

A Faster Kind of Photojournalism?

Image-Selection Processes in a Swedish Newsroom

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Abstract

This article examines factors influencing the editorial processing of photographs, the impact of photojournalistic practices on those processes as well as perceptions of images. Perspectives on visual gatekeeping and the news value of photographs were applied to a newsroom and interview study with a specific focus on photographs for the main news section of a Swedish newspaper. Findings identified routines, publication formats and resources as key factors, with some challenges posed by mobile publication formats and a focus on routine news. Photo editors were found to have a key function asserting expertise in a shared and interactive process. Yet changing routines and a reduced visual expertise on weekends were found to result in some lower image quality. While the ‘observed moment’ appeared to remain a photojournalistic ideal among visual gatekeepers, there were divergent perceptions found of the current and future functions of the news photograph.

Keywords: news value, newspapers, photo editors, visual gatekeeping, Svenska Dagbladet

Introduction

While the number of permanently employed journalists has decreased in recent years, it is arguably the elimination of photo departments and staff positions in photojournalism that has received the most attention (Allan 2014, Ritchin 2013). At the time of writing this article, a mere handful of newspapers in Sweden still employs photo¹ editors, although those newsrooms have also seen a reduction in their in-house photo staff. As a result, there is a sense of flux regarding visual expertise in newsrooms that merits further attention (Gürsel 2012, Newton 2009, Schwalbe, Silcock & Candello 2015).

Such shifts, where news organizations devote fewer resources to in-house image production, paradoxically occur at a time of a rising visual culture and an increased demand for imagery in a 24-hour news cycle (Newton 2009, Vobic & Tomanić Trivundža 2015). Scholarship on visual gatekeeping, the editorial processes of selecting and publishing photographs and other visual materials, indicates that the journalistic gatekeeping role has been transformed in recent years into one of ‘gatechecker’ where newsrooms now have less control over publication processes (Schwalbe, Silcock & Candello 2015), due to the rise of social media, citizen journalism and other factors. Another trend is an

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increased use of stock photos and generic images (Machin & Niblock 2008, Wadbring & Nilsson 2016) that may have a weak connection to the news event reported in the article.

These circumstances raise questions to be addressed in this case study of editorial processes in a Swedish newsroom. Drawing on literature on visual gatekeeping and conceptions of the newsworthiness of photographs, the study uses a combination of methods – newsroom observations and interviews – to address three questions: 1) Which factors influence newsroom processes for news photographs? 2) How do photojournalistic roles and practices impact those processes? 3) Which functions do gatekeepers perceive that the news photograph has in communicating the news?

Literature review

This study is informed by scholarship on visual gatekeeping and professional practices, and on perspectives of the function of news photographs as content as well as visual communication. The notion of news value refers in this study to how photographs address actuality and other aspects of news coverage.

From visual gatekeeping to gatechecking

A small yet growing field within gatekeeping research focuses on editorial processes and decisions about photographs and other visual content (Bissell 2000a, 2000b, Fahmy 2005, Fahmy, Kelly & Kim 2007, Schwalbe, Silcock & Candello 2015). Visual gatekeeping research draws on gatekeeping theory that addresses the construction of news through editorial processes with various levels of influence, including: the individual, news routines, the organization, social institutions and social systems (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). This literature review primarily addresses scholarship on recent and current changes and challenges to the visual gatekeeping concept and newsroom practices.

A growing area of research examines a phenomenon alternately labeled user-generated content or citizen photojournalism, that is the contribution of eyewitness footage and imagery of breaking news, which, it should be noted, is not new to journalism. However, an increased flow of images and videos available to news organizations has brought into focus and helped question professional norms and claims within photojournalism, including the notion of objectivity and photojournalism as the domain of eyewitnessing as well as the question of accuracy and immediacy as a signature of news photography (Zelizer 2007).

