

Examining the Impact of User-Generated Imagery on Professional Photojournalism: Practice, Ethics, and Visual Culture

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Abstract

User-generated imagery (UGI) is important in professional photojournalism as it offers real-time pictures that expand news coverage and modify newsroom procedures. However, it also raises questions about authenticity and media ethics. The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of UGI on professional photojournalism, with a focus on newsroom practices, ethical issues and visual culture. The researcher used a mixed-method, cross-sectional research design to evaluate both quantitative and qualitative data. Data from professional photojournalists of Chinese media organisations were gathered using convenience-sampling method. The research used structured questionnaires to collect responses from 500 individuals and conducted semi-structured interviews with 113 participants. The relationship between variables was investigated using Analysis of Variance, while patterns and qualitative insights were identified and interpreted utilising thematic analysis. The results showed that UGI has changed photojournalism by improving audience engagement with instant and relevant visual content. Nevertheless, issues with misinformation and dependability continue to persist. The findings also underlined the expanding importance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in journalism education, especially in the verification and review of visual information. AI-powered solutions facilitate picture authentication and assist learners in critically assessing digital content. In conclusion, UGI has become a crucial component of modern news creation, helping to enhance critical evaluation abilities. The research underlined the significance of maintaining professional standards, using AI-supported verification tools and adhering to ethical principles to guarantee responsible usage of visual content. These indicators further contribute to information credibility, enhanced public confidence and facilitation of informed judgement in professional photojournalism.

Keywords: *Digital Media, Media Ethics, Photojournalism, User-Generated Imagery (UGI)*

Introduction

There have been fundamental changes in the production, distribution, and consumption of audio-visual content in the field of journalism because of the development of digital media and social platforms. Due to this change, the media landscape is now more decentralised, with multimedia content dominating in terms of audience engagement. User-generated imagery (UGI) has become more popular because of this participatory culture (Peña-Fernández et al., 2024). In modern days, the integration of UGI in newsrooms has emerged due to the popularity of social media platforms in the digital

media. Visual and textual content of current news events on social media platforms has increased in size and breadth. This is due to the huge availability of smartphones with high-quality cameras and internet access. News organisations can collect breaking news stories and trending updates at a rapid speed due to the published content on social media (Khan et al., 2023).

Modern educational frameworks of journalism are using AI-assisted technologies to handle the huge amount of information. Algorithms, which use machine learning, help to filter the information to determine the reliable sources and identify the fake images. Educational institutions are using AI-assisted technologies for digital storytelling and content verification to help students make the transition from classroom theory to real-world practice. As a result, they will be better equipped to handle media ecosystems and will be more likely to engage in responsible media consumption and creation (Rajalakshmi et al., 2024). The speed at which images circulate across digital platforms has increased, allowing visual content to spread globally in seconds and changing the news consumption methods. The mass sharing of unverified content has also raised the potential for misinformation, raising questions about modern journalism's accuracy and credibility. As journalists and users must evaluate the consequences of providing sensitive or false visual information, these advancements have increased the importance of ethical responsibility. As professional journalism continues to distinguish itself by truth, clarity, and adherence to established conventions despite the rise of UGI, sustaining visual quality standards has become increasingly crucial (Qu et al., 2025). As a result of this integration, media literacy is enhanced, and aspiring journalists are more equipped to use digital media platforms responsibly while maintaining a steady pace of reporting.

Review of Related Literature

UGI has garnered significant interest as a subject of research due to its comprehensive impact on society, media and communication. UGI is a source of unfiltered, on-the-ground information used in news reporting, including pictures, videos and direct feedback from people who were present at events. In war areas or during breaking news, when professional reporters have restricted access, this information can be extremely valuable. Moreover, the study demonstrated that UGI often uses audio-visual communication that strikes an emotional connection with viewers, boosting its capacity to shape beliefs, attitudes, and actions (Breve et al., 2024). In this context, Rahman et al. (2024) emphasised that the ability to effectively document real-time events has been improved by devices that are equipped with computational imaging capabilities and high-dynamic-range capture (HDR). In addition to empowering journalists, this transition also raises ethical concerns about the integration of UGI into mainstream narratives, as the integration of citizen journalism continues to increase (Rahman et al., 2024). On the other hand, Schulte et al. (2022) claimed that professional photographers are able to more accurately craft visual stories by having complete manual control over camera settings. This entails the deliberate selection of shutter speed, depth of focus and exposure to effectively convey expression, mood or action (Schulte et al., 2022). However, in this ever-changing scenario, professional photographers are compelled to redefine their roles and workflows to respond to the rapid growth of UGI. Proficiency in digital storytelling and audience engagement within a dynamic media environment is essential for adjusting to this new landscape, in addition to maintaining technical skills (Kumar, 2023).

