



Authenticity vs. Authority: Ethical Dimensions of Integrating User-Generated Content in Broadcast News

Ishani karki, Doctoral Researcher, School of Media, Films and Television Studies, IIMT University, Meerut

ishanikarki88@gmail.com

Dr. Prithvi Sengar, Assistant Professor, School of Media, Films and Television Studies, IIMT University, Meerut

prithvisengar_jmc@iimtindia.net

Abstract

The convergence of citizen-shot footage, social media posts, and institutional broadcast news has reorganised the epistemology of televised journalism. Smartphones have turned bystanders into first responders of information, and newsrooms have turned bystander footage into programming. This paper examines the ethical fault line that emerges when the raw, embodied authenticity of user-generated content (UGC) meets the procedural authority of broadcast news organisations. Drawing on gatekeeping theory, participatory journalism scholarship, and verification studies, the paper argues that authenticity and authority are not opposites to be reconciled once and for all but two competing forms of legitimacy that broadcasters must continually renegotiate, story by story, frame by frame. Using a qualitative, document-based and comparative case approach spanning international examples such as the BBC User-Generated Content Hub and CNN iReport alongside Indian broadcast practice during floods, communal unrest, and farmer protests the paper identifies five recurring ethical tensions: consent and dignity, verification failure, decontextualization, algorithmic amplification, and the emergent problem of synthetic or AI-manipulated UGC. It then proposes an original integrative framework, the Authenticity-Authority Continuum (AAC), together with a five-step editorial checklist (the VERIFY model: Verify, evaluate consent, Recontextualise, Identify source, Flag uncertainty, Yield attribution) intended to help broadcast newsrooms make defensible, transparent decisions when incorporating citizen-sourced material. The paper concludes that ethical UGC integration is not a matter of adding a disclaimer to unvetted footage but of building an editorial culture that treats authenticity as a value to be earned through process, not merely a quality inherent in amateur origin.

Keywords: user-generated content, broadcast news, journalism ethics, gatekeeping, verification, citizen journalism, authenticity, media authority

1. Introduction

On any given evening, a television newsroom anywhere in the world will run at least one story that did not originate with a trained reporter. It may be a shaky vertical video of a building on fire, a voice notes describing a landslide, or a WhatsApp forward of a crowd chanting outside a polling booth. Fifteen years ago, such material rarely made it past the assignment desk. Today it frequently leads the bulletin. The transformation is not simply technological smartphones with high-resolution cameras and near-universal connectivity but epistemological. Television news, an institution historically defined by its claim to trained observation, editorial verification, and institutional accountability, now regularly borrows its most powerful images from people who have none of those credentials and who did not intend to become journalists at all. This paper is concerned with the ethical consequences of that borrowing. The phrase user-generated content, or UGC, has become a catch-all term in industry usage for any audio-visual or textual material produced by non-professionals and later incorporated, in whole or in part, into professional news output. The term is deceptively neutral. It groups together a grieving relative's phone video of a disaster, a political operative's strategically leaked clip, a bystander's accidental capture of a crime, and a coordinated disinformation campaign dressed up as a citizen eyewitness account. Broadcasters increasingly rely on all of these categories under the single banner of UGC, and the industry's editorial vocabulary has not kept pace with the ethical complexity this creates.



The central argument advanced here is that broadcast news organisations face a persistent and probably permanent tension between two forms of legitimacy. The first is authenticity: the sense that footage shot by an ordinary person, present at the moment something happened, carries an evidentiary and emotional truth that professional reportage arriving after the fact, mediated by cameras and correspondents cannot replicate. The second is authority: the institutional apparatus of editorial verification, legal accountability, professional training, and reputational stake that broadcasters have historically offered as their distinguishing value over unmediated eyewitness accounts. UGC integration asks broadcasters to borrow the emotional and evidentiary power of the first while retaining the institutional credibility of the second. This is not a technical problem to be solved with a verification checklist alone; it is an ethical problem about what broadcasters owe to the people whose images they use, to the audiences who trust those images, and to the profession's own claim to distinguish itself from the undifferentiated flow of social media content it now so heavily depends upon. The paper proceeds in eight further parts. It situates the debate within gatekeeping theory and participatory journalism scholarship; it sets out the study's objectives, questions, and qualitative comparative method; it examines authenticity and authority as competing paradigms of legitimacy; it presents case material from international and Indian broadcast practice; it maps five recurring ethical tensions in UGC integration; it proposes an original framework and editorial checklist; it discusses implications for newsroom practice and media literacy; and it concludes with recommendations for broadcasters, regulators, and journalism educators.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The scholarly conversation about UGC in broadcast news sits at the intersection of three older bodies of theory: gatekeeping theory, participatory and citizen journalism studies, and the sociology of trust in mass media. Each offers a partial lens on the authenticity-authority tension, and each has been complicated by the smartphone era in ways its original authors did not anticipate.

