

All by Myself?" Journalists' Routines and Decision-making in Gathering and Publishing Death-related Visuals

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyse journalists' routines and decision-making in gathering and publishing death-related visuals. Empirical data were collected by analysing visuals published in two cases: the death of a teen, and a person who had a mental illness. We conducted eight in-depth interviews with people involved in publishing the visuals. The data showed no guidelines in the newsroom of how journalists should act when covering sensitive topics. Although producing or publishing the visuals depended on various beliefs and professional norms of people involved, the reporter as the last link in the chain had to take responsibility for the visuals. Yet, reporters usually did not get to choose how the visuals were produced. The lack of instructions and internal agreements led to relying on routines that did not consider the ethical aspects of covering sensitive topics.

KEYWORDS: News sociology, routines, death, narrative, photography, journalism, journalists

Introduction

Death is an inevitable part of everyday life, not only do we have personal experiences with it, we also witness deaths via news making it a subject close to us. We see photos, videos and read or hear about deaths by accidents, wars and the deaths of celebrities. But visually, how much should the audience see? The bodies? Blood pools? Or only the crashed cars? Crumpled metal?

There are discussions on the topic of whether visuals of the dead should be published at all (e.g., Lewis 2016), also, what kind of visuals cause outrage among the audience (e.g., Kim and Kelly 2010). Thus far, the studies have mostly focused on the audience perspective, less on the editorial decision-making process. Yet, analysing the process is especially vital in converged newsrooms, where journalists lack an efficiently routinised workflow, which influences their overall decision-making (Ivask 2019; Ivask, Siil, and Laak 2017). This article looks at who chooses such visuals, how they choose and on what grounds they publish them. Research into how journalists make their decisions when gathering and publishing visuals on sensitive topics within a converged newsroom is limited, we aim to provide more information on the topic.

In-depth and detailed knowledge of routines and decision-making helps the newsroom create instructions for the journalists who have to publish sensitive or even gruesome visuals. These guidelines help journalists to understand the newsroom management's expectations, yet not strip journalists from the autonomy of deciding on what ethical grounds they make their decisions. This study refers to photographers and reporters both as journalists and differentiates between reporters-editors and photographers when needed. This study can also be used by journalism students in training when discussing the decision-making process and routines. There is a high probability that their future job touches upon covering such topics. Additionally, understanding how death-related visuals are selected and published is increasingly essential, as they are used for attention (Geise and Baden 2015; Zelizer 2010).

The term "death-related visuals" is used in the article as a cover term for both photos and videos that portray people dying, being deadly injured or dead. The cover term is necessary, as in some cases journalists published screenshots from a video next to photos taken on the scene. We do not analyse the semiotics of the visuals or the event itself.

The News Production Process, Routines and Ethics

To analyse journalists' decision-making in publishing death-related visuals, we rely on research about routines in the news production process. We look at routines as patterns, and repeated actions that are based on knowledge and experience (including skills) gained to carry out journalistic work according to professional ideals, norms and standards (Berkowitz 1997; Konow Lund and Olsson 2016; Shoemaker and Reese 1996). Routines provide a structure to news production, which is useful for analysing the overall process and decisions made in producing and publishing death-related visuals. In this subchapter, we pay attention to reporters' routines as they are the ones in charge of publishing the stories and visuals.

It has also been noted that journalists, in case of critical or new situations, fall back on their everyday routines (Berkowitz 1997; Konow Lund and Olsson 2016; Tuchman 1973). Routines are necessary for both the journalist as well as the newsroom. Firstly, journalists with developed routines are effective in their work and less likely to suffer from accumulative stress (Ivask 2019). Secondly, routines are

necessary for the media organisation to function and meet the set deadlines and goals, e.g., publishing a newspaper on time (Hackett et al. 2000; Schudson 1989; Tuchman 1973; Witschge and Nygren 2009).

This article discusses routines in a converged newsroom, where journalists are expected to work both for the newspaper and online outlet. This distinction is important because, in a converged newsroom, journalists have to adapt their routines to different mediums' demands when publishing news (Ivask 2019). This shift has brought on several problems; one is that journalists struggle with deciding what and where to publish, because of the difference in schedules (Ivask, Siil, and Laak 2017): newspaper's deadline is once a day, the deadline for the online is "now" (Pavlik 2001). We consider deadlines to be one of the pressurising factors for journalists in deciding how to behave when covering a sensitive topic.

