Truth or dare –

the changing norms of journalism

Performing verification and authentication on amateur visuals in Finnish newsrooms.

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The aim of this study is to examine how journalists perceive the importance of verifying and authenticating amateur visuals, how these images are presented and in which way an increased presence of amateur visuals might impact how journalism as a profession is performed. The study is based on interviews with 19 Finnish journalists and editors from various news media companies, conducted for a broader research project studying the use of amateur image material in crisis reporting. The theoretical framework of this thesis approaches the topic by looking at both seminal and recent studies exploring the norms that constitute journalism as a profession, the challenges facing accuracy brought on by the changing media environment, and the various coping mechanisms applied to dealing with non-professional material. Additionally the value of images is discussed, in relation to their assumed testimonial power and innate realism.

The results of this study show a high credence towards amateur visuals, and a reluctance of first-hand inquiry even as there are concerns regarding the trustworthiness of amateur visuals – furthermore this reluctance appears to be connected to working methods and practical limitations. It appears as newsrooms utilize several overlapping strategies in order to retain epistemic authority and govern the authenticity of non-professional image material. Amateur visuals are considered both a risk and an opportunity, however there appears to be an absence of policy regarding how to deal with non-professional material and were the ultimate responsibility of their accuracy lies. Consequently, the results of this study hints that there might be a reconceptualization of the role of journalism dependent on media environment developments and where the competitive edge of the industry in the future will lie.

Amateur images, citizen journalism, verification, professional norms, media change
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1. INTRODUCTION

Modern news media is heavily dependent on visuals – having the most arresting images and videos can give a vital competitive edge for print, online and broadcast media in particular. During the last decade amateur images have increasingly started to appear in mainstream media, yet the mechanisms for verifying the authenticity of these visuals are still uncharted territory for most newsrooms. One of the first occasions where amateur visuals set the agenda was during the 2009 protests in Iran in connection with the presidential elections. In a situation where the country was almost completely closed to foreign media, it was difficult for media companies to obtain professional images. Instead they opted for the amateur visuals that increasingly became available online. As it was almost impossible to verify or validate the visuals in many cases, a tactic of using disclosures was applied, “signaling … that the authenticity of published material could not be verified”, which allowed the media outlets a form of disconnection from the responsibility of authentication. (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 99)

The use of difficult-to-attest-for, non-professional material has presented a moral dilemma – what to do when images are needed, yet none are to be found that were taken by known professionals, while the visuals produced by citizen journalists are interesting and easily obtainable online? Another reason for the increasing use of amateur visuals is the value they present as a competitive edge. News media have realized that non-professional content attracts audiences, especially online, where it generates much-desired ‘clicks’ and ‘shares’. As a result reporters are faced with an increasing amount of non-professional material, and confirming its accuracy is becoming more and more time consuming. Hence it seems journalists are moving “towards ‘a more relative and post-modern view on accuracy’”, implying that
verification might be losing its importance (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 46, in Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 100).

This thesis sets out to explore how the onset of non-professional visual material, both domestic and foreign, is influencing the journalistic locus of factual reporting that sets it apart from entertainment, PR and other forms of mediated content. The focus of this study is how the challenges of amateur visuals are met and how newsrooms relate to non-professional material and its authenticity. The choice of focusing on visuals is based on the innate conception of images as embodying a certain form of testimonial power, as part of the “mirror metaphor” (Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 6). Photographs and videos are often viewed as presenting reality, and are thus given a form of authoritative clout – a stereotype that further challenges traditional journalism, a profession proficient at textual verification, yet often at odds with assigning equal value to visuals.

1.1. Study goal and research questions

The purpose of this study is to present, explore and compare how media professionals relate to the verification of amateur material, and how these performative conceptions are based on the current changes in the news media environment. This post-hoc study is based on interview replies obtained from a broader study researching the use of amateur image material in crisis reporting, consisting of interviews with 19 journalists and editors from different media companies in Finland.

By studying how Finnish journalists relate to the fact-checking process of amateur image content, this study aspires to acknowledge several factors by answering the following research questions:
• How is the importance of verification of amateur visuals perceived, and how are these visuals authenticated and presented in the Finnish media outlets?

• In what ways is the increasing amount of amateur visual content impacting the way journalists perform their profession?

This thesis is structured into five chapters; introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. The theoretical framework is divided into three parts, covering the different aspects of how today's journalism is relating to the issue of verification of amateur visuals. Firstly, the professionalism of journalism is discussed by studying the norms and rituals that function as the core and the boundaries of the profession; additionally the theoretical background of images mirroring reality is briefly introduced. Secondly, the changing media sphere and the evolving modes of communication are presented with regard to how they are affecting the premise of journalism. Lastly, the practical implications of verification and authenticity in modern journalism are discussed by looking at studies and cases relating to amateur content and how news media deal with it.

In the methodology chapter, the study design, data collection methods and data analysis methods are presented. For this study qualitative content analysis was chosen as a tool for examining the semi-structured interview material. The content analysis was operationalized by using a thematic approach to the location and selection of relevant material for this study. The result of the content analysis applied to the interview material is presented in its own chapter, and in the discussion chapter the results are further connected to the theoretical framework of this study.
2. JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE AND AMATEUR VISUALS

There may be many definitions of what journalism as a profession stands for, but one of the key features is the search for the truth. Due to the fact that there are no specific requirements to practice journalism the foundations and boundaries defining the profession are based on a strong sense of ideology connected to the ethical codes that uphold journalistic authority, and protect it against “outside threats” (Sjøvaag, 2011, p. 81). Championing factuality and truthfulness is one of core building blocks of the essence of news journalism, as stated by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2007) in their book *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. As their first “element of journalism” they state that the primary obligation of journalism “is the truth” (p. 36). This reflects the first rule for journalists as set out by the International Federation of Journalists in 1954: “Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.” (White, 2008, p. 2).

As elusive as the term truth is, it appears to be one of the driving forces behind the dogma of journalism – a lodestar and a marker of achievement, as exemplified by the words on the memorial stone at the Arlington National Cemetery, commemorating the American journalists killed in assignment: ”One who finds a truth lights a torch” (Moeller, 1989, xi). Ever since the birth of the newspaper around 1610 the “claim to truthfulness and authenticity” has been an important part in differentiating newspapers – and in the long run news journalism as a whole – from “gossip, pamphlets [and] newsletters” (Broersma, 2010, p. 24). As early as 1695 the notion that truthfulness of reporting is key for “publishers to [earn] their reputation” was printed in the first known handbook for journalists, written by the German Kaspar Stieler (ibid). Such is the power of authenticity that the legendary turn of the century newspaper *New York World,*
owned by Joseph Pulitzer, had the motto “Accuracy, Accuracy, Accuracy” (Kovach et al., 2007, p. 39).

These values still remain momentous among the media professionals of today and in journalistic education, and have evolved into several ethical policies and guidelines defining the collective discourse of journalism. Kovach and Rosenstiel cite a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, which reveals that when asked about the most paramount values in journalism, a full 100 percent of respondents replied “getting the facts right” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 36). Similarly, most journalists from “both old and new media” – implying a perceived differentiation between online and offline media – agree that the primary mission of journalists is the truth (ibid).

2.1 Reporting the truth

What then constitutes this elusive search for the truth? Roger Silverstone (2007) relates to the difficulty of discussing the complexity of truth by exemplifying how the suggestion of a “truth in the Mediapolis “is both hubristic and wrong”, due to the fact that the truth is always a subjective creation – “inevitably partial” – faced with endless changeability and incompleteness. The truth will always be subject to alteration and complexity, although it can be suggested, “that falsehood is finite”, and hence functions as a border between the truth and the false. Silverstone points to an argument made by Bernard Williams, which focuses on the necessity of truth to exist to be able to rebuke it – if there is no truth there can be no falsehood. Even as there is an admittance of elusiveness connected to the notion of truth, combined with both “skepticism and disbelief”, we still adhere to a sentiment of sanctified honesty that the media sphere in particular is obliged to present. As Silverstone writes, “we nevertheless expect our
media to be truthful, for without that expectation they have no value – they become mere noise”. (Silverstone, 2007, p. 158).

The discourse regarding the feasibility of mirroring reality by (re)presenting the truth can be traced back to philosophers like Plato (Broersma, 2010, p. 24). In the 1950’s the anthropologist Paul Radin pointed to how the newsman is “a man of action” – or as exemplified by Tuchman (1972), the journalist is a professional pressured to make rapid decisions concerning the authenticity of information, in order to produce “the depletable consumer product made every day … called news” (Radin, 1957, 1960, cited in Tuchman, 1972, p. 662). Journalism as a profession continues to define itself based on “claims to truth and authenticity” and a conspicuous attachment to what Tuchman (1972) describes as the “objectivity norm” (Broersma, 2010, p. 24, 27).

Even if the notion of truth is a chimera, it is a necessary one in order to raise a desire to hold those in power to account and to be a driving force in the creation of the professionalism of journalists. As a guiding light in mediated communication (in a democratic/liberal society), and making sense of the world, “the production of truth is a matter of both accuracy and sincerity”; therefore the media should not lie or mislead (Silverstone, 2007, pp. 159–160). Kovach and Rosenstiel echo this statement in their attempt to describe the journalistic value of truth by using the following terms: “accuracy”, “fairness”, “reliable”, “fact”, “realism”, “reality” (Kovach et al., 2007, p. 37–41).

2.1.1 Accuracy as a form of attempting to mirror reality

Accuracy could be seen as the operationalization for reporting the truth, and its function in journalism is explained by Zelizer and Allan (2010) as:
…a long-standing ideal associated with neutral or objective norms of journalistic practice… particularly associated with professionalism, by which journalists are expected to provide fact-based, value-free accounts of the events and issues on which they report. Accuracy … involves a series of journalistic practices, including verifying facts, questioning the judgment call of others, contextualizing and assessing details [and] eradicating mistakes.

(Zelizer and Allan, 2010, p. 1)

A simplified explanation of the paramount importance assigned to the concept of truth is its role as a binary antithesis to fiction, i.e. ensuring the role of the journalist as an objective messenger – impartial, ethical and independent. These norms can be seen particularly in the many journalistic codes of ethics that are the foundations of journalistic interest groups, and in the guidelines of many media companies. For example the first rule of the IFJ declaration of principles is echoed in many professional guidelines around the globe, such as in the handbook for Thomson Reuters, considered one of the most respected news agencies in the world. Their Reuters Handbook of Journalism (2012) takes the mission of truthfulness to an almost zealous level by stating that the first of ten absolutes of a Reuters journalist is to “always hold accuracy sacrosanct”.

Reporting without accuracy is viewed as one of the most severe violations of the essence of journalism, closely related to the immorality of claiming fictional accounts as factual. If the first rule of journalism is to respect the truth, the third rule of the IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists is focused on the importance of reporting only facts that the journalist can trace; implying that accuracy per se does not suffice without actually investigating the fundamental building blocks behind the statements.
3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.

(The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists, 1954 and 1986)

This rule is in essence a demand for verification. The definition of to verify is, according to the Merriam Webster dictionary, “to establish the truth, accuracy, or reality of something”. The actual systematics behind verification vary from medium to medium, journalist to journalist, but in essence it is what differentiates journalism “from entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art” – the verification of facts is the core of journalism (Kovach et al, 2007, p. 79, 80). However merely presenting accurate facts will produce successful journalism – indeed, selecting items of facts, or truths without context, can backfire and result in paradoxically “factually correct but substantially untrue” reporting, as concluded as far back as 1947 by the Hutchins commission, a group of scholars tasked with setting down “the obligations of journalism” (Kovach et al., 2007, p. 42; Leigh, 1974, p. 23).

As Kovach et al. (2007) state, the truth by which journalists abide is “a practical or functional form of truth”. This is exemplified by their quote from journalist Carl Bernstein, who summarizes the journalistic search of truth as an attempt to ‘provide “the best obtainable version of the truth”’ (cited in Kovach et al, 2007). In practice this means a step-by-step process to ensure factual accuracy by verification, and to then add layers of context, hence building a more complete and truthful image of the subject being portrayed. (Kovach et al., 2007, p. 42–44.)

The verification process in journalism is a reflection of the origins of journalism – the need to report events truthfully and accurately, and thus to spread information. By looking at a story from as many angles as possible, talking to many
different observers, presenting different opinions, and by making sure that the journalist has understood the essence of the story, the possibility of a form of replication is created. This technique of verifying is as close to an empirical form of accuracy that journalism can achieve, without conducting actual or theoretical experiments. As Philip Meyer, University of North Carolina journalism professor has stated:

> Journalism and science come from the same intellectual roots, from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century enlightenment. The same thinking that led to the First Amendment led to the scientific method… I think this connection between journalism and science ought to be restored to the extent we can… I think we ought to emphasize objectivity of method. That’s what the scientific method is—our humanity our subjective impulses… direct toward deciding what to investigate by objective means. (Kovach et al., 2007, p. 87)

In essence, Meyer is asking journalists to methodologically evaluate the rivaling standpoints, and to see verification – and thus true objectivity – as a method, not a favorable result (Meyer, 2004a). Kovach et al. relate the scientific aspect of journalism to transparency, by stating that the principle is the same: “explain how you learned something and why you believe it so the audience can do the same” (Kovach et al. 2007, p. 96). This resonates with Theodore J. Glasser's notion that objectivity only requires “journalists [to] be accountable for how they report, not what they report” (Glasser, 1984). Journalists, editors-inchiefs and photo editors do not have the option to perform replicable experiments in verifying the source and content of the amateur image material they use. Nonetheless methodological systems for verification can be used to improve the reliability and likelihood of accuracy. Shapiro and his colleagues on the other hand argue that this is quite far from the reality of life in a newsroom:

> … [the] zeal for accuracy is a professional norm, but also that it is a norm of compromise – the compromises being simply understood rather than
articulated. A small, easily checkable, fact needs to be checked; a larger but greyer assertion, not so much – unless it is defamatory.

(Shapiro, Brin, Bédard-Brûlé and Mychajlowycz, 2013, pp. 12–13)

Based on the results of their study of how Canadian journalists deal with the verification of articles in their everyday work, Shapiro et al. conclude that “verification for a journalist is a rather different animal from verification in scientific method”, since journalists cannot “hold every piece of data subject to a consistent standard of observation and replication” (Shapiro et al., 2013, pp 12–13). These results echo the conclusion of Edward J. Epstein (1975): even if “journalists had unlimited time, space, and financial resources at their disposal, they would still lack the forensic means and authority to establish the truth about a matter in serious dispute” (Epstein, 1975, p. 5, cited in Broersma, 2010, p. 25).

Nonetheless, it is apparent from the results of Shapiro et al. (2013) that the journalists they interviewed agree with the idea that “journalism is a discipline of verification” (p. 2). This notion functions as a legitimization for rendering journalism into its own distinctive profession, where verification can be seen as a “strategic ritual” (Shapiro et al., 2013). A similar phenomenon has previously been presented as “objectivity as a strategic ritual”, creating a bulwark against the critique of journalism as a profession, and as a professional differentiation separating journalists from other forms of communicators (Tuchman, 1972, p. 661).

2.1.2 Creating professional credibility through accuracy

The study by Shapiro et al. (2013) also sheds light on how the notion of verification is connected to a drive among journalists to appear credible, and to attribute positive connotations such as objectivity and accuracy to their product. This double-edged idea of appearing truthful and providing stories that emit a sense of accuracy can
be seen as vital for the delineation of journalism as its own profession, however large
the discrepancy between the “stated ideals and the actual practice” of authentication and
verification in the journalistic process (Shapiro et al, 2013, p. 9).

The ideal of finding the ‘truth’ is closely linked to the idea that it is a
journalist’s job to distinguish between “facts and opinion” (Witschge and Nygren, 2009,
p. 52). Witschge and Nygren refer to surveys of Swedish and English journalists, were it
appears that core journalistic practice, in addition to the previously mentioned
responsibility for factuality, is “filtering information and determining what is news” (p.
51). This consideration of the audience, and the professional role of the journalist as
upholder of a certain standard of ethics and truthfulness, goes back to the notion of the
journalist as a member of the “Fourth Estate” (Schultz, 1998, p. 15). This originally
British ideal of the press as a watchdog working towards “ensuring a functioning
democracy” by conducting “investigative and independent journalism” has been around
since the French Revolution, and still impacts the ideals of journalism as a profession

As Julianne Schultz (1998) exemplifies, this institutional role of the press as
spokesperson for the public sphere is today under question due to several circumstances
(p. 15). The term has been disseminated from the traditional press to the news media,
which today encompasses outlets that are owned by large international enterprises and
hence part of the global economy. Schultz argues that the power to influence, as part of
the dogma of the Fourth Estate, has been transferred from being a watchdog overseeing
the system from outside, to being a part of the system. Thus the role of maintaining the
“responsibility for the Fourth Estate … has passed from the news media as an institution
to journalists, editors and producers”. (Schultz, 1998, pp. 15–16).
In his study of how professional journalism is defined by journalists themselves, Henrik Örnebring (2013) categorizes the different justifications for the profession under three domains: expertise, duty and autonomy (pp. 38–39). The perceived change brought about by how commercialization is impacting on journalism – and hence on the Fourth Estate – is categorized under the domain of autonomy, or “self-governance within the profession”, reflecting the extent of independence from social institutions, such as the state and market, and the separation of editorial and advertising departments (p. 39). Örnebring sees the endeavor of journalists to “act as a Fourth Estate” as a claim to legitimize the profession, by categorizing the need to inform the public under the domain of duty (p. 38–39). The sense of societal duty is essential for the professional norm of journalism, and is based on notions such as codes of ethics and practices, notably verification. Autonomy, meanwhile, is “most often operationalized as trustworthiness” – in particular with regard to the role of the media itself by presenting and regarding certain media companies as institutions (Örnebring, 2013, p. 45).

This importance of the changing role of the Fourth Estate, and hence the responsibility of the individual journalist, is addressed by Silverstone (2007), who examines how the “morality of the media” is creating a framework for society – both by portraying 'the other’ and by inviting a “moral response from us, the audience, as potential or actual citizen” (p. 7). Through media ethics, which are defined by journalistic practice, the media are becoming increasingly significant in constructing a “moral [world] order, one which would be, and arguably needs to be, commensurate with the scope and scale of global interdependence” (Silverstone, 2007, p. 7). This implies that the way the world is presented in media is of great importance for the
creation (or sustenance) of an ethical civil society, an argument that can be connected to Örnebring’s (2013) notion of duty (Silverstone, 2007, p. 7–8).

