic photography in China may gain by following journalistic norms and choosing user-generated photographs that are appropriate.

KEYWORDS: User-Generated Imagery, Professional Journalistic Photography, Digital Media, Photojournalists, Ethical Responsibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last several years, people have started to rely more on visual information along with news. Throughout history, images have been an important part in shaping how people think, feel, and remember things that happened in the past. As time has gone on, photography has become more and more important to journalism. This is because it helps people understand intricate situations that can't be fully articulated with words alone. Professional photojournalism used to be done by skilled photojournalists who worked for big media companies. These photojournalists followed very strict rules for writing, ethics, and technical work. A lot of individuals thought these pictures were actual, trustworthy, and authoritative representations of what they were witnessing (Khan et al., 2023).

This environment has changed a lot since digital technology is growing quickly and mobile phones are becoming more common. User-generated imagery (UGI) let average individuals snap pictures of news events and share them with others right away. This typically happened before professional journalists got to the site where the pictures were taken. Because of this, news organisations began to rely more and more on the visual material that people sent in. This changed the way news was made, shared, and consumed in a big way. As a result of this change, professional photographers who work in journalism had to deal with both new opportunities and new problems (Qu et al., 2025).

On one side, using UGI made it possible to watch events as they were happening from many various angles and made it easy to get a quick look at them, which in the end expanded the range of the visual tale. On the other side, it brought up big concerns about how quickly photos are shared, the chance of spreading false information, the need to act ethically, and the need of keeping up standards for the quality of visuals. Because images can be shared quickly on social media, there is more competition between pictures taken by experts and those taken by individuals. Because there is a lot of competition, people sometimes care more about getting things done quickly than about getting the facts right and checking them (Yamagishi et al., 2024). Also, the idea of edited photos or images that gave false impressions made it hard for journalists to be believed and for the public to trust them. The fact that the photographs may have been changed made this scenario much more worrying. There were also times when enquiries regarding who took the pictures, who gave permission for them to be used, and how

they should be used were not answered. Smartphone cameras have also become better over time, which has helped to close the gap between amateur and professional photography. Because of this, it has become harder to stick to the traditional ideas of quality and competence that are linked to the topic. These new ideas changed the way professional photojournalists did their jobs and led to the creation of new ways to deal with the always changing media landscape (Huang & Zheng, 2024).

Consequently, the objective of this study was to assess the influence of user-generated photos on professional journalistic photography. The study's intended audience was journalists. To be more specific, the focus was on important things like how quickly photographs spread, the risk of spreading false information, the need to behave ethically, and the requirements for visual quality. This research was to investigate how the characteristics of UGI impacted professional practices, traditions, and perspectives in contemporary visual journalism. To achieve the objectives of this study, a quantitative methodology was used, and a sample of professional photojournalists that accurately represented the whole population was selected.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Digital media has drastically changed how journalism is done including photographic and visual communications. Professional photographic journalism has historically been viewed as a key part of credible news production where the journalist follows established criteria that include accuracy, objectivity, and ethical responsibility. Up until this point, photojournalists worked under institutional guidelines that provide for editorial control, verification, and accountability (Hellmann & Oppermann, 2022).

UGI in real time at the events when the photos were taken, were made possible with the use of smartphones with superior quality of photo technology. Non-professional photographers now can obtain photos that are as clear, detailed, and professional as photos obtained by trained photojournalists (Hadland, 2025). UGI quickly became part of the news organisation's reporting processes, with the goal of enhancing immediacy and increasing audience engagement. Research studies have shown that UGI helps to enable faster dissemination of visual information and contributes to a wider range of visual perspectives to audiences, which may have been missing from traditional news media channels (Matich et al., 2025).

These challenges raise serious issues for the ability

of journalism to maintain its independence and credibility in an increasingly digital age. One of the most significant issues raised by the rise of UGI has been the speed at which images are moving from one platform to the next. This has resulted in a shift away from verifying an image prior to using it in favour of getting it into the public realm as quickly as possible, thereby increasing the likelihood that misinformation will be spread by using an image in this manner (Ren & Dan, 2022). In addition, the vast majority of the content created with user-generated content has been created by individuals who have not been trained in a professional manner; therefore, the journalistic standards of professionalism, accuracy, and responsibility are not likely to be maintained when using such material. Finally, although technological advances in the processing of images have increased the quality of user-generated content, questions remain about their consistency, reliability, and the extent to which they adhere to professional guidelines (Fernández-Castrillo & Ramos, 2023).

The influence of UGI was especially significant in the media landscape of China, where the combination of ubiquitous smartphone ownership and the popularity of service-oriented platforms (Hua et al., 2024). Additionally, the strong regulation of the media in China has provided further complications in terms of the control of content, the verification of images, and the ethical implications of the use of UGI in contrast to professional photojournalism (Meng & Zhang, 2022).

3. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The Purpose of this study was to evaluate the influence of UGI on the photography practices of professional journalists. These operations were executed within the context of the ever evolving realm of digital media. The study examine how significant elements of UGI—including the transmission speed of images, the potential for misinformation, ethical accountability, and visual quality benchmarks—affected the conduct, standards, and professional judgement of photojournalists. The research specifically sought to examine the potential impact of these factors on the previously indicated variables. Because news is becoming more reliant on information generated by the general people, it is very important to understand how these factors affected the work of professional journalists.

The research focused to assess the extent to which the distribution rate of photographs influenced the timeliness of verification procedures and editorial

decisions in professional photography. This research also assess the impact of the possibility for erroneous information associated with UGI on the credibility and accuracy of news coverage. This research also looked at and evaluated a number of ethical problems that come up when using photographs made by users. Some of these fears were about the person's rights, responsibilities, and ownership. The research also looked at how changes in photo quality that came from non-professional sources throughout the study contradicted the accepted conventions of visual journalism.

The research provide empirical insights into the evolving dynamics between user-generated photos and professional journalistic photography. During the research, a quantitative methodology was used, and participants were selected based on their intents.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital media, along with social networks, has greatly affected how visual material is produced and shared in journalistic circles. UGI also represents one of the most important aspects of today's news environment. UGI sources (individuals) are able to create and distribute their work instantly from any event they are attending. The UGI phenomenon has been studied recently and researchers have noted that UGI has helped to create a more participant-based media structure because now the audience can engage in creating news as opposed to simply being passive consumptive participants through traditional media methods (Wei et al., 2024). Smartphones and other Internet-connected devices have made it possible for individuals to create and distribute their work faster than ever which has also changed the way traditional media organisations conduct journalism.

UGI circulate is also changing how professional photographers work. Research indicates that digital media and social networks have allowed UGI to circulate across multiple digital media platforms almost instantaneously and thus increase the rate of news propagation, while at the same time increasing the competitiveness between news organisations (Barchas-Lichtenstein, 2023). As a result, realising the authenticity factor; thus, causing a need for real-time photos that capture breaking news events (i.e. the immediacy of accessing UGI allows journalists to have real-time photographic documentation of breaking news events). Additionally, UGI was perceived as being authentic and engaging, hence the UGI content is therefore more likely to be used to draw in an audience and create a value for the audience, and as a result, influence and create an

impact on a person's opinion of an event or issue (Sánchez-Franco & Rey-Tienda, 2024).

The enhanced rapidity of image circulation has created a great deal of challenges within professional journalism. Due to the time constraints placed on professionals to publish images quickly, many scholars believe that this is often at odds with traditional verification methodologies. Furthermore, the rapid growth in the proliferation of un-verified images has also added to the likelihood of dangerous misinformation being published prior to verifying the images (Raman et al., 2024). The challenges of verifying the volume of unverified images that have been seen have had to be met with updated verification mechanisms and formal editorial strategies due to the volume and very fast speed with which visual content is now coming into the business of professional journalism.

Moreover, many studies have recently produced evidence that the rapidity of image circulation has had a very large impact on the roles and responsibilities of professional photojournalists. This is due to the demand that has been placed on photojournalists to balance the urgency of immediate publishing with the ethical standards, accuracy, and visual quality that are expected from a professional photojournalist. Therefore, with the competitive climate created by the ever-expanding digital environment, they have had tremendous pressure on all professionals to shift their jobs from long-established reporting to real-time reporting while effectively maintaining credibility. Additionally, this rapidly changing media landscape has illustrated the necessity for contemporary frameworks to be developed that provide solutions to all of the challenges that continue to impact photojournalists due to rapidly sharing images and other forms of visual content (Ye, 2025).

5. RESEARCH QUESTION

- What is the role of image circulation speed in professional journalistic photography?

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The researcher adopted a quantitative technique for the examination of the investigation. The researcher used SPSS 25 to analyse the gathered data. The researcher used the odds ratio and 95% confidence interval to assess the amount and extent of the statistical association. Results are deemed statistically significant when p-values are less than 0.05. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis facilitated comprehension of the fundamental parts of the material.

6.2 Sampling

The research used a purposive sampling method to get samples from the qualified individuals. The researcher used Rao-Soft software to guarantee the inclusion of 473 individuals in the sample. A total of 550 questionnaires were sent out for the study. Of those, 537 were returned, and 37 were excluded because they were not complete. The final sample size is 500.

6.3 Data and Measurement

The study used a questionnaire survey as the principal method for data collecting. The survey included two parts: (A) basic personal information and (B) a 5-point Likert scale for thoughts on the characteristics of both online and offline channels. The researcher collected secondary data from many sources, mostly from online websites.