Aside from the growing volume of UGI that is shared online on a daily basis, it is becoming simpler to create fake and misleading content using user-friendly and

inexpensive photo editing software. The existence of these technological advancements at the fingertips of every individual presents further difficulties for media practitioners and newsrooms in verifying visual UGI. This is responsible for creating serious ethical issues since photos could potentially be shared without enough context, permission or verification (Ismail et al., 2025). According to research on UGI visual standards, computational improvements such as AI-driven smoothing and HDR blending might increase aesthetics but may unintentionally change a scene's factual depiction. Such improvements have the potential to weaken the visual narrative's considered neutrality and authenticity in journalism, which might result in public distrust or charges of disinformation. Additionally, participatory journalism in China has used social media platforms to transfer authoritative responsibilities from media institutions to users, emphasising the democratic empowerment potential of UGI (Zasiekin et al., 2022). Moreover, another study by Chunqiong et al. (2025) discovered that those whose cultures value certainty with greater respect (like Japan and China) are less likely to accept unverified information as well as more inclined to seek more regulation from regulatory bodies. Hence, the comprehension of cultural dynamics is crucial for understanding different attitudes towards platform responsibility (Chunqiong et al., 2025).

The consideration of authenticity and deceptive knowledge leads to the implementation of AI techniques, which are essential for assessing UGI in professional journalism. These strategies investigate irregularities that might determine manipulation, pixel configurations, or compression artefacts. Big data technological approaches also allow for the correspondence of content from extensive databases to determine representatives of image duplication, replication, or distortion (Tran et al., 2022). Another element of AI-driven validation is the employment of digital provenance tracking and metadata analysis that assist in determining the origin and evolution of visual content. These instruments are also being combined with educational settings, where students are taught to essentially assess digitalised content, determine inaccurate information and comprehend verification approaches. When negotiating with digital media content, students are instructed to consider visual dependability, understand context, and exercise honourable judgement (Zhang et al., 2024).

Participatory Culture Theory by Jenkins (2006) examined how digital technologies have made viewers active media producers and distributors. The theory stated that individuals create, share, and combine material online. This highlighted aspects such as low participation barriers, focused creative and sharing assistance, and informal user mentorship. The theory explained the ways digital surroundings influence communication and how information is generated, transmitted, and understood in modern society (Jenkins, 2006). According to Sujatmiko et al. (2025), Participatory Culture Theory may assist in detecting UGI's growing influence on professional photography. People actively engage in news generation by producing and sharing visual content. This might impact visual narratives and journalistic standards. Professionals alone no longer develop content, affecting visual standards and media ethics. UGI transforms news narratives, redefines trustworthiness and influences audience-driven visual culture in journalism (Sujatmiko et al., 2025). Thus, the theory supported this study by explaining the role of audience involvement and the production of digital media in journalistic credibility and ethical limits in modern photography.

Objectives

- To examine the influence of user-generated imagery on professional photojournalism.