Another underlying reason for the moral code of truth in journalism surfaces from the postwar social theories, such as the seminal social responsibility theory, which was formulated by Theodore Peterson in 1956 (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000, p. 63). Peterson’s new theory, which was created as a response to a changing world system with decreasing competition in the press, a centralization of ownership and concerns regarding democratic stability:

…introduced (or reinforced) three significant conceptual distinctions. First, the news media were separated from the entertainment media, with the former viewed as most directly responsible for fulfilling the media’s civic functions. Second, within the news media, fact would be distinguished from opinion, and news reporting would strive to be accurate, objective, and balanced. Third … the public was distinguished from media elites and policy experts, with the former viewed as generally passive, easily manipulated consumers of information and the latter as information gatekeepers who represented the public’s interest in the construction of political and social reality.
(Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000, p. 63)

These ethical premises of truthfulness, objectivity and impartiality are part of the *mythos* of professional journalistic standards, which are communicated with the public and hence paramount in maintaining a role of the journalist in the public sphere as the authority of truthful information (Sjøvaag, 2011, emphasis in original, p. 82). Through procedures, norms and practices an institutionalized form of journalism has been created, based on a strict sense of professional ideology (Sjøvaag, 2011, p. 82). Until now there has been a feeling of “exclusiveness” connected to particularly news journalism. When traditional mainstream news is starting to face challenges from
amateur journalists and photographers, this perceived exclusivity of “the knowledge and practice of journalism” is starting to fade (ibid). As accuracy, honesty and verification are all ideals – heavily dependent on the feeling of professionalism among every individual journalist, the conduct of the media and its effect on the public sphere is in the end deplorably reliant on every individual journalist. In the long run, accuracy is of paramount importance for a news media outlet. As Meyer puts it, “the main importance of accuracy is a building block in creating long term credibility” – both for the media and the society it serves (Meyer, 2004, p. 100).

2.1.3 Visuals portraying the real

Ever since the first photographs started appearing in newspapers in the 1880s, visuals have been used as reinforcement to the message conveyed; as attestation that the reporting is truthful and honest. In her study of how the photograph has affected notions of war amongst Americans, Susan D. Moeller (1989) points to how words have “become suspect”, indicating how audiences during the last century developed a feeling of having their opinions manipulated by not only the military and the government, but also the press (p. 9). From within this situation of incertitude the image became elevated to the status of “unimpeachable witness” (Moeller, 1989, p. 9). The role of visuals as the grounding part in journalistic truth telling couples with the idea of the “paradigm case of a medium: the means by which experience is supplied to others who lack the original” (Peters, 2001, p. 709). In addition to serving as evidence, photographs started setting the agenda for what was categorized as newsworthy.

The debate regarding whether text or visuals have more power in transmitting a message is still ongoing; however many would claim images take the prize concerning memorable events. One such event is the iconic image by Joe Rosenthal of US soldiers
raising an American flag on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima. The image brought much more attention to the war that was waged on the Pacific Islands during World War II than any article or book (Moeller, 1989, p. 7). Images from conflicts in particular have had tremendous effects on the public knowledge of war, and our attitudes towards conflicts (p. 7). As Moeller (1989) states in *Shooting War*, “photography is the way in which most of us have experienced war” (p. 7).

Even as photography traditionally has been seen as a truthful representation of reality, and continues to be used as candid *evidence* of events, visuals are never objective (Sjøvaag, 2011, p. 88). A camera is a technical device, dependent on the right conditions to capture reality, and always leaving out what is not seen in the image (Moeller, p. 9). The power of the mechanical status of a camera and the image it produces is the perceived justice connected to it, as a virtual pinhole to an event, seemingly free from gatekeepers – creating a perfect illusion of reality. Problematically enough for the public this perceived reality is manipulated on several layers before it reaches the eyes of the consumer. It is essential to note that the mechanical device capturing images is held by a person – as Moeller points out, “photographers make the event”, by documenting and “assigning meaning to them” (1989, p. 14–15).

Where Moeller approaches the reality of images with pragmatism, previous researchers and semioticians have problematized the reality of the image from semiotic and philosophical angles, and often from an iconoclastic viewpoint. Some have seen images as mere symbols, conceiving meaning through referential conventions, as argued by Nelson Goodman (cited in Andén-Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 191). Goodman denies any inherent characterization of reality in images, and claims that realism is simply a style among others, focusing on presenting reality as we are used to seeing it.
presented (ibid). Other scholars have argued that image creation is strongly based on contextual references and conventional schemes rather than natural observations (Andén-Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 189). Some again have seen the photographic image as absolute realism, and hence a "perfect analogon" of reality (Roland Barthes, 1977, p. 196).

Historically the power of an image to entice the mind into thinking of it as a portal into the reality that lies behind has been seen as the very weakness of the medium: the image arouses emotions and sensations while blocking rational thought (Andén-Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 192). However, these theories have to a large extent ignored the importance of context; how captions and news narratives defined by journalists alter the meaning of the visuals (ibid, p. 193; Pantti, 2013, p. 3). Concerning journalistic images, it would appear that the argument for the figurative representation of reality is the most reasonable, as presented by David Freedberg (Freedberg cited in Andén-Papadopolous, 1994, p. 194) His holistic view of the image as both attempting to portray nature while simultaneously adding a context to it, can be used to explain the power of the journalistic image's attraction, and its omnipotent role (Freedberg cited in Andén-Papadopolous, 1994, p. 194). In this sense, photographs function as a means to convey information in a "real" (or "more real") way (Sontag, 2002, p. 7, citations in original).

As argued by Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen (2013), images and videos are often the deciding factors in the birth of a news item (p. 3). Hence the value of images as depictions of reality aimed at stirring emotions is crucial (Andén-Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 194). It is based on this premise that photography and, later, moving images, have become an intrinsic part of modern society and news media.
Several scholars have argued that photography in journalism has functioned as a form of warranty for truthfulness and objectivity in news reporting, however this function has merely been reduced to a form of support for the larger narrative created by the journalistic story (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2008; Moeller, 1989). Visuals are haunted by a stigma of “deception, irrationality, vulgarity and empty voyeurism”, reducing them to the status of a leer and fixing them within a continuum of the iconoclastic approach to images (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2008, p. 7. 1994, p. 191). Images evoke emotions and are much more difficult to control or edit than textual material, or as stated by Bill Keller, executive editor of The New York Times:

Photos are trickier than words … because their content is in large measure emotional, visceral.” Unless photographs are doctored, “you can’t edit their content. You can’t insert a ‘to be sure’ paragraph in a photo. (Kalb and Saivetz, 2007, p. 59)

This connotation is still visible today when comparing the use of photography in different forms of news media, especially newspapers. However, the wariness towards using images as news items on their own is being extenuated by the changing media landscape, and the transformation of the image as a form of communication due to technological advances and modern production schedules. Another daily anxiety among especially foreign editors is the fear of using images portraying overly graphic atrocities, while media as a whole is being targeted for causing a presumed “compassion fatigue” (Moeller, 1999) among consumers, due to a perceived standardized exposure to suffering (cited in Cottle, 2009, p. 350). Until now the ethical codes mandating the professionalism of photojournalists, and thus photo agencies, have provided a reliable source of ready-made images from which editors have been able to safely choose what best fits their particular news media outlet.
Problematically enough the view that images are only an added bonus to a story – the hook to the narrative – ignores the actual value images may have as senders of a certain message. The ideal of always showing two sides of a story is heavily entrenched in the minds of most media professionals that would call themselves journalists, however, very few photographs are given the same treatment. Instead there is usually only one image per story, although this is also critically dependent on, for example, the layout strategy of newspapers and the framing of the journalistic narrative of the story (Pantti, 2013, p. 4). Another issue with photography in particular is how it is removed from context and time – it is not any moment presented in an image, it’s a “decisive moment” creating a situation where “reality becomes hyperreality” (Moeller, 1989, p. 15, emphasis in original).

Whereas Moeller focuses solely on images from war, and hence to a large extent on photography of action or powerful emotions, most journalistic images are concerned with everyday events. Andén-Papadopoulos (1994) exemplifies how the idea of visuals being a mirror of reality erodes when a photographer is assigned to capture images of something mundane – a situation where the photographer takes on the role of creating an event by directing the actors in the image, producing an image suitable for the requirements of the newsroom (p. 188). By directing, posing, lighting and using other analog methods, the photographer sets the scene for creating an image which is supposed to depict reality, and at the same time appeal as a visual. A good image evokes emotions, a response, and captures the gaze of the viewer.

As one tool for creating a gripping image, the photographer relies on the traditional concepts of visual iconography; hence coding the image with emotion based on cultural context and preconceived knowledge (Andén-Papadopoulos, 1994; Barthes,
Journalistic visuals are no exception, and contain as many recognizable motifs and symbols as do any other form of visual messages, be they art or images of information (Andén-Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 189). Thus the verification, and/or objectivity, of the image becomes not only a question of physical authenticity, but also of ideological and emotional context and truthfulness of action. Arguably, several cultural codings are added unconsciously, rendering these theories – and the coding in particular – applicable and relevant when studying amateur visuals.

Interestingly, the low quality of amateur visuals does at times work in favor of the perceived validity, and perhaps dramatic effect, of the material. The shaky, un-sharp, pixelated and at times unclear visuals convey a sense of urgency, chaos and panic (Sjøvaag, 2011, p. 91). Hence they function as “visual clues”, assigning credibility to the event through their witness status (p. 91). Pantti and Bakker (2009) revealed that journalists perceive an innate intimacy and charm in amateur images, which signals a “perceived ‘authenticity’” (p. 482, my emphasis).

The respondents in their study do not see the low technical quality as a negative aspect; instead it appears to give the visuals “evidence of authenticity” (ibid). This phenomenon is further consolidated by an example from a study by Williams, Wahl-Jorgensen and Wardle (2011), where a broadcast journalist explicitly explains “his use of amateur images to enliven conventional news reports and construct the impression of authenticity” (p. 205).

2.2 Journalistic verification in a changing media environment

The era of a strong mainstream news media dominating the news discourse in both broadcasting and the press has passed. Encouraged by the technical advances during the last two decades the consumer has, to a certain extent, moved to the online
sphere, while some have forsaken the ‘traditional’ mainstream media altogether. This fleeing audience is the biggest threat to modern journalism, according to professor Charlie Beckett (2008, p. 20). The implications of declining audiences influence many areas of newsroom journalism, including the resources available for the verification of amateur material and the decisions regarding what amateur material to use. When “the audience of yesterday is thinning while tomorrow’s audience is simply not turning up” new ways of luring consumers back to mainstream media become even more valuable (Beckett, 2008, p. 21). At the same time this lack of audience is reflected in a loss of revenue, which accelerates the decline in hands on deck, considering the content production in news media.

Many news media outlets are struggling to hold on to the old consumers while at the same time trying to appeal to the ‘new’ consumers, which stretches the resources between solving the “old media problems” and the “new media problems” in the new media landscape, as outlets produce both the traditional product and the new online versions (Beckett, 2008, p. 47). As journalists are attempting to cover many different fields of journalistic output both offline and online, the areas of input for information and material to the journalists have in a similar way expanded. This has led to new rules of engagement with regard to both the sources and the audience – who often play double roles.

2.2.1 The 24-hour news cycle

Even as the principles of journalism remain the same, the online environment has changed the everyday functions of the news media. Previous research has pointed to both the possibilities the digital media allows and the hurdles it is creating. On a positive note, Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen (2013) point to how increased access
to the Internet amplifies the possibility of a more heterogeneous framing of news stories and a more diverse mediascape, in addition to an increased amount of sources of information available online for both journalists and the audience (p. 4). Additionally, the onset of increasing information on the Internet “makes the processes faster for all journalists” (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 43).

On the other hand, newsrooms have been criticized for using the new online services to “increase produced quantity, and not to increase quality and develop new forms of expression” (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 43). Many journalists find themselves struggling to cope with tasks such as critical verification of facts when faced with a combination of tighter deadlines and an accelerating output from the ever-increasing abundance of online sources (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 4).

This situation is an extension of the CNN effect, a phenomenon that goes back to the First Gulf War of 1992. There is little consensus in the academic community on the exact definition of the term; however, it in essence describes the onset of real-time media and the impact of the “increased flow of broadcast information and shortened news cycles” on civil society and public opinion (Bruno, 2011, p. 1). This pressure has been multiplied by the onset of the online news environment and the social media revolution (Bruno, 2011). When the devastating earthquake of 2010 hit Haiti – a blind spot for most institutional media as a result of cuts in correspondent numbers and several other factors – the social media service Twitter became the most important source of information. This popularity was not only created among active twitter users, but largely as a result of the immense need of the media outlets to have information to
present to their consumers (Bruno, 2011, p. 3) – and hence the Twitter effect was created.

One aspect that defines today's competition between news outlets is immediacy, and in an increasingly online environment amateur material becomes a “prized asset” (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 110). In a 24-hour news cycle the lack of especially visual material, or any information at all for that matter, is an impossible situation for news media companies. At the same time the pressure to hold on to consumers in the face of losing them to the immediate reporting coming from citizen journalists – or simply the non-intermediated amateur content – has pushed many journalists and media companies to activate and increase their presence on social media platforms.

This added need for non-stop output from news media, via multi-reporting on different platforms, has created a horizontal pressure on newsrooms. In addition to producing content for their traditional products, newsrooms are faced with the added task of producing material for online outlets, which play by the rules of the “tyranny of real time” (Gowing, 2009). These rather new outputs have been met with varied approval from journalists, who often feel that it is merely a form of cutting costs rather than improving content (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p.44). Journalists have to produce “much more with less time to do the basic work of research and verification” (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 49).

Witschge and Nygren claim that the constant pressure to publish material online has altered the three main processes of journalistic work – “newsgathering, evaluation and production” – by switching the positions of production and evaluation, creating a situation where the “phase of evaluation is often carried out in front of the
audience” (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 45). This is not a situation which is seen as optimal by journalists themselves; studies show “that verification is still the (abstract) norm but many journalists say that speed makes it more difficult to fulfill the norm” (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 46). When Singer (1997) studied how metro reporters in the US felt about their changing role in an online media world, one editor for a Midwest Daily, the Sun, stated how the need for instant information is eating away at accuracy – and credibility: “in print, we’ve always had the luxury of, well, let’s see if what we have immediately is actually true and the whole story, and can be verified … [t]he old adage was, you know, ’Get it first, but first, get it right’. Well, now, it’s just ‘Get it first.'” (p. 82).

At times speed appears to surpass verification, resulting in a situation where unconfirmed and sometimes even contradictory information is reported (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen p. 4). The increased speed of the news routine, and the escalating amount of testimonial material provided by amateur sources, does not only affect the newsroom but also the traditional “elite sources” (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 2). It has been argued that the changing global online environment has created “new patterns of information gathering and dissemination”, where amateur sources provide the “raw and fragmented bits of visual and verbal information”, and the traditional elite sources are assigned the role of validators and commenters (ibid, emphasis in original). These elite sources are thus used as on-air experts to endorse or contest the legitimacy of the amateur material and give the news a context, a phenomenon for which Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen have coined the term “metasourcing”. This form of legitimation is used in particular when dealing with amateur visuals, which the news media cannot verify by themselves (p. 9).
2.2.2 Journalism of assertion on the rise

Verification is still held as an important norm among journalists, however the increasing demand for speedy production makes this ideal increasingly elusive (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 46). Added to this Kovach et al. (2007) write of the new forms of journalism based on “affirmation” and “aggregation”, where the former indicates an increase in partisan, opinionated, interpretative journalism, and the latter the trend towards simply gathering and dissemination, leaving the verification for the “user to sort out” (p. 47–48).

In the continuous news culture, journalists trying to shovel the latest information onto the air or the Web have little time to check things out. Often they are largely passing things along, creating what we have called the new journalism of assertion, which is overwhelming the old journalism of verification. (Kovach et al, 2007, p. 46)

Paradoxically, even though information is easier to come by, the sheer amount of information makes the process of verification more exhausting for both the journalist and the user (Kovach et al. 2007, p. 48). Finding fresh news items from the ever-increasing flow of generic news is surpassing the importance of both verification and the discovery of own news (Kovach et al., 2007, p. 86).

The relevance of the first and third rules of the IFJ guidelines lies within the notion that in the modern, rapidly moving information era, journalists might in fact be transferring information that they assume to be true, but which in fact is not. According to Kovach et al. (2007) a danger of the modern “journalism of assertion” is that journalists might turn into passive receivers rather than being active gatherers (p. 87).

This passivity has been noticed in several other studies. O’Neill and O’Connor (2008) found in their study on the use of sources in local newspapers in West Yorkshire
that journalists tend to submissively pass on information they are given, “becoming … mere processors of one-sided information or bland copy dictated by sources” (p. 487). Other British studies indicate how “statements of fact were … often published without corroboration”, hinting that the journalistic norm of independent authentication and plurality might in fact be “the exception rather than the rule” (Singer, 2010, p. 129).

The change that has arrived with digital technologies has led to society as a whole altering its relation to and perception of news events – the clear distinction between “fact and opinion or entertainment and public affairs” has become opaque, and the role of journalists and news media has changed with society (William and Delli Carpini, 2000, p. 78). With stories being updated just for the sake of updating and the pressure on publishing becoming increasingly strong, the trade-off leads to “less time to reflect … more mistakes, and a reduced ability to correct those mistakes” (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000, p. 78–79).

2.2.3 The Intermediator – a modern gatekeeper

The verification of amateur visuals could be seen as a form of gatekeeping, as part of the journalistic role of making “particular information available to the public” (Singer, 2010, p. 128). The traditional view on gatekeeping, a term coined in 1949 by Kurt Lewin, was in the beginning simply seen as “resting on individual decisions about what was both true and worthy of passing on to the community” (Singer, 2010, p. 128). In its simplicity, the gatekeeping theory is built around the notion that “[as] a news item [travels] through certain communication channels...certain areas within the channels functioned as ‘gates’”(White, 1964, p. 162). The phenomena of gatekeeping has been connected to journalistic notions such as being unbiased and detached; employing
routines and norms aimed at helping the journalist avoid libel and choosing which stories fill the criteria of being newsworthy (Singer, 2010 p. 128).