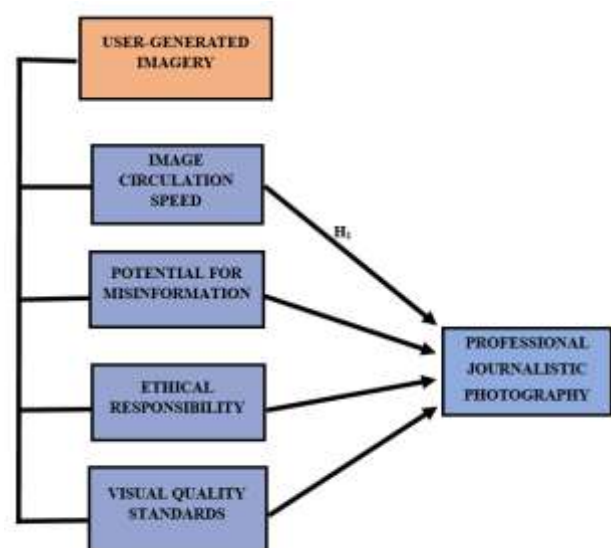
6.4 Statistical Software

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

6.5 Statistical Tools

The researcher used descriptive analysis to comprehend the essential characteristics of the gathered data. Additionally, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and factor analysis (FA) were used to confirm validity.

7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



8. RESULT

• Factor Analysis

The goal of FA is to find hidden variables in data that can be seen. Examinations often use regression

coefficients in the absence of distinct visual indicators or diagnostic criteria. The basic purpose of modelling is to uncover weak spots, rule breaches, and linkages. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test is used to look at a number of regression study datasets. In summary, the results indicate that the theoretical model and the parameters used for predictions are accurate. The data may show symptoms of duplication. Also, reducing the size smaller makes the information simpler to read. KMO gives a value that is between 0 and 1. The KMO value shows that a good sample size is between 0.8 and 1.

These are the restrictions that Kaiser says are okay: Kaiser has set the following requirements for approval:

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

With a score of 0.80 to 0.89 on the quality point scale. They are quite good in the range of 0.90 to 1.00.

Table 1: The KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO test and Bartlett's Sampling Adequacy shows a score of 0.917.

The findings of Bartlett's test of Sphericity are as follows:

The approximate chi-square is 6648.237, with 190 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000.

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 overall. The sample adequacy value according to KMO is 0.917. The researchers used Bartlett's Sphericity test to get the p-value of 0.00. The correlation matrix is not a correlation matrix since Bartlett's Sphericity test showed a significant result.

❖ DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Professional journalistic photography: The term "Professional Journalistic Photography" refers to the field of photography that focuses on taking, creating and presenting images as a part of journalism by trained photojournalist. This type of photography is considered to be a key part of how news is presented because it documents events as they occur visually; it documents factual information; provides viewers

with a deeper understanding of the Social, Political and Cultural issues. Jointly with casual or amateur photographers, photojournalists have established guidelines that are adhered to by professional photojournalists regarding how to accurately capture, substantiate and distribute images for their use in media outlets. To be successful, photojournalists must possess not only technical skills in taking photographs but also possess an in-depth understanding of storytelling, viewing context and understanding how to determine what constitutes newsworthy content (Mäenpää, 2023).

Professional photojournalistic photography must also adhere to the basics of authenticity. Image authenticity is measured by ensuring that images depict actual events without manipulation of the image. The ethical principles governing professional photojournalists include respect to individuals photographed, informed consent and avoiding harm. The professional photojournalistic imagery also affects how the audience perceives events and provides credibility to the images being reported on through standards applied in images. Furthermore, the standards set by professional photojournalistic images adds to the credibility of the newspaper and creating an environment free from any outside influences through adherence to established guidelines and professional standards (Mortensen et al., 2023).

❖ 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 (Chen et al., 2022).

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. UGI was also characterised by its rapid circulation rate and reach. 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 (Yang *et al.*, 2023).

- **FACTOR**

- ◇ **Image circulation speed:**

It became appropriate to use the phrase "image circulation speed" to characterize how rapidly visual content, particularly photographs, could be distributed and circulated through various digital channels and media networks. "Image circulation speed" was a useful word in relation to the rate of transmission of images through a variety of media forms, including social media sites, news web pages, instant messengers, and more. In other words, such terms are in line with the principles of journalism in the modern environment. Among others, some changes relate to the fact that mobile devices, fast Internet connections, and real-time platforms have become available. The rate at which photographs were disseminated had a significant impact on the process of news creation and dissemination when professional photographers started to take photographs. The increased accessibility of printed materials helped news organizations and journalists promptly display photographs of incidents. The greater accessibility of printed materials contributed to that (Meng *et al.*, 2022). The timeliness and relevance of such reports occurred due to some incident. In addition, the possibility of prompt access to visual information helped people learn about it and feel emotionally connected almost instantly.