2.1 Gatekeeping Theory and the Rise of Gate-watching

Gatekeeping theory, developed initially to explain how wire editors selected which stories reached the public and later elaborated into a multi-level model spanning individual, routine, organisational, social-institutional, and social-system influences, long assumed that the gate was controlled by an identifiable set of professionals operating inside a newsroom. The rise of participatory platforms unsettled this assumption in two distinct ways. First, the supply of raw material exploded: instead of choosing among wire dispatches and staff reports, editors now choose among an effectively unlimited stream of citizen-shot video, much of it uploaded to open platforms before any broadcaster sees it. Second, the gate itself becomes porous, because footage that a broadcaster declines to air may already be circulating publicly, which changes the ethical calculus of publication from 'should this be seen' to 'should this be seen with our institutional endorsement attached.' Contemporary gatekeeping scholarship increasingly describes this as 'gate-watching' rather than gatekeeping the newsroom's function shifts from selecting what becomes public to curating, verifying, and contextualising what is already public.

This shift matters ethically because it changes what authority actually buys the broadcaster. A broadcaster can no longer claim exclusive access to the image; audiences may well have seen the raw clip on social media before the evening bulletin airs it. What the broadcaster can still claim, and arguably the only thing left for it to claim, is a process: verification, context, restraint, and accountability for the framing choices made around the image. Authority in the UGC era is less about controlling access to information and more about vouching for its meaning.

2.2 Participatory Journalism and the Citizen Contributor



A second strand of literature, associated with the study of participatory and citizen journalism, has examined the normative promise that ordinary people's contributions might democratise news production, widen the range of voices represented on air, and correct the historical tendency of professional journalism to under-report certain communities and events. Scholars working in this tradition have documented genuine gains: during disasters, protests, and rapidly unfolding crises, citizen footage has repeatedly supplied broadcasters with material no professional crew could have obtained in time, and has occasionally supplied evidence that powerful actors would have preferred to suppress. At the same time, this literature has been consistently cautious about overstating the democratising effect. Newsrooms remain the final arbiters of which citizen contributions are selected, how they are edited, and what narrative frame surrounds them; the citizen contributor rarely retains editorial control once their material enters the broadcast pipeline. Several scholars in this field have described this as a form of 'outsourced risk, retained authority' the citizen contributor bears the physical and sometimes legal risk of capturing the footage, while the broadcaster retains the interpretive and commercial power that follows. This asymmetry is directly relevant to the ethics of the authenticity-authority relationship. If broadcasters wish to claim the emotional and evidentiary authenticity of citizen footage while retaining full editorial authority over its presentation, they take on an ethical obligation toward the contributor that is easy to state in principle informed consent, fair attribution, protection from harm and considerably harder to discharge consistently under the time pressure of a breaking-news cycle.

2.3 Trust, Credibility, and the Naive Authenticity Heuristic

Thirdly, the topic of trust with respect to mass-mediated information is considered. It is important to mention that while studying trust, scholars distinguish between source credibility (the speaker) and message credibility (the message itself). In the case of user-generated content, things get complicated. While the "naive authenticity" heuristic can work for bystander footage since people tend to believe that an unedited footage shot by someone who does not have a hidden agenda or any interest in manipulating the audience should be trusted more than the edited footage with perfect picture quality, this same authenticity could actually decrease the trust in the broadcaster since the audience finds out that the broadcaster airs unverified user-generated videos.

2.4 The Generative AI Complication

This is an emerging trend in the literature that highlights the role played by generative AI technologies in making the situation more complicated. Affordable and indiscernible synthetic audio, videos, and images challenge the validity of the previous authenticity criteria. In other words, low-quality and amateur images cannot serve as a sign of the authenticity anymore because synthetic images can be created in a way that makes them look authentic. Scholarly studies of newsroom self-regulation indicate that some media organizations have introduced internal standards regarding the use of AI-related content but enforcement remains poor.