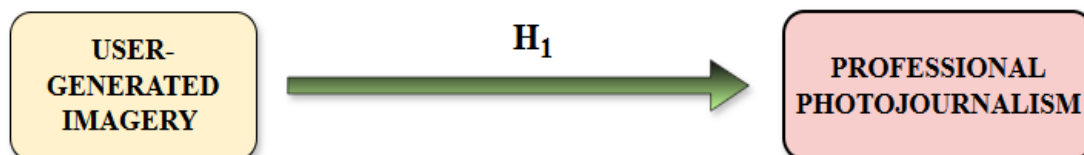
Methodology

Research Design and Procedure

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of UGI on professional photojournalists. The study used mixed-method, cross-sectional design that incorporated quantitative and qualitative techniques. This study used a quantitative approach to collect numerical data from professional photojournalists of Chinese media organisations. The objective was to identify the relationship between research variables and their factors. For data collection purposes, the researcher distributed a structured questionnaire to the survey participants. The study used a pilot test for validity assessment and Cronbach's Alpha for reliability assessment. The researcher used SPSS 25 to perform statistical analysis for the data. The 95% confidence intervals helped the researcher to identify the strength and direction of the statistical relationship. The study established the statistical significance at $P < 0.05$. Moreover, the researcher conducted descriptive analysis to identify the key characteristics of the data and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine the relationship between the research variables.

In addition to the quantitative design, the qualitative method helped the researcher to understand the experience, perspectives and interpretations of respondents to examine the role of UGI in modern journalism. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather data from the participants. Moreover, thematic analysis was used to develop the critical awareness of the research subject. The researcher selected Chinese media organisations to choose participants who have practical knowledge in photojournalism. Furthermore, interviews were transcribed for systematic study. As a result, the gathered data was categorised according to recurring themes about the value of UGI and its influence on professional photography. In this context, the research established qualitative reliability through credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. The researcher ensured credibility by accurately reflecting photojournalists' perspectives on UGI. Transferability was addressed by examining whether the findings can be useful in other situations, particularly in similar media environments. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail and documentation of data collection and theme development. Dependability was achieved through consistent coding and systematic thematic analysis across all interview responses of professional photojournalists.

Operational Framework



Subjects or Data Sources

The study used structured questionnaires and in-person interviews to collect the data to analyse. Professional photojournalists from different Chinese media organisations were

selected as samples for the study. The survey had two distinct sections: the first part included questions about the demographics of the participants and a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. Additionally, the researcher conducted structured and open-ended interviews to gather primary data. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the research variables with the help of qualitative thematic analysis.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

The study used a convenience sampling method to choose relevant participants for the study. RaoSoft suggested a total of 461 samples for adequate data collection from the targeted population. Therefore, the researcher distributed 575 survey questionnaires to the selected Chinese professional photojournalists. A total of 532 individuals filled out the surveys and submitted them to the researcher. The researcher discarded 32 questionnaires because they were incomplete. Therefore, the final sample size for the study was 500. Both SPSS 25 and MS-Excel were implemented to evaluate quantitative data. With the objective to understand the fundamental characteristics of the data, the researcher implemented descriptive analysis, while ANOVA was implemented to analyse the collected data.

The qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews from 113 selected participants. Further, the researcher used thematic analysis to evaluate the gathered data. In this procedure, underlying patterns were used to classify the data from the collected interviews. Further, the researcher used an inductive coding strategy to organise the data into themes. This helped in extracting generalisable information about the study context from the interviewees' experiences and expertise with the help of simplified representations of the data.

Limitations

Several limitations in the mixed-method research strategy might have impacted the results. Due to the increasing complexity of the research process, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies required considerable time and resources for data collecting, analysis and interpretation. Challenges in balancing different interpretations and maintaining consistency across data types developed as a result of integrating qualitative and quantitative findings. Due to the possibility of participants providing socially desirable answers instead of completely accurate responses, response bias might have been incorporated into the data set by interviews and surveys. Additionally, researchers' inherent biases and subjectivity might have influenced the interpretation of qualitative results. Additional limitations in establishing long-term changes or causal connections were introduced by the study's cross-sectional design.

Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

- **Factor Analysis**

Factor Analysis (FA) is used to identify the hidden elements in observable data. By looking for connections between variables, this strategy seeks to find discrepancies, trends or inconsistencies in the information. In this context, the KMO test is used to measure sampling adequacy for FA. If the data is factorable and the theoretical model is predictive, then the KMO value is an accurate measure of that. Another advantage is the ability to detect possible cases of variable duplication or redundancy. In addition, factor analysis makes the data

easier to grasp by clustering variables that are related. The range of potential values for the KMO statistic ranges from 0 to 1.