News production routines within the converged newsrooms in Estonia tend to remain separate according to Ivask's (2019) research. She explains that news production for the newspaper starts with (a) journalists recognising an event, seeing it as newsworthy, (b) journalist presenting the idea to editors, who decide if it is worth publishing (considering newsworthiness and ethics); (c) after the editors approve the idea, journalists decide what kind of materials and sources to use when packaging news; (d) then the story is edited, (e) printed and published. Journalists might not have an editorial sifting process or editing online; they have full autonomy in deciding how and what to cover, they also take full responsibility (Ivask 2019; Singer 2004). For online, the journalist (a) recognises an event worth publishing, (b) decides what kind of materials to use when packaging and editing it and (c) publishes it (might revisit and revise it after publishing). We look at the behavioural patterns within the news production phases Ivask (2019) brings out in her research. According to studies, journalists are influenced by the newsworthiness of the information, the public's overwhelming necessity to know, production routines and economic considerations, additionally organisation's understandings, rules and norms (Borden 2007; Deuze 2008; Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc 2018; Lee and Tandoc 2017; Strömbäck, Karlsson, and Hopmann 2012; Borden 2007).

Ethics play a significant role in covering death and publishing death visuals. Yet, there is a lack of common ethical grounds within the Estonian media industry on covering death and publishing death-related visuals. There is one direct statement in The Code of Ethics for the Estonian Press (1997) about reporting death: a journalist must consider the newsworthiness of suicide and suicide attempt. Other statements touch on covering sensitive issues indirectly, such as, journalism must not cause unjustified suffering to anyone unless there is an overwhelming need for publicising; newsrooms cannot make the journalist do anything that goes against journalist's beliefs; victims and underaged criminals should not be identified. Following the journalistic code of ethics is accepted by most significant newsrooms in Estonia, including the daily Postimees that is in the focus of this study. The Press Council supervises adhering to the code of ethics, and if a violation is found, then the organisation is accountable, not the author of the story. One problem with the code is that it was accepted by the professional community in 1997 when online journalism was just starting to develop, and authors say that it needs to be revised.

There is a separate Code of Ethics for Press Photographers, provided by the Estonian Association of Press Photographers (The code of ethics ... 2011). Photographers are expected to follow the code voluntarily, and it is meant as a set of guidelines, no one observes adherence to it. Among more general guidelines, such as being mindful, avoiding stereotyping, and aiming for diversity in perspective, it also calls photographers to treat people with respect and dignity, and avoid intrusion and support vulnerable subjects. The code of ethics states that victims and participants of a tragic event have the right to be

protected from the public and the moments of mourning can only be captured if the public has a justified need to see them. The overall concept of the Code of Ethics for Press Photographers falls together with Morse's (2014) thought that a photographer or a videographer has to find a balance between two values – human dignity and the public's right to know.

Publishing Death-related Visuals

When talking about death-visuals, we also look at how the visuals have been taken or gathered as photo-videographers' choices of angles and shots influence directly editors-reporter's choices later on (Bock 2011; Shoemaker and Vos 2009).

Visuals are essential in evoking emotions and capturing attention; additionally, visual handwriting that is captivating helps enrich the news story with dramatic elements and emphasise pathos. When looking at the news, not only do photos convey pathos, but the writing also has to present spectacle with wordplay, conflict and struggles to create an emotional connection (Grabe and Zhou 2003). So, reporters and photographers have to work together to publish news that grabs attention.

In a multimodal message, both visuals and text play an essential role in constructing or recreating reality (Bignell 1997; Kress and Leeuwen 1996), hence a photographer is a responsible creator. Just like a reporter follows a code of ethics and other journalistic principles, a photographer has its own set of values and professional principles to follow, e.g., a good photo is direct, straightforward, factual and realistic (Rothstein 1979). It has to find and show tragedy, conflict or a particular emotion.

Decision-making, however, is not just a part of the publishing process (Genette, Ben-Ari, and McHale 1990), if we use the term "news narrative" (Fiske 1987), the construction of the visual narrative begins on the set. It is a matter of choice: what is portrayed on the visual and what is left out. Photographers are always on a hunt to require the best visuals, and decisions made during hunting rely on photographers' choices and empathy (Flusser 2012; Linnap 2006). Meaning that photographers, while being the ones whose primary decisions create the content, to begin with, lead us to believe that they should be critical decision-makers in later publishing stages as well.

Photographers, who are in charge of providing the visuals can remain anonymous when they are on a hunt for visuals, as they do not have to be physically close to the object while attempting to take a close-up shot, they can use lenses or zoom on the camera (Thorsen and Møller 1996; Yorke 1990). Meaning, photographers do not have to make themselves seen and recognised by the person they photograph.

Many studies have indicated that visual journalists feel inferior, less important than other journalists or they are not included in journalistic decision-making (Bock, Lough, and Fadnis 2017; Čísařová and Metykova 2020; Lowrey 2002) even though photo- and videographers most likely have double "trained judgement" (Daston and Galison 2007) because of a combination of being the skilled operator of technology and an expert visual interpreter. The cameras still provide visual evidence and collapse the distance between the event and the viewer – therefore, images will still retain a prominent place in news's epistemology (Carlson 2019).