2.5 Research Gap

Three gaps exist nonetheless. The first gap is that most of the research is carried out in either the Global North's broadcast environment (BBC, CNN, prominent American/European broadcasters) or platform citizen journalism (Twitter, YouTube) without much reference being made to the Indian broadcasting context which includes a vibrant 24-hour broadcasting system in India and unique forms of user-generated content during religious festivals, disasters, communal events, and protests. Second, there is no unified approach to the use of user-generated content in an ethical manner, although there are many pieces of advice scattered throughout newsguides and verification guides that can be used by trainers. Third, synthetic UGC has been analyzed mainly in connection with text-based social media.

3. Research Objectives and Questions

3.1 Objectives



This paper addresses these gaps through the following objectives:

1. To theorise the relationship between authenticity and authority as two distinct, sometimes competing, forms of legitimacy that broadcast news organisations draw upon when incorporating UGC.
2. To identify, through comparative case analysis, the recurring ethical tensions that arise in the practice of UGC integration across international and Indian broadcast contexts.
3. To examine how the growing presence of AI-generated and AI-manipulated material intensifies existing ethical challenges around verification and consent.
4. To propose an original, teachable framework the Authenticity-Authority Continuum and the accompanying VERIFY editorial checklist that newsroom practitioners and journalism educators can apply to UGC decisions.
5. To offer practice-oriented recommendations for broadcasters, media regulators, and journalism curricula.

3.2 Research Questions

RQ1: How do broadcast news organisations construct and communicate the legitimacy of user-generated content when they lack the traditional authority markers of professional sourcing?

RQ2: What recurring ethical tensions emerge across international and Indian broadcast case material when UGC is integrated into professional news output?

RQ3: In what ways does the increasing availability of AI-generated or AI-manipulated content alter the ethical calculus of UGC verification in time-constrained broadcast environments?

RQ4: What editorial framework can meaningfully reconcile the evidentiary and emotional value of authenticity with the institutional obligations of broadcast authority?

4. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design combining comparative case study analysis with document analysis of editorial guidelines. The approach is appropriate because the research questions concern meaning-making, professional norms, and ethical reasoning rather than measurable frequencies, and because the phenomenon under study editorial decision-making around UGC is rarely observable directly by outside researchers and must instead be reconstructed from published newsroom guidelines, verification handbooks, regulatory rulings, post-hoc journalistic accounts of specific incidents, and the researcher's own comparative reading of broadcast coverage during major news events.

Case selection followed a purposive, maximum-variation logic intended to surface a wide range of ethical scenarios rather than to achieve statistical representativeness. Cases were drawn from three categories: (a) institutionalised international UGC operations with published editorial standards, principally the BBC's User-Generated Content Hub and CNN's iReport initiative and its successor practices, chosen because both organisations have been unusually transparent about their verification workflows in public statements and industry commentary; (b) Indian broadcast coverage of recurring high-UGC-volume event types monsoon flooding, communal or law-and-order incidents, and the 2020-2021 farmer protests chosen because these represent the event categories in which Indian news channels most heavily depend on citizen-sourced footage and because they surface distinctive regional, linguistic, and regulatory dimensions largely absent from the international literature; and (c) documented cross-national incidents of UGC verification failure or synthetic-media deception, chosen to illuminate the boundary conditions of the authenticity-authority tension.

Data sources included publicly available newsroom editorial guidelines and verification handbooks, regulatory and self-regulatory body rulings (including guidance from bodies such as the News Broadcasters and Digital Association in India and comparable international press and broadcast standards bodies), industry and trade press coverage of specific UGC incidents, and secondary academic literature on gatekeeping, participatory journalism, and misinformation. Materials were analysed thematically, using an iterative coding process that



began with the five ethical tensions identified provisionally from the literature review consent and dignity, verification failure, decontextualization, algorithmic amplification, and synthetic manipulation and refined these categories against the case material until thematic saturation was reached, meaning that further case material ceased to reveal materially new tension types. The study's limitations should be stated plainly. As a document-based and comparative analysis rather than an ethnographic study inside newsrooms, it cannot directly observe the informal, unrecorded editorial conversations in which many UGC decisions are actually made; its account of newsroom reasoning is necessarily reconstructed from what organisations choose to publish or what becomes public through post-hoc reporting, which may understate both best and worst practice. The Indian case material, while chosen for its regional and linguistic diversity, cannot represent the full diversity of India's more than four hundred news and current-affairs channels operating across more than a dozen major languages, and the analysis should be read as illustrative of recurring patterns rather than exhaustive of the field.

