

# Use of free labour in the media within the scope of citizen journalism: A case study of the main news bulletin on *Show TV*

## *Yurttaş gazeteciliği kapsamında medyada ücretsiz emek kullanımı: Show TV ana haber bülteni üzerine bir örnek olay incelemesi*

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### Abstract

Citizens' ability to interact with content and participate in its production has enabled shifts in journalism techniques. Citizens' ability to record experiences, thanks to digital technologies and internet usage, has offered new perspectives on the news and helped place certain events on the agenda. Media organisations are now using user-generated content derived from images submitted by the public to report news that their reporters do not have access to. This research addresses the process by which media organisations exploit free labour by incorporating images captured by citizens into their broadcasts. To this end, news coverage on *Show TV* from May 9 to 15, 2022 and May 9 to 15, 2023 was analysed, with content analysis conducted to determine the proportion of non-professional images in the broadcasts. An in-depth interview was also conducted with the person in charge of *Show TV*'s *WhatsApp* Notification Line, which allows citizens to contribute to news production and gain insight into the operational processes of this structure. The findings that while the use of citizen-generated content varies from newscast to newscast, such images are present in every broadcast and enable the exploitation of free labour and the creation of value.

**Keywords:** Citizen journalism, user-generated content, crowdsourcing, prosumer, free labour

### Öz

Vatandaşların içerikle etkileşime girebilme ve üretime katılabilmeye yeteneği, gazetecilik pratiklerinde değişimlere olanak sağladı. Dijital teknolojiler ve internet kullanımı sayesinde vatandaşların deneyimlerini kayıt altına alabilmesi, haberlere yeni bakış açıları kazandırmış ve bazı olayların gündeme gelmesine yardımcı olmuştur. Medya kuruluşları artık kendi muhabirlerinin erişemeyeceği haberleri bildirmek için kullanıcı tarafından oluşturulan içeriklerden elde edilen görselleri kullanıyor. Bu araştırma, vatandaşların çektiği görsellerin yayınlarına dahil edilmesini

yoluyla medya kuruluşlarının ücretsiz emekten yararlanma sürecini ele almaktadır. Bu amaçla 9-15 Mayıs 2022 ve 9-15 Mayıs 2023 tarihlerinde *Show TV*'de yayınlanan haberler incelenerek yayınlarda profesyonel olmayan görsellerin oranının belirlenmesi amacıyla içerik analizi yapıldı. Vatandaşların haber üretimine katkıda bulunmasına olanak sağlayan *Show TV*'nin *WhatsApp* Bildirim Hattı sorumlusu ile de bu yapının operasyonel süreçleri hakkında bilgi sahibi olmak amacıyla derinlemesine görüşme gerçekleştirildi.

Bulgular, vatandaşların ürettiği içeriğin kullanımının haber programından haber programına farklılık gösterse de, bu tür görüntülerin her yayında mevcut olduğunu, ücretsiz emeğin sömürülmesine ve değer yaratılmasına olanak sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Yurttaş gazeteciliği, kullanıcı tarafından oluşturulan içerik, kitle kaynak kullanımı, üretketicici, ücretsiz emek.

## Introduction

The confluence of computer technologies and the Internet has significantly changed individuals' relationships with media (Van der Huff 2001). People have begun to satisfy their needs for information and entertainment not only through traditional mass media but also through the environments offered by these new technologies. This situation not only required the integration of mainstream media into digital environments but also enabled alternative, new publications (Negroponte, 1995; Lievrouw, 2011; Harcup, 2013).

The advent of Web 2.0 has significantly changed the manner in which people interact with media (Choudhury, 2014). People are no longer passive consumers; they can access news, information, entertainment, and contribute their own content through various online platforms. With the proliferation of smart devices and increased access to the Internet, users can share their perspectives and experiences from anywhere, becoming "prosumers" (Toffler, 1981) who play an active role in media content creation.

This situation has led to new approaches and understandings in journalism and has transformed the sector (Pavlik, 2001; Bardeel & Deuze, 2001; Ledford, 2008; Manfredi Sánchez et al., 2015; Vultee et al., 2020). As a result, new perspectives and approaches have emerged, such as the concept of citizen journalism. More and more people are contributing to news production by creating and sharing content online and responding to requests from media organisations.

User-Generated Content (UGC) includes journalism, news production, and content beyond (Holton et al., 2013). In this case, newsrooms had to open their doors to access photos, videos, and user comments (Lewis et al., 2010). The impact of technology on news has been addressed with a user-centred approach (Hermida & Thurman, 2008) and from a participation perspective (Deuze et al., 2007).

To complement their news productions, media organisations have adopted nonprofessional structures that allow UGC to be incorporated into their broadcasts (Atton, 2008). While this approach has brought a number of benefits to media organisations, such as increased efficiency (Goode, 2009; Blaagaard, 2013) and reduced costs (Buckingham, 2009), it is essential to recognise that users who contribute their content to these productions should also receive financial compensation for their

efforts. The surplus value added by non-employees is then fed into publications and creates the potential for financial returns.