However, the audience might accept photos as credible and true without thinking about how the photographers' choice of tools (depth and angle of field, etc.) is determining what is seen and what is left out of the frame (Bissell 2000; Bock 2011; Schwartz 1992, 1999). Additionally, photos represent things that exist and express the point of view and judgement or evaluation of journalists or

photographers (Sontag 2006). The meaning is never fixed. It also depends on the context and the viewer's subjective eye; therefore, visual images are always a collaboration and are decoded by "existing personal experience and knowledge and wider cultural discourses" (Pink 2007, 82; Azoulay 2008). However, it seems arguable whether photographers, journalists, and editors share those discourses and value sets while making decisions in sensitive situations.

Photographers' decision-making is influenced, for example, by the situation and the context, also what they want to say with the visual and how much of the case or person they want to show. For this they have a variety of shots they can use, for example, the wide shot is used for a broader context or addressing the surrounding environment; medium shot lets the viewer explore the action and body language, close-up shots are used for emphasising the emotions, extreme close-ups, however, should be used with caution because of their powerful effect: showing tears, crying grimaces (Boyd 2001; Bowen and Thompson 2009; Monaco 2000; Thorsen and Møller 1996). However, an emotional visual might not always be ethical. Bock and Araiza (2015) also point out the duality of roles: photographer as a journalist and photographer as an artist, who has artistic freedom in interpreting the event.

Besides choices regarding perspectives and shot sizes, there is an element that can be out of photographers' control: physical access to the scene or event. Unlike reporters, who can gather information via phone calls or e-mails, photo- and videographers have to be physically present on the scene to be able to produce their body of work (Bock 2008; Schwartz 1999). Or as Morris (2002, 9) puts it a "photographer must ... be in the right place at the right time. No rewrite desk will save him". So, although journalists might not admit to or see their part in journalistic decision-making, they are directly connected to material received from the scene. As described by different researchers: photographers' decisions influence the decisions made in later choosing and publishing visuals.

Selection of Cases

We selected two cases from the national daily Postimees (circulation: 38 000 hard copy) to be studied. The newsroom and journalists received e-mails, hostile comments online, and social media about being "unethical" or "inhumane" when publishing the events' visuals. There were even disagreements inside the newsroom. Photographers did not receive any negative feedback. There are three national dailies in Estonia; two compete in the overall national news category. One is a tabloid. We chose one national daily to look into the cases, as we were able to map all people involved in the publishing process of visuals that received a lot of negative attention.

These cases make it possible to analyse routines and reasonings among two similar, yet different cases. One event occurred out of the blue and journalists and photographers needed to decide while working on the scene; the second event – funeral – was known to happen beforehand. To make the news comparable, we chose the first news published online and in the newspaper in both cases, so altogether the four articles' visuals. We did not analyse follow-ups or further journalistic investigations about the situations. We were interested in how decision-making occurred when publishing the first news while trying to get the scoop.

Case 1: "the Police Shot the man, who Gestured with the Knife on Vabaduse Square"

The first case concerns a shooting in Freedom square in Estonia's capital Tallinn. A psychologically disturbed barefooted man walked around in the Freedom square and gestured with two knives. The police shot him in the chest area, and the person died later in the hospital.

Firstly, the news was published online, and its heading was “Photos and Videos: the Police shot the man, who gestured with the knife on Freedom square” (published 31.10.2017). The first newspaper news about the case was “Man killed with a single shot by a police officer securing his partner” (published 01.11.2017).

Postimees published a passerby’s video of the moment the man was shot, in addition to a gallery of 65 photos that showed mostly the police, detectives and medical personnel in action. There were photos of the knife on the ground, but no images of the body.

There were four photos in the newspaper that illustrated the narrative of how the event took place. Three visuals were screenshots from the passerby’s video; on the one, you can see the man moving towards Freedom square with knives. On the others, you can see the man lying down on the ground after receiving two bullets in his chest and his body being put in the ambulance. One smaller photo on the page is taken by the photographer, on which you can witness the forensics collecting evidence.

Case 2: “Mourners Said Their Goodbyes to Murdered Nastja”

The second case concerns 15-year-old Nastja, who was presumably murdered by her boyfriend. The story shocked the Estonian public as there had not been a case of a young teen being murdered since the middle of the 1990s. The event took place in a city in Northern-Eastern Estonia – Kohtla-Järve.

The first online news published was “A gallery: mourners said their goodbyes to murdered Nastja” (published 19.04.2018) and the first article in the newspaper was “Mourners said their goodbyes to murdered Nastja” (published 20.04.18).

Postimees published a gallery with 45 photos that showed the funeral, grieving family members, friends and attendants of the funeral. One photo was presented in the newspaper, and it was a photo of grievors around an open casket showing Nastja’s face. The news published in the newspaper was a copy of online news (slightly edited). The photographer took all of the photos that were published both online and in the newspaper.