5. The Authenticity Paradigm

Authenticity of user generated footage in broadcasting operates on at least three different planes all too often collapsed into each other, thus making ethics of UGC integration into news broadcasts particularly complex.

The first is evidentiary authenticity: the assertion that the footage shows what it shows, shot where and when it claims to have been taken and not materially altered in any way. This is the register most directly addressed by technical verification tools reverse image search, metadata analysis, cross-referencing with satellite imagery or weather data, geolocation of visible landmarks, and corroboration with other independent sources. Evidentiary authenticity is, in principle, a factual question with a right answer, even if that answer is sometimes difficult to establish under time pressure.

The second is experiential authenticity: the sense that footage captures something professional cameras could not, precisely because it was shot by someone who was not trying to compose a shot. The tilted horizon of a phone pulled from a pocket mid-emergency, the panicked breathing audibles on the audio track, the unedited duration of a moment that a professional editor would have trimmed these imperfections function rhetorically as guarantees of presence. Audiences read technical roughness as proof of proximity to the event, even though, as noted above, this heuristic is increasingly exploitable by synthetic media designed to mimic those very imperfections.

The third is what might be called representational authenticity: the claim that UGC gives voice to perspectives and communities that professional news crews, for reasons of access, resourcing, or institutional bias, would otherwise fail to capture. This register carries the strongest normative weight in participatory journalism scholarship, because it connects UGC integration to broader arguments about media pluralism and the democratisation of the public sphere. A citizen video from inside a flooded village that no television crew could reach before the waters receded is not merely evidentiary or experiential; it is, in an important sense, an act of testimony that the broadcast institution did not itself produce and could not have produced. The ethical stakes of UGC integration differ substantially depending on which register of authenticity is actually doing the work in a given broadcast decision, and newsroom practice frequently elides the distinction. A producer who selects a piece of UGC primarily for its representational value because it is the only footage available from an underserved location but who then presents it to the audience primarily on the strength of its experiential authenticity, without having done the evidentiary work to confirm it, has quietly borrowed legitimacy from one register to cover a deficiency in another. This is one of the paper's central diagnostic claims: many of the ethical failures documented in the case material below occur not because broadcasters ignore authenticity altogether, but because they allow one register of authenticity to substitute, unexamined, for another.



6. The Authority Paradigm

Authority on the part of the broadcaster is just as much multidimensional. It is important to consider four elements that together make up the idea of institutional authority that audiences and authorities usually have in mind when referring to a broadcaster's authority. Verification authority within the newsroom: The process of confirming facts before broadcast dedicated to verification desks, source guidelines, double-sourcing, and staff training on open-source verification. BBC UGC Hub and other organizations have established their credibility by explaining the process of how citizen journalism footage gets verified and refusing to broadcast unverified materials even when it was to their detriment. Regulatory authority comes from the fact that they are bound by defamatory laws, licensing and regulation, and self-regulation codes and there is punishment for spreading any kind of misinformation; something that is not possible for anonymous social media users. Professional and reputational authority is based on a long record of good performance. People can rely on the channel because of their track record of good editing; they can trust new information coming from someone who is known to be trustworthy.

Thirdly, there is the curatorial and contextual authority. Here, the authority of a broadcaster is based on framing the citizen video within the right context by telling more about the background of the incident, what happened after that, and what it all means. A simple video where people are throwing stones indicates that people threw stones but it does not indicate who provoked them into doing so, how many were involved, and what was happening just before. Providing the needed context becomes an ethical duty that helps in maintaining authority even when that authority is not necessarily true. In the paper, it is stated that in order to ethically frame UGC, the broadcaster should first figure out which kind of authority would be right for which content.

7. Comparative Case Studies

The following case material illustrates how the authenticity-authority tension plays out in practice, drawn from both international and Indian broadcast contexts.