Research has shown that imagery created by non-journalists challenges editorial standards of ethics and verification (Andén-Papadopoulos 2013, Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti 2011, 2013, Sjøvaag 2011), while providing news organizations with eyewitness reports from unfolding events when they are not on location (Allan 2014, Caple 2014, Mortensen 2011). The editorial gatekeeping function has come under pressure from the outside as visual content may be captured, uploaded and shared on social media where it may bypass news organizations altogether while reaching a wide viewership (Mortensen 2014). However, research has also shown that the publication rate of visual contributions by the public is minimal in the general news flow (Pantti & Bakker 2009), including in the newspaper selected for this study (Nilsson & Wadbring 2015). Thus, it is possible that visual contributions from the public are of greatest interest to global news organizations' coverage of breaking news (ibid.).

Yet several news organizations now produce their own social media content and participate in various interactive processes, further blurring gatekeeping boundaries and challenging traditional notions of audiences. These and other shifts have led to a re-examination of the gatekeeping model within journalism research (Shoemaker & Vos 2009) where gatekeepers might now instead be considered ‘gatewatchers’ (Bruns 2008, cited in Schwalbe, Silcock & Candelio 2015) or ‘curators’ (Bakker 2014) participating in collaborative production of digital news. Journalists increasingly curate or manage content produced by others, including user-generated content and content produced by public services, according to Bakker (ibid:599). In turn, Schwalbe, Silcock and Candelio (2015), in a recent interview and survey study of visual gatekeepers, propose the term visual ‘gatecheckers’ for a changing role in the digital newsroom that includes: ‘content provider, transmitter of news and information, validator of accuracy, curator, distributor, and watchdog’ (ibid:477). The authors posit that, in an environment with accelerated flows of images and where ‘visual truth can be murky, visual gatecheckers at legacy media perform a vital role in maintaining the accuracy and credibility of the professional news sources on which citizens must rely for a clear view of world events’ (ibid:479).

In turn, Gürsel (2012), in a study of the global news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP), defines gatekeeping more broadly as processes of production and distribution of images. Defining the context as one of shifting image technology and a moment of ‘crisis of visualization’ (ibid:3), Gürsel calls for a re-examination of notions of quality and credibility in contemporary photojournalism.

There have also been changes to professional roles and functions in the visual gatekeeping processes *within* the newsroom. The historic rise of specializations in newsrooms throughout the twentieth century includes the photo editor, though this position emerged first in the illustrated magazines before entering newspapers (Bair 2015, Hardt 2001, Lebeck & von Dewitz 2001). A period of expansion has been followed by a widely familiar current trend adopted by some news organizations where each journalist produces content in both written and visual forms (e.g. Nygren 2014). These changing photojournalistic functions are a contrast to the more clearly defined areas of newsroom expertise examined in research a decade or two ago (e.g. Bock 2008, Hansen, Neuzil, & Ward 1998, Lowrey 1999, 2002).

Thus, there has been a widespread shift towards an integrated, multi-platform and, in many cases, multi-skilled or, as they are known in Sweden, multi-competence newsroom (Nygren 2014) where everyone may be a visual gatekeeper although not everyone is a designer or news editor. There have also been changes in photojournalistic work routines (Langton 2009, Solaroli 2015). For instance, staff photographers may increasingly do their own digital editing and image selection (Bissell 2000b, Fahmy & Smith 2003, Solaroli 2015). Furthermore, art directors’ and page designers’ presence in newsrooms has risen with an increased emphasis on visual communication (Lowrey 2002, Machin & Niblock 2008).

The communicative function of news photographs

The function of news photographs is an overlooked area within journalism scholarship according to Caple (2013) and Harcup & O’Neill (2016). Specifically, Harcup & O’Neill

call for future research that takes into account ‘visual content’ as a news value in its own right. The most common news values, according to an overview of the literature on journalistic news value (Bednarek & Caple 2012), include: negativity, prominence, proximity, elite persons, impact, the unexpected, drama/intensity and personification. A recent study of the discursive construal of news value in photographs, examining how photographs enhance certain news values through content or visual devices, proposes ‘aesthetics’ as a visual news value (Bednarek & Caple 2016). The notion of aesthetics is in fact part of long-held professional standards for photojournalism summarized here by Langton’s characterization of a journalistic image: ‘Good composition, quality light, strong moment, meaningful content’ (2009:106). According to this perspective, the news photograph functions on two levels: journalistically by referring to a specific event, place or person and conveying meaningful information, and visually by containing certain technical and aesthetic qualities.