By looking at these two cases, we aim to analyse reporters’ routines and decision-making in gathering and publishing death-related visuals. For that we propose three research questions:

1. What are the routines in publishing and gathering death-related visuals among journalists and photographers?
2. How do journalists and photographers decide what kind of visuals they gather and publish?
3. How do journalists and photographers react to the negative feedback they receive after publishing death-related visuals?

Data Collection and Analysis

We carried out semi-structured in-depth interviews with people involved in gathering and publishing the news events’ visuals. They were photographers Liis Treimann and Ilja Smirnov, the head of the PVD Erik Prozes, reporters Kadi Raal, Karel Reisenbuk and Uwe Gnadenteich and layout designer-editor Ellen Laagus. We refer to the participants by their names as they asked for not being anonymized.

The interviews were carried out face-to-face. Four different kinds of interview plans were designed, depending on the position of the interviewee. We carried out eight interviews: two interviews with the head of PVD Erik Prozes. One interview lasted for about 50 min.

The interview consisted of four parts. The first part of the interview focused on the interviewee's role in gathering/publishing the death visuals. The second part focused on how much the interviewee had autonomy in choosing and publishing the visuals. The third part focused on describing gathering/publishing the visuals. The fourth part focused on analysing the aftermath of publishing the visuals.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed by qualitative content analysis. The approach was inductive, the codes were generated when analysing the data. After the text analysis, we carried out a cross-case study, where we looked at both cases and compared the results.

It is important to note that one of the researchers was an insider-researcher, she worked for the daily Postimees when carrying out the interviews. Via inside-researcher, we managed to map out the participants involved in publishing the visuals, making it possible to focus the study more precisely on people involved in choosing the visuals. So, some of the reporters, although being authors, were left out of the sample.

Results

We present results from interviews explaining the phases of gathering and publishing the visuals and decision-making. The results are presented in the order of before gathering the information (case 2), gathering information, publishing and coping and criticism.

Case 1: "the Police Shot the man, who Gestured with a Knife on Freedom Square"

Gathering Information

The reporter Uwe Gnadenteich and photographer Liis Treimann stumbled across the incident saying that they were on their way to another event but saw emergency vehicles and started following them. Bock and Araiza (2015) talk in their study about the zone journalists-photographers work in physically, but in this case, neither photographer nor the reporter had any information on the "zone" they were about to enter. They arrived on the scene when the ambulance drove off with the (then) injured man and their next steps relied on the fact they did not witness the shooting or dying themselves, still, they were in a hurry to start gathering information and send it off to the newsroom. Journalists did their work like with any other case, they did not think about the sensitivity of the topic, rather saw the exceptionality of the event, which was caused by the proximity (the last similar case in Estonia took place in 1996).

Treimann described herself as a tool for the newsroom: she takes photos of everything and everyone, the newsroom later decides what will be published. Although she left the final decision-making for the newsroom, she knowingly made decisions herself on the scene by firstly taking illustrative, neutral photos, then looking for interesting angles. By this order, she provides herself with some time to think the situation through but also provides time for the people on the scene to, for example, clean up.

Although the sensitivity of the case was evident – there was blood on the ground, and investigators working, the photographer relied on her own rules that comply with the code of ethics. When Bock and Araiza (2015) talked about the duality inside of the photographer – a journalist and an artist – we would emphasise the humanistic side of those roles. Treimann did not rely on any professional or artistic guidelines, she firstly determined interpersonally what were her moral boundaries as a human being, and then made decisions within the roles. It was also because of the time pressure and lack of professional-ethical guidelines.

It is noteworthy that her and the reporter's actions were limited by the conditions of the "zone": the absence of the main character. As the photographer took photos, the reporter Gnadenteich was occupied with getting a video of the incident from an eyewitness. After battling with technical difficulties, the video was finally received via a colleague. The reporter admitted to being a "tool" for the newsroom as well: his main task was to get the video and forward it to the newsroom, who then will decide what to do with it next. In sum, in the newsgathering phase, the reporter and the photographer worked only on gathering the information; they left main sorting, packaging and publishing on an editor in the newsroom. It is noteworthy that the reporter – although not making editorial decisions – pressurised the newsroom to publish the video as quickly as possible to beat the competition.

In the converged newsroom the decision-making of what to publish and where is complex in itself (Ivask, Siil, and Laak 2017), adding on the sensitivity of the topic, the presumption is that there is a change in routines. But the opposite happened, the reporter relied on his usual routines, which goes together with research on similar topics (Berkowitz 1997; Konow Lund and Olsson 2016; Tuchman 1973).