In the Internet era the role of gatekeeping has changed. The theoretically endless online environment has erased the “concept of limits” regarding information and content, meaning that a traditionalist form of gatekeeping as a watchdog of transmitting information from policy makers and institutions to the receiver is superfluous (Singer, 2010, p. 128). This new media environment challenges mainstream journalists “in their gatekeeping role as agenda-setter and issue-framer” (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000, p. 78). It is certainly the case that websites such as YouTube, Bambuser, Vimeo, Vine, Facebook, Twitter and iReport have enabled ordinary citizens to upload and spread images and videos without having to convince the traditional gatekeepers. Nonetheless, it could be argued that even as the power of the previously omnipotent gatekeepers has been watered down, it is still present in new forms. As stated by Lewin in 1949, these gates are “governed either by impartial rulers or by ‘gatekeepers’...or by groups ‘in power’ for making decisions between ‘in’ and ‘out’”, indicating that the scope of presumed gatekeepers has perhaps been too narrow (Lewin cited in White, 1964, p. 162).

However, it has been suggested that the role of the gatekeeper should not be abandoned; instead it needs to be redesigned (Friend and Singer, 2007, p. 56). The reconceptualization of the term gatekeeping from mainly encompassing story selection to embracing “news judgment, norms and practices such as verification” enables an accentuated newsroom-centric view, where gatekeeping becomes the locus of what separates the journalist from the common publisher (Singer, 2010, p. 128). In an era where social media is becoming increasingly integral to how news is selected and
gathered, the more essential it will be for journalists to adopt the role of curator, “able to filter, verify and edit the most relevant content circulating online” (Bruno, 2011, p. 64).

This point of view is theorized by Jan van Dijk (2012) in his formation of “The law of extension”, one of the “seven ‘laws’ of the web”, which crystallizes the notion that the World Wide Web has become too large to work without intermediaries (p. 37, 39). van Dijk exemplifies the intermediaries as “search engines, portals, price comparison sites… to SNS (social network sites)”, however, by extension it could be argued that media companies function in a similar way as nodes that rummage through large quantities of information and select and disseminate material deemed worthy, and thus individual journalists could be seen as a particle of the cluster which is the media company (p. 39). As Charlie Beckett (2008) argues, there is a growing market for journalists that can “filter and package” in the age of information overload (p. 19).

The rise of the Internet was initially followed by an hyperbolic excitement over the liberties it would bring – an end to the need for intermediaries, as everyone instead starts to link to each other, free from in-between meddling (van Dijk, 2012, p. 39. Friend and Singer, 2007, p. 56). When looking at the media landscape it is notable that the traditional gatekeeping by journalists, editors and the traditional media (i.e. newspapers, television and radio) has indeed been contested by social media (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008, p. 12). On the other hand, it appears that the more professional social media authors become, the more similar they become to the traditional journalist in their form of gatekeeping (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008, p. 13). This indicates that a form of gatekeeping is difficult to avoid in a system with abundant information. Indeed, the notion of the Internet being a haven of equal abundant information is coming under
question. One concern is that of the filter-bubble effect governing the online information we have access to, by collecting our habits and channeling the information we seek through algorithms aimed at personalization and optimization of targeted marketing (Pariser, 2011). Arguably this phenomenon in itself becomes an added layer of gatekeeping, perhaps amplifying the tendency towards topic concentration in news media.

2.2.4 The power of a critical mass – and the right people

Of the “seven ‘laws’ of the web” presented by van Dijk (2012), several are of interest for this study. In addition to the previously mentioned “law of extension”, which focuses on the need for intermediaries in the ever-growing online world, the laws regarding “network externality” and “the law of the limits to attention” are useful for trying to explain how journalists relate to amateur material, and the verification of user generated content (p. 38, 40).

The second law presented by van Dijk (2012) regarding network externality essentially states that “the more people participate in the network the bigger the effects are”, which leads to how a growing network “exerts pressure on people to join” (p. 38). The implication of the law is that it enables a “critical mass” that creates a predominance of a certain standard, i.e. why certain networking sites, operating systems or apps, become more popular than others (p. 39). This would indicate a form of inbuilt threshold within the systems of communication that could be seen as a form of technological gatekeeping. Additionally this law in combination with the next law of interest, the law of the limits to attention, narrows the likelihood of an item finding its way from originator to journalist and increases the importance of the critical mass (p. 40). This is due to the “limits of attention, because the time to read, listen or view for
receivers runs out” – which indicates that as a whole, users of online information have a limited possibility to access everything from the primary source, and leads us back to the importance of intermediaries (p. 40–41).

The laws van Dijk presents are not specifically aimed at how journalists work with networks, but rather explanations on how networks work. Nonetheless, since these networks are becoming everyday tools in the journalistic processes, it is relevant to study how these laws can influence the new media landscape and the journalistic networks themselves. Journalists use this “critical mass” of information to validate both sources and news items, as primary or secondary sources or as affirmation for unverified or equivocal information.

This power of this mass can affect how a sense of accuracy and authenticity is applied to both news items and amateur material, implying that at times sheer volume can become a form of justification. Both Amira Firdaus (2009) and Alfred Hermida (2011) have studied the effects of volume on the trustworthiness of user-generated content online. Their studies focus on the social media website Twitter, but the theories of collective approval – even when leaning into different theoretical directions – pose an interesting explanation as to the habits of newsrooms and reach a parallel conclusion to van Dijk’s laws on how networks work.

Firdaus suggests that instead of relying on old, accustomed methods of source checking, a new process may be behind the increasing use of social media as sources. According to the author there might be a form of “mass legitimation” at play in “assigning credibility to information and images from [social media]” (Firdaus, 2009, p. 10). Hence, the sheer mass of people – or in the case of Twitter, accounts – creates a situation where a fact becomes reality, simply because of the volume and spread it
possesses. A simplified verification based merely on volume raises the question of the possibility of how misinformation could be turned into truth. This raises questions regarding especially “the objectivity and credibility in transnational and national news outlets” (Firdaus, 2009, p. 1). Hence it could be argued that even renowned news and photo agencies could fall victim to false verification.

Somewhat similar to what Firdaus calls “mass legitimation”, Hermida (2011) chooses to name “collaborative verification” (p. 1.). The idea behind Hermida’s hypothesis is that social network sites such as Twitter could be used for a “more collaborative method to determining the truth”, implying that journalistic verification could be moved into a collaborative sphere where the public – or the one which exists online – would have the possibility to verify facts, or to rebuke for example the accuracy, factuality or authenticity of facts or images (Hermida, 2011, p. 5).

Another form of mass legitimation occurs when journalists use news agencies or other news outlets as sources. Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen (2013) compared how two large Danish newspapers used sources in connection to the foreign news of the death of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the former leader of Libya. The news item was primarily based on amateur visuals, captured by a rebel militant who was present at the moment when Gaddafi was captured and killed. The study showed that the most common sources used to validate the amateur images were different types of officials, such as Libyan politicians and international organizations (p. 7–8). However, the second most important validators of the death of Gaddafi were in fact international news agencies and other news media institutions – with specific correspondents even sometimes used as sources (p. 8). According to Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, this:
…reflects the general tendency in contemporary journalism of including the perspectives of media institutions, commentators, correspondent and other media professionals in the news coverage as opposed to involving sources outside the media institutional realm. 
(Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 8)

This phenomenon is partly due to, and partly a symptom of, the increasingly high-speed global “media circuit”. Another phenomenon connected to this media circuit is the “second-hand” sourcing, which occurs when the sources refer to other sources. According to the results from the study one in five sources quoted by the Danish newspapers were in fact derived from other sources, creating a chain of “facts” that most of the time were not gathered from primary sources. This shows how “the news media do not have first-hand access to the event”, and how this behavior in a sense becomes a “coverage of the coverage”. (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 8, emphasis in original.)

2.3 Newsrooms challenged by verification

Verification is very much a form of legitimation and professional identity creation for journalists. In a situation where journalism is seen as merely a “semi-profession” – if even that in an era when the time scope for verification in newsrooms is limited – the differentiation from bloggers and other sources of information becomes of utter importance (Witschge and Nygren, 2009). Hermida (2011) argues that the expert status of journalism is connected to a core mission of “knowledge production” based on verification, adding that this form of cunning is “central to a structural claim to expert status and statement of authority” (p. 4). The credibility of a media and any form of journalism is still very much connected to praxis of verification (Hermida, 2011, p. 5).
2.3.1 Verification as expertise

However, defining the responsibility of verification continues to pose difficulties. What Kovach et al. (2007) refer to as the “journalism of assertion”, many journalists might in fact call a form of verification in a media environment where accessing first-hand sources is deemed too slow (p. 46). Thus the approach of “report first verify later”, and hence ignoring several aspects of source criticism, appears to be more commonly accepted in newsrooms than one might expect (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 9).

According to Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen (2013) this trend in choosing to focus on the content of the report, rather than the possible truthfulness, is a distinguishing trait brought on by the change in newsroom practices due to digital media technologies (p. 9). Nonetheless, news media attempt to repair this inadequacy by using metasources for interpreting and challenging, or confirming, especially visual material that is difficult to pinpoint (ibid). Similarly, other medias are used as second-hand sources to “verify what little may be verified” in regard to especially amateur images and footage (p. 11).

It is easier to blindly trust the source, or to simply transfer the responsibility of verification onto the consumer by citing the source where the image is gathered from, and/or add a disclaimer stating that the image or video is unverified. As Witschge and Nygren (2009) conclude, “the responsibility for accuracy is to an increasing degree given to the sources and the public, as journalists often do not check the facts before publishing” (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 45). Nonetheless, the attempt to achieve transparency through naming a source “signals the journalist's respect for the audience” and is in the end the last thing a journalist can do when no other means of verification
are available, and the news item is of such urgency that it must be published with
limited or no information regarding the truthfulness of the image or the video (Kovach
et al., 2007, p. 92).

However, some would consider this to be low quality journalism, or to put it as
television journalist Mark Little, founder and CEO of the social news agency Storyful
concludes:

It is not good enough to broadcast a user-generated video and then say it
can’t be verified. You must tell us what you did to verify it and what
context exists, if any. You are still a journalist.
(Little, 2012)

Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen (2013) point to how valuable and relevant
amateur visuals are, especially with regard to their closeness to the actual event.
Nonetheless, in their study the amateur visuals of the event often came with great
uncertainty and limited possibilities for authentication. To counterbalance this lack of
validity, metasources with “institutional legitimacy” – elite sources such as NATO and
the EU, or news media institutions such as Al Jazeera or the BBC – were added. In an
attempt to add validity to the amateur visuals, Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen
instead show how the editorial processes at the newspapers actually ended up obscuring
the source patterns by adding too much information to the mix. (Nørgaard Kristensen
and Mortensen, 2013, p. 11.)

This result shows how difficult the idea of leaving the verification to
someone else – the consumer, an elite source or a news media institution – actually is.
In the end an increasingly common form of covering the media circuit itself by “re-
cycling … information by self-referential news media” results in a form of non-
transparent convergence of the material (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p.
11). It could be argued that as long as nothing goes wrong, this is as good as it gets. However, the peril of publishing false information can give news media a stigma which can be difficult to overcome. Hence, the choice to go for speed before verification “seems very dangerous for one of journalism’s golden rules: each news story must be verified first” (Bruno, 2011, p. 63).

At the same time, some argue that the combined force of the CNN effect and the Twitter effect should lead news organizations to give up attempting to be first with breaking news, and focus instead on being best at “verifying and curating it” (Bruno, 2011, p. 6). This echoes an old struggle in journalism, indicating that journalists have long had to find “the right balance between speed and accuracy, between being comprehensive and being merely interesting,” (Meyer, 2004, cited in Hermida, 2011, p. 7). This struggle is often played out solely in the mind of the journalist in question, which at times can lead to questionable judgments, based on human prejudices and values. As exemplified by Matthew Weaver, a journalist working for The Guardian Live Blog, when interviewed about how he selected sources from Twitter during the earthquake in Haiti:

I found this guy on a Twitter list. What was good about him is that he was updating his account, he was taking videos, he was blogging regularly, he had some really interesting first-hand stuff. He was Christian, so there was something a bit honest about him, he was very authentic.

Matthew Weaver, The Guardian
(cited in Bruno, 2011, p. 40)

When looking at the role of traditional mainstream news journalism it could be argued that its strength lies within its ideology and methodology (Sjøvaag, 2011, p. 83). According to Sjøvaag, the challenges of increasing amateur material and possible loss of commercial ground to user-generated content should be met by increasing the focus
on journalistic methodology, “as a measure to protect [the] professional claim” of the
news media (p. 83). By guaranteeing a high journalistic quality that is ethical, factual,
impartial, balanced and validated, accuracy and thus reliability is ensured (p. 83).

2.3.2 “Fauxtography” – when visuals lie

When visuals are thrown into the mix, the task of ensuring that journalistic ideals and norms are met becomes even more of a challenge. Alterations, manipulation and improvements have been made to photographs ever since the medium was invented. One of the earliest recorded manipulated images is that of four Capuchin monks on the island of Malta, taken in 1846 by man called Calvert Richard Jones, using the then recently developed calotype process (Fineman, 2012, p. 3). A careful look at the negative process reveals that there were in fact five monks on location when the image was taken – just who decided to erase the fifth with some ink, or why, remains a mystery (ibid). Another historical example is the frequent disappearance of the Soviet leader Leon Trotsky and other political figures from historical Russian images, owing to their falling out of favor in Soviet Russia (Lyon, 2012). Although photographs have been given an almost iconic status of historical honesty, several instances imply that this might not be the case.

There have been a few more recent situations where media institutions in more recent times have failed to notice alterations made to images they have distributed. An example is the two images shot and later altered by a local freelancer working for Reuters, Adnan Hajj, during the Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006 (Kalb and Saivetz, 2007, p. 57). The first image shows bellowing smoke rising from a devastated building, where the smoke has been made darker and multiplied. The other image portrays an Israeli jet dropping three flares over Lebanon, when in fact it was later proven it had only dropped
one flare (p. 57). The falsifications were found by the American blogger Charles
Johnson, who started to unveil the inaccuracies on his blog Little Green Footballs (p.
57). Later, Reuters fired the freelancer and removed all his 920 photographs from its
database – despite the fact that Hajj denied all accusations of falsification, “saying he
was simply trying to remove dust marks in poor lighting” (p. 58).

During the same conflict in Lebanon attention was brought to the ethics of
the photojournalists and camera personnel on location. It was discovered that several
images showing a man called “a Lebanese rescue worker” carrying around dead bodies,
were in fact staged (p. 58). The man who was dubbed “The Green Helmet” by the
camera personnel simply ‘helped’ the camera teams to get better shots by “reloading a
body into an ambulance” and “carrying dead bodies from one location to another so
that, it was said, different groups of cameramen could shoot the scene” (ibid). This
could be seen as a form of setup – “livening up” the shot by adding, altering or
removing elements – that is the “single most cited violation of photojournalism”,
according to Dona Schwartz (1999, p. 175).

But in fact, all the violations that might provoke disapproval, such as “flipping
negatives … toning down or eliminating backgrounds, airbrushing, and cutting and
pasting” are up for consideration and their justification continues to be contested (p.
176). For many “purists” among photojournalists these techniques represent a
“departure from the elaborate practices of art department staff” (p. 176). For others it is
enough if the essence of the image is still intact. Furthermore, the golden rule of “don’t
do anything that can’t be done in the darkroom “ is a professional standard for most
photojournalists, even if the darkroom is becoming a thing of the past (Schwartz, 1999,
p. 179). When considering the difficulty of recognizing these forms of manipulations in
images by professional photographers, it becomes apparent just what a challenge the verification of amateur visuals presents. In particular the motives of the photographers and the uploaders of visuals are of interest – why this and why now?

2.3.3 Reforging journalism through non-professional content

The visuals that both broadcasting and the printed press are dependent on are, to an increasing extent, provided by amateurs with first-hand access to the actual event (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 3). This is down to the scarcity of professional material from certain areas, as well as the “value of [amateur visuals] to the news agenda” (Sjøvaag, p. 83). Hence a situation is created where the prevailing system of knowing who is recording the visuals – or at least having an agency taking responsibility for the image – is becoming unstable. When using amateur visuals the assumption of trust and professionalism come under question, and the responsibility of verification is not automatically connected to the provider of the image.

When regarding the use of user generated visuals in news organizations it is paramount to take into account the issue of professional authority of journalists, and how this is reflected in the amateur material. Through gatekeeping, agenda-setting and other “narrative strategies” news media remain in control of the authority of the message delivered in the news, even if it is partially portrayed by material the news organizations have not controlled the production of (Sjøvaag, 2011, p. 81).

However, even as the ethical standards that set the rules for journalistic authority are the largely the same from a global perspective, the approach to their implementation can vary greatly. In his study of how UK and US news media handle the rise of user–generated content, Nic Newman (2009) argues that the integration of amateur material posed significant dilemmas for the news organizations in question.
Even though Newman’s study focuses mainly on the use of Twitter and other social media networks during two sample cases, the G20 protests in 2009 and the Iranian street protests in the same year, the practical implications are of importance for this study. One of the problems the news media organizations faced was the vast amount of “false information generated by the networks, some of which was deliberately placed to influence the debate” (p. 5). Other issues that surfaced were how slanted the amateur reporting on social media was, mainly due to a form of digital divide: in the case of the Iranian protests it was mostly supporters of the oppositional presidential candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi – academic and tech-savvy younger Iranians – that used the social networks to spread their message (ibid).

Adding to the confusion of what material is real and what is not is the sheer amount of information online, both original material and re-generated. During the street protests CNN received a total of almost 6,000 items to their online community iReport, of which around 200 were vetted and triangulated and thus approved for use on television (Newman, 2009, p. 6). The format iReport was introduced by CNN in 2006 to collect non-professional content in the form of visuals. In 2008 the concept was enlarged into an online community where the audience could upload text, photographs and video footage (Bruno, 2011, p. 42).

A study examining how three institutional news media outlets: the BBC, CNN and The Guardian, incorporated non-professional content into their reporting of the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 showed how news media outlets apply different approaches in dealing with amateur content, to a certain extent reflecting the differences between the companies, but also in their approaches to verification (Bruno, 2011). The study shows that the BBC considered verification and fact checking of every online source
“the paramount principle” in their reporting, and they also utilize social media for both finding stories and authenticating them (Bruno, 2011, p. 29). The reporters working at a specially designed unit called the UGC Hub employ a vast array of checklists in their authentication process when validating an uploader or verifying an uploaded item (Bruno, 2011, p. 31). In addition technical software was used to authenticate visual material (p. 32).