However, the literature also points to a tendency in newsroom practices to privilege content while ignoring how the image conveys its message. This may be explained by an historical marginalization and ambivalence about photojournalism within journalism practice and the academy, addressed by Becker (1992) and Zelizer (1995) in their respective writings. Some scholarship on newsroom practices indicates that such an ambivalence prevails, for example in an un-used potential for in-depth visual coverage (Klein-Avraham & Reich 2016), as well as a tendency to consider news photographs mere ‘complementary illustrations, as a result of a shift towards “news packaging” and pre-planned newspaper pages’ (Lowrey 1999:13). Furthermore, some respondents in the aforementioned study on digital visual gatecheckers (Schwalbe, Silcock & Candello 2015) lament the ‘tyranny of the text’ and a lingering bias towards writing, interestingly even in news organizations committed to a strong visual coverage and where the respondents themselves hold positions of influence. In contrast, other scholars see a potential, at times unfulfilled, function for photojournalism and visual storytelling in digital channels through online news galleries, video and multimedia (Caple & Knox 2012, Patrick & Allan 2013) and in in-depth visual coverage published in channels other than newspapers where it may reach a wider audience (Newton 2009, Ritchin 2013). Such interactive modes of dissemination, according to these scholars, offer a necessary innovative potential for photojournalism.

Nevertheless, there are signs of a shifting connection between the news photograph and the news event it is set to visualize. Historically, photographic realism and the seemingly transparent connection between a photograph and reality contributed to making photojournalism the preferred tool for journalistic claims of objectivity and eyewitnessing (Zelizer 2007). In journalistic practice, these values are in part predicated on the presence of the photographer on the scene of an event (Allan 2014). The observed, spontaneous moment rather than a visibly posed situation remains the norm for photojournalism and a marker of journalistic eyewitnessing (Langton 2009, Mäenpää 2014, Zelizer 2007). However, as noted previously in this literature review, research has shown an increased use of stock and archival images not always related to the story they visualize (Machin & Niblock 2008, Wadbring & Nilsson 2016), as well as an increased use of small, ‘thumb-nail’ sized images – frequently portraits – in online and print newspapers, accommodating the reading logic of the mobile format (Knox 2009, Wadbring & Nilsson 2016). Factors contributing to these and other changes include the

aforementioned public access to visual eyewitness reporting, a shift to digital production and mobile platforms, and changes in the types of stories covered.

Research design

This study focuses on Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), a Stockholm-based national-circulation legacy newspaper founded in 1884 and since 1999 owned by Schibstedt Media Group of Norway. In 2000, Svenska Dagbladet became the first among Swedish subscribed morning papers to shift from broadsheet to the tabloid format – a format now almost uniformly adopted by the country’s newspapers. As in many other Swedish news organizations, there have been staff reductions and organizational changes at Svenska Dagbladet in recent years, including reductions in the photo department. However, the newspaper retains a commitment to photojournalism, a strong reputation dating back decades, and its staff photographers have won numerous professional awards and recognitions. Its photo department is at the time of writing this article part of an integrated newsroom producing digital and print editions in various channels, with most content published first on the web. The daily print-edition circulation is about 140,000 copies, the second largest among the country’s national-circulation former morning papers, and the reach across channels is an estimated 2.2 million readers per week (Schibstedt 2017).

In 2015 and 2016, when this study was conducted, the Svenska Dagbladet photo department consisted of 11 full-time staff positions, including the director of photography, five photo editors and 4.5 staff photographer positions, following staff reductions in 2013.² During the periods of newsroom observation, one photo editor was assigned to print and online news, one photo editor was responsible for video and TV for the digital edition (svd.se), while one photo editor worked in the culture section and one in the business section. Following a newsroom reorganization in 2013, there was no longer a photo editor or photographer on duty during evenings or weekends.