Publishing

Gnadenteich gathered the video of a person being shot, the editor Reisenbuk was in charge of publishing the visuals, and the head of PVD Prozes explained why they published it. Firstly, they relied on the newsworthiness of the incident, more precisely the proximity – as did the reporter and the photographer, so there was a similarity when evaluating the event's newsworthiness. Secondly, by publishing the video, they tried to highlight the need to provide surveillance of mentally disturbed people. Finally, both reporters, the head of the PVD and the photographer stated that they have to capture and present life as it is, even its dark sides without censoring themselves. They also described the situation as sensitive, yet their practices reflected using everyday routines and lack of discussion about ethics.

Journalists and the head of PVD took a "mediator" role when publishing the video, which was already circulating on social media, so it was out there anyway, hence no need for discussing ethics. They said that publishing the video on their platform offered a safe and thought-through space for discussion, which might not be the case on social media. However, they did not frame the video in any way to encourage topical discussion. When looking at Ivask's (2019) description of how online news is created, then in this case the chain was as follows: (a) recognising the event and (c) publishing, without proper (b) editing, deciding and packaging. So, the routine was very similar to the usual online publishing cycle, just lacking the editing-packaging phase, or being prepared to return to the phase afterwards. The same became visible when reporter Gnadenteich explained publishing the video to have a journalistic function: by publishing the video they rhetorically posited a question of whether the police acted correctly, but they did not frame the story as such.

In the printed copy, the layout designer-editor Ellen Laagus explained that her decisions of what kind of visuals to use were driven by two factors: the length of the article and written narrative; secondly, the aim of providing a visual narrative for readers, which could be achieved only by using still images of the video. Her decisions lied in what researchers (Bock 2008; Schwartz 1999; Morris 2002) also bring out: the reporters can go back in time when gathering information, but the photographers have to be present in the situation. This is also an explanation why in order to create a full narrative with photos and the text, she had to use the video from the scene in the time of the event, not the photos the photographer had taken after the event.

But the conflict here lies in the fact that the witness video took the video without professional and ethical journalistic knowledge or consideration between human dignity and the public's right to know, which is expected from newsroom photographers (Morse 2014). Due to the nature of news, which is to give an overview of what happened, the photographer's body of work was secondary, although she chose carefully what and how to photograph.

Laagus pointed out that since the man was shown on the screenshots from the video only from behind or lying face-down on the ground, he could have been recognised by family members only, so no infringement of the dead's dignity. She overruled the narrative to the probability of hurting close ones.

“It will hurt those who know anyway, but those who do not know, they cannot even recognise whether the body is their neighbour or not.” (Laagus, the layout editor-designer)

People in the chain of publishing the visuals have a different look on the situation: the photographer said her principle is to avoid showing victims in degrading ways, keeping the dignity of people in mind; the editors-reporters aimed to show as much of the incident as possible, saying that close-ones would recognise the victim anyway, and hoping others did not. The difference in approaches is especially highlighted when the reporter Gnadenteich discusses calculating possible clicks such tragic visuals bring, it grabs attention and is economically profitable as shown in other research as well (Geise and Baden 2015; Zelizer 2010). The reporter said that the risk of publishing ethically questionable visuals is worth it because even if they are asked to be removed afterwards by relatives, the newsroom “already has the clicks anyway”. In Ivask's (2019) news production routine model, this means revisiting the second phase of the publishing chain – editing, packaging and sorting. The other reporter, Reisenbuk, said he knew that it would bring in a lot of clicks, but tried to avoid relying on “chasing” them while publishing the story and visuals. Gnadenteich and Reisenbuk said that most newsroom colleagues had no doubts about publishing the video showing the police shooting the man.

Case 2: “Mourners say Goodbye to Murdered Nastja”

Reasoning Before Gathering the Information: Context

Postimees did not send their newsroom photographers to the event that took place around 160 kilometres (approximately 99,4 miles) from Postimees' newsroom. The head of PVD gave orders to photographer Ilja Smirnov to take photos of the event. He works for a regional outlet, Põhjarannik, in one of the Estonian cities – Jõhvi (around 14 kilometres/8,7 miles from where the funeral took place). National daily Postimees and a regional paper Põhjarannik belong to the same affiliate group, making it possible for the head of PVD to give orders to a photographer of Põhjarannik. In this case, the newsroom had time to plan the coverage, because the event did not come out of the blue.

As the head of PVD provoked covering the funeral, he also explained why he wanted photos from the event. Firstly, he emphasised the public's interest in the whole event: the murder of such a young person was exceptional in Estonia. He equalled “strong societal interest” with “attracting a lot of clicks”, by which he used a sensitive topic for the economic well-being of the company (Deuze 2008; Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc 2018; Strömbäck, Karlsson, and Hopmann 2012; Zelizer 2010). The head of PVD aimed at catching the attention of the audience by using the artistic frame of “funeral of someone's daughter” or “loss in the family”.

Although Smirnov admitted that there were people who minded his presence and he felt terrible about it, it did not stop him. It is noteworthy, that the code of ethics for the Estonian Association of Press

Photographers (2011) does not state that the photographer has the right to decline covering an event that goes against their beliefs. Smirnov justified attending the funeral by saying it was ordered by the head of PVD.