The Guardian on the other hand has a more pragmatic approach to amateur material, and actually “strive for using raw and potentially unverified reports” (Bruno, 2011, p. 39). However, these reports do not end up in the published articles, rather they are used online in the Live Blog, a continuously updated format where the posts are shorter tidbits of information and where “immediacy is the essence” (p.39). The Guardian approaches its readers to help them in the authentication process of the material they publish as unverified on their online platform, hence pushing the verification into an interactive direction (p. 39). Added to this they also emphasize the importance of “good journalism” and putting up a “disclosure” such as “we are hearing rumors that [something has happened]” (p. 39).

CNN's iReport had twenty employees in 2011, responsible for authenticating content and keeping up the community (Bruno, 2011, p. 43). The community is to a large extent unmoderated and functions as an SNS in itself, though some of the material is vetted and cleared by CNN and receives the label ‘CNN iReport’, marking that the item has most likely been aired on the news channel and has been verified (p. 42). The study by Bruno does not show how large the amount of UGC-material broadcast on CNN is, but numbers from 2008 show that only approximately 10 percent of the “100,000 news-related photos and videos from
“viewers” were published or aired (ibid). The news channel has also incorporated iReport into its vetting procedure by using reports from a certain area for triangulation and corroboration of rumors. This approach was employed during the uprising in Iran in 2009 (p. 43).

Due to the fact that non-professional content has become an increasingly important part of modern news reporting, the need for a more extensive authentication process has become a key element. Hence, a new niche for media production has been born – agencies that control the authenticity of non-professional content on social network sites. One example of such a company is Storyful. The tactics the company uses to authenticate visuals provide a haunting image of the difficulty of verifying especially foreign amateur visuals. Storyful uses a combination of human skills and automation for checking such issues as if the location of the visuals are correct, by comparing buildings to visual material known to be authentic; if the local weather conditions match with the claimed date of the footage; how long the SNS-accounts have been in use; if the person posting the material is listed in the local directory; if the speakers on the video have the correct dialect for the claimed location, etc.

In addition to these methods the company also looks for new forms of opinion leaders in the online media sphere, where the traditional “authority has been replaced by authenticity” (Little, 2012). When a news story breaks and gains momentum on social media, the company uses this buzz in the network to collect further information. This means looking at the roles the different actors have in connection to the news item; some are the witnesses, other the amplifiers, and some users become trusted “filters” (ibid).
In the end the tools used for the validation of amateur visuals does not differ greatly from the traditional mechanism of journalistic verification, what has changed is the framework for authentication in a setting where absolute authorities are scarce. As Newman (2009) points out, journalists can use techniques such as crowdsourcing to legitimize amateur material. This can be done regardless of whether the material is uploaded to a platform controlled by the media organization in question, or if the visual material is gathered from social media networks. As argued by Newman, “news organizations are going to need to get used to the fact that they will always be running behind the social networks”, and that these networks will continue to display a “deficit of trust, context and perspective” (p. 9).

Whereas most media professionals abide by some sort of journalistic ethic, either imbibed from a journalistic education or from the professional environment, the individuals who produce the amateur visuals are not obliged by any professional ethical guidelines (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 4). In addition many of them may not have the perceived self-awareness that is often connected to the journalistic norms of objectivity and taking into account several sides of a story. An added difficulty is the fact that some amateur sources choose to remain anonymous, because of security reasons or as “a genre convention” (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 6). These factors may make the situation for the photo and news agencies that collect and sell visual material difficult.

Santiago Lyon, the vice president and director of photography at Associated Press (AP), describes how the strict policy of honesty and accuracy that is applied to the professionals who work with AP can be troublesome to apply when the material is from a non-professional source. Situations such as the London bombings presented a case
where authentication did not in fact cause problems – contact was established with the author of the image, a price was set and the rights handed over to the agency (Lyon, 2012). However, the issue at hand is quite difficult when there are geographical, technological, linguistic, ideological, or other differences that need to be solved, in combination with the pressure to send out visuals to buyers as quickly as possible.

Lyon (2012) argues, “that some image [is] better than none”, though AP acknowledges the seriousness of authentication. Here, the search for clues is based on “elements that can support authenticity”, in the same manner as at Storyful or the BBC verification hub (p. 9). Yet even as the company uses technological experts and several processes to ensure the authenticity of the visuals, the question of who and why the visuals were captured and spread online remain. In the cases where the photo agencies cannot verify the images, adding disclaimers is usually applied as a last resort.

2.3.4 A new set of journalistic processes in an online world

Where traditional newspapers, radio news broadcasts or television news have had regular publishing schedules, the online world exists completely without any form of deadlines. News appears to live in a very different set of rules on the Internet, not only from the perspective of the media producers, but also from the perspective of the audience and the content providers. Activist or interest groups upload videos and images to their social media sites and invite the media to use the visuals free of charge, however the images are often small in size and low in resolution, making it difficult to use computer technology to detect manipulation (Lyon, 2010, p. 9). Oftentimes the information connected to the images is scarce or doubtful, and the possibility of checking copyright, authenticity or aim is extremely limited.
Different media companies approach the changes in audience behavior and in the news cycle in various ways, particularly regarding the challenges set by equivocal material and how it should be handled. The Guardian makes a very strong differentiation between material online and offline. For example the amateur material that is published on the Live Blog, often quickly and with little verification, would “never be published in the paper” (Bruno, 2011, p. 39). One example of a case where the information on the Live Blog was false was during the uprising in Egypt, where a post on Twitter claimed that the captured Google executive had been released – a statement that later proved to be false (p. 42). The Guardian deleted the false post from their website, and added the statement “Sorry for the earlier post. That report we posted earlier turned out to be unfounded” (p. 42).

This was considered to be a serious mistake. Nonetheless it could be argued that the standards for behavior concerning authentication appear to be different online and offline. James Morgan from the BBC UGC Hub states, “we don’t need to talk with the user if we are just publishing a tweet that is an opinion or adds just a little bit of colour”, marking that the normal procedure applied for vetting amateur content that is broadcast is more rigorous than for the material which is used online (Bruno, 2011, p. 33). However, if the amateur content is used as a source, the BBC states that the person behind it always has to be qualified and validated (p. 34).

In their study of two Danish daily newspapers Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen (2013) noticed how the use of second-hand sources is most common online, a fact which most likely reflects the need for speedy publication of new bits of information (p. 8). The impression is given that material published online is held to a lower standard of objectivity than material destined for the traditional main outlets. The
increased speed of online production has moved the verification “from the journalistic backstage” to a frontline position where the journalistic processes are in full view of the audience, handing over the responsibility of fact checking to the consumer (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 46).

In the quest to receive and transmit news as quickly as possible it appears there is a notion that the audience is accepting the changing role of online media. Meg Pickard, who at the time worked as Head of Digital Engagement at the Guardian, argues that breaking news online will be considered “through [a] certain lens” by the public, due to the fact that it “is the latest information that we have” (cited in Bruno, 2011, p. 39). This echoes what previous studies have shown, indicating a perspective in the mainstream media “that audiences have lower expectations of accuracy and verification from journalists' and media outlets' social media accounts than they do of ‘appointment TV’ or the printed page” (Hermida, 2011, p. 8). Or as Meg Pickard states, “context is everything” – the approach to the readers and their expectations is dependent on the format of publication and the increasing competition to be first with breaking news (cited in Bruno, 2011, p. 39).

2.3.5 News media dealing with amateur visuals in practice

Journalists themselves are aware of the need for verification, and the lack thereof. Thus it seems the focus has changed from an unwillingness to deal with unverified material to a certain form of governance of the material (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 101). This governance of citizen-generated content varies depending on both the medium and the news organization, and takes on various modes of performative methods to improve the value of accuracy of the visual – namely
labeling, transparency, and embedding or embellishing details of how the material is presented.

According to the study conducted by Nicola Bruno (2011), the BBC considers labeling of utter importance: “it’s very important to tell people where the stories come from … when you cannot verify something that seems true, you always have to label it as unverified” (Bruno, 2011, p. 34). Another method is to add a disclaimer, such as “this footage which appears to show” (emphasis in original), or “CNN has not been able to verify this material”, thus signaling that the media publishing the material can’t guarantee the truthfulness of the visuals (Bruno, 2011, p. 52, 56). The Guardian on the other hand focus greatly on transparency, by using what they call a “mutualization of the newspaper”, by for example encouraging their journalists to online “link to sources for facts or statements you reference, and encourage others to do likewise” (Bruno, 2011, p. 35). This is combined with the previously mentioned methods of using the readers as co-verifiers and posting disclosure (Bruno, 2011).

One form of relieving the news media outlet from responsibility for the authenticity of the material is by taking a stance of assuming a form of a “contract” with the audience, affecting the style of verification and reporting (Bruno, 2009, p.41).

On a live-blog you are letting the reader in on what’s up there, and say: look, we’re letting you in on the process of newsgathering. There’s a more fluid sense of what’s happening.

Matthew Weaver, The Guardian
(cited in Bruno, 2009, p. 41)

In her study of how Norwegian television dealt with two events that were dominated by amateur visuals, Helle Sjøvaag (2011) argues that news programs applied two different approaches. According to Sjøvaag, the amateur visuals were either
embedded or embellished in a journalistic narrative. By embedding the material it is removed of its amateur capacity, denying any difference from professional material “both visually through montage editing, and orally by refraining from comments as to the source of the material” (Sjøvaag, 2011, p. 85). By removing the amateur from the image, “journalistic authority” is ensured and the gatekeeping power is also retained within the newsroom, removing the visual images of its sensationalism (p. 85). In this way, the amateur status of the visual is in a sense concealed from the audience.

Embellishing on the other hand implies “to enhance, expand or elaborate”, portrayed in this study by amateur visuals that were given prominence “primarily through repetition, close analysis and speculation as to their origins” (p. 85). The distinction from professional material is maintained, and the amateur visuals are often used as the hook in the inverted news pyramid, signaling their importance to the event and uniqueness (p. 85). According to Sjøvaag, both techniques “serve to render authority to the broadcaster”: the former emphasizes journalistic professionalism and the necessity of sometimes using amateur visuals to communicate breaking stories, and the latter holds up the amateur visuals as proof of the scarcity of professional images, hence positioning the broadcaster as a “trustworthy legitimating function” in relation to visuals (p. 85). Both embedding and embellishing are methods applied in order to allocate trustworthiness to the media in situations where actual first-hand verification by the newsroom is not possible, or done.

In their exploratory study of how four different news broadcasters dealt with amateur videos from the Iranian street protests in 2009, Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2011) exemplify how differently the media organizations approached the often both graphic and un-validated video material. One particularly gruesome example is the
video of Neda Soltan, a bystander who died after presumably being shot by a sniper. Both on a practical and ideological plane the differences in how the four different broadcasters coped with the material are poignant: of the three public service broadcasters only the Swedish public broadcasting company SVT showed the short amateur video in its entity, however by “framing the imagery in a more matter-of-fact-manner” without further explanation for the origin or content of the video, and this was done only after the video had gone viral and was “peer-reviewed” by other institutional media (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 108).

The Finnish public service company YLE decided to draw attention to the amateurishness of the video by showing only a few seconds of the YouTube interface screen with the video running, thus distancing the newsroom from the content and portraying the media circuit as well as the actual content of the event (p. 108). The BBC only showed a few stills captured from the video, whilst CNN chose to give the video an iconic status and simultaneously create a meta-story of the media circuit and ‘hype’ surrounding the video (p. 108). CNN aired the video in its entity, re-running it and using “dramatic frame grabs” from the video in what could be seen as a sensationalist manner (p. 108).

CNN took the approach of embellishing the material, by pointing to how the citizen eyewitness images in themselves became a news event, in addition to the actual death. As stated by other examples in their study, Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti show how the American broadcaster choose to narrate amateur videos, explaining and reflecting over the difficulty to verify the author and the content, hence creating a form of excitement around the uncertainty and gruesomeness of the events. By doing so the broadcaster is illustrating its credibility and journalistic methods by using transparency
as a “strategic ritual” (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 101). In this way, transparency and an apparent openness surrounding the journalistic procedure of newsgathering becomes a selling point in the competition for viewers, by emphasizing the validity of the broadcaster and its authority in its mission to deliver the ‘truth’.

None of the three public service broadcasters in the study by Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2011) created a narrative of exclusiveness and “hype” around the amateur visuals, nor did they label the visual material as rigorously as non-professional as CNN (p. 104). However, there where considerable differences with regard to the identification and contextualization of the material among the public service broadcasters: the BBC and SVT pointed out “the non-professional status” of the visuals in the verbal narration, whereas YLE chose an absolute form of embedding by choosing not to highlight the amateur status of the images from Iran in their reporting (p. 104–105, emphasis in original). In this case both SVT and YLE appear to opt for a so-called “trust-me journalism”, entrusting their credibility to the established legitimacy of the professional journalism of the Fourth Estate (p. 105, 109). The primary origin of the amateur visuals is omitted, although it is likely that the material was supplied from the international news agencies the Nordic public service companies employ for visual material, and hence the responsibility of the accuracy of the citizen images is assigned to the news agencies (p. 109).

2.4 Performing journalism under pressure

In the theoretical framework of this study the need for verification of visuals has been explored from different angles, based on the normative premises of journalism and their relation to the creation of a status of professionalism. By looking at the supreme desire to report “the truth” and how it creates a mythos for journalism as a
profession, the literature part of this thesis has focused on presenting theory that sheds light on how the changing media environment, digitalization and increasing use of non-professional material is affecting news reporting in an increasingly rapid 24-hour news cycle, and what effects this has on verification in particular.

As this thesis studies these changes by looking at how journalists relate to the verification of amateur visuals, a theoretical standpoint connected to the truth-value of images has been discussed to exhibit the additional layers of integral meanings that are attached to visuals, and how these amalgamate with journalistic notions of presenting an authentic truth for the audience. Finally, studies performed on how news media deals with non-professional material in practice have been presented to give a referential standpoint to the interview material employed in this study.

In the next part I will present the methodological framework for this thesis and the thematic coding frame that was used to extrapolate the findings. The data analysis based on the interviews conducted with the 19 Finnish journalists will be exhibited, and finally the results will be discussed and connected to the theoretical framework.
3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to analyze how Finnish journalists relate to the aspects of verifying the authenticity and truthfulness of amateur visual material, and how this is operationalized in their daily work in newsrooms. Furthermore the study attempts to illuminate the different factors that influence the choices and decisions journalists and editors are faced with when dealing with user-generated visuals, and how the professionalism of journalism is affected by the growing use of non-professional material. In an attempt to understand of the verification of amateur visuals, qualitative content analysis has been applied to the interview material obtained for this thesis (Kvale, 2009, p. 11).

The approach of this study is a material-oriented analysis based on abductive reasoning, conducted through a qualitative content analysis of thematic interviews (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 95). Hence the study will aim to give us possible explanations suitable for further inquiry and theory creation.

3.1 Study Design

The material used for this thesis is collected from semi-structured interviews with 19 Finnish journalists, which aim at “obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee” and interpreting “the described phenomena” (Kvale, 2009, p. 8). This study will focus on the information the interviewed journalists provide us with, when asked about how they, and/or the media they work for, handle non-professional images – and if they are faced with such at all. The open-ended interviews that have been analyzed in this thesis have been approached from a combination of the factist and specimen perspective, as the very nature of qualitative interviews and the topic of research intertwine both angles (Alasuutari, 2000). The factist information within the
comments is at times supported by the way the information is presented, and thus enhances the quality of the conclusions drawn from the interview material (ibid, p. 62).

The idea behind choosing interviews as a basis for gathering information for the larger research project is justified by the simple notion that when wanting to know how a specific person relates to a subject, the most logical thing to do is to ask the person in question (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 72). When attempting to understand a phenomenon from a qualitative perspective, interviews arise as a qualified approach. Qualitative interviews have been established as an important research method in social sciences, dating back to the 1960s when Glasser and Strauss employed qualitative interviews in their sociological field studies in hospitals (Kvale, 2009, p. 6).

By doing thematic interviews instead of a survey, a more flexible approach was granted, where the interviews are less rigid and the possibility for follow-up questions, precisions and restating of questions is allowed (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 73, 75). The negative aspects of interviews are connected to its positive aspects – the questions can be asked in any preferred order, and some questions might receive a greater focus than others (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 73). This can at the same time pose issues, as with this study. During the data analysis phase it was noted that some interviews focused more on certain topics than others, depending on the position of the respondent.

3.2 Data collection: Interviews with journalists

The interviews with the Finnish journalists were conducted as a part of the research project *Amateur Images: A comparative study on how audiences are shaping photojournalism*, directed by Mervi Pantti in 2011–2013. Whereas that project focuses on how major news organizations and their audiences in Finland, Sweden and the UK, are reacting to an increased availability of non-professional material in news reporting
and crisis reporting – particularly visual content – this study takes a deeper look at the replies relating to the verification and authentication of amateur images and videos.

By focusing on the replies that relate to the journalistic norm of truthfulness, the study attempts to give a deeper understanding of the aspects that impact how modern journalism relates to amateur visuals and how that might alter the concepts of journalism as a profession. In an attempt to limit the scope of this thesis only the interviews conducted with Finnish journalists for the research project were selected. The data for the content analysis was gathered from the transcribed interviews conducted for the research project. The interviewees for the primary research project were selected from the major news media companies in Finland, representing the broadcasters, the newspapers and the evening newspapers. The letter next to the media category represents the letter assigned for the corresponding respondents.

- Public service broadcaster (M):
  - YLE, three respondents

- Commercial broadcasters (M):
  - MTV3, three respondents (MTV Media)
  - Nelonen (Channel Four), one respondent (Sanoma)

- National/regional morning newspapers (P):
  - Helsingin Sanomat (HS), five respondents (Sanoma)
  - Aamulehti, two respondents (Alma Media)

- National evening newspapers (T):
  - Ilta-Sanomat (IS), three respondents (Sanoma)
  - Iltalehti (IL), two respondents (Alma Media)
Subsequently 19 different interviews were conducted, with a range of newsroom employees in different roles: news editors, photo editors, web journalists and world news editors. The different positions of the interviewees give a wide range of approaches to the authentication of amateur visuals. The people who took part in the study were all selected because of their relevance as working journalists, and are hence eligible respondents with regard to the research question (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 74). The study is representative as the amount of respondents (N=19) is large in regard to the media field in Finland, which allocates more credibility to the thesis and the result (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 85).