7.1 The BBC User-Generated Content Hub

The BBC's User-Generated Content Hub, established in the mid-2000s and gaining momentum after it played a crucial verification role during breaking news events, is often considered an example of UGC verification on an institutional scale. The Hub functions as a 24-hour desk independent from programme production: the people responsible for verification are not the ones who scramble to fill the next bulletin on time and are thus less inclined to confirm unverified content to avoid missing the deadline. What is known about the BBC Hub process is a multi-step procedure: checking metadata, comparing locations and the weather conditions in the footage, contacting the source of the material and asking for permission to use it, corroborating information in the footage with wire service or independent news sources. It is also worth noting that BBC's Hub has been openly rejecting the verification of high-profile material refused by other media outlets, showing that restraint can be seen as a form of authority. BBC's experience illustrates that authenticity and authority can co-exist if an organization is prepared to sacrifice the speed (and sometimes competitiveness) for proper verification.

7.2 CNN iReport

In 2006, CNN launched iReport which was subsequently reorganized into an approach that differed significantly from central verification in its approach. The process involved a process where citizens' inputs would be accepted in an open format and subsequently published without much pre-screening as unverified reports but some selected ones would be verified and placed on CNN broadcasts. It is clear that the gap between authenticity and authority was highlighted through this platform since unverified stories came with a disclaimer while the verified ones came with the weight of the CNN editorial board. However, this model was met with criticism



for publishing false information as unverified until they could be removed because labeling might fail due to misunderstanding of the hierarchy by the audience or through promotion processes.

7.3 Indian Broadcast Practice: Monsoon Flooding

Indian television news channels, existing in a busy 24x7 and multilingual space, often end up covering the same news stories as well. In the context of monsoons and flooding in major urban centers such as Mumbai, Chennai, and Bengaluru, Indian media uses a lot of user-submitted videos of flooding shot using mobile phones and forwarded through WhatsApp. The use of encrypted forwarding system on WhatsApp, which eliminates all metadata and allows several forwarding steps from the initial source before arriving at the broadcaster, creates problems for authentication of sources. The use of user-generated content shows how such content has value for representational authenticity but evidential authenticity can become an issue.

7.4 Indian Broadcast Practice: The Farmer Protests (2020–2021)

The farmer demonstrations in India during 2020-2021 generated an extensive collection of broadcast videos from citizens that have considerable ethical implications. Depending on their particular editorial/political objectives, channels chose clips for their broadcasts in a radically different manner, making each protest site a battleground for competing informational realities. This highlights the flaw in international UGC studies that generally view verification as an act of validation of facts alone. The issue in the highly polarized media landscape is not only that there could be unverified clips, but also that the verified and authentic ones can be selectively chosen and arranged in order to generate completely different realities from one and the same events—a manipulation of context, not merely of content, that can rarely be solved by any checklist.

7.5 Synthetic and AI-Manipulated UGC

With more instances around the world, broadcasted or social media operations use of synthetic/manipulated media as authentic citizen footage indicates the most recent authenticity versus authority problem. With the rise of generative technologies that can create realistic audio/video, the old authenticity heuristic based on the imperfections of media to detect authenticity is now exploitable. According to the findings from self-regulatory newsroom studies, while more AI-media verification policies are developed, their implementation is inconsistent, and rarely complemented by real-time technical solutions.

8. Five Recurring Ethical Tensions

Drawing together the theoretical discussion and case material above, this paper identifies five recurring ethical tensions that structure the practical work of UGC integration in broadcast news.

1. **Consent and Dignity.** Citizens recording events may do so in the midst of trauma, danger or grief; asking for proper consent in such circumstances may be difficult and easy to take for granted. The individual in mourning or the passerby may be focused on something else entirely besides national broadcast, may not be reachable or may be unable to give consent to the news organization that wishes to use the clip. For broadcasters, it's an ethical question of either requiring full documentation of consent in every instance, which might result in exclusion of important user-generated content from disaster areas because it would be impossible to contact the citizen contributor, or foregoing consent altogether, considering it public domain footage.
2. **Failure to verify in a deadline environment** is a constant feature of the format rather than a problem of tools. Failure even occurs at resource-rich hubs such as the BBC Hub. The central moral issue here is whether news organizations are transparent and quick enough in setting the record straight when their verification process fails and whether they weigh properly incentives against costs of spreading misinformation.
3. **Decontextualization and selective framing,** In the Indian farmers' protest example, it becomes clear that the clips may be authentic in terms of the actual footage but unethical in



terms of how they are used by the means of selective sequencing, misleading titles, or framing that implies some kind of causation that isn't demonstrated by the clip. This is the most challenging issue to verify technically because it has everything to do with editorial bias, not with the authenticity of the clip.