Both newsroom observations and interviews were used to address the research questions. The specific focus was on the selection of images for the newspaper’s main news section, with a primary focus on processes for the lead news story. This boundary was based on the aim of the study, project resources and an interest in the perceived function of photographs. While various staff functions were interviewed and their work observed, the for-grounded function, and the study’s main focus, was that of photo editors for news whom were ‘shadowed’ during the periods of observation.³

Observations took place in May 2015 and September 2016, with three consecutive weekdays and two consecutive weekdays respectively⁴, followed by in-person interviews and mail correspondence with photo editors and the director of photography. The periods of observation, spaced about a year apart to address possible changes and to allow further insight into patterns of editorial processes, focused on routine news work. The author observed production and decision-making processes, attended formal and informal newsroom meetings and asked key staffers questions throughout the process. The semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted after the observation with key gatekeepers focused on the observed process, the rationale and outcome of publication decisions during the observed days and the days immediately prior to and following the days of observation, as well as respondents’ views of photojournalistic practice and their perceptions of the function of news photographs.

Observations and interviews were further informed by the author's previous research on the genres and function of new photographs in Swedish newspapers between 1995 and 2013 (Wadbring & Nilsson 2016). Specifically, in individual interviews and conversations, selected findings and materials from the previous study were tools for eliciting respondents' reflections on the newspaper's visual coverage.⁵

Findings

The findings are presented in the following sections, beginning with factors influencing processes regarding photographs, followed by photojournalistic practices and concluding with the perceived function of news photographs. Findings from observations and interviews are presented together in the following section in order to reflect the focus on processes. Therefore, information and insight into the editorial process provided by respondents are primarily integrated into the narrative, with opinions of respondents attributed and directly quoted where relevant. Respondent comments and documents cited in the findings section were translated from Swedish to English by the author.

The designed edition and the logic of the web

It was towards the end of a week when a photo editor was working on a story for the Sunday paper about a lack of hospital beds in the Stockholm region. The ideal would have been to photograph inside a hospital emergency ward, according to the photo editor. Yet, hospitals and other public institutions in Sweden are very restrictive in giving the news media access to photograph. As a result, the best option was to find a 'case', a frequently used journalistic device in which a complex issue is told through the experience of an affected individual. It was agreed that a photographer would accompany a reporter conducting an interview with a couple who had travelled to a hospital in another region to deliver their baby.

The outcome of the photo assignment included a portrait of the smiling new parents posing with their baby at home but no pictures from the hospital. While the image served its purpose on the inside pages, where it ran alongside archive photos of ambulances and a generic hospital entrance, it did not visually hold up for the intended cover spot as it lacked information about the story content, according to the photo editor. As a result, the photo editor pitched an alternative Sunday cover photo: an image from a reportage running in the culture section on youth culture and integration. The news editor agreed that it was a good solution that would also promote the paper's own coverage and in-depth Sunday reading.

The balance between the news value of the story and the aim to visualize it with a strong photograph, such as in the hospital story, was a recurring theme in observed processes and respondents' comments. The example above also illustrates various factors of influence on image selection. Story topic, production routines, publication formats, access to sources, newsroom resources and image quality were the main factors found, with story topic and focus cited as decisive factors. 'Story content rules', one photo editor noted.

A sustained focus on the newspaper's own material for the print edition, with an emphasis on routine and in-depth news and reportage, was perhaps the most salient

aspect of routine influencing image selection, according to observations and respondents. Reporting routines also had an impact on photojournalistic routines in that it was sometimes a challenge to make an interview situation photographically interesting. This could lead to a lack of options for suitable images, especially for page one.

A photo editor whose experience as a photographer dated to the pre-digital era considered changes in reporting routines over time to have an impact on photojournalistic routines. That is, while reporters nowadays conducted phone interviews from the office, a photojournalist still needed to be at the scene of an event to photograph. 'If we don't go outside we won't get the picture', this editor stated in a newsroom discussion about whether to send out a photographer or use archival photos. Furthermore, fewer resources for photo assignments coupled with increased speed and demand for images for the web edition had resulted in an increased use of stock photo and archival images.