Additionally this study aims at providing an understanding of how newsrooms work in conjunction with receiving amateur visuals, thus an intermediary in the form of an image-providing company was removed from the analyzed material. The amateur status of the visuals are defined by the respondents as produced by non-professional photographers, or labeled as such by news organizations from where they are purchased. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, and transcribed in Finnish. The translation to English, which was done after the data analysis, has been done in such a manner that the original syntax and style would resemble that of the original spoken comments as closely as possible.

3.2.1 A cross-section of UGC-material in Finnish media

All media outlets represented in the material produce multimedia material. The public service broadcaster YLE produces traditional television material for both online and offline broadcasting, in addition to radio and online websites connected to different areas of journalism. Due to their ownership structure HS, IS and Nelonen have newsrooms that at the time of the interviews collaborated, which to a certain extent is
visible in the interview material. All the media companies and outlets represented produce online and offline material: videos, images and text, with the exception of the broadcasters, who do not produce printed textual material.

The media outlets represented in this thesis all deal with amateur visuals on a daily basis. However, they differ greatly in to what extent they exhort their audience to provide them with such material, and to what extent amateur visuals are used in their daily production. This is reflected in the replies of the journalists and editors that were interviewed. Some come into contact with amateur visuals solely from foreign material, whereas others to a larger extent oversee visuals coming from within Finland, provided by Finns and sent directly to the media in question. Both the television channels MTV3 and YLE have webpages specifically aimed at attracting viewers to send in images, whereas Nelonen (in November 2013) only created something similar in connection with a competition arranged by one of their advertisers.

All the newspapers offer their consumers the possibility to send in images or videos. The users are as standard compensated for their content with a small sum (approximately 22–300 euros), however this is usually reserved only for material that gets published. A few of the websites stipulate that the users hand over their rights to the visuals when they send them to the news media, and for example Iltalehti reserve the right to publish the images delivered to them through the website even if they cannot reach the author of the image for consent. All of the aforementioned media outlets also receive foreign amateur visuals from the news agencies and cooperative partners they have contracts with.
3.3 Data Analysis Method

The choice for using qualitative content analysis on the transcribed material is based on the fact that this study does not aim to quantify frequencies or study relationships between data, instead it aspires to sense-making through interpretation, and seeks to establish qualitative knowledge through linguistic expression (Alasuutari, 2000, p. 7; Schreier, 2012, p. 20; Kvale, 2009, p. 11).

The word qualitative [emphasis in original] implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, or frequency. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 4)

Firstly the material was thoroughly examined several times before the observations were purified, secondly a consistency check was conducted by re-examining the material in relation to the categorization in an attempt to minimize the risk of errors in the condensation and analysis (Alasuutari, 2000; Schreier, 2012, p. 34).

As my study had certain set goals, I searched for parts in the material that fitted the pre-determined thematics of the research project the interviews were conducted for, and the groupings I had loosely constructed based on the existing research approach (Kvale, 2009, p. 108). The categorization into themes arose from the material itself, however the themes are in a sense etic, being based to an extent on the questions asked in the interviews and the predisposition of this study (Alasuutari, 2000, p. 67). Since the interviews did not merely focus on the verification or the importance of reporting the source of amateur visuals, but also on several other aspects of the use of amateur images and footage in the media companies the interviewees were selected from, all replies that did not directly respond to the research questions were omitted.
From the ten main questions used in the research project five questions and connecting sub-questions were selected for this thesis, based on relevance.

However, due to the complex circumstances of authentication and practicalities of the journalistic process, and the semi-structured style of the interviews, certain comments that were not directly connected to questions concerning verification occasionally contained comments that were relevant for the study. Thus the replies have not been selected solely on the basis of the questions posed, but based on the relevance of the comments.

After this primary selection of relevant material was conducted the final stage of the analysis was done on approximately 40 pages' worth of interview material. These comments and their responding questions were divided into different groups according to the research questions and the relating thematics of this thesis. The themes became my system for categorizing, and functioned as headlines for collecting comments into specific groups. During the process examining the material, the themes connected to the groups became clearer, new ones arose and others were excluded. The comments were extracted, with corresponding questions, based on having a “common point of reference” connected to the themes (Schreier, 2012, p. 137). In these groups the text was further segmented and reconsidered, moved if needed, added and removed in an attempt to minimize overlap and condense the material to its essence (Schreier, 2012). In the end five different themes were created during the process of deconstructing the interviews, based on the theoretical framework and the research questions of this study (see Fig. 1).
Due to the broadness of the research questions, the themes were loosely constructed, and do at times overlap, since many of the comments mention different factors that affect the verification – often even in the same sentence (Tuomi and

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Thematic relating to research questions</th>
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| • When working with amateur images, what criteria do you/your organization have for choosing the images that will be published? | • **Source check:**
| o How do you check the authenticity of the images, and that they are not manipulated? | o How the respondents relate to the verification of amateur visuals and the need for it.
| o Other aspects of “good reporting” that influence the usage of amateur images? | o How the respondents exemplify how the authentication is done on a daily basis. |
| • How is the origin of the amateur visuals communicated? | • **Source definition:**
| o Is it important that the consumer is made aware of the origin of the image? | o How important the journalists feel it is that the origins of the amateur visuals are presented for the audience, and how this is done in practice. |
| o What strategies do you have for integrating or framing amateur images into the professional news reporting? | • **Risks with amateur images:**
| • What do you see as the largest challenges you face on a daily basis in your job? | o How the respondents discuss the possible risks connected to amateur visuals. |
| • Are there disadvantages, possible dangers or challenges with using amateur images? | • **Online/offline:**
| • Do the general standards of what can get published online and what can be broadcast or printed in offline editions differ? | o How the analog and digital media differ with regard to the use of amateur visuals, particularly when considering the verification of the original source and how it is represented. |

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**Fig 1. Interview questions and corresponding themes**
Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 93). The process of analyzing and interpreting was ongoing during the course of examining and condensing the material, and was finalized by a final interpretation of the text by looking at each theme separately. Hence a hermeneutic interpretation of the material was applied (Kvale, 2009, p. 109). The analysis of the material, which turned out to be quite vast even after reducing it to its essence, will be presented according to each theme in the following chapter. During the analyzing phase certain sub-categories were formed within the themes, and they will be presented in correspondence with the relevant thematic.

3.3.1 Validity and Ethical Considerations

The validity of this study is dependent on how well it “captures what it [has] set out to capture” (Schreier, 2012, p. 175). In an attempt to improve the validity of this study a certain phenomenological and hermeneutical approach of openness has been applied, based on the notion of an ontological cross-examination of the possible prejudices and pre-assumptions the researcher might have regarding the topic of study (ibid p. 96). To ensure the validity of this study I have tried to apply the approach of “continually checking, questioning and theoretically interpreting the findings” (Kvale, 2009, p. 123). The research method applied to this material pertains to an open form of validity, by attempting to reflect the phenomena this study set out to examine (ibid, p. 122).

The ambiguity that can be seen in the interview material might to a certain extent be linked to communication problems in the interview situation, yet the contradictions and uncertainties presented are presumably connected to the ambivalence and novelty of the subject of inquiry (Kvale, 2009, p. 13). In a sense this strengthens the validity and significance of the study, as it presents us with a projection of the daily life-
world realities the interviews aim at gathering and show a form of sensitivity present in the interview technique (ibid, p. 124).

Since the respondents were aware of what they were taking part in, and agreed to being interviewed, they have agreed to be part of the study (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 74). However, in an attempt to secure their anonymity their names have been omitted, and they are presented based on a coding system, which indicates which group of media they represent.

3.3.2 Reliability and limitations

Tuomi and Sarajärvi write in *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi* how critical theory does not view the observed world as a given constant, but as a product of one's own activity. Instead of objectifying the world as traditional theory does, critical theory admits that the researcher is constantly defining the object when it is being studied (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 37). As a journalist, and having similar experiences as the respondents in trying to cope with foreign and domestic amateur visuals, I have attempted to keep a high level of awareness of my risk of “going native” during the whole process of completing this thesis (Kvale, 2009, p. 29). Naturally, it is impossible to take my background into consideration when interpreting the material. Nonetheless, I have attempted to turn this predisposition into something that could improve the depth of analysis, especially in regard to using my existing knowledge of the field when ‘reading between the lines’ of the respondents’ comments.

The aim of this study is to mirror the current practices and approaches used by journalists regarding the verification and authenticity of amateur visuals, and the use of them in news media. Thus the study can only give a broad understanding of conceptual character, and not a deeper empirical insight into how the verification of amateur visuals
is carried out in practice in newsrooms. In addition it must be noted that the media companies differ in regard to how they work with images – in some cases the journalists do not select the visuals used, instead this is done solely by photo editors or in collaboration with the journalists. In other media companies the journalists are responsible for the whole journalistic process, including the choice of visuals and the verifying. This is reflected in the comments and it should be taken into consideration that these differences are not presented consequently in the interview material, and hence not thoroughly examined in this thesis.

With regard to the different media outlets that are represented in this study it is significant to observe the differences between the news outlets, depending on the characteristics of the media companies. There are differences in especially the online presence of the news media outlets, and how they support the other branches of the outlets of the media house, and/or work as sole entities. This is reflected in some of the differences in the replies by the interviewees and must be taken into consideration. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents represent a singularly online media publication. Only eleven out of 19 respondents specifically discuss differences in online and offline publishing, hence the conclusions drawn regarding this topic are derived extensively from the rest of the selected thematic material. This is possible due to the fact that when analyzing previous themes, the differentiation of online and offline material and the horizontal pressure of multiple outlets has to a certain extent been discussed.

As I have had the opportunity to use this material for my study, it has to be noted that I was not involved in the interview process or the creation of the thematics of the interview structure. Hence I have studied the transcribed material without having an interpersonal relationship with the respondents, and my interpretations and
understanding of the meanings of the life-world of those interviewed are based solely on the transcribed material (Kvale, 2009, p. 8, 11). The interview situations were in a sense asymmetrical, with a set goal for the interview questions and semi-guided into certain themes. However, this asymmetry has partially been counterbalanced due to the elite status of the respondents (Kvale, 2009, p. 70).

Maximum openness in connection to the process behind this study has been attempted. Regarding the reliability of the respondents and their approach to the subject of study, it is almost certain that due to these interviews, these specific respondents would most likely alter their approach to the subject and/or bring forth new aspects. On the other hand this functions as an indicator of the reliability of the results in this study.
4. RESULTS: A DAILY BATTLE BETWEEN NORMS AND PRACTICE

In this chapter the results from the qualitative content analysis of the interview material will be presented. Firstly the methods and ideologies connected to verifying amateur visuals will be exhibited; secondly, how the respondents consider providing the audience with a source for non-professional content is shown; thirdly, the possible risks the respondents connect with the use of amateur visuals is analyzed, and finally the differences in how verification is conducted offline and online are presented.

4.1 Managing journalistic accountability

The main goal for this study is to examine how the respondents relate to the importance of verifying the amateur visuals used in daily journalistic outlets. The most prominent question is hence related to checking the source of the amateur visuals, and evaluating the validity of that information. When looking at how the respondents consider the question of validity of the amateur visuals and the verification of their authenticity, the results show that there is a certain dichotomy in the ideological standpoint and the practical application. These differences stem from the clash of journalistic norms defining the profession with mundane issues such as a lack of resources and realistic possibilities for newsrooms to ensure authenticity first-hand (Broersma, 2010; Örnebring, 2013).

As one responder from HS put it after visiting a British media company, “I was green with envy when I saw that they had one person whose job was to go through social media and blogs”. It is safe to say that in most Finnish media companies few resources are attached to the verification or background research of amateur material – regardless of origin, domestic or foreign.
Nonetheless, there is a prevalent suspicion of user generated content, while the solution chosen in response is usually simply deciding not to use the material available – or to simply use it and leave the responsibility of verification and validity on the viewer or the provider of the material – often backed by a disclosing statement such as “cannot be verified”. These decisions are often backed by concerns in connection to quality: the respondents tend to agree that amateur images are often grainy, out of focus, and simply not of a high standard. As concluded by a journalist at HS:

> In a normal situation we trust and believe, quite blindly … when we sometimes [question the authenticity of the images] we think about it separately every time, do we believe this or not, it depends quite often on the quality – if it’s a miserable picture and we can’t verify the genuineness, then it’s useless to put it anywhere. (P6)

Some regard this as a negative trait, whereas others do not see the technical quality – the resolution, white balance, steadiness and so forth – as such important factors in deciding whether to use the material or not. This also varies depending on the purpose: using an image online, a video online or an image in a newspaper or on television. Whether an amateur image or video is published or not is connected to several factors, however, in the end it appears that the appeal of using an amateur visual is the ultimately down to one key feature – its newsworthiness.

Additionally, there is another paradox visible in the perceived responsibility of verification, and where it should lie – is it the responsibility of the individual media to do the verification, or does it lie with the seller of the image (i.e. the news or photo agencies), or does it perhaps lie with the author of the visuals? There are many aspects that affect how the authenticity of visuals is perceived, most of them relating to the validity of the claims of the images or videos. A particular phenomenon is the
ambiguity in many of the replies concerning the question of the necessity of crosschecking the visuals. Quite a few of the respondents reply to the question by indicating that it is implicit that the amateur visuals must be approached with concern, only to continue by pointing to how their trustworthiness mostly is taken for granted, and how rare it is to encounter disputable amateur material.

4.1.1 How newsrooms relate to authentication

The material shows that the respondents agree that amateur visuals cannot be used without some sort of vetting, however there are great differences in exemplifying how this is done in practice, in particular when it comes to the technical verification of the metadata of the visuals. Or as one newspaper journalist replied when asked about the criteria used for how to check the authenticity of amateur visuals:

I don’t know, if the photo editors look at them, if they can somehow inspect them, it’s the kind of technique, which in a way goes beyond my professional knowledge. Hopefully [they do]. (P5)

On the other hand, other respondents state the importance of the newsroom independently confirming the authenticity of the amateur visuals, especially when there is no professional visual testimony of the event portrayed (M1). The most common form of vetting is crosschecking that the event the images claim to present are corroborated by other sources, such as other media outlets, government officials, experts and social media. In the media outlets where it is common to use domestic amateur images the primary authentication is based on obtaining the details of the photographer and the time and location of the image or video. Even though many of the respondents appear to be quite unaccustomed to the field of authenticating amateur visuals, particularly foreign images, some mention very specific checklists for crosschecking the accuracy of the visuals. However, it is apparent that the success rate
of these checklists in most cases concerns domestic visuals where the sequence of verification is more straightforward, as exemplified by a news editor at MTV 3:

> We have this kind of own chain of command how we investigate if something has happened. It’s the police and the emergency dispatches and specific numbers that we then call and investigate. (M6)

However, there are certain respondents who provide detailed accounts of what should be either visible in the visuals, or possible to corroborate to ensure that the visuals can be used. A journalist from YLE points to how there should be certain telltale signs in the material that should be cross-examined, instead of only following the acuteness of the newsworthiness of the visuals. An example is given of how easy it is to make something look like a happening by simply “kicking at each other's feet”:

> There should be much more in the image composition, in addition to just the close-up of the clash, [one] should see scenery, a wide shot, what’s the space, so that [one] could identify certain buildings … if it is a known square, what the place is, national flag, all of these things, then [one] can start putting together that, hey, this is at least filmed in the right country. (M2)

In particular material that originally comes from social media outlets such as YouTube can prove to be difficult to authenticate, especially regarding the authorship of the footage. Nonetheless, these social media sites can provide information that enables backtracking the origin of the material. A world news editor at HS who is accustomed to following video material from Syria on YouTube traced the origin of one video, in an attempt to verify the location of the material so that it could be used for a screen grab that would be printed in connection to a story about the alleged occasion.

> … I don’t remember the name of the group but they were some Syrian activists that had a YouTube-channel … this time they had a website with a telephone number, I call there … and a person in the US answered the
phone who was able … to say from where it was, what the people were screaming, what the signs were saying. (P7)

However it becomes clear that in this particular case the journalist never knew the name of the person on the phone, nor was the position of that person validated. The same world news editor continues by explaining how Google translate is used as a tool for translating the website to be able to get a sense of what the footage is about, and how other media companies are used as support for using material that is difficult to verify. In this case The New York Times functioned as a metasource, as they had linked to the particular video, which gave the footage a stronger feel of authenticity and validity (Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 9).

Some wish simply that there were more metadata attached to the visuals, such as time stamps and metadata marks, to make the verification process more feasible (P4). As one journalist at YLE puts it (M2), there has to be sufficient data to back up the claim of a certain visual, such as time and place, so that the journalists can continue triangulating the factuality of the visuals by looking at other information available outside and inside the visual material to decide whether it can be verified or not.

We go through them, depending on the case, very carefully and in a quite big forum, usually the chief of the newsroom or the editor in chief take part, depending on the level, and then we think, can we trust the image and can we somehow corroborate that it’s really authentic, is it captured today, there’s always these things that [one] has to go through. (M7)

This respondent from the commercial channel Nelonen continues by pointing to how the traditional journalistic criteria of having at least two to three sources that corroborates the factuality of the claimed event should be applied to amateur images, in an attempt to ensure their validity.
4.1.2 Digital and analog manipulation

When considering the manipulation of images, it would seem the respondents tend to agree that such manipulation is extremely rare – simultaneously most can name cases where such alterations have happened. It is notable that most of these cases are from visuals that originally fooled the major international news agencies, and hence spread on a global scale before being found to be fraudulent. Some of the mentioned cases are the adding of video material from the movie Titanic to illustrate Russian submarines operating in the Arctic, the doctoring of images during the Israel-Hezbollah war, suspicions of manipulation in images from the war in Georgia, the assassination of the former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and so on. Importantly the respondents mention how these suspected and confirmed cases are not solely enhanced after the image or video has been captured, but also before. Hence there is a separation into digital and analog manipulation, which could be said to reflect the notions illustrated by Susan D. Moeller concerning the power the author of the visual wields over its inherent message (1989, pp. 14–15).