If the KMO value is between 0.8 and 1, it suggests the sampling was sufficient. According to Kaiser, there are different ranges of acceptable limits for approval: poor (between 0.50 and 0.59), below average (between 0.60 and 0.69), medium (between 0.70 and 0.79), satisfactory (between 0.80 and 0.89), and excellent (between 0.90 and 1.00).

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Testing for KMO and Bartlett's Sampling Adequacy Measured by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin: 0.926

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

Approx. chi-square= 4158.637

df =190; sig =.000

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.926
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4158.637
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

The broad significance of the correlation matrices was further confirmed using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sample adequacy score was 0.926. Using Bartlett's Sphericity test, researchers found a p-value of 0.00. A significant test result from Bartlett's Sphericity test proved that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix.

Independent Variable

- **User-Generated Imagery (UGI)**

UGI is any kind of media (photos, videos, text, and reviews) that is created by actual people instead of any brand. App screenshots, gameplay videos, user reviews and social media postings on apps are numerous examples of UGI in the context of mobile apps. These contents are developed by people in an organic way and shared across many digital platforms. It often represents real user experiences and views. There has been a massive increase in UGI due to the widespread availability of connected gadgets and interactive platforms. The foundation of several well-known service-oriented websites of the modern period is UGI. The function of UGI is specific within the framework of online journalism, despite its widespread usage across all digital media platforms. Journalists use UGI to increase, educate, and sometimes even build upon their own work. In addition, viewers may participate in reporting and sharing stories by adding their own voices to the equation (Qu et al., 2025).

Dependent Variable

- **Professional Photojournalism**

The practice of using images to convey a narrative is known as photojournalism. Unlike traditional journalists, photojournalists capture their subjects' surroundings via the lens of a camera. If executed effectively, a reader is unlikely to require words to completely comprehend the information sent by a photojournalist. Professional photojournalism adheres to several moral values such as respect for privacy, subject sensitivity and accountability in reporting events. It is the duty of photographers to think about the impact of their captured photos on people and communities. They need to check facts and make sure that their pictures are not misleading the audience (Li & Bang, 2026). In general, the dedicated visual documentation of current events provided by professional photography is crucial in moulding public awareness. It is the duty of photojournalists to properly comprehend events via the photos they capture. They maintain the standards of journalism by basing their decisions on moral and ethical principles. This is essential for them to provide truthful and objective depictions of events (Khan et al., 2023).

- **Relationship between UGI and Professional Photojournalism**

Professional photojournalism and UGI have different norms and functions, yet they are both crucial in media environment of modern days. Reputable journalists follow strict ethical guidelines, utilise original sources to verify all claims and deliver their narratives using present narrative points. On the other hand, UGI highlights the current and personal perspectives, offering raw, unadulterated perspectives on events. UGI is becoming increasingly significant in the contemporary media landscape. The fact that UGI includes real consumers supporting products or services contributes to its legitimacy and dependability. Nevertheless, the relationship between UGI and professional photography is evolving more significantly due to this intersection. In fast-paced or challenging circumstances, news agencies are relying increasingly on UGI to supplement human reporters. In contrast to professional photography, the absence of editorial supervision in UGI increases concerns about the possibility of misinformation and misunderstanding. Lack of training among content makers also gives rise to ethical concerns, including privacy breaches and unauthorised content sharing. Consequently, professional photography must change by embracing UGI and strengthening verification criteria, which guarantee media credibility and responsibility (Ismail et al., 2025).

Following up on the previous discussion, the hypothesis was established to examine the important relationship between professional photojournalism and UGI:

- ***“H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between user-generated imagery and professional photojournalism.”***
- ***“H₁: There is a significant relationship between user-generated imagery and professional photojournalism.”***

Table 2: H_1 ANOVA Test

ANOVA					
Sum					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	36521.358	127	2857.687	1016.247	.000
Within Groups	998.983	372	2.812		
Total	37520.341	499			

The study produced noteworthy results. An F-value of 1016.247 and a p-value < 0.05 showed the statistical significance. This denoted that the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis, "H1: There is a significant relationship between user-generated imagery and professional photojournalism".