The impact of production routines included an early deadline for the print edition and a routine to pre-produce editions for the weekend when no photo editors and staff photographers were on duty. Furthermore, the page template and publishing format, such as a current focus on mobile apps – including smart phones and reading tablets – had an impact. Images were selected for the web to be readable in small size, sometimes with the exclusion of images of greater complexity in content and composition.

Decisions regarding photographs for the hospital story and other observed moments in the production process, where a line was drawn for quality for the print cover, appeared driven by the photo editor on duty in a routine shared among photo editor, news editor and designers. Furthermore, feedback on the quality of the lead cover image was articulated in the section editors' morning meeting where the day's newspaper – text as well as photographs and graphics – was evaluated page by page.

Photo editors, news editors as well as designers articulated the importance of getting the lead news photograph and cover image right. One reason offered by several respondents was that the tabloid-format and page template only allowed for one large photo on the cover page, in contrast to the news mix with various photos on the broadsheet-format cover prior to the year 2000. As a result, the choice of lead page-one photo – which in Svenska Dagbladet frequently referred to the top news story running on the page eight-nine spread – had significance in the designed edition, which is how one respondent referred to the daily edition available in print and digitally; the digital designed edition available to subscribers was accessible either on reading tablet, smart-phone or computer and could be downloaded in pdf-format. While as a rule, stories were published first on the web, the print edition featured stories selected for their impact and durability. Given the focus on the newspaper's own material in this edition, it appeared to manifest the journalistic identity and editorial philosophy of Svenska Dagbladet. 'We're good at education stories and this is an important story', a print-edition editor explained the choice of a lead news story as part of the newspaper's focus and areas of expertise.

If there were no suitable images available, the print cover might run with what several respondents said was a less desirable 'graphics solution', while photographs for the lead story would run on the inside pages of the print edition. However, the continuously updated digital edition, which included breaking international and domestic news as well as in-depth and routine coverage, had a different logic given the absence of a durable front-page image since readers were expected to scroll down while reading; as a result, when posting the hospital story to the web edition, the photo editor opened with the

portrait of the couple with the baby followed by archive photos of the ambulance and hospital entrance.

Continuities and changes in gatekeeping routines

Various staff functions were observed to participate in decisions regarding images, an indication of a process depending on shared conceptions of news values and routines. The news editor and page-one designer had influence over the final choice of cover image, based on the stories of the day and issues such as design concerns – including an image's graphic character and fit with the headline. Furthermore, the image selection depended on breaking news, developing stories and continuous coverage, such as a desire not to be repetitive in topic and style for the print cover and an expressed need for variety in the selection of archival photographs.

The photo editor assigned to news was observed to be involved in a process from production to publication in a daily news cycle of the print edition as well as image selection for the changing digital edition. Therefore, it is not possible to separate the decision-making process from the rest of the production process. This is particularly the case since the photo editor also gave photo assignments and would be able to at least partially determine and anticipate a certain image for the story before making the final selection. Whenever possible, the photo editor chose photographs produced in-house, either resulting from assignments or archival images. When in-house photographs were not available, as is generally the case for the international coverage, the editors relied on news agency images.

The photo editor was evidently the specialist on photojournalistic content. During one observed day, the tasks of the photo editor for news included attending meetings where stories of the day and the following days were discussed and, throughout the day, the photo editor was making image selections for the following day's print edition and for some consecutive days; toning photographs for the digital edition and answering requests for photographs from digital editors; coordinating and giving photo assignments to photographers and reviewing the outcome of completed assignments as photographers returned to the newsroom; viewing a photographer's selection of images for a reportage; coordinating shooting assignments with other sections' photo editors; going through the image feed from agencies and picking images for international and agency stories for the inside pages of print and for immediate upload to the digital edition; and performing archival image searches.