4. Amplification and Feedback Loop Through Algorithm, The use of UGC will not remain restricted within the newsroom process anymore. A clip uploaded by a citizen journalist may get wider dissemination through the social media account of the broadcast than even the original broadcast version of the clip, sometimes even without any additional context attached to it. This feedback mechanism through which platform optimized versions of the content may outperform and undermine the verification process will be a cause of concern for the ethical responsibility of UGC use.

5. Fake or artificially modified videos. The newest challenge is fake or modified content that creates an appearance of authentic citizen video material despite there being no actual event or that has been modified in a subtle way from authentic footage to avoid being detected as such. This is a qualitative change in the problem in that it challenges the very notion of authenticity by means of cues of imperfection and spontaneity that used to be authenticity cues.

9. Toward an Integrative Framework

In response to the five tensions identified above, this paper proposes an original conceptual and practical contribution intended for both scholarly use and newsroom training: the Authenticity-Authority Continuum (AAC), accompanied by a five-step editorial checklist referred to here as the VERIFY model.

9.1 The Authenticity-Authority Continuum (AAC)

The Authenticity-Authority Continuum reframes the two concepts not as a binary choice but as two independent axes along which any given piece of UGC can be plotted at the moment of an editorial decision. The authenticity axis captures the newsroom's current confidence in the evidentiary genuineness of the material, ranging from unconfirmed through partially corroborated to fully verified. The authority axis captures the extent of institutional process that has actually been applied to the material whether it has passed through a dedicated verification function, received legal review, been contextualised by editorial staff with relevant subject expertise, and been clearly sourced and attributed to the audience. The central diagnostic claim of the framework is that broadcast ethics problems cluster disproportionately in the quadrant where authenticity is presented to the audience as high through confident anchor framing, dramatic placement, minimal hedging language while the underlying authority process remains low. Conversely, material that sits low on perceived authenticity but has actually received strong authority-side process (clearly labelled as unverified, but professionally contextualised and sourced) tends to generate comparatively few ethical complaints even when it later turns out to be inaccurate, because the audience was given an honest signal about the newsroom's actual confidence level. The practical implication for newsrooms is that the two axes should be made to move together and communicated to the audience together: perceived authenticity in the presentation of a piece of UGC should never be allowed to outrun the authority process actually completed behind the scenes, and where full verification is not possible before airing, the presentation itself through explicit sourcing language, visible caveats, and restrained framing should be adjusted downward to match.

9.2 The VERIFY Editorial Checklist

Building on the Continuum, the VERIFY model offers a five-step sequence intended to be teachable as a routine editorial habit rather than an occasional special procedure reserved for high-profile stories:

V- Verify provenance: confirm, to the extent achievable in the available time, that the footage depicts what it claims to depict, using metadata analysis, geolocation, reverse search, and



independent corroboration; treat technical imperfection as a neutral signal rather than a positive indicator of authenticity given the growing sophistication of synthetic media.

E - Evaluate consent: make a documented, good-faith effort to establish whether the contributor understood and agreed to broadcast use, weighing the public interest value of the footage against the dignity and welfare of identifiable individuals shown, particularly in scenes of injury, death, or acute distress.

R - Recontextualise deliberately: before broadcast, ask explicitly what the footage does and does not prove about causation, scale, and representativeness, and ensure the surrounding editorial narration does not imply more than the footage supports.

I - Identify source transparently: attribute the footage to its origin as specifically as circumstances allow, distinguishing clearly on-screen between professionally verified and provisionally sourced material, so that the audience receives an honest signal of the newsroom's actual confidence.

F - Flag uncertainty proportionately: where full verification has not been possible before airing, say so explicitly rather than allowing dramatic presentation to imply a confidence level the newsroom does not actually have, and commit to updating the audience if the assessment changes.

Y - Yield attribution and, where appropriate, credit or compensation: recognise the contributor's authorship and labour explicitly, both as an ethical acknowledgement and as a practical incentive that encourages future contributors to identify themselves rather than submit anonymously, which in turn supports better verification.