Gathering Information

Smirnov recalls that he was both gladdened and astonished to see journalists from other newsrooms attending the funeral. Yet, being in the middle of grieving made him uncomfortable, even thinking whether he should be there in the first place. Being on ethically sensitive ground without concrete knowledge of what the newsroom expected of him put Smirnov in a difficult position: he did not know exactly how to approach covering the sensitive event. Additionally, he was the only person from the newsroom on the scene gathering the body of work and it made him responsible for how the story was going to be portrayed by the outlet overall (Bignell 1997; Kress and Leeuwen 1996).

Feeling uncomfortable led him to take photos of the funeral from a distance using a long-focus lens. As he got more comfortable, he moved nearer to the coffin, paying attention to the close ones' reactions. The photographer did not precisely aim to take a photo of Nastja's face, Prozes, on the other hand, said that photos showing the open coffin and the face of Nastja next to grieving close ones was his aim. So, the editing, sorting, packaging and publishing phases were strongly influenced by Prozes, but it would not have been as influential, if the photographer had decided to delete the sensitive photos. This chain of events is also brought out by Bock (2011) and Shoemaker and Vos (2009): without having photos in the first place, the reporter-editor cannot choose and publish anything.

Prozes used "us" and "our" when talking about taking and publishing the visuals, saying that everything was decided together; the photographer, on the other hand, used "they" indicating dissociation from the "main" newsroom and from the task of taking the visuals.

"The moment when they are bidding farewell to the departed, next to the open coffin, is the most emotional photo. Our choice was to take and publish photos of that culmination." (Prozes, the head of PVD)

Prozes admits one mistake they made was that they did not let the family know that their photographer is attending the funeral. On the other hand, Prozes said that the photographer was recognisable (wearing the photo equipment, taking an observer's role) for the attendants. The head of the PVD said that the photographer was supposed to let the close ones know that he is from Postimees, Smirnov said that Postimees sent him on the spot, so they were supposed to organise it. Once again, it indicates the confusion in the role of the photographer; is he merely a tool for the newsroom or someone knowingly making decisions in how the event is covered?

Publishing

Smirnov pointed out that while on-site, as a usual routine, he takes as many photos as possible as quickly as possible – "shooting away to the right and left" – and only later will he sort and see what he had photographed. This time, he did not analyse the photos from an editorial or ethical perspective. He deleted the technically defective ones (e.g., blurry) and sent the rest to the newsroom. According to Smirnov, responsibility for publishing the photos lied within the newsroom of Postimees, as he was just in charge of taking them.

Kadri Raal, a reporter for Postimees, wrote the online news about the event. Raal said that she excluded close-ups of the deceased's face but kept those where the dead could be seen from afar. She saw it as a compromise: taking into account the selection of photos the photographer sent to the newsroom, expectations of the head of PVD and her own beliefs. If she had relied only on her own beliefs, she would not have published photos of the deceased. It as though indicates that there are some sort of guidelines or standards within the newsroom that exceed the reporter's personal beliefs, yet the respondents failed to specifically name them. They were mostly influenced by their own understandings of what should be done, even if they as human beings disliked it.

Raal added she feels that the business model pressures journalists to publish such visuals: if they do not, their competition would. Not publishing means a considerable loss in clicks, therefore a massive loss in media ad money. She also said that the newsroom and media company's well-being exceeds journalists' values and ethics in some cases, meaning journalists have to carry out practices they do not agree with in order to serve the media house. Raal admitted, when she heard that the girl had been killed, she immediately thought they had a "click magnet" for the next three weeks, because of the follow-up stories, which yet again replicated the commercialising death issue brought out by Geise and Baden (2015) and Zelizer (2010).

Raal was not part of the first phase of decision-making: she did not choose to cover the event nor decided how to cover it but was in charge of packaging, editing, and publishing the story. On the other hand, the photographer did not choose the event but was in charge of gathering the visuals, yet did not participate in editorial decisions or publishing. Raal said that the publishing of a photo taken of the dead body at a funeral would be justified if the person had been a public figure, which the girl was not. The article in the newspaper was copied from the online news; Prozes chose the photo. Therefore, he participated in most of the phases of publishing the visuals, except in gathering them.

Prozes' and Raal's standpoints in publishing such visuals conflicted. Prozes reasoned that the girl was not depicted lying in a pool of blood, but nicely dressed in a coffin, therefore no infringement of the dead's dignity. Raal said that publishing any photos of a dead person, especially a young one, and using them for gathering clicks online is not acceptable. Raal also added that publishing such visuals means abandoning professional ethics and fundamental human values. Smirnov on the other hand pointed out that the news story gained a lot of clicks, so taking the photos is justified by the immense amount of attention it got from the audience. This description shows that participants in the decision-making process had different understandings of why such visuals were taken and published.