A few respondents expressed concerns regarding analog manipulation, especially in war zones, and named a few cases that had awoken their suspicions. One journalist talked about a case in Chechnya where it appeared the same body had been dragged around and posed in different positions for different images (T4), while another mentioned visuals where, for example, fighters ‘re-enact’ or simulate war situations:

…it’s hard to say what is manipulated and what is not […] when thinking about the phenomenon [during the Lebanese civil war] there was always the cliché image of men firing somewhere behind a wall and there is smoke rising […] and most likely the photographer had asked them,

“Come on, show some fight action,” … and that’s somehow crazy, acting war for [an amateur] photographer. (P1)

Added to the risk of engineering the actual visuals is the possible deception of the media and the receiver. In the case of the death of Muammar Gaddafi one journalist expressed the conundrum the newsroom went through when considering how they perhaps might be aiding the former leader if they broadcast the images of his assassination, since it was known that he had several lookalikes serving as his doubles (M3). As one journalist at YLE puts it, it is important to be aware of the aim behind the capture of the visual, and hence the amateur material should preferably be met with a certain form of suspicion.

And then there’s always the purpose-orientation, who is the counterpart, who is the photographer, and what did they want to say with it and what did they leave out of the photograph? (M2)

Another journalist at YLE points to the agenda setting of the authors of the visual material, and how the awareness of the purpose and possible partisanship should not be ignored, but rather acknowledged and respected (M3). In some cases there are practical examples of situations where a media outlet has received an image and started questioning the authenticity of the image, due to irregularities in either photo quality or what it portrays. Interestingly, a photo whose quality is technically too good can at times be a telltale sign that an image has been manipulated. One respondent mentions the case of an amateur image taken during the Eyjafjallajökull volcanic eruption in Iceland in 2010, which heavily disturbed the flight traffic over Europe for several weeks. In this case it actually appears the media themselves were trying to alter the picture to look less edited.
We doubted the picture and in the evening we called to Norway and asked and we also tried to call the photographer to ask what this is about. But we couldn’t reach him. It [the image] was the only one at the time, and we had doubts, if one looks at it carefully… we didn’t believe it. And then we did a little bit that, we weakened it, just, we were quite sure that, it… But it was still added to the newspaper as it was, even though we tried a little bit, because we kind of found two versions that we looked at online, we were wondering a bit. We tried to call, but then it went into the newspaper, but we did have doubts. (T3)

This example shows the prevalent inexperience in newsrooms in connection to dealing with citizen imagery, and a glimpse of the journalistic norm of crosschecking the authenticity of information. Coincidentally this comment exemplifies the rarity of newsrooms suspecting manipulation in visuals, and illustrates the dichotomy between trusting the local – presumably Norwegian – news agency that bought and distributed the image from a local photographer, and newsrooms independently setting out to investigate the authenticity of a visual by attempting to contact all parties involved. This case, as in most other cases where the suspicions of journalists have been raised, are connected to situations where there are only one or very few visuals from a certain situation. In most cases concerning foreign news there are several images delivered through the news wires, and as they are assumed to be vetted by the agencies, hence they are rarely suspected of being manipulated.

4.1.3 The elusive accountability

The issue of responsibility of the authentication of amateur visuals varies from medium to medium; there does not appear to be a consensus regarding the subject. Interestingly a few respondents actually question the importance of authenticating the visuals, and whom the responsibility should lie with, illustrating how the veracity of the visuals is of lesser importance than the message they convey. One respondent from a
commercial broadcaster argued that the responsibility for the authenticity of the visuals does to a certain extent lie with the photographer who sends the image and adds a claim of sorts to it, as long as the media outlet does not append any further information to it to ensure that all responsibility lies with the primary author (M6). However this reflects the “un-gated” publishing formats, where non-professional content is published as it is and where the photographer is mentioned in the caption.

Some of the interviewed do not see the verification as an actual issue that needs to be considered, especially if the material comes through an agency, which most often is the case concerning images from foreign conflict areas in particular. One example is the case of the crisis in Syria, where 89% of all visuals were transferred by one of the three major Western news agencies (Pantti, 2013, p. 7). The news media companies appear to be quite willing to assign a role of “image brokers” to the news agencies, acknowledging – and at times requiring – them to execute their power as gatekeepers (Pantti, 2013, p. 8). As a respondent from an evening newspaper states when discussing the need for authentication:

… in principle one can start checking them if someone wants to, but few here would probably start calling Syria and asking if one of those Abdullah’s were there (laughter), with their camera on the spot. But I don’t see it so much as our problem, it’s perhaps mostly a global problem, if this [kind] occurs. (T5)

Another aspect mentioned is how some amateur visuals at times do feel questionable, but the journalists argue that they do not have any other choice than to trust the news agencies, and assume that they have verified the accuracy of the visual material (P1). These results are in line with the analysis provided by Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013), where it becomes clear that the journalists are not at
ease with ‘outsourcing’ the responsibility to the news agencies; nonetheless it is a practical question limited by existing resources (p. 969). This phenomenon is illustrated by one evening newspaper journalist (T3), who implied that the sheer amount of images that the newspaper receives every day (around 5,000), makes it difficult in practice to apply a rigorous verification of the visuals in the newsroom.

On the other hand other respondents pointed to the disclaimers that the news agencies add to images that have not been verified, and the responsibility that allocates to the users of these images, i.e. the photo editors and the journalists (M2). Some respondents make it clear that the final responsibility for verification lies with the medium that publishes them, since any form of misinformation or falsification is reflected on the publisher/media outlet from which the public obtains it, regardless of the initial source. Thus the value of authentication is connected to the trustworthiness of the medium, as stated by a world news editor at YLE:

…because we are responsible whether it came from Reuters or from wherever, in the end we are liable for the accuracy of the information in our publications. (M1)

Added to this the world news editor states that due to this notion of responsibility, it would be an impossibility to provide direct access for users to publish visuals on their platforms, which implies a sense of governing the content through a form of gatekeeping (White, 1964, p. 162).

4.1.4 Confidence in agencies functioning as disclaimer

An important factor in the authentication process is the trust that the respondents show, both towards the international news agencies, the amateurs who capture the visuals as well as in themselves and their ability to spot inaccuracies. Even though many respondents can name a few situations where the major news agencies
have failed to spot inaccuracies or manipulation, they still appear to have a strong confidence in the agencies and deem them trustworthy.

One evening newspaper journalist argued that in questionable cases there should be a caption notifying the reader of the vagueness of authenticity and questioning the believability of the image, however if the visual comes through more than one news wire, or if it already has been published, it is rarely questioned:

But if some other news agency has [sent] it to us or published [it] then we usually use it without thinking. In addition [one] can add one’s own view; is this really like this … (T1)

By using news agencies as third-party mediators, and hence attributing “institutional legitimacy” to the visuals, a form of “authorization” is created that relieves the news media from responsibility and simultaneously emphasizes the “epistemic status” of the citizen visual and supports the credibility of the news media (Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 14–15).

Interestingly, this trust at times appears to take on an air of a relationship between a seller and a buyer, perhaps indicating how the modern market economy is starting to influence journalism. By purchasing the material from a seller, in this case international news agencies, some of the journalists presume that the responsibility for authenticating the material falls on the shoulders of the seller. This is also reflected in a reply by one respondent, who relates this to the expensive contract the commercial broadcasting company has with Reuters. A producer from MTV points to how the responsibility in the end lies with the news agency from which they purchase the service, particularly regarding news stories about foreign events:

…or for example this from yesterday from Syria, I’m not sure from which photo agency but I can check that quickly, but they have bought that
amateur [reel], so yes, then they have checked where it was filmed and who and how, because they always forward the information [about] who is the photographer, when it happened and so on. (M5)

This study unfortunately cannot address the legal implications regarding responsibility of falsified images or copyright breaches in any further detail. Some of the interviewees also mention that it is essential to trust the agencies and their professionalism, a notion that reflects the fact that they rely on the agencies to do part of the verification (P3/T3).

Beyond the apparent trust attached to the news agencies and their ability/responsibility to authenticate and verify the material they send to their customers, some respondents pointed to the ability they have, or their photo editors, to spot manipulation if it were to occur. As one evening newspaper journalist stated:

That would be visible by looking at it if someone would do something like that [manipulate]. That’s what I would claim. (T4)

This opinion stretches beyond digital manipulation to falsifications of visuals to encompass a notion of professionalism, in particular with regard to visuals that have been captured in Finland, by claiming that the journalists would be able to identify the location and authenticity of the images based on certain parameters, based on previous contextual and cultural knowledge:

… for example if [there is] some accident or some car crash then we do know what it looks like over there, if we receive an image of a fire then we instantly see if it’s from the mansion in Jyväskylä or somewhere from last autumn, somewhere from Ostrobotnia, or some fire in Seinäjoki. (M5)

A few respondents propose similar notions regarding specific international locations, however in both situations it is prominent that geographical knowledge and expertise regarding the visual clues of locations is the foundation for being able to draw
any conclusions regarding authenticity. An interesting aspect that a few respondents mentioned concerned the similarities regarding which amateur images are chosen by different news media. One argument for why this happens came from a world news editor at HS (P7) who stated that one possible reason might be the news agencies the image comes through. When certain amateur images are delivered by the news agencies with some forms of sources they appear to have a higher standard of authentication attached to them, compared with, for example, images where it is stated that they "cannot be verified".

4.2 Presenting the author – defining the source

There are several ways of dealing with amateur material when it is used in news media, and many of the ways are crossbred and modified according to circumstance, and do often mold together. Hence, it is difficult to discern how the respondents relate to embedding and embellishing, trust me-journalism and the outsourcing of verification (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011; Sjøvaag, 2011). Additionally, there are different views on the importance of naming sources.

However, there are tendencies that can be lifted from the interviews. In particular the separation of amateur and professional is seen differently depending on the use of the visual and the media outlet, similarly there are differences in whether this separation is important or not, and whether the audience should be made aware of the origin of the visuals.

R: I think it’s important. I don’t know why, perhaps … of course from the perspective of the ethics of professional photographers and so on, we just want to separate, this is amateur [material] … yes I think it’s important to be made aware of who has taken it.

Q: Do you add the source or the photographer to the image?

R: Mostly yes. (M4)
These comments from a chief of online news at MTV illustrate how defining the sources of amateur visuals is a question to which many newsrooms do not give much thought, hence resonating the multimodal remediating strategies newsrooms tend to apply to amateur visuals in order to attest to their validity and importance, as theorized by Saugmann Andersen (2012). How amateur visual sources are defined is of interest due to the aspects of both truthfulness and ethics: when using professional images, it is standard that the author of the visual is named in a byline or in a caption – naturally depending on the copyright. Additionally, captions shape the understanding conveyed to the audience regarding the content and the meaning of the visual (Pantti, 2013). Overall there appears to be an uncertainty concerning the importance of using bylines and their content. They are indeed considered important, yet it appears the importance is dependent on situation and media outlet, as exemplified by a newsroom chief from IS:

Yes, yes, of course [we] have to tell. Overall the bylines are [very] important. Sometimes [we] forget them but that’s usually when it’s a photo from a news agency and it feels like, if it reads up there in small text AP or AFP is quite irrelevant. But if it’s an amateur image then we try to tell it in a highlighted way. Not necessarily with the small byline but maybe also in the caption or the story. (T4)

This incoherence can reflect the liquidation of the journalistic and legal standards that is caused by the increasing speed of production in the modern media landscape. Furthermore it can be an extension of a form of “trust me”-journalism where the audience is expected to trust the media (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 105, 109). Approximately half of the respondents are of the opinion that it should specifically be mentioned if an image or a video is taken by an amateur, and not a professional photographer. It should be noted that it is unclear how many of the
respondents are personally responsible for the bylines or captions of the amateur visuals that are used in the media outlets they represent.

4.2.1 Attracting the audience

When studying how the respondents reply to the question of the necessity of signposting that an amateur captured a visual, there are several factors that play a role. One component is the attraction of the visuals, which is especially poignant for media outlets where non-professional content is of the essence for gaining a competitive advantage, by attributing to them a status of “prized asset[s]” (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 110). In these cases the driving motivation for stating that the picture or video is taken by an amateur is connected to encouraging more readers or viewers to provide the outlet with amateur content. For these products, mainly the evening newspapers and commercial broadcasters, being clear about the origin of the image or video is linked to attracting further content by showing that user generated material is used, and that the readers should not feel that they send the images “in vain” (T3).

This probably correlates with the fact that most of the amateur material presented in these media outlets appears to be provided by domestic, named sources that are fairly easy to corroborate. Or as this journalist at an evening newspaper concludes regarding why it is relevant to provide the information that an image is captured by an amateur:

I haven’t thought about it so explicitly, but in my opinion there’s the inclusive aspect to it, why we put the reader image, that you can also be included in creating a news item … I think it’s a form of positive inclusion, other than that a good image is a good image. (T2)

In addition to attracting viewers and readers to deliver their own content to the media, there is the element of “clickability” of an amateur visual, which further explains
media companies' enthusiasm for trying to persuade audiences to send them images or videos. The fact that journalists are in such a manner involved in the ‘marketing’ of the product itself can be seen as an elongation of Charlie Beckett’s idea of “new media problems”, where the responsibilities of the newsroom are being altered, and the erosion of journalistic autonomy by loosening the division between the editorial departments and the advertising departments (Beckett, 2008, p. 47; Örnebring, 2013, p. 39).

According to one evening newspaper journalist working with amateur footage, videos taken with mobile phones draw interest due to the feeling of “reality” which is generated by the low quality of the material and the haphazardness of the content (T1). This comment reflects the results of the study conducted by Pantti and Bakker (2009), that shows how journalists connect notions of “perceived ‘authenticity’” with the composition and technical quality of amateur images (p. 482). It also points to the findings of Sjøvaag (2011), showing how jittery, low-quality pictures add testimonial value and function as “visual clues” for the viewer, highlighting the witness status and coding the material with an emotional narrative (p. 91). The journalist from the evening newspaper regards the duty to acknowledge the sources of amateur videos as lesser than the sources of amateur images:

It’s not as strict. I don’t really know the rules how it should be but we don’t for every video put the [origin] … And then if we put that it’s amateur video we usually state it also because it instantly gives the video a lot of clicks. Of some reason it interest a lot. If it’s a mobile phone video or so then people usually assume that wait a minute this is taken by chance this is happening for real [,] if they watch it. That’s also a good lure. (T1)

Furthermore, if an amateur visual is chosen by an outlet that normally uses professional visuals, the news value of the image or video itself is often connected to the mere fact that it is provided by a member of the audience of the particular outlet.
Hence, this is seen as a reason for ensuring that amateur visuals are marked as such, and not merely as an obligation of credit for the author, or as a form of ensuring authenticity. On the other hand there is also the notion that the author of the visual is of lesser importance in comparison with the content of the image.

4.2.2 Content before authorship

Another factor playing a part in defining the sources of amateur visuals appears to be its evidential value, which becomes particularly relevant when looking at foreign material, where the possibility for verification by newsrooms is often limited, and where the actual content of the visuals is more significant than the characteristics of their authorship.

Well the relevant thing is really that despite if it’s professional or amateur, the value in itself, as I think, when talking about readers’ images it is probably the information that is there that is significant … when putting it simply. (P3)

This statement from the chief of the world news desk at HS points to how the information value of the visual is paramount. This tendency to focus on the content and not the author is to a certain sense connected to an unwillingness to focus on the type of visual, whether professional or amateur. Instead the visuals are viewed as a form of evidential marker, providing information about – and presence at – an occasion that is deemed newsworthy, hence echoing the notion that visuals function as support for the journalistic narrative by guaranteeing objectivity and providing “truth-value” (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2008, p. 7). Thus the amateur visual often functions either as a source itself, or as authorization for the newsworthiness of the story (Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 14). As a newsroom chief at YLE states, this is in a sense also connected to the
ownership of the visual, when considering the need to provide the viewer with an author:

… we don’t tell it since we buy [them]. I don’t think it is significant. It can even lesser the bearing of the image … if we say that this “is a reader's image”, that makes me primarily think that it’s somehow a bit weaker than a real photograph, although … that’s how I see it. (M1)

Here the journalist attaches the notion of “realism” to professional images, illustrating how there is no real consensus regarding what is deemed more worthy as evidential material, amateur or professional visuals. Additionally it could be seen as mirroring a certain form of suspicion regarding the reliability of amateur visuals.

Overall the notion of naming the source can be condensed to a desire to report copyright ownership rather than authorship, by stating the news agency from which the image or video is bought but perhaps omitting the name of the actual author. That notion is crystallized in the viewpoint that in the end it is irrelevant who captured the video or image – as long as it is authentic. This pragmatic view is visible in some of the comments, and is also applicable to amateur visuals where the authentication is difficult:

We usually try to say that the veracity of the image cannot be verified, but in a way the [fact] that it is an amateur image … if it really is the image it is said to be, then it does not really matter if the [author] is an amateur or a professional. (P6)

However, this standpoint by a journalist from HS only refers to the importance of the authenticity of the images, but does not acknowledge the ownership or origin of the visuals.
4.2.3 Outsourcing the responsibility

Adding a caption to amateur visuals highlighting the difficulty of ascertaining accuracy is particularly used in situations where the news agencies add a disclaimer to the material, stating that the agencies do not take responsibility for the accuracy of the content and that it cannot be verified. According to some of the respondents the urgency for being particularly thorough with defining the primary source is heightened when the visuals portray events that are in some way questionable or shocking. This points to how the graveness of the events portrayed in the visuals affect the perceived importance of accuracy and the desire to outsource the responsibility of veracity by using transparency.

A world news reporter from HS pointed to the importance of marking the source so as to enable the readers to judge for themselves the believability of the visual:

Our principle is that if we use amateur images, which in our case often are hard to verify, then we want to say it clearly in the caption so that the reader will understand … and think that, “OK, now it’s a little bit up to me to decide whether this is correct or not,” we don’t present it [the image] in the same way as authentic as if it … came from a more reliable source, it’s a form of honesty towards the reader, that we try to tell the source in the images. (P5)

A world news editor from HS explained how the sheer amount of video material from a certain event functions as an implication of the truthfulness of the actual event. This form of “mass legitimation” can occur when the volume of dissemination of an amateur video or image in itself in becomes a form of verification of an event (Firdaus, 2009, p. 10).

