How to work with Amateur web content?

Fact checking, metadata, document value. Security of the informant

Main Issue:

The use of amateur web content needs to be assessed against the risk of using false, propagandistic or offensive information, or risking the safety of the informant.

This tipsheet discusses what journalism students should learn about content obtained from non-professional sources.

This tipsheet contains recommendations derived from point n°5 of the State Of The Art Report (the ten tips guide), p. 17:
"Schools of journalism have always worked with media professionals and companies. However, they should extend cooperation to non-media professionals associated to non-profit organizations, NGOs, associations and social networks. Through citizen journalism, participatory journalism, social networks, news is also produced by ordinary citizens, political activists or amateurs. The Arab springs or other recent social movements show that video documents made by "non-professionals" circulated in the social networks but were also broadcast on mainstream media, as they were the only source of information. This trend must therefore be taken into account by the schools of journalism as it questions the way to train newsmakers".

Keywords:

Non professional contents, user generated content, ethics, violence, images, informative value, security, amateur, violence, images, metadata, fact checking

Short description:

Professional journalists share the journalistic sphere with bloggers, citizen journalists, and social media users; traditional media enterprises are converging and new actors invest the market (like Google), while different media are integrating.

The question toward our students is to ask if ethical standards are determined by a specific technology or new concurrent actors, or if these standards have to be the unchanging center of the profession.

The following sections of recommendations synthesize main principles when dealing with amateur content: evaluating the informative value of amateur web content; checking the authenticity of photos and videos; and maintaining the security of the informant.

To do	Topic	Teaching method
Encourage and teach the student to identify the source documents from social media	Source of the document Verification User generated content Amateur web content	**4 questions to teach:** • Who is the author of the tweet? • Who is the holder of the Facebook account? Is it possible to interview him or her? • Is he/she the source the author of the images? • To what extent can we rely on this Facebook or Twitter account?
Provide students a reflection on the informative value of the document/video	Assessment of value Amateur web content User generated content	**If a video comes from the web, the student will have to ask himself basic questions like:** • Is this document propaganda? • If it is propaganda, is it useful for the audience to see it? • What is the principal informative value of the document? • Has the video been made under constraint? (hostages, for example).
Encourage and teach the student to analyse the context	Verification Validation User generated content Amateur web content	**3 main issues:** • Are well known local informants able to confirm information? • Check the picture elements (places, decor, clothes...). • Does the image shows really the place the source is talking about? Example of questions you can ask the source according to Alex Murray, journalist at the BBC, UGC Hub: *"You ask the same questions that you would ask anyone talking the story: what's the weather like today where you are? Something you can check out [...] where are you standing? What can you see from there? What are the streets' names? [...]* *"(Alex Murray, journalists, UGC Hub, BBC, see the reference below).* The verification is based on "a combination of several things: *interview someone who tells the story, check the history in official documents if they exist (court documents, police data, figures, etc.) and get details for institutions, press releases or press conferences. " (Agence France Presse Newsletter) (cf. bonus material).*

To do	Topic	Teaching method
Give your student technical skills about metadata	Metadata Verification Amateur web content	Learn how to differentiate metadata associated to a picture and metadata from the web and a picture that comes directly from a smartphone. (Metadata is information associated to photos and videos: time, format, date when the picture was taken.) Use specific software. Tools like http://tineye.com are useful to check if a photo has been modified by browsing the web for similar copies. New tools are coming up that can add watermarks or signatures to photos and other documents. One example is https://guardianproject.info/apps
Give special treatment to violent documents (hostage videos/murder of hostages in video)	Violent content Ethics	**Some advices:** • **Skip video:** if a video has been made under constraint, use just selected pictures (stop motion) and not the entire film. • **Protect the reader** by a system of disclaimers (instead of the photo a black screen with a message explaining the content is violent).
When you teach to your students to use testimonial content from the web, you have to maintain the safety of the informant: physical security, political security	Safety, Physical security, Political security.	**Tips for protection of the source:** • Be sure that the source in a safe place. • Be sure that the method of communication is safe. • Encourage the source to use networks with a good amount of encryption • Encourage using the different layers of data security on social networks

Recommended resources	Topic/Learning outcome
BBC Academy Main questions to be asked to provide context and check a video: http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20130702112133524 Written advices on the same topic: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/blogcollegeofjournalism/posts/bbcsms_bbc_procedures_for_veri How to maintain the safety of an informant, by Trushar Barrot, Assitant editor, UGC BBC Hub: http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20131113144258981	On the web site of the BBC Academy (school of journalism from the BBC), you can find very interesting videos from the BBC UGC hub that explain how journalists work with content from the web. The BBC UGC hub is a specific service, funded by the BBC, that collects web content from amateurs, testimonials, videos, photos. These journalists check them and eventually decide to give them to BBC journalists in order to use it in their reports
Agence France Presse newsletter (in French) about information from social networks: http://www.afp.com/newsletter/francais/communication/guidelines.html	The document explains how to use information from social networks: • How to check a social network account? • How to quote a statement form a social network? • How to use twitter as an alert?
Process of certification http://ticetsociete.revues.org/1183	This link leads to a French academic study done on the process of certification on collaborative content conducted in the agency Citizenside (a French news agency which buys and sells amateur photos and videos to professional media)
From the blog "AFP Making of": How to appreciate an informative value about a web amateur content: http://blogs.afp.com/makingof/?post/couvrir-l-etat-islami-que-afp#.VHdDdyg3gSJ What to do with violent contents which are informative (terrorists propaganda for example): http://blogs.afp.com/makingof/?post/que-faire-des-photos-effroyables-d-irak#.VHdDOig3gSJ	The blog "AFP Making of" is written by some journalists from Agence France Presse: they give some testimony about their practices on images (in French) Quotation from Michèle Leridon, director of information, AFP: *"We take a lot of precautions.* *First: Always identify the source of the images, and explain that they were received in a very particular context.* *Two: Do not enter the game of staging. That is why, unlike others, the AFP has released no videos of hostage beheadings. We have published a very small number of still images from the videos trying to make sure that they are the least degrading possible. We show the victim's face in close-up, face the executioner, and the face of the hostage presented as the next victim."*
The Verification Handbook: http://verificationhandbook.com	As the name states: A handbook (for journalists) on how to check and verify information, sources, people.

Recommended resources	Topic/Learning outcome
Guardian Project: https://guardianproject.info/apps	A project devoted to the development of apps for privacy/security purposes, such as the watermarking of images, emails and documents.
TinEye: http://tineye.com	Example of a service that can show if a photo has been modified; it does so by browsing the web for similar copies of that photo. News organisations like AP and BBC use that service, amongst others.
Tungstene: http://www.exomakina.fr/	Example of a product that helps revealing whether a photo has been modified; it does so by deeply analysing the data of the photo. It is being by e.g. the French news agency AFP.