Criticism and Coping

In both cases, journalists said they were branded as being unethical, inconsiderate of the close ones, and scandal-savvy by audience members and colleagues. Journalists said that if they paid attention to each death-related incident they cover or each negative comment/feedback on their news, they would not last even a week as journalists. They identified themselves with ambulance and rescue workers who can joke next to a dead body or objectify the dead to cope with the situation and avoid emotional distress.

"I do not treat them as people; I treat them as units. I switch off my mind because otherwise, you will not be able to do this job." (Reisenbuk, the reporter)

Making decisions about publishing has become increasingly faster, and often the decisions are left to the single news reporter-editor currently at work, who is overwhelmed by multitasking. So, decisions on

such sensitive topics are made in a hurry, rushed gathering of the information outweighing sorting. Gnadenteich also mentions there are no guidelines on what and how to publish visual-wise, rather the moral compass of the reporter.

“Before the web, a gang would gather around a table with their fingers in their mouths and discuss which photo to choose. Now the reporter uploads a photo with one hand, using the other one to call the police. Decisions are made in a fraction of a second. If none of the photos makes you sick, it will be published.” (Gnadenteich, the reporter)

Yet, there is another stressor: competition, journalists from other outlets. Journalists have to resolve quicker than ever what to publish and how they have no time to give a thought to their actions in the process (Ivask et al. 2017). Nevertheless, the lack of guidelines was illustrated by the fact that the discussion about the topic was raised after publishing the visuals. Yet again, newsrooms should work as one unit, relying on internal norms and rules (Borden 2007), but in these cases the main norm was to gather attention, cover the events and bring in the clicks.

Conclusive Discussion

Lack of Cooperation between Different Links Within the Newsroom and Fragmented Routines

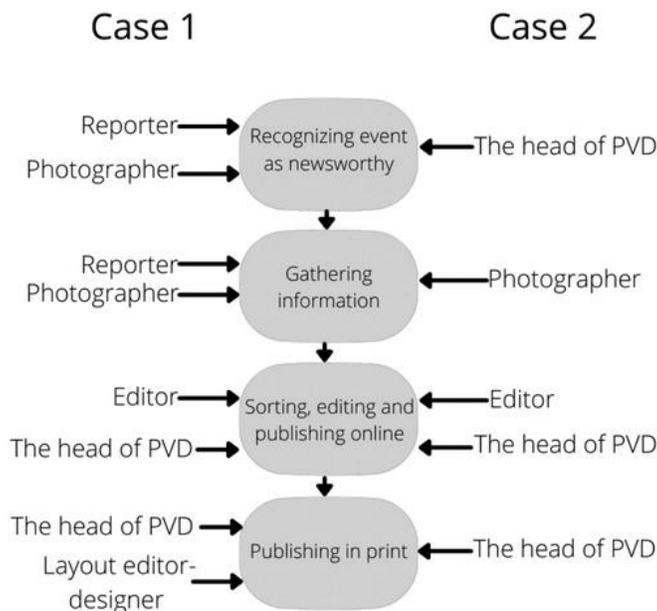
The results of our study help us analyse how gathering and publishing death-related visuals occur. We chose two events to investigate by three aspects; firstly, the visuals published received a lot of negative feedback from the audience and professional community; secondly, the extent of the events was extraordinary for Estonia, and thirdly, they occurred in recent years, so journalists in our sample have valid memories of the decisions and processes.

By analysing the routines and process of gathering and publishing death-related visuals, we hoped to highlight topics or routines that hinder efficiency or even negatively affect journalists. One of our study's main results is that there is a fragmentation of routines and lack of cooperation within the chain of publishing death-related visuals; journalists tend to be alone with their decisions. We argue that a more coherent routine, with agreements, expectations and norms, should be developed by newsrooms to lessen journalists' stress, confusion and dividing responsibility.

In a way, our study repeats the results of Konow Lund and Olsson (2016) and Císařová and Metykova (2020) and Bock (2008) studies but adds another layer to them. When the studies say that photo- and videographers do not interfere in editing and journalistic decision-making, our research shows the news photographers work in a hurry and do not think about the broader influence of their actions, hoping the others in the publishing chain do. Relying on Ivask's (2019) description of the news creation process in a converged newsroom, we saw that the process tends not to be coherent in case of an urgent event or a sensitive one, even missing a phase when publishing the video (Case 1).

Unlike the Císařová and Metykova (2020) study, our results showed that in these sensitive urgent events, the news production process was not led by any one specific; different phases had different “deciders” (Graph 1) – the text and photos were created separately, although Grabe and Zhou (2003) argue they should complement each other to create an emotional connection and construct “reality” (Kress and Leeuwen 1996). The routine used in our study encourages journalists not to create emotionally engaging stories, instead use only visuals to evoke emotions among the audience and intrigue them. Journalists, who feel trapped, can aim at balance: use less unethical visuals (or questionable ones) and put more effort into describing the situation textually.