As a result, the photo editor performed manifold tasks reflecting the complexity and various stages of image production and decision-making carried out simultaneously. While not all tasks were completed in one day, some were part of a longer cycle to be concluded the following day or later. In this respect, the photo editor appeared to have a certain control in shaping image production and selection.

There were also signs of a shared gatekeeping role and process, in part reflecting a change in routines and professional roles in the digital newsroom. The photographer as gatekeeper was evident throughout both observation periods. This might be attributed to changing routines, new technology and the increase in recent years of direct coverage on the web, as well as the active participation of photographers in this newsroom. Photo editors encouraged photographers to make their own first selection of images for a story,

with submissions from three to perhaps 30 or more photos depending on the story. Furthermore, photographers on assignment could add visual content to the digital edition.

Another evolving gatekeeping function, visible in 2016 in a new routine, also concerned the digital edition, specifically through a new function where news editors now had direct access to searchable image banks from where they could choose and upload images to the digital edition. There were different views on the impact of this novelty on the workflow and output. A photo editor, stating that ideally all photo selections should involve a photo editor, especially for technical image quality, acknowledged that there were not enough staff resources to oversee all image selections.

However, a news editor said that he found the new tool useful for getting a hold of images quickly, emphasizing that image quality was most important for the print edition and the newspaper's own stories and less so for the digital edition. Some photo staffers, however, questioned certain image choices, either due to content or lack of appropriate toning. Another perspective offered was that the notion of shared control of content selection within the newsroom didn't just concern images. Rather, everyone could now participate since the digital edition was open for staffers to go in and upload materials and make corrections to texts when needed. According to this perspective, there was a shared responsibility for content.

Individual photo editors assigned to news were observed to differ slightly in approach, perhaps as a result of individual style, workload, the specific news stories of the day or for other reasons. For instance, there were differences in how much photo editors asserted expertise in the selection of images for the digital edition.

A certain elasticity in gatekeeping and publication time was observed when a photo editor replaced agency images in the digital edition due to low quality in content and technique. Conversely, at one point a news editor critiqued a photo editor's selection of an image for its low news value, with the result that the image was replaced. The second part of this elasticity had to do with the logic of the web where stories were frequently updated. This could also occur when images by staff photographers were added as a story developed.

The search for the observed moment

Asked how they perceived the function of news photographs, several respondents stressed news value and the fact that the image must fit into the 'entirety' of a story and the focus of the paper on a given day. Journalistic news value had priority, although the weight of a story's news value over image quality or vice versa depended on story topic and news genre, the general news flow and factors in ongoing coverage and breaking news. An equally important attribute was the capacity of the photograph to make readers pause and feel engaged. Sequencing and storytelling were deemed important in the selection of images for a page spread or reportage. These assessments hewed close to the newspaper's photo policy that stated, in part: 'The photograph published in Svenska Dagbladet must be true, journalistically and visually motivated, aesthetic, have actuality and be of high technical quality. Together with headline, text and graphics, the photo should communicate with the reader. It must touch, engage, surprise and inform – not merely illustrate...'

The documentary mode, perhaps best articulated in the observed moment, remained the ideal and was the convention used when possible to help fulfil some of these crite-

ria. This notwithstanding, a large number of posed portraits were published in the news section, a tendency confirmed by respondents. This contradiction was explained by one respondent as the product of the types of stories published where, as previously noted, the photograph easily becomes an illustration and reference to the people interviewed in the story rather than an engaging visualization of the topic.

Yet portraits were also considered assets because of their ability to establish a bond with readers by making a personal connection. A photo editor exemplified this point with a news reportage in which people in the countryside were interviewed about the immigration and integration policies of the governing Social Democrats halfway through their four-year term in office (published on September 10, 2016). The selected cover portrait depicted a man and his young grandson seated in the clubhouse of a small-town football club; the grandfather was casually dressed in a track suit, the club's trophy shelf behind him and a coffee thermos and cookies laid out on the coffee table in the foreground, while the boy was enjoying a lollipop. The image was lauded for the way it captured everyday rural life, a topic said to be an uncommon focus for a newspaper mostly covering the capital city and with a largely urban readership. Furthermore, some respondents welcomed the intimate, personal address currently common in Svenska Dagbladet portraits, where the subject looks into the camera, a break with documentary conventions associated with photojournalism.