Although it would seem that the actual cases where images or videos have been manipulated are rare, the fear of manipulation still lingers when it comes down to
stating the origin of the visual material. Using wordings such as “cannot be verified” in the captions functions as a precaution and disclaimer ensuring a form of exemption from responsibility. However, as exemplified by the aforementioned world news editor at HS, there is also a form of combining the responsibility of the author of the image, the publisher and the viewer by delivering facts for the reader to weigh up when dealing with possibly doubtful visuals.

… well if AP has said that they cannot verify then we do repeat that, sometimes we repeat it anyway. And we try to make it clear that if it is a image grab from a YouTube video, then we say who claims to be behind it… well it does feel important [to state the origin]. If it comes through some YouTube channel, then I feel we have to say that. To give [the reader] the possibility to judge what it is about. (P7)

Another respondent from a Nelonen mentions how for example material from YouTube has to be marked particularly clearly, as a form of ensuring a fair representation for all parties in cases where the accuracy of the visuals are not completely verified, and to ensure that the ownership is presented:

They should be in a continuous part …clearly marked, that this is not our own, or from any news agency, [one] definitely has to show on the screen, that this is YouTube or amateur or so … it is unconditionally important in that case, we have to tell it, especially when there’s this, can we really be sure and so on…(M7)

This form of clearly marking amateur visuals is a form of embellishing the status of the visuals, whereas it appears as other representatives from other broadcast media companies prefer embedding the material. The sources of the visuals are then presented – if at all – with title graphics or in a voice over.

On the other hand the often quite low technical quality of the amateur visuals is also understood as a form of disclaimer by some of the respondents. It is assumed that
the viewer should recognize the amateurishness of the image or video by the telltale technical inadequacies, hence relying on the media literacy of the audiences and the force of trust me-journalism (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011; Singer, 2008). This appears to be a phenomenon specifically connected to broadcasting, where the differences between professional and amateur video material are usually quite visible. A journalist from YLE exemplifies how much responsibility for understanding the visual material is attached to the audience:

We should probably emphasize [if it’s amateur or professional] more in our voice over, which visuals it is about … sometimes we mention it in our voice over, that this is taken with a mobile phone or so, or then we mention in the voice over that to this country or in this situation no professional journalists were [able to get] on location, from which it can directly be deducted that it’s amateur material. Of course it’s important to convey the message to the viewer. But I think that we trust very much the reasoning of the viewer and that he or she can deduct from the visual material what kind of material it is. (M3)

It appears there are differences in how the source of amateur visuals is reported, not only based on media outlet but also connected to many other factors such as the quality of the material, the respondent in question and in particular from where the amateur visual is selected – if it comes from a news agency that labels it as non-verified the media outlets will mostly follow suit.

4.3. Amateur visuals as both risk and opportunity

When the journalists discuss the biggest risks connected to using amateur visuals, and how they are changing the media sphere, it is interesting to see that they often tend to talk about issues surrounding the use of user generated material – such as the increased haste of the media cycle, the increased risk of errors and the lack of professional visuals. This again reflects an underlying characteristic of the news media,
which penetrates almost all decisions and that the respondents resonate with – in particular the ones representing the evening newspapers: the importance of the news item overrules all other concerns. Nonetheless, the fear of untrue visuals: faked, manipulated or staged material; and related issues such as the difficulty of asserting factuality, spotting manipulation or ensuring legality are considered to be the principal risks. On the other hand there is also a notion of giving the news item a feeling of evidence and reality by using amateur material.

4.3.1 The faster news cycle

A common denominator among the respondents is the changing character of the news cycle, mainly connected to the digitalization of media production and the free material on social media. A chief of the newsroom at IS mentions how the media previously simply had to wait until a professional journalist was on the spot, and how everything was “done more thoroughly back in the day”:

> Nowadays it has of course changed more to that the pictures pop up, and then we have to do the process of pondering on if this reliable or not and so on in retrospect. (T4)

A journalist at YLE pointed to how the biggest presumed risk is the accuracy and authenticity of the material, and how this risk is increased because of the large quantities of visual material and information rapidly spreading on the Internet, creating a situation where it is difficult to ascertain what is trustworthy. Furthermore the situation is made even more difficult when the material coming from the news agencies is marked with disclaimers disavowing their responsibility for the validity of the visuals. According to the respondent from YLE, the only valid competitive edge the traditional news media has over the raw material on the Internet is the epistemic “journalistic authority” they can attribute (Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 2; Örnebring, 2013, p. 37):
… [that time] there was a huge amount of material on the web and we had to somehow compete with what we knew. Well we can compete with knowledge, and that we know more than what the video clips on the Internet show. We can tell more, and … condense it and analyze it more than a raw clip online. (M3)

This particular respondent stated that even though YLE has not yet had to deal with false material, it would most likely be something they one day would have to face. It appears as though the news media in certain situations is caught in a form of impasse; a take-it-or-leave-it situation, where the choice is to either have no visual material at all, or to go with amateur visuals that are often not verified, validated or in any way reliable and where using these visuals might in fact be playing politics on behalf of someone or something. The “tyranny of real rime” (Bruno, 2011, p. 6) implies a change in traditional news journalism, creating a situation where a product cannot always be evaluated before it is published (Witschge and Nygren, 2009, p. 45). However, it appears this is presumed to be “better than nothing at all” as stated by the editor-in-chief of the world news desk at HS, resonating the notion presented by Saugmann Andersen that excluding available visuals would reduce the credibility of the news outlet (2012, p. 7). A world news reporter at HS points to how in the beginning they chose to avoid using non-professional images:

…if [the news agencies] write “alleged”, then they in practice are saying that we don’t know either, here’s the image, take it or leave it … in the beginning I think that we didn’t put them [in the newspaper], but then when it started looking like there were no other images coming from there and we had to somehow add images, then we started using the amateur images because we didn’t have anything else. (P5)

Almost all respondents mention in some way how the criteria of critically assessing every bit of information and amateur visual is a must, at the same time as the
pressure of time is being elevated. A few in fact mention how they see themselves as gatekeepers or filters, with a mission to try to assess the accuracy and truthfulness of the material deemed relevant, performing their *editorial judgment* as part of their professional authority, working against the clock (Örnebring, 2013, p. 43). This situation is further complicated by the lack of any forms of guidelines or policies regarding how to handle amateur visual material, as shown by the larger study involving the Finnish respondents analyzed in this thesis and their Swedish counterparts (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2013, p. 969). Some of the respondents also mention the risk the increased speed has on accuracy due to the time pressure some journalists are forced to work under, as exemplified by a newsroom chief at MTV3:

... there are several cases where a journalist in a panic splashed some image [to the story] which has been the product from some totally wrong company and then the company calls “well now it’s about Atria’s meatballs and here is our Saariosten meatballs [in the image]”. This is one of those where [one] has or be extremely sharp to not end up here … (M5)

This example, albeit not concerning an amateur visual, illustrates how a quite mundane issue can turn into a serious mistake, and points to how the need and desire for proper research is elevated when there are real threats of legal consequences. When talking about the faster news cycle some of the respondents bring up the increased pressure on online publishing, where speed is assumed to be of essence for a competitive advantage, and how this phenomenon puts at strain on the newsrooms to ensure the minimization of errors.

4.3.2 Balancing reliability and audience trust

The changing media circuit seems to be holding sway over the news criteria. The increased speed of the news cycle is ratcheting up the pressure on news production,
putting more weight on the need for media outlets to be competitive. Some of the respondents reflect on how the ongoing technical changes, such as the increased use of mobile phones and the ability they provide to instantly capture and send visuals, are changing the decisions and evaluations made in the newsrooms.

One fear is that of losing trustworthiness, and hence one of their competitive edges as news media outlets. As the editor-in-chief of the photo desk at HS states, “our trustworthiness … is our lifeline”. According to the respondents, one way of attempting to preserve trustworthiness is to remain vigilant with amateur material, triangulate the sources and be clear about acknowledging the restraints the material create for journalists since the amateur visuals might only show one side of a story. This reflects the worry of lacking objectivity when using amateur visuals – other worries include that of copyright infringement and that the images are faked. The newsroom chief at IS sheds light on the complexity of the process:

We have to in this end do the deliberation … and then describe it very carefully and in detail … where this image came from and so forth. Then a smart person will understand from it what it’s about. … we don’t necessarily want to say that the authenticity of this image is slightly questionable … but on the other hand if we know it’s doubtful then we of course won’t publish it. The readers help us correct [mistakes]. (T4)

Hence the ideal of being the heralds of impartial, verified, curated material is present among the journalists (Sjøvaag, 2011, p. 83. Bruno, 2011, p. 6). Among the respondents there is a sense of leaving the definite responsibility for deciding the truthfulness to the viewer or reader, after the journalist has done the evaluation of news value versus the authentication of the visual, and taken the possible measures to ensure the highest possible validity of the information at hand. These can be situations such as assuming that the viewers should understand that governmental video material – marked
with a logo in one corner – could be partisan in its nature, as in the case of using material by the Syrian governmental news agency, SANA. In a sense this can be seen as “collaborative verification”, where the determination of truthfulness becomes a communal, interdependent, process (Hermida, 2011, p. 5), and as a form of using transparency in an attempt to achieve authorization and hence insuring validity (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 101).

However, there is a strong ambivalence connected to amateur material. On the one hand, it is seen as unreliable; on the other hand it is seen as bringing a form of closeness and reality to news reporting. A world news editor at HS crystallizes the ambiguity of amateur visuals by pointing to how taking risks and making decisions is part of the news media business:

Of course there is the risk that we somehow get fooled. But we just have to take responsibility for it. It is still such a valuable channel, that every decision has to be weighed. (P7)

Many of the respondents use the word evidence when they talk about the value of amateur visuals. The editor-in-chief of the photo desk at HS argues that the evidence-value of amateur images can in fact work in the product’s favor if it is harnessed in the right way, and by ensuring that the media company is not deceived. The newsroom chief at MTV3 argues that Finnish journalists have perhaps been too careful in their use of amateur material, since the benefit of non-professional material outweighs the possible risks. The respondents show a great deal of trust both towards the low risk of amateur material being in any form corrupted, and towards the readers and viewers and their ability to discern possible falsehoods – and their trust in the media companies. Interestingly, one journalist at YLE poses the argument that since viewers have a jaded belief in the media's trustworthiness, utilizing amateur visuals can in fact bring more
authenticity to news reporting, due to the innate feelings of realism contained within non-professional material. This notion, and the idea that amateur visuals function as testimonials, echo the idea of the image as the “unimpeachable witness” as described by Moeller (1989, p. 9).

According to one journalist at YLE the way in which the amateur visual is incorporated into the news item is significant for how the viewer will perceive the material. By not giving the amateur visuals too much weight, but by embedding it into other professional video material the value of the visuals are heightened, and a perception of inclusion is signaled to the viewer. Nevertheless, the perplexity of verifying amateur visuals by using traditional journalistic means is proving difficult, particularly in regard to international material:

… the information about, for example, casualties … point to the same, small groups and then the reader might assume that he has checked it from many different sources, when he checked this from the BBC and from HS, but both of their sources … the traces lead to the same origin, and that’s a pretty bad situation. (P5)

This comment reflects the findings of Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen (2013), which pointed to how media is increasingly leaning towards “cover[ing] the coverage” by using “second-hand” sources (p. 8). On the other hand, there is still a prevalent feeling among some that the main risks of amateur visuals are filtered out by the news agencies that deliver them to the news outlets. Added to this is an interesting notion connected to triangulation; namely the trust in large news media outlets and their ability, or responsibility, to authenticate – organizations such as the BBC or CNN are assumed to have a larger array of employees authenticating and verifying events, stories and visuals (M4). Hence this becomes a form of ‘peer-reviewing’ that grants validity to
the statements and visuals (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 108). The editor-in-chief for the photo desk at IS describes how this trust toward the news agencies and the global news media companies has to an extent been born out of necessity:

> We never know who sends, if something would come from [abroad]. One has to remember that a piece of news is news. From our perspective it’s based heavily on that the international news agencies have done their part of the deal, and can tell us who took [the image]… the biggest risk is that something comes from [abroad] which is not true. That is the most frightening risk. (T3)

In the end the value of news photography and news is heavily connected to the importance of a happening being deemed such that it must be told to others. The editor-in-chief of the online news desk at IS condenses the importance of images in journalism by stating that “in the end it’s insignificant who captures the image”, since it is the content that matters.

### 4.4 Amateur visuals offline and online

The normative journalistic criteria for authenticity and verification online or offline appear to be identical among the respondents, when analyzing the comments concerning the differentiation between material published online and in the traditional outlets. Some consider the authentication of online publishing of even larger urgency than in the traditional outlets, notably this is the case in media outlets where the online product has a large importance for the media company. However, many respondents do mention how online publishing is a matter of “pushing a button” in comparison with traditional forms of media publishing. As stated by the chief of the online desk at IS, the risks are even bigger online than offline:

> As a matter of fact it is actually even more important online, it spreads further. The problem with online is, the picture can always be deleted, but
in principle it never disappears from there …that’s why [one] has to be
downright attentive, and we are. Before we push the publish button it's
always good to stop and think. (T5)

This notion that whatever is published will remain “hanging” somewhere in
cyberspace is common; indicating that the ability to make corrections after an erroneous
article or visual has been published is not to replace the need for accuracy in the first
place. However, some respondents point to a form of complacency indicating that the
material, which is published online, is treated with a lesser routine of verification
compared to material that would appear in their traditional outlets would be submitted
to. There appears to be a notion among the respondents that errors occur more
commonly in online publishing. As one respondent from IS concludes, the speed with
which the online content changes is so fast that the errors appear more frequently,
compared to the paper version where the draft of the newspaper is checked by “tens” of
people every night before it is sent to be printed. The lack of a physical deadline
removes the valuable time needed for taking a last look:

…[online] are exactly the same criteria as in the newspaper. The only thing
online of course …the publishing happens in an instant … when you push
the publish button, then it’s there and you can’t remove it. Otherwise you
have to remove the whole news item. (T3)

Moreover, many of the respondents feel that the criteria for publishing news online is
different compared to the news values that dominate in their traditional outlets. One
respondent from HS comments on how publishing online is done more
straightforwardly, even though the risk of having erroneous texts remaining somewhere
in cyberspace, since the articles online can easily be corrected due to the instant
technological access. It appears as though the ‘freedoms’ to publish are superfluous in
online publication compared to print – although why this threshold is different for
online compared to offline is not explained. It is, however, insinuated that this might simply be due to the limitless space in online publishing.

Another difference in the criteria for newsworthiness mentioned by the interviewees is connected to the online format: “what is interesting online is not necessarily interesting at all for example on television” as stated by the photo desk producer-in-chief at Nelonen. Or as a world news reporter at Aamulehti concluded, “it’s possible that online [one] wants … more action, that there is more happening and moving in the visuals”. Another point is that of how the image or video creates the news by being an item of news value in itself: “the amateur visual is the news”, according to the chief of the newsroom at MTV3. Furthermore there is the element of speed: if the amateur visual is depicting something that just happened or is occurring at that very moment, there is an added bonus of realism and urgency.

The online world gives the impression of being the epitome of amateur visuals with regard to media outlets, both in regard to drawbacks and benefits, as articulated by the editor-in-chief of online news at MTV3:

The biggest challenge with the online world is that people want everything here and now, this minute, they want the information and the images … whatever happens we have to instantly be able to publish as much as possible, people expect that. We are in a hard competition with the evening newspapers about who has the information out first. And the next competition is about who has the first image … this is a competition in speed, but also about having correct information. (M4)

On the other hand the amount of amateur visuals that passes across news desks appears to still be so low that many respondents, particularly from the newspapers and the public broadcasting company, do not feel a necessity to focus manpower on
authenticating amateur visuals – especially when they come from news agencies and if they are being used by other big news media outlets.

4.5 Summary: Newsrooms battling to retain a journalistic norm

The results imply that there are differences in how media workers and media outlets relate to the verification of images. Additionally, there is a discrepancy between the desire to achieve trustworthiness and truthfulness, and the shaping of a professional identity for journalists. The main results from the qualitative content analysis on the interview material can be summarized as follows:

1. High reliance on the trustworthiness of the amateur material, especially if provided by recognized domestic sources or international news agencies.

2. However one can discern a reluctance to dig deeper into the truthfulness of the material, despite concerns regarding the authenticity and objectivity of the material.

3. This reluctance appears to be connected to newsroom working methods, limitations in time and workforce.

In the following chapter the results will be further analyzed and interconnected with the theoretical framework of this study.
5. DISCUSSION: AMATEUR VISUALS IN THE NEXUS OF JOURNALISM

The ambivalence and ambiguity among the respondents in relation to how amateur visuals should be verified could arguably be seen against the background of the status of journalism as a profession. The overlapping of topics relating to verification that is present in many comments reflects the complexity of the practical journalistic process. As there are neither written unified standards, nor obligations – apart from the legal restrictions concerning issues such as copyright or defamation – the ethical codes of journalism become what sets professional journalists apart from any other form of communicators (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2013, p. 969). This is also reflected in the material by illustrating how different the ideals and practices are between the different media outlets, and even between journalists in the same newsrooms. Adding to the confusion is the question of where the responsibility lays – an interrogative saturated by conflicting viewpoints.

5.1 Managing the zeal of journalism and reality

Indeed, the notion of journalism as a watchdog functioning as the Fourth Estate is perhaps being eroded as the practical aspects of the profession are changing. As argued by Schultz, the changes have in some cases pushed “the responsibility for the Fourth Estate” onto the individual journalists and editors, and away from the media companies as a whole (Schultz, 1998, pp. 15–16). Hence it could be argued that the power that the Fourth Estate traditionally has wielded is transferred from the media as a system to the individual news items, and the journalists who produce them. How then, is this position of power transformed when the authenticity and validity of the content cannot be verified?
Although some respondents are less focused on the importance of the ethical aspects of journalistic reporting, the majority of the comments imply that there is still a strong notion of heralding objectivity, accuracy and balance, hence echoing the key words of the ‘social responsibility theory’ (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000, p. 63). In the creation of a professional norm for journalism the reporting of ‘the truth’ is a key factor, which goes back to the historical beginnings of news reporting. This ‘mythos’ of journalism is based on a sense of duty and role in society, and is paramount for establishing journalism as a profession, but because of this role in society it could be argued that it will be forced to follow the changes within the society of which it is a part. Due to the limited possibilities of presenting a scientific form of truth through journalism, this urge to deliver veritas to the audience is operationalized through accuracy in reporting, which relies on the verification of facts.