Graph 1. Decision-makers in news production phases by Ivask (2019) modified by authors.



Comparing the results to the Konow Lund and Olsson (2016) study, similarly, journalists used their everyday routines in urgent or dangerous situations. Still, in our research, the overall routine was fragmented. The person who recognised the event as newsworthy did not gather information (case 2) or edit, package, and publish the visuals (case 1). It was a hot potato situation where publishing decisions were forwarded from one person to another.

Several factors caused the fragmentation of the routines, one being the time pressure, getting information out as soon as possible, but not being able to do it on the spot, so having to rely on people in the newsroom (Case 1). Another factor was the way online journalists work: in some cases, the newsworthiness of a topic is decided for them, their task is to edit, package and publish (Case 2), they rely on the people who gather the material. It leads us to a situation where the first damaging flood of feedback is directed towards the author of the story, who might not have anything to do with gathering the information but has to decide what kind of visuals from the database to publish. Our study emphasises the importance of communication between colleagues. Knowledge of what decisions were made in collecting and forwarding the visuals is essential for the last person in the chain to make decisions. For example, visuals gathered and forwarded without any ethical and critical considerations would encourage the publishing reporter-editor to be more critical in sorting the visuals or even seek advice from colleagues in the newsroom.

According to the code of ethics, journalists have the right to decide what to cover, and if a topic goes against one's beliefs, they can drop it. Still, these cases showed that people in the newsroom did not have a chance to drop sensitive topics, neither did they have guidelines on approaching the situation, which encouraged fragmentation. It also indicated the necessity of revising the code of ethics and setting professional journalism standards. Journalists rely on the "grey areas" of the code more than on the statements. On the other hand, the code of ethics does not seem to be a strong enough reason in

the newsroom for dropping an uncomfortable topic, which leads us to question what kind of rights do (online) journalists have in reporting urgent sensitive issues?

These questions and how to cover urgent sensitive topics and publish visuals as teamwork should be covered in journalism education to develop future journalists' moral and professional compass. It will help journalists cover sensitive topics without an immense amount of stress during the coverage and deal with the aftermath of the traumatic event.

Ethics – who Takes the Responsibility?

The code of ethics for both the journalists and photographers says that taking visuals of the victims and publishing them has to be very thought through; the code also states that victims have the right to be protected from the public. Although knowing the code of ethics, showing the event was more important to journalists than the code of ethics. The emphasis was not on minimising the harm, but rather it was expected from the audience to act as a moral compass to put the cat back into the bag when it was doing too much harm. However, this “retrospective gatekeeping” raises further questions as once something has already been online, it cannot be removed that easily; the damage is done either way.

An ethically interesting topic arose from this research: if the way or the place where one dies makes the subject a “celebrity”, how should journalists approach covering the event? And if a video of shooting circulates the internet, is it acceptable to spread it on journalistic platforms as well? The sample solved these questions by relying on their own beliefs and understandings and mentioned they disagreed with their actions. We think that there should be an agreed behavioural standard in these situations; professional ethics are not just to protect the sources but also to help and protect the journalist.

We argue that an adapted work process or a routine pattern is needed that considers various ethical considerations accepted and agreed upon in the newsroom. It saves journalists from feeling alone in the process and divides the responsibility – also stress and criticism – between different participants. As journalists said, they have to decide quickly, so they lack time to think through what and why they are doing. Lack of guidelines leads to decision-making in isolation: everyone in the gathering-publishing chain makes decisions independently, although they depend on each other in the overall process. Our study confirmed Bock and Araiza's (2015) conclusions about a difference in word and image journalistic treatment. The visuals did not receive similarly neutral treatment as the choices regarding the text.

We develop the idea of visual journalists' option to “hide” behind the camera by Bowen and Thompson (2009), Thorsen and Møller (1996) and Yorke (1990): not only do photographers remain anonymous when “hunting” the photos, but also in other phases of the news production process decisions are made for them, leading photo- and videographers becoming emotionally and ethically detached. Just like the lens of a camera allows to zoom from a distance, a photographer may distance themselves from the responsibility of being an equal party in the authorship of a news story. It widens the gap between the actual producers of the visuals – photographers and videographers – and the rest of the newsroom; it sends a message that they do not have as much saying and responsibility as reporters. Additionally, neglecting photos from a professional photographer and publishing stills from a video taken by a passerby instead (Case 1) reproduces the culture of the photographer not being a full participant in creating news.

Newsrooms and editors should rely more on photo- and videographers. As Daston and Galison (2007) and Sontag (2006) say, photo- and videographers know about the principles used while taking the shots

and the effect those visuals might have on the audience. Again, a coherent and an agreed routine pattern helps a photographer set boundaries beforehand and act more ethically sound on the scene.

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