**Photo Ethics in Journalism**

The history of photo ethics in journalism has been studied earlier in Western academia. As early as 1964, knowledge was mentioned in Western journalism textbooks, and Curtis Mac Dougall's book *The Press and Its Problems* stated that photographers should give more consideration to the ethical issues they face in their work (MacDougall, 1964). In 1978, Horold Evans identified four areas of ethical concern: violence, invasion of privacy, sexuality and public morality, and photo falsification(Harold，1978).

With the advent of the "picture age," the role of pictures in news reporting has become more prominent, and the live and visual nature of pictures has led to an unprecedented development of news pictures. However, the ensuing problems have also aroused people's concern, such as some media or journalists creating false pictures for their own purposes, the *South China tiger fake* photos have aroused people's pursuit of the authenticity of news pictures (*The photo of the South China tiger proved to be fake*, 2020) and *The Starving Sudan* news pictures have aroused people's discussion of journalistic ethics (Carter,1999). The image was chosen comes from Radio Free Asia, and it is a panoramic view of the aftermath of an explosion at the Tianjin port. From the picture, one can see tens of thousands of brand new cars that have been burned to a crisp, with thick smoke still billowing in the distance from unextinguished fires. The photographer both demonstrates the severity of the incident and, at the same time, does not show any victims, thus protecting their privacy. Based

on this, this essay analyzes the ethics of news pictures in social media during disaster reporting by using news pictures from the series of reports on the Tianjin explosion accident on August 12, 2015.

On August 12, 2015, an explosion occurred at a hazardous materials warehouse of a logistics company in Tianjin, and upon receiving the news, the fire department started an emergency rescue. This sudden disaster was a challenge not only for the rescuers but also for the media outlets. The media, as the main channel for the public to obtain information, must report the latest situation of the disaster accurately and timely, while not making the report hurt the person concerned, that is, not violate the ethics of journalism. The first media outlet to report on the *Tianjin explosion* was the microblogging platform, and it was found that a microblogger posted a microblog about the Tianjin explosion at 23:26 on August 12. Weibo acted as a "pioneer" in the early warning period of the explosion.

In the initial phase of news reporting, images were captured by onlookers and shared without any editorial oversight. The primary goal of these images was to alert others to a significant disaster. As the second stage began, various media outlets quickly responded and started disseminating related news, with Weibo and WeChat being the main sources. However, due to the varying media literacy among internet users, rumors began circulating on Weibo and WeChat, spreading rapidly before professional media could step in. In the third stage, more professional media outlets actively gathered evidence, debunked misinformation, and provided expert reporting, eventually overshadowing the role of microblogs and Weibo. During this stage, editors used images to reveal the truth, dispel rumors, maintain social stability, and direct public opinion. In the final stage, the incident's prominence on Weibo and WeChat waned, while newspapers, television, and other professional media reported on the causes and consequences of the disaster. The editorial use of news images during this stage focused on explaining the rescue and investigation results. It is evident that while microblogs and Weibo play a crucial role in the initial information-sharing stage of an incident, they can also contribute to the spread of inaccurate information and increased uncertainty. The involvement of professional media is vital in reducing uncertainty and providing accurate information. The sooner they intervene, the better they can guide public opinion and minimize the period of uncertainty.

And the whole process also involves the issue of journalistic ethics in disaster reporting. The ethical problems in social media news pictures are mainly divided into repeated rendering causing secondary damage; anonymous dissemination, serious picture falsity, and encouraging the spread of rumors; over-representation of the disaster situation, causing panic in people's hearts; confusion in citing sources and serious inaccuracy in reporting; and invasion of privacy (Duncan, 2012).

The threshold for social media is low, and information can usually be uploaded without screening. In catastrophic events, images of the victims and their families’ suffering can be circulated without restriction, easily causing secondary damage (Muller & Gawenda, 2010; Powell, 1990). At the same time, there is no gatekeeper in social media, and the public can repost images without verifying their authenticity. The condition of "related to the explosion with the source is a 'well-known person’, or a high number of retweets" is enough to make people follow the retweet (Ma, 2021). We often see the same pictures of the scene, but from different sources, resulting in confusion about the source of news pictures in social media, leading to misrepresentation and inaccurate reporting. In addition, the visual nature of pictures makes it easier for rumors to spread. When news of disaster relief appears on microblogs and WeChat friend circles, people immediately forward them, leading to the disaster situation being rendered, panic, and affecting the relief process. Moreover, there is personal information and photos in social media, but this does not mean that there is no limit to quoting others' information. Directly quoting the victims' social media personal information and pictures is easy to violate privacy, but few users are aware of this.

However, the Tianjin explosion also reflected some progress in disaster photo coverage. First, the use of images is more focused on disaster relief and humanistic care. In the "Tianjin explosion" related reports, we did not see the psychological discomfort and will cause secondary damage to the subject of the footage. Within a week after the explosion, the proportion of news pictures reflecting care and concern was much higher than that of irritating pictures. The very few irritating pictures that were published would also be handled in terms of shots, avoiding the camera from getting too close to the injured and downplaying the pain, which shows that humanistic care has been deeply rooted in people's hearts. Secondly, the report information is balanced and stabilizes social emotion. The picture report of "The Tianjin explosion accident", including the report of the accident itself, the report of the affected people, the report of the relief workers, the popular resort of the knowledge of disaster prevention and resistance, and the report of the investigation to reveal the cause of the accident. The information reported is comprehensive, balanced, and targeted, and can satisfy the information needs of the public.

In general, in the environment of ease of communication in the information age, the threshold of news picture dissemination has been lowered, and almost everyone can disseminate news pictures related to living disasters through microblogs and WeChat. While people are enjoying the convenience of photo dissemination, they have neglected some basic guidelines for photo dissemination, making the ethics of news photos face unprecedented challenges. The answers to these issues can be condensed into three tiers: on a broad scale, enhancing journalism ethics laws and regulations to manage news image distribution; on an intermediate scale, refining journalists' professional understanding, bolstering their professional consciousness, and mastering the crucial role of gatekeeping news image reporting; and on a smaller scale, boosting media literacy for everyone, enabling individuals to actively uphold the ethics of news images.

**Appendix**



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