Nonetheless, having an extremely fast picture circulation rate brought several challenges, most of which revolved around verification and validation of the pictures. As individuals are so pressured to produce their photos at high speed, it can be expected that less time is taken for verifying the images before publication, and this could bring about higher chances of dissemination of wrong information, thus posing another risk. Photo circulation rate is not just a technical issue; it is, without doubt, one of the most important issues facing journalists today, when it comes to the aspect of decision-making (Yang *et al.*, 2024).

- **Relationship between image circulation speed and professional journalistic photography**

One of the most crucial things about modern visual journalism was the link between how quickly

photos were shared and how good the journalistic photography was. The growth of social media networks and user-generated pictures has led to a huge shift in how quickly visual material is made, transmitted, and disseminated. This change has happened since there are more and more social media networks. The pace at which this process was done affected both the job of professional photojournalists and the work of news organisations (Lough & Mortensen, 2023).

First and foremost, the speed at which photos were shared was very important to make sure that the news was both timely and important. For professional photographers to be able to quickly provide visual material of events, they had to make sure that photographs were shared quickly. Professional journalistic photography not only became faster, but it also became more active. This is because news organisations fought to get their pictures out there (Vasconcelos & Barbosa, 2024). But even so, there were some concerns with how quickly pictures spread on the internet. This tendency posed a challenge to the conventional ethics associated with journalism. For example, journalists frequently thought they didn't have enough time to check the pictures they intended to publish. This means that photojournalists need to find a good balance between speed and accuracy in order to make sure that visual news reporting is credible (Kamal, 2025).

In line with the preceding discourse, the hypothesis was formulated to examine the substantial correlation between the image circulation speed and professional journalistic photography.

"H01: There is no significant relationship between image circulation speed and professional journalistic photography."

"H1: There is a significant relationship between image circulation speed and professional journalistic photography."

Table 2: H1 ANOVA Test

ANOVA					
Sum					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	39588.620	130	5655.421	1051.584	.000
Within Groups	492.770	369	5.378		
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 1051.584. This denoted that the null hypothesis has been rejected, and the alternative hypothesis, *"H1: There is a significant relationship between image circulation speed and professional journalistic photography"* has been accepted.

9. DISCUSSION

The study findings indicated that UGI significantly impacts several facets of professional journalistic photography. There were a lot of things to think about, such how fast the pictures were distributed, the chance of spreading false information, the necessity to act ethically, and the requirements for visual quality. The fast sharing of photos has had a big effect on the way professional photojournalists operate. This happened because there was a rising requirement for speedy reporting in the articles that were published in paper newspapers. Journalists had to be able to respond quickly to breaking news, and they frequently used photographs that were available to everyone. This was because the digital world is continually changing. The goal of this move was to make sure they stayed ahead of the competition in the digital world.

On the other side, the study showed that the probability of wrong information made professional journalism less credible and reliable. This was shown to be true since there were big obstacles along the way. Because some of the photos had been modified or were misleading, journalists had to utilise stricter verification methods, which occasionally got in the way of their need for speed. This was occurring because certain pictures had been changed. One explanation for this was that there were pictures that had been modified or that were meant to be deceptive. Because of this, there was always a conflict between the requirement to report quickly and the desire to keep things accurate. Additionally, ethical obligation became an essential element since journalists were required to meticulously examine matters such as authorisation, authenticity, and the potential harm that may arise from the publication of certain photos.

The findings also showed that the traditional visual standards employed in professional photography are starting to be endangered by the

improvements that consumers have made to the quality of their own photos. The fact that the results were found pushed this issue to the forefront. The rise of high-quality images made by people who weren't professionals blurred the line between amateur and professional work. This blurring of the barrier changed how the editors made their decisions. The study results indicate that the UGI not only promoted accessibility and diversity in visual reporting but also mandated that professional journalists adapt by improving verification procedures, ethical standards, and editorial judgement. This was seen when UGI told professional journalists to change the way they did things.

10. CONCLUSION

In current digital age, it has been shown that images taken by regular people have a big effect on the work of professional photographers. Many things worked together to change the way professionals do things and make decisions. Some of these problems were how quickly images might be shared, the risk of disseminating false information, ethical issues, and the need to create criteria for visual quality. One of these things to think about was the risk of spreading false information. The UGI made it easier and more efficient to convey news visually, but it also created problems that affected the truthfulness and reliability of the reporting.

After the test was finished, the researchers decided that professional photojournalists need to find a compromise between the values of verification and ethical obligation and the need for immediacy. In order to maintain the level of professionalism and reliability that is common in visual journalism, changes have to be made to these improvements. For this reason, the effective use of user-generated photos depended not only on a comprehensive review but also on a rigorous adherence to the journalistic standards that had been imposed from the start of the project.

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