This study takes a critical look at the support media organisations receive from users through citizen journalism. To illustrate this point, the news from *Show TV* is analysed and the surplus value created by images captured by non-employees is evaluated. In addition, the study includes an interview with the person responsible for *WhatsApp* Notification Line, which acts as an intermediary for citizens in sending images to media organisations.

### **Transformation of individuals into prosumers using user-generated content and crowdsourcing**

The advent of Web 2.0 and subsequent communication technologies have empowered individuals to not only consume media content and actively produce it (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011). Anderson (2007) referred to UGC as a key feature of Web 2.0. UGC encompasses all the ways people interact with social media and describes a range of media content and formats created by end users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Another study in this area highlights two important aspects of UGC. The first relates to business models that incorporate UGC and the impact of UGC on journalists' work routines and news reporting. The second aspect focuses on citizens' role in democracy through content creation, with an emphasis on strengthening the public sphere and promoting citizenship (Manosevitch & Tenenboim, 2017).

According to van Dijck (2009), users view their voluntary contributions to content creation as entertainment or play, rather than work. This is especially true when users engage in social activities, express their thoughts and feelings, or spend their free time on social media platforms. As a result, individuals tend to overlook the time and effort they invest when sharing content with their consent. Therefore, the act of taking advantage of content producers' labour becomes obvious (Martens, 2011).

On the other hand, crowdsourcing is a model for problem-solving and production that leverages the collective intelligence of online groups to benefit organisational goals. Participants are invited to engage in various activities, and incentives are provided to encourage participation (Estellés-Arola & González-Ladrón-de-Guevara, 2012; Brabham, 2013). Crowdsourcing is an online participatory activity in which an individual,

institution, organisation, or company solicits information from a large group through an open call. Brabham (2013) characterised it as a story of collaboration, teamwork, consensus, and creativity. This approach also provides organisations with access to new perspectives and innovative solutions while allowing them to engage with people who are not on their payroll, thus revealing value and reducing costs.

In news production, crowdsourcing goes beyond citizen journalism. It encompasses a variety of applications that use collective intelligence to gather information, regulate it, create news, or make production decisions (Haak et al., 2012). In this way, media organisations can gain access to information and documents and employ confirmation mechanisms from different perspectives.

Toffler (1981) coined the term “rise of the prosumer” to describe the processes involved in product production. This essentially refers to consumers’ increasing participation in production activities. As a result, the traditional boundaries between these segments are disappearing, and consumers are increasingly taking on tasks that were once performed by others. Toffler also argued that customers’ taking over a certain part of the work can be seen as an “externalisation of labour costs,” which means that employee costs are reduced. In summary, this concept highlights consumers’ growing role in production and the potential cost savings associated with increased participation.

It has been observed that capitalists have found new ways to generate surplus value through productive consumers in addition to the traditional exploitation of workers. To this end, the prevailing view in capitalist circles is still that “the only thing better than a poorly paid worker is the one who does the work without pay” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

The advent of communication technologies has significantly changed the way in which producers think. Frayssé and O’Neil (2015) note that the computer and the Internet have moved beyond the “do-it-yourself” mentality by creating consumption and production channels. Consumers’ digital labour includes the free acquisition of data, symbolic construction of brands, and the “labour of the audience,” i.e., the free provision of creative content.

## Citizen journalism

Advances in communication technology have led to changes in the production and dissemination of news, which is the result of journalism (Hermida, 2012). With the advent of portable digital devices and Internet access, even ordinary citizens in crime scenes can record and share their testimonies.

According to Allan (2013), citizen journalism is when ordinary people temporarily take on a journalistic role, often because they are in a crisis, accident, or disaster. Wall (2015), on the other hand, explains it as news content created by amateurs in the form of text, images, or sound. Both definitions emphasise the importance of witness testimony and the possibility of obtaining records by being present at the event. Thus, citizen journalism is created by individuals who participate in immediate events such as accidents, disasters, or conflicts as witnesses, spectators, or observers and share their recordings online using digital technologies.

In places where a journalist is not available, ordinary people can use their smart devices to capture and disseminate online events. Citizens can also play an active role in news production by sending images to traditional media outlets through *WhatsApp* Notification Lines. Thus, citizen journalism encompasses various activities, from providing newsworthy images to news agencies and sharing them online (Roberts, 2019). Thanks to the mobility of communication technology, millions of people can now capture what they see and share their first-hand experiences without waiting for reporters.

At this point, it is necessary to mention the concept of monitorial citizenship. Monitorial citizenship is a form of civic engagement in which people gather information about their surroundings or follow issues concerning their local or personal interests to improve their communities and ensure justice (Graeff, 2019). The term comes from Michael Schudson's 1998 book, *The Good Citizen*. Schudson (1998) discussed the responsibility of citizens to monitor government affairs. This definition is even more effective now, given the opportunities provided by smartphones. Smartphones improve the practise of audience citizenship by expediting citizens' information gathering and sharing procedures.