The results demonstrated a noteworthy and important connection between UGI and professional photojournalism with the help of a significant p-value and high F-value. This showed that UGI could be considered a crucial part of journalistic practices in the current era. However, the integration of UGI additionally creates issues regarding ethics and credibility. This demands the immediate implementation of professional regulations and maintenance of media dependability and verification standards.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative research analyses intentions, perceptions, experiences, and social relations. It strives to comprehend the explanation of the way people believe, function, and react in exceptional conditions rather than depending upon numerical data. Interviews, observations, and open-ended reactions generally gather data. This shows practices, compositions, and interpretations. This approach functions sufficiently for examining complicated, developing problems that possess human viewpoints.

In examining the effect of UGI on professional photojournalism, the qualitative technique helped understand the way journalists, consumers, and content suppliers interact with visual content. The researcher focused on journalistic media ethics and visual culture trends. Through experiences and opinions, the qualitative study revealed how UGI affects media credibility, decision-making, and professional standards.

Interview Questions (Open-ended)

Questions
1) What impact has user-generated imagery had on the duties of a photojournalist within an organisation?
2) How does the rapid spread of user-generated imagery influence the everyday operations and editing choices?
3) What methods do professional photojournalists use to assess the credibility and validity of user-generated photos, especially under time restrictions?

4) What changes have been noticed in photojournalistic ethics and visual culture as a result of the increasing usage of user-generated imagery?
5) What ethical concerns arise from the integration of user-generated imagery in professional journalism?
6) While using the photographs that were captured by non-professionals, how do photojournalists handle both permission and ownership?
7) Based on work experience, how have user-generated images influenced changes in visual culture and narrative approaches within Chinese media?
8) In what ways do audience expectations and involvement influence the decision of the photojournalists regarding using user-generated imagery in news reporting?
9) In which circumstances have user-generated imagery significantly impacted the reporting approaches of professional photojournalists?
10) What adaptations are expected in professional photography due to the increasing growth of user-generated imagery in Chinese media?

Thematic Coding

Themes	Keywords	Interpretations
Transformation of Professional Photojournalism	Workflow modifications, dependence on UGI, editorial decisions and reduced fieldwork	Reconfigures procedures and the generation of content
Validation and Authenticity in Professional Standards	Verification of authenticity, review of sources, minimal editing, inconsistent quality	Presents difficulties in verifying and maintaining quality standards
Ethical Dilemmas and Obligations	Misinformation, confidentiality, misuse, exploitation of intellectual property, authorisation, and recognition	Raises substantial ethical and legal issues in professional photojournalist approaches
Visual Culture and Audience Psychology	Interactive media, diverse visuals, audience involvement, authenticity	Revolutionises both the visual culture and the expectations of the audience

Theme 1: Transformation of Professional Photojournalism

The growing popularity of UGI has had a profound impact on the transformation of professional photojournalism. With the help of carefully planned editorial procedures and real-life reporting, photojournalists used to be in charge of collecting, editing and presenting visual content. Nevertheless, these traditional methods have changed due to the increasing accessibility of UGI. News organisations now employ images captured by public, especially for significant subjects that need visual coverage. This move has accelerated content creation and reduced the need for field reporting. As photojournalists increasingly assess and include pictures from other sources with their own work, editorial decision-making has also changed. These needs adopting quick content selection and dissemination strategies. Journalists now compile and assess visual content from external sources in addition to producing it. Additionally, by combining other viewpoints that

would not have been available via traditional methods, the inclusion of UGI expanded the breadth of visual storytelling. Thus, this transformation enabled the massive transformation of professional photojournalism with the help of UGI.

