

Telling stories to a different beat: Photojournalism as a “Way of Life”

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Abstract

This thesis presents a grounded theory of how photojournalism is a way of life. Some photojournalists dedicate themselves to telling other people's stories, documenting history and finding alternative ways to disseminate their work to audiences. Many self-fund their projects, not just for the love of the tradition, but also because they feel a sense of responsibility to tell stories that are at times outside the mainstream media's focus. Some do this through necessity. While most photojournalism research has focused on photographers who are employed by media organisations, little, if any, has been undertaken concerning photojournalists who are freelancers. This thesis focuses on the stories and experiences of freelance photojournalists to develop a theory that accounts for the ideological, moral and value-based foundation of photojournalistic practice. Using a grounded theory methodology, I conducted 23 in-depth interviews with photojournalists and other industry members to discover what their stories revealed about the freelance photojournalistic way of life.

This thesis examines definitions of photojournalism and establishes that photojournalism is defined not so much by who commissioned it or where it is published, but rather by the ideology, values and morals that underpin the genre. The way that photojournalists see their role and speak about it reveals that witnessing and documenting history is underpinned by key ideals, values and responsibilities. In order to witness and document history, photojournalists face significant challenges – financially, physically and psychologically. However, these challenges do not deter photojournalists because they believe in the ideals, values and responsibilities of witnessing and documenting history and are motivated primarily by these and other internal rewards, rather than externally based financial rewards and accolades. This study establishes that being a freelance photojournalist is more than an occupation – it is a way of life that is ideologically and morally driven and governed by the ideals, values and responsibilities that are seen as inherent in the tradition of photojournalism.

Understanding what drives the photojournalistic way of life enables photojournalism and photojournalists to be viewed holistically rather than separating the practice from the product. Thinking about photojournalism as a way of life rather than as an occupation, an approach to image making or a product, places photojournalists' intentions, ideals, values and responsibilities at the forefront of enquiry and furthers the understanding of photojournalistic practice.

Statement of original authorship

This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This thesis represents my own original work towards this research degree and contains no material which has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution, except where due acknowledgement is made.

Name: Naomi Verity Busst

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Naomi Busst', written over a light blue circular stamp.

Date: February 2, 2012

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