However, as the results from this study reveal, the examples of this operationalization are not inherently connected to first-hand verification, rather they are managed through several strategies and procedural steps that are applied in order to arrive at a notion of authenticity. The reluctance to do independent verification – or acceptance that it is not taking place – appears to be a result of practicalities in news production, in particular time limitations caused by limited work force (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2013).

The results show that the cases where actual first-hand verification has taken place have certain similarities, in which either one or several of these aspects are present: a) a large newsroom b) an urgent news story connected to a scarcity of visuals c) a domestic situation. Instead of performing the verification in the newsroom, the responsibility of keeping up the journalistic norm – particularly concerning foreign
material – is allocated to the layer ‘above’, i.e. the news agencies that the media outlets purchase visual material from. This is particularly interesting when looking at the cases of manipulation the respondents name, as almost all of them are related to global phenomena where the source of the falsified images or videos were in fact the same news agencies that these outlets purchase their visuals from. When concerning domestic material, the ‘truthfulness’ appears to be connected to a high reliance on the honesty of the authors, perhaps portraying a certain cultural standpoint specific to Finland. On the other hand it is also a possibility that it simply reflects a notion that since so few proven cases of manipulation have been uncovered, the importance of thoroughly verifying the visuals is understated.

5.2 Visuals as venturesome testimony

This study is limited to focusing on the verification of amateur visuals, nevertheless it is meaningful to note how these visuals, however unverified or suspect, are often endowed with testimonial status. Regarding non-professional material journalists have a higher tendency to “attribute epistemic authoritativeness” to visuals in particular, relying heavily on the mirroring of reality that photographs and video are assumed to innately encompass (Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 2). However, this notion of ‘reality’ in images presents a precarious situation as visuals can hide several layers of information and be subject to both analog and digital manipulation – a predicament many of the respondents relate to. The results indicate that there are certain cases where it in fact might be deemed preferable to select visuals that may contain propaganda, as a form of ‘supporting the underdog’, a possible form of digression from the ideal of showing several sides of a story.
As presented in the theoretical framework, iconography often takes the lead when newsrooms deal with images and the focus remains closely attached to the perceived content of the visuals, exemplifying the omnipotent visceral and emotional status of images (Kalb and Saivetz, 2007, p. 59). This can be seen as a tangent of utilizing the combined power of photography to both perfect nature and uglify it, and hence use the invitation to “an active response” connected to visuals as enticing the audience (Sontag, 2003, p. 81).

As attested by the results, it appears that some of the respondents worry more about the validity of the content of the visuals rather than the authorship and copyright, a phenomenon exemplified by the lack of concern for giving the photographers credit for their material when making the decision as to whether to acknowledge sources. Visuals are often treated as news items on their own, separately from the story they are connected to, based on a combination of attributes such as evidence value, newsworthiness and quality – or as suggested by one respondent: ‘a good image is a good image’ (Saugmann Andersen, 2012). These factors are combined with didactic values, as in the case of presenting atrocities or ‘immoral’ content, to create a toolkit for decision-making concerning what to publish and what not.

5.3 Filtering as expertise

Simultaneously the 24-hour news cycle – perhaps better named the “now”-news cycle since it is detached from a linear perspective – is upping the ante for journalists, making it increasingly difficult to uphold old routines. The distinction between the editorial office and the advertising office is becoming more diffuse at the same time as the differentiation between “fact and opinion or entertainment and public affairs” is becoming opaque (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000, p. 78). Comments
regarding attracting audiences by using amateur visuals in a timely manner, mostly online, exemplify how pressure is being exerted on journalists and how this creates a rift between pre-digital professional norms and the diffuseness present in the information era.

The challenge between “getting it first and getting it right” is altering the roles of journalists as issue framers, agenda-setters and gatekeepers (Williams and Delli Carpini, p. 78–79). It could be argued that there are some media fields where the only remnant of these roles is that of selectors, curators or intermediators (Bruno, 2011; van Dijk, 2012). Hence a situation where “intermediation [is] the only faculty separating rumors from authoritative accounts” might present itself (Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 17). However, depending on the media – and perhaps its economical position and management policy – the agenda setting and issue-framing have become even more prominent as journalists embrace their increased responsibility to filter and judge the increasing amount of information. This “shifting towards the retention of a traditional gate-keeping role towards UGC”, as proposed by Hermida and Thurman (2008) is also aligned with the “risk-averse nature of newspapers and reflects editors’ continuing concerns about reputation, trust and legal issues” (Hermida and Thurman, 2008, pp. 11–12).

As Mark Deuze (2008) argues, journalists might be losing control of the “flow of (meaningful, selected, fact-checked) information in the public sphere” and becoming just one of the “many voices in public communication” – a situation that removes the journalist as the main intermediary between consumers and the information providers, public institutions and businesses (p. 12). Instead the journalistic role might be reconceptualized to mediating non-professional content (Singer, 1997; Singer, 2010).
The notion presented by Singer (2010), that “everyone can be a publisher, but not everyone can be a journalist”, is reflected in the inclinations among the respondents (p. 128), and is connected to the ideals of professional credibility and authority, which in turn are connected to the raison d’être for a journalistic product from a financial point of view. This concept of “trust” in the media product is connected to the operationalization of professional practices to ensure trustworthiness, which has enabled the “institutional legacies and strengths” of journalistic news media (Örnebring, 2013, p. 47).

The increased pressure to “get it first” is pushing newsrooms to “report first, verify later” and to pay more attention to the content of a news item, and the value it pertains based on several variables, such as newsworthiness and clickability (Singer, 2010, p. 82; Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen, 2013, p. 9). This becomes particularly poignant when looking at the use of amateur visuals that arrive at the news desk, occasionally stamped with disclosures regarding their origin and disclaimers of responsibility. As the need for verification on one hand is increasing, as a form of establishing legitimacy and credibility (Hermida, 2011, p. 5), and as speedy publication on the other hand is viewed as a strategic asset, the methods for attempted verification become multimodal.

As illustrated by the results, the jury is still out on whether verification is more acute online or offline – the complacency based on the notion that flaws and errors can be fixed later is challenged by the standpoint that whatever is published will forever be stored somewhere, regardless of the corrections on the websites. Interestingly, almost all respondents argue that the verification of content in the main product was of greater
concern than that which is published online, reflecting a longstanding notion that the online publication is ‘additional’.

5.4 A myriad of measures to uphold authority

In addition to the reshaping of the journalist into a “reporter-curator” in the face of the “journalism of assertion”, the use of second hand sources, metasourcing by using elite sources as verifiers for non-corroborated information, and mass legitimation – both from social media and other news media, and both in regard to the textual and visual information – the notion of the “critical mass” of “pack journalism” might interestingly in fact become accentuated (Bruno, 2011, p. 64; Kovach et al., 2007, p. 87; van Dijk, 2012, p. 39; Crouse, 1979, in Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 5).

As exemplified by several studies, the coping mechanisms connected to tentative amateur visuals, and non-professional content overall, differ greatly from medium to medium (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011; Bruno, 2011; Newman, 2009). The narrative strategies, or governance, employed by journalists and editors range from embellishing to embedding, using disclosures and disclaimers, linking, corroborating the facts through the audiences, collaborative verification through crowdsourcing in social media, and outsourcing the verification to the audience or performing the evolution process of the information in front of the public, hence employing transparency as a strategic ritual (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011; Bruno, 2011; Hermida, 2011; Newman, 2009; Sjøvaag, 2011; Witschge and Nygren, 2009).

Other forms applied are those that relate to adding validity and legitimacy to information – by *metasourcing* elite sources, or peer-revoring the facts by looking at other institutional media – another form of mass legitimization (Andén-Papadopoulos
Considering visuals in particular, they are also used both as *sourcing* and as *authorization* for stories – the former functioning as visual proof of a claimed event, the latter being attributed to “professional third parties, rather than to their creators”, hence “bolstering [their] epistemic authority”, removing their amateur bias and “denying authorship” (Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 14).

All of the above are techniques used for upholding journalistic authority, some more conscious than others. Many of these strategies are represented in the results of this study, and the interviews present an array of mechanisms applied, dependent on media, source of the amateur visual, whether it is domestic or foreign etc. From the results of this study it can be proposed that there are several directions that media outlets employ in their presentation of amateur visuals, and different levels of saturation of source knowledge needed to arrive at a stage where the material can be published. A prominent distinction is that of embellishing and embedding, which differentiates the media outlets that focus on bringing forth the amateurishness of the visuals from the ones that choose to subdue this distinction. The methods of transparency and outsourcing of verification could also be seen from the perspective of a changing norm of professionalism, where the objectivity norm based on reporting the truth is perhaps facing a paradigm shift. As stated by Michael Schudson (1995), media does not only obtain power through “declaring things to be true, but … [by providing] the forms in which the declaration appear” (cited in Broersma, 2010, p. 27).

A paramount notion is that of recognizing truth as a social construct, shaped and formed through “news [as] a social construct that constitutes reality”, whose importance is based on the choices of the media professionals that choose them based
on a previously “culturally and ideologically determined set of selection criteria” (Broersma, 2010, p. 25–26). The understanding of the message in the visual is dependent of the concept of “we”, and the position this “we” has in relation to the image determines what reality or truth is conceived from it (Sontag, 2003, p. 7–11). Hence, the decoding of the amateur visuals and their analog and digital authenticity is based on having matching social and cultural premises, a situation further challenged by the increasingly rapid global interaction online.

Perhaps as a result of this, there is a notion that the audience accepts the limited possibilities for verification. This points to a change that is already occurring in praxis and imposing itself on the practice of the journalistic norm, hence perhaps altering “the deal” between the media and the audience (Bruno, 2011, p. 39). Thus the goal of arriving at what Joris Luyendijk calls a “verifiable picture of reality” might be challenged by what Nick Davies (2008) argues is a media structure that “positively prevents [journalists] from discovering the truth” (p. 28; Luyendijk cited in Kester, 2008, p. 505). The question is whether the adage of journalists being ‘heralds of truth’ is an applicable, or desirable, notion in the 21st century – can the “performative discourse” of journalism, based on persuading readers that the interpretations of journalists can be transformed into truth, be a valid construction for the profession in the future (Broersma, 2010, p. 26)?
6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how Finnish journalists relate to the verification of amateur visuals, and how the performance of journalism as a profession is reacting to increased amounts of non-professional material in a changing media environment. By applying qualitative content analysis to 19 semi-structured interviews with Finnish journalists from different positions and media companies, and by grounding the empirical material with a theoretical framework reflecting both seminal communication theory and contemporary interdisciplinary studies a dialectic approach was enabled.

The empirical material is derived from a larger research project, *Amateur Images: A comparative study on how audiences are shaping photojournalism*, directed by Mervi Pantti in 2011–2013. From this large multimethodological project conducted in Sweden, Great Britain and Finland, only the interview material with Finnish media professionals was selected for this thesis. By focusing on the comments and questions related to verification, the relevant material for this study was lifted from the semi-structured interviews. The material was coded and grouped into a thematic scheme for analysis, based on the research questions and the thematics present in the original study.

The study is descriptive, non-generalizing in nature, and attempts to understand the processes of newsrooms in a modern media environment by asking journalists about their daily professional work, and by comparing these statements with the theoretical background relating to the research questions (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 74). As this particular study was not conceived of at the time of the interviews, and I was not involved in the construction of the framework for the interviews or present at them, certain limitations and problems occurred in the analysis phase. The results are to an extent limited by the fact that the original research had a much larger scope than this
study, hence certain follow-up questions and clarifications that would have been posed if the study had focused solely on the research questions of this thesis have not been performed. Thus this study becomes quite broad in nature. However, to conduct a thesis based on interviews with this many respondents would not have been possible, hence this opportunity to analyze such a large sample of material from this theoretical perspective is nonetheless relevant in the light of the certain weaknesses inherent to a post-hoc study.

By examining the material from a viewpoint of four different themes – source checking, defining source authorship, observed risks with amateur visuals, and differences in verification online or offline – the study set out to answer the research questions: how is the importance of verification of amateur visuals perceived, and how are these visuals authenticated and presented in the media outlets of the respondents, and in what ways is the increasing amount of amateur visual content having an impact on how journalists perform their profession?

The results indicate that by employing several “strategic rituals”, the newsrooms attempt to enhance the authenticity and validity of the amateur visuals in a situation where actual verification simply isn’t feasible – or perceived as necessary (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011, p. 101). The results from this study point to how authenticity seldom is attempted through first-hand verification, and more often through governance of the risks. By using several strategies such as adding disclosures in both narrative and captions, using meta- and elite sources, mass legitimization, outsourcing responsibility both to the audience and the sellers of media content, media outlets accumulate factors and methods that legitimize the claims of the visuals. The results show an inclination towards perceiving the visuals as containing testimonial
value, indicating a connection to the idea of visuals portraying “the world outside” as part of the “mirror metaphor”, hence lowering the threshold for assuming integrity and authenticity of the images (Lippman, 1922, cited in Saugmann Andersen, 2012, p. 6.; ibid). Even as this study is not comparative in nature, it is still possible to see that the results appear to show a certain discrepancy in the ways methods and strategies are applied to amateur visuals, related to the type of media outlet and size of the newsroom, hence indicating that target audience and financial issues possibly play a role. These results echo those found by Pantti (2013), when studying how large European newspapers construct visual narratives of conflicts.

The most prominent indication of this study points to how Finnish journalists continue to place high value in authenticity, truthfulness and the authoritative position of journalism as a profession. However, it is apparent that the idea of performing first-hand verification on amateur visuals is in fact a quite new phenomenon, a reality supported by the limitations of existing theory on the topic. Interestingly, the respondents feel that the biggest risk of using amateur visuals is connected to them being falsified, incorrect or invalid. At the same time, the need for active verification is not perceived as acute, based on the scarcity of cases where ‘manipulation’ or false facts have been uncovered. On the other hand, several respondents indicate that they feel that it is “only a matter of time” before their news organization will be involved in publishing ‘untruthful’ visuals, and there is also a conviction that the situation concerning corroboration of material was “better before”.

This supports the judgment presented in Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) that the phenomenon of resignation is a narrative concerning how journalists relate to the verification of amateur visuals. However it could be argued that the
underlying reason behind this feeling of resignation is not in effect the emergence of non-professional content, but rather the lack of possibilities to conduct background checks and authentication. The journalists do still abide by a notion of journalism as a profession created by a desire to report the truth, no matter how performative, socially constructed or utopian such a *mythos* indeed might be.

Thus the inability to respond accordingly to a changing media environment creates strains for journalists that adhere to norms created in a different society. There is a profound confusion with regard to *how* this verification of especially foreign visuals should be conducted, in addition to the question of *who* should perform it. From the few examples that present first-hand verification it becomes apparent that these forms of practices are neither time-effective nor highly successful. Hence, the verification is operationalized by applying several forms governing strategies, which can alleviate the possible connotations of insecurity that amateur visuals may contain (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2011). As journalism is a profession that in many countries is shaped only by diffuse specifications and not easily defined, the ‘right or wrong’ way of labeling what is journalism and what is not is based on interaction between the audience and the producers of journalistic content.

The difficulties facing modern newsrooms are in a sense a continuum of an ongoing struggle. The main problem connected to upholding journalistic authority while incorporating non-professional content was defined almost a decade ago, in a book that argues that in order to survive, journalistic objectivity must move towards a more scientific form of verification:

> The trouble with this kind of journalism is that it is expensive, time consuming, and requires a level of skill not much in demand from a system
that conceives of news media as mere platforms for attracting eyeballs to ads. That model puts a premium on low-cost attractants. (Meyer, 2004a)

This status of being at an impasse of zeal and reality is consequentially creating a situation where the responsibility for verification is becoming outsourced beyond the newsroom. Either this is done through the in-house strategic methods, as shown in the theory and results of this study, or it is unintentionally transferred to other media companies such as the international news agencies – or intentionally to new verification intermediaries such as Storyful.

During the process of writing this study several suggestions for further study have been revealed. Through the combination of my personal experiences in newsrooms and the increasingly dense body of work regarding how economic factors and (perceived) changing audience behavior is influencing the decisions made in both newsrooms, and on a managerial level, raise questions concerning what journalism will be defined as in the future. The importance of authenticity connected to the journalistic ethos can be seen as part of a business model with a competitive edge, increasingly based on the question: ‘what can we deliver?’.

As the competitive pressure on media businesses is increasing, a binary battle seems to intensify between two directions: credibility through accuracy on the one hand, and a premier position through speedy publication on the other. The struggle to establish journalistic authority through credibility is increasingly being challenged by a media model based on speed of publication, which derives its competitive edge from being first rather than being accurate. Traditional news media outlets appear quite often to attempt to master both directions – a seemingly natural evolvement of a process inherent to the news media business. This notion of a ‘third model’ is supported by several of the comments in this study, by pointing to how the urge to be both accurate
and premiering breaking news is altering the processes and performance of the profession by further straining the daily work of the newsrooms. This binary struggle between legitimizing existence and building a competitive edge is no longer reserved only for private media – it also appears to increasingly influence the public broadcasting companies. A topic of interest is how this change impacts the role of media in supporting democracy within civil society through knowledge distribution, and the continuation of its role as the Fourth Estate.

The lack of professional policy for dealing with amateur material becomes evident when examining the different methods for coping with amateur material, visuals in particular. At the same time, the online world of news is the new natural home for amateur visuals. In an era when everything else seems to be untrusted or skewed, visuals become the totem of reality – as the colloquial saying goes, ‘pics or it didn’t happen’. As presented by both the theoretical framework and the interview material, journalism is living in an era of change that can have profound impacts on society – and vice versa. However, as argued by Witschge and Nygren (2009) “journalists foresee a viable role for themselves in the future: producing trustworthy, credible news.” Particularly in a time of abundant information of variable quality online, journalism is more relevant than ever (p. 54). To be able to uphold its authoritative position “journalists need to get comfortable with risk, transparency and collaboration” (Little, 2012). Nonetheless, the strategies applied particularly to non-professional content need to be articulated and examined to ensure the viability of the performative norm of journalism as a profession.
7. REFERENCES


the 5th of April 2013 from