Theme 2: Validation and Authenticity in Professional Standards

With the growing usage of UGI, validation and authenticity remain crucial to preserving professional standards in photography. Discovering the origin, context and correctness of visual information is a challenge with UGI, in contrast with traditional photojournalism that relies on photos captured by trained specialists. Consequently, photojournalists must implement stricter verification techniques to guarantee that published photos maintain professional standards and ethical norms. Validation involves evaluating sources, comparing data, and using digital technologies such as AI-based tools to verify information, location, and time. Due to the fast spread of UGI, there is a conflict between quick action and reliable findings. There is a possibility that this may lead to issues with dependability and consistency in quality. A further issue that impacts professional standards is the wide range of technical quality among UGI. Certain images convey information in real time, while others may be misleading or poorly developed. Therefore, photojournalists must be careful while including such content in narratives. Hence, it is evident that validation and authenticity have been the main concerns of UGI in the domain of professional journalism.

Theme 3: Ethical Dilemmas and Obligations

The ethical dilemmas and obligations of journalists have grown as a consequence of the inclusion of UGI into professional photojournalism. UGI, developed without journalistic constraints, raises concerns about truth, authorisation, innovation, and ethics. Photojournalists should thoroughly check such information for media ethics before publishing. As misinformation and exploitation are serious ethical risks. People face the risk of misleading others when they edit, remove context or misinterpret their captured photos. Therefore, experts must validate the photographs and shooting locations. Sharing photos without authorisation may potentially breach privacy in sensitive circumstances like accidents or disputes. There are further difficulties related to ownership and intellectual property rights. When information comes from people who are not professionals in the field, it can be difficult to determine who owns the rights to an image and make certain that it has been credited correctly. Legal consequences and negative effects on media integrity can arise from neglecting these concerns. Therefore, ethical dilemmas and obligations regarding usage of UGI influence professional photojournalism in an extensive way.

Theme 4: Visual Culture and Audience Psychology

UGI has caused a significant transformation in professional photojournalism's visual culture and audience psychology. Due to the widespread availability of images taken by ordinary citizens, the news media have received more innovative, diverse and emotionally compelling pictures. The audience is now preferring reliability and authenticity of the visual content over technological excellence. This indicates the shift in development and use of journalistic content. As a result of this transformation, audiences are no longer considered passive consumers but rather active participants in the visual storytelling process. UGI's casual and unedited manner shapes viewers' reactions to and knowledge of current events, frequently elevating emotional connection. At the same time, the trust of the audience continues to be negotiated, as an excessive amount of visual content creates uncertainties about the trustworthiness of the content. Overall, the UGI is altering

visual culture by influencing the personal preferences of audiences, patterns of engagement, and the psychological impact of photojournalistic imagery.

Qualitative Thematic Findings

The thematic analysis revealed that UGI has altered professional photojournalism in terms of ethics and visual culture. In the first theme, there is an emphasis placed on a significant difference in professional practice. It is no longer sufficient for photojournalists to depend only on field reports. They use a substantial number of photographs that were captured by various other individuals. As a result of this transformation, their responsibilities shift from that of production to those of collector and critic. In the second theme, the focus is on the validity and legitimacy of professional standards. In light of the data, it was clear that verification continues to become ever more difficult and demanding. Journalists verify the accuracy of their sources with AI-powered tools and check the context before utilising photographs in their reporting activities. Redefining professional standards is being done as a reaction to the growing prevalence of UGI. The third theme simplifies the understanding of fundamental ethical dilemmas and obligations. Regarding ownership, privacy, and the broadcast of misleading information, the use of UGI presents significant challenges. It is the duty of journalists to ensure that photos are used in a responsible manner, without causing any damage to the individuals shown in the photographs or distorting them in any way. Therefore, ethical responsibility plays a more important part in the process of decision-making as a consequence of this reality. The focus of the fourth theme is on the developments that have taken place in the fields of audience psychology and visual culture. Audiences are more likely to engage with content that seems to be authentic and is given in a timely manner. This leads to a change in visual culture, making it participatory, in which viewers consume media content and also contribute to it. Overall, the findings suggested that UGI continues to have an impact on the professional methods, ethical standards and audience engagement that are connected with modern photojournalism.