While some respondents stated that the criteria for image selection for the digital edition were the same as for the print edition, it was possible to observe clear differences in a use of generic photos and tightly cropped, small photos on the web. Furthermore, the preferred visual style of images published in the digital edition was to be intimate and not too complex. In comparison to the print edition, images in the continuously updated web edition were expected to receive a more fleeting attention from readers.

Observations and some respondent comments indicated an ambivalence towards a 'faster kind of photojournalism', a reference to easily-read web images of little communicative value. Asked about the communicative function of news photographs, a photo editor with long professional experience reflected: 'I think we have forgotten the purpose of the photograph. It is supposed to show something and lure you to read, to look closer. This has disappeared more and more.'

There was an expressed uncertainty about the future role of the print edition; yet the digital version of the print edition (the designed edition), downloadable in pdf-format, was lauded for its high-quality image resolution and was perceived to be popular with readers. Furthermore, the news section was merely one part of the newspaper's output. Indeed, in particular during weekdays, the daily news section contained few pages and stories, while there were more resources and space allocated to weekend reading, including photo reportage. According to the director of photography, the newspaper had more respect for the image today than previously and photojournalism enjoyed high status in the newsroom, a sentiment echoed by other respondents. At Svenska Dagbladet, staff photojournalists primarily focused on visual coverage, while reporters focused on writing. Thus, the multi-skilling employed by some other news organizations in Sweden was not in practice in this newsroom.

Discussion and conclusion

In agreement with previous studies, decisions about the production and publication of images at Svenska Dagbladet appeared to be shaped by factors on various levels that tended to interact (e.g. Bissell 2000a, Schwalbe, Silcock & Candello 2015, Seelig 2005). For instance, Schwalbe, Silcock & Candello (2015) identify four interactive factors, including the news value judgment of the journalist, the organization's routines for news-gathering, economic factors and technology, with audiences as an additional factor.

In this study, reporting and production routines as well as economic factors and technology were found to be major influences. More specifically, story topic, access to sources, resources, image quality and publication formats, as well as perceptions regarding the audiences, were found to shape decisions regarding images. Format considerations were foregrounded in observed processes and comments, which can be explained by shifts in reading habits and the newspaper's current emphasis on mobile platforms. For news stories primarily produced in-house, the main focus of this study, the production and decision-making processes were observed as intertwined, in part because the photo editor participated in the entire production process.

Visual gatekeeping processes were found to be mostly collaborative with the photo editor possessing the expertise needed to make judgment calls and 'visual sense' of images, in the words of Seelig (2005:10). Compared to the functions of the visual gatecheckers of the afore-mentioned study on the digital newsroom (Schwalbe, Silcock & Candello 2015), Svenska Dagbladet photo editors performed additional functions, perhaps a result of the focus in coverage and the organization and staffing of this particular newspaper. Specifically, the functions of researcher and archivist were part of a practice where staffers occupying the post of photo editor possessed an institutional memory of the newspaper's own archival images and staff photographers' past projects. A related finding concerns the complexity and multi-faceted role of the photo editor function: today the photo editor carries out various tasks that were previously carried out by staff functions that have now disappeared; two examples are those of photo or lab technician and archivist.

There were also signs of a shared and changing gatekeeping function with some changes from 2015 to 2016, notably in some decisions about image publication that no longer passed by a photo editor (see Vobic & Tomanić Trivunđža 2015). Lowrey (2002) argues that there is a difference in output between newsrooms where photojournalists have a strong position and those where they do not, while Langton (2009) finds that image quality has declined as a result of the reduced time allocated to assignments and image selection. Some respondents at Svenska Dagbladet noted a lessened technical image quality on weekends when there were no photo editors or photographers on duty.