The VERIFY sequence is deliberately designed to be completed, at minimum in abbreviated form, within the time constraints of a genuine breaking-news environment; the point is not to slow verification into impracticality but to ensure that even a rapid editorial decision passes through each of the five considerations rather than defaulting, under pressure, to authenticity-only reasoning that skips the authority-side obligations altogether.

10. Discussion

The case material and framework developed above point toward several broader implications for how the industry and the academy think about UGC ethics.

The idea that the verification of user-generated content is a primarily technical task that can be solved by metadata tools, reverse image searches, or sophisticated synthetic media detection is a gross simplification since the editorial decisions, incentives, and organizational culture actually cause the most serious ethical issues. The example of Indian farmers' protests reveals that even after the total verification, the footage might still be misused via its presentation and sequence – something that cannot be prevented by any tool.

Secondly, with the convergence of broadcast and social media, it becomes impossible to approach the topic of UGC ethics through the concept of broadcast bulletins as the primary means of communication. This creates the problem of algorithmic amplification where there is an implication that the social media team in the newsroom requires their own VERIFY process. Third, the tension within the context of synthetic media reveals that there is a structural problem because the informal signs that audiences and even some journalists rely upon when assessing UGC content namely poor-quality production, spontaneity, and emotion are precisely the same elements that the tools used in generative media can now recreate most accurately. In other words, media literacy will not be enough to solve this problem, and the ability to verify will have to outpace tool availability, resulting in an arms race. Small or under-resourced broadcasters will find it difficult.

Finally, the differentiation between the three types of authenticity can be a way for journalism instructors to evaluate the process of choosing UGC by trainee producers. The distinction will allow trainee producers to make a clear statement of the register responsible for the choice of UGC and to check whether the verification process of the authority matches the demands of



this particular register. When the producer is able to say, “I use this clip primarily for its representational aspect since there is no footage from this location except this, and I have mentioned that on the screen,” it is an acceptable editorial decision despite the uncertainties.

11. Recommendations

In summary, the recommendations for each of the following:

Broadcast newsrooms:

- Develop a dedicated deadline-oriented verification process (BP: BBC UGC Hub system); if a dedicated desk is not viable, then implement the VERIFY process as a required step in the regular editorial flow process.
- Extend UGC ethical guidelines to social media sharing personnel beyond broadcast production personnel.
- Adopt clear on-screen labeling differentiating verified content from conditionally sourced content.

Media regulatory and self-regulatory agencies:

- Develop industry-wide minimum requirements for the UGC sourcing disclosure requirement, much like sponsorship disclosure requirements.
- Consider imposing an obligation on the broadcaster to have and disclose, if relevant to the complaint of the viewer, the verification record associated with certain UGC broadcasted particularly in the context of politically or socially sensitive events (protests, communal disturbances, etc.).

Broadcast journalism education/training:

- Incorporate the discussion of the authenticity/authority dichotomy as well as the three levels of authenticity into broadcast journalism teaching curriculum.
- Make synthetic media detection a core rather than an elective part of broadcast journalism education.

12. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the ethical challenge of integrating user-generated content into broadcast news cannot be resolved by treating authenticity and authority as a single problem to be solved once, at the point of intake, with a verification checklist. They are two distinct, sometimes mutually reinforcing and sometimes mutually undermining, forms of legitimacy, each with its own internal complexity three registers of authenticity, four components of authority that broadcasters must continually renegotiate across every stage of the editorial process, from initial sourcing through framing, sequencing, and downstream social distribution. The case material examined here, spanning institutionalised international verification operations and the distinctive pressures of India's large, competitive, multilingual broadcast environment, demonstrates that the same underlying tension produces different specific harms depending on institutional resourcing, platform architecture, political context, and, increasingly, the technical sophistication of synthetic media. The Authenticity-Authority Continuum and the VERIFY model proposed in this paper are offered as a modest, practically oriented contribution toward closing the gap between what UGC appears to promise broadcasters unmediated, emotionally powerful, competitively valuable proof of events as they happened and what responsible broadcast journalism actually owes to the contributors who capture that footage and the audiences who are asked to trust it. As the volume and technical sophistication of UGC continues to grow, the newsrooms most likely to retain public trust will not be those that use the most citizen footage, or even those that verify most technically rigorously, but those that are most transparent about the difference between the two showing their audience, consistently and honestly, exactly how much authority stands behind each claim to authenticity they choose to broadcast.

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