Findings and Discussion

The quantitative results indicated an effective and statistically noteworthy relationship between UGI and professional photojournalism. With a KMO score of 0.926, the sample adequacy was excellent, suggesting that the data were eligible for factor analysis. Moreover, the variables were sufficiently related for analysis, as shown by the significant results of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.05$). An extremely high F-value of 1016.247 with a significance level below 0.05 was achieved by the ANOVA, further supporting this association in the hypothesis testing findings. The researchers accepted the alternative hypothesis and rejected the null hypothesis. According to these results, professional photojournalism is significantly impacted by UGI. Its importance in modern journalism has grown to the point that it is no longer a secondary consideration. Public contributions are becoming more integrated into professional processes, which is reflected in the growing dependence on UGI.

The qualitative findings corroborated and extended these results by explaining the mechanisms of this influence within the domain of newsroom practices, ethics and visual culture. The themes explained that professional photojournalism has changed massively, from field reporting to content creation by individuals. As journalists are now required to establish the authenticity within a very short period, the role of verification methods has been enhanced. This leads to better identification of privacy and ownership, which is considered the responsibility of the modern photojournalist. These findings revealed that

apart from promoting diversity and audience engagement, UGI also develops problems regarding standard maintenance and public trust.

The findings of this research provided a broader perspective of the influence of UGI on professional photojournalism by showing both convergence and distinction between the quantitative and qualitative findings. The quantitative findings revealed a strong and statistically significant link between UGI and professional photojournalism, as demonstrated by significant hypothesis testing results. This suggested that UGI has evolved into a structurally incorporated component of contemporary journalism, rather than a supplemental instrument. This was supported by qualitative findings that showed how UGI actively influenced photojournalists' duties and responsibilities. Professionals are no longer limited to traditional field reporting; they are increasingly involved in choosing, validating and incorporating externally created photos into news content. This combined data demonstrated an obvious change in journalistic practice, with content creation becoming a more dynamic and collaborative process, including both professionals and the public. Simultaneously, the comparison of results demonstrated that UGI has an impact on professional standards and media ethics in addition to practice. While the quantitative research revealed the importance of UGI, the qualitative results revealed the way this effect is responsible for verification procedures and ethical decision-making. The rising dependence on UGI has highlighted the significance of AI-based authenticity verification and source assessment, since journalists must guarantee that visual content is correct and dependable. Moreover, misinformation and ownership have gained importance, which indicates the need for stricter criteria and responsible actions among the professionals. Both analyses demonstrated that these transformations have been transformed by the expectations of the audience. However, the integration of UGI requires constant changes in adaptation to find a balance between the advantages and drawbacks to secure the credibility and accuracy of the data. It enhances the public confidence in a media landscape that is always exploring innovative ideas.

Conclusion

The research concluded that professional photojournalism has been greatly impacted by UGI in terms of practice, media ethics, and visual culture. The results demonstrated that UGI might enhance availability of real-time visual information and expand the range of viewpoints in news reporting when appropriately controlled. This indicates that UGI is a significant part of modern media rather than a supporting component. Important elements like editorial judgement, adherence to ethical norms, and verification processes determine its integration into the professional media. UGI provides significant advantages, such as accelerated content accessibility and enhanced audience interaction. Nonetheless, it also increases inconsistent results in quality and dependability owing to the lack of expert supervision throughout content generation. These disparities can undermine the trust of visual reporting, especially in contexts where accuracy is fundamental. Despite this concern, the research showed that organised verification processes, detailed editorial guidelines and careful application of AI tools could minimise these shortcomings. The research underscored its capacity to enhance visual storytelling while also highlighting the need for constant evaluation and improvement. Future initiatives must prioritise the enhancement of consistency, the refinement of AI-based verification tools for future journalists and the analysis of long-term consequences to facilitate their ethical use in dynamic media landscapes.

The research findings have significant implications for professionals in media organisations, teachers and policy makers. The research indicated that stringent validation and ethical assistance are essential to incorporate UGI. This assists in confirming the credibility and dependability of photojournalism. This may enhance the precision of the information and the overall quality of the visual journalism. It may also highlight that UGI may be used to boost audience participation and change journalistic descriptions. Policymakers may employ these outcomes to construct stringent guidelines, which will manage misinformation, security and ownership. Further, the employment of AI in the academic sector may improve the rate of digital literacy of future journalists by increasing their validation capacities and skills of critical thinking.

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