When it comes to the criteria for evaluating an image, respondents cited story content as the most decisive. As a result, image content was foregrounded over its communicative aspects. This echoes the afore-mentioned study by Schwalbe, Silcock and Candello (2015) where respondents mention news value judgment as the most important factor, followed by professional norms, ethics and other criteria, while placing image quality third in level of importance.

Findings from the author's previous research (Wadbring & Nilsson 2016) and some respondents' reflections regarding images published in Svenska Dagbladet in recent years indicate a partial shift in news photography, away from photographic eyewitnessing

and the observed moment and towards portraiture and, what one respondent referred to as ‘static images’, as well as archival photographs. Yet it was also possible to observe the creative potential and accessibility of digital news production, such as in the direct posting of images and of space for visual storytelling on the web. However, similarly to the findings of Langton (2009) and Vobic & Tomanić Trivundža (2015), some respondents spoke of resources and formats as constraints. One stated constraint was a lack of time needed to edit visual stories with images from the daily agency feed. As a result, the multi-platform publication strategy and available images offered opportunities for photojournalism, but not always the resources to fulfil them.

This case study focused on editorial processes for news photographs with a particular emphasis on the printed or edited newspaper edition. As a qualitative study limited in scope and focusing on one aspect of image-production and selection in one newsroom, it does not claim general applicability nor does it claim to represent the examined newspaper’s overall production processes across platforms and media.

Nevertheless, the findings have raised a set of issues that may be addressed in future research, including the visual strategies of news organizations and the impact of those.

For example, Svenska Dagbladet is adopting a widespread trend of placing more resources on weekend reading and web-TV. A recent (2017) change in photo desk staffing at the newspaper signals that this focus will continue as photo editor resources have been shifted to web-TV while the photo editor functions for business and news have been consolidated into one.

Another area of interest is the shift to so-called multi-competence production where journalists are no longer either photographers or reporters, but rather each staffer performs all tasks. While some major newspapers in Sweden, including Svenska Dagbladet, have not introduced this model, it is gaining ground in other media companies. Such a study might also be comparative, in order to compare the effects of such strategies in different contexts.

As a result of these changes, the status of visual expertise in journalism merits further attention in future research. The topic was raised during the fieldwork in conversations about the future direction of photojournalism. Reflecting on the possible factors behind the widespread trend of reducing or eliminating photojournalism staff, some respondents suggested that the contributions and tasks performed by photo editors were ‘invisible’ and not well known.

Finally, the experience of audiences is of great importance. A question that emerged during the fieldwork is whether readers have different expectations of images published in the print edition compared to the digital edition. While an eye-tracking and interview study conducted by the National Press Photographers Association of the United States in collaboration with the Poynter Institute (NPPA 2015) found that readers preferred complex images that featured visual storytelling and image quality, there is a need for more research in this area given the rapid changes in media content, visual language and reading and viewing practices.

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Notes

1. The word 'photo' is used for all functions of the photojournalism area, including 'photo editor', 'photographer', 'photo department' and 'director of photography'. While staff photojournalists also worked with video, the narrower definition 'photo' or 'photographer' is used throughout the article, with the exception of direct references to video, for consistency's sake and since the focus is primarily on still photographs.
2. In 2007, the Svenska Dagbladet photo desk had 20 fulltime staff positions, consisting of the director of photography, seven photo editors, 10 photographers, one assistant and one archivist. The current director of photography has held that position since 2000. Most of the photo editors and photographers have also been employed at the newspaper for a number of years.
3. The function of photo editor for news was assigned to different individuals during the two periods of observation as photo staffers, including some photographers, rotated to functions as needed in case of leaves of absence, etc.
4. The days of observation were selected in consultation with the photo staff to offer maximum opportunity for insight into production processes concerning images, specifically since the news photo editor's routine work during those weekdays included the daily news cycle as well as producing the weekend editions and planning for the following week.
5. Findings from the author's previous study were also shared with the photo staff in a presentation by the author following one of the periods of observation, with the purpose of sharing research and inviting comments and feedback.

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