Bruns, Highfield, and Lind (2012) stated that technology plays a critical role in driving these developments. They highlight the impact of the Internet, which has led to a surge

in the number of avenues for information dissemination. As Internet-based media content and reader engagement continue to grow, opportunities for news production innovation are emerging. In addition, Bruns, Highfield, and Lind emphasise the importance of using Internet technologies to gather insights from a diverse audience and a variety of participants rather than relying solely on a paid professional team. Similarly, Dyer-Witthford (2015) highlighted the emergence of cyber-proletariats with the rise of Web 2.0. With this technology, unpaid labour spread to digital environments, and he noted that the profession was destroyed by placing professionals working in corporations in competition with unpaid labour with approaches such as citizen journalism.

Media organisations are trying to cut expenses and save time and resources because producing a certain types of news is expensive. For this reason, downsizing, cutbacks, and layoffs are often resorted to. If work is to continue with the remaining staff, employees are forced to multitask and work under flexible conditions (Allan, 2013). Reducing the number of employees and lowering the cost of news production lead organisations to develop methods that take user feedback and contribute to the production of news by followers. In this way, civilian participation in news production is encouraged, and news can be enriched through their input without the need to employ reporters. The proliferation of digital technologies has enabled individuals to capture and share events as they unfold, resulting in a more diverse group of news creators and disseminators than ever before.

### **Free labour and the contribution of free labour to media organisations by individuals**

Labour is not merely an economic concept; it is a general aspect of human existence and is independent of social structures. It has been stated that it can produce value with both paid labour and free labour (Wittel, 2012). The concept of value can have different meanings when interpreted from the perspective of different disciplines. According to Cevizci (1999), the concept of value, which is considered economic in this study, means the ability to determine the value of a saleable or exchangeable object, especially in material terms. Alpagu (2015), however, explains that, in the liberal view, value is the price or exchange power determined by the market and formed by the equilibrium between supply and demand. In contrast, from the socialist perspective, this means that the working class determines it, comes out with the labour power, and corresponds to the value of labour.

Marx argued that workers' labour power is exploited by capitalists or capital (1982, p. 326). According to Marx, capital has only one purpose: to create surplus and gain value (1982, p. 342). While surplus value is defined by Marx as "the materialised form of unpaid labour," he notes that it costs the labour of the worker, but the capitalist gains it effortlessly (1968, p. 509). Therefore, the capitalist "absorbs the surplus labour and exploits the labour power" (1968, p. 300). Marx asserts that surplus value is nothing but unpaid labour. This means that part of the profit comes from unpaid labour. In every commodity, the production cost reflects the invested capital, and the surplus over these costs represents the unpaid labour controlled by the capital (1968, p. 40). Harvey (2010), on the other hand, calls attention to a procedure that exploits employees' labour by using the means of production, pays them just for their labour, and generates communal rather than individual exploitation. Today, however, things have changed drastically as common people use their own technology to participate in production without even receiving payment.

According to Marx, the technologies developed under capitalism have not been used to reduce human labour. The goal is to increase labour productivity, which leads to higher profits for employers without increasing workers' wages (Marx, 1982). Fuchs, on the other hand, argues that the workplace has expanded beyond physical locations and is now global thanks to the Internet, mobile devices, and social media (Fuchs, 2014a). Just as machines are used in factories to produce value, millions of cell phones have become tools that individuals can use to generate value while on the move. News organisations now use free video from the public rather than relying solely on paid staff to create content.

According to Fuchs (2014b), outsourcing value creation to free labour can lead to increased capital accumulation. Fuchs also notes that users are often turned into unpaid workers, allowing firms to reduce their investment and labour costs. Unfortunately, this can lead to the hollowing out of professions, the exploitation of users, and companies without paying for them, producing surplus value from which they make a profit (2014a).

In the media sector, financial gains are also achieved through free labour. Value is created not only by extending the days and hours that media workers work but also by reducing labour time and extending the time they work for capital. The advent of communication technologies has significantly reduced labour time, leading to the



production of more products. In addition, technological advances have enabled non-employees to participate in the production process.

Thanks to the communication technologies used by citizens, the media are now capable of producing content for publications without the need for paid workers. This has become easier with users being able to produce content and using developing technology in newsrooms. Media organisations use free labour in news production through crowdsourcing, *WhatsApp* Notification Lines, and users' social media posts. Therefore, audience labour has evolved into user labour and continues to be utilised by the media in its new dimension. The viewer is also the producer of the consumed content. Portable smart devices have become value-producing tools. It is possible to see citizens as agents who produce news and naturally create value. By not presenting the labour of people through citizen journalism as 'work', media organisations take absolute control of income generated from production. Citizens and their technological devices are used as tools for fuel production. In this way, both labour and technology are made functional as externally provided resources and become part of the economy.

The concept of free labour was used by Terranova (2000) to describe how users can produce in the digital economy and how such production can be exploited by capital. According to him, free labour is 'simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited'. However, this concept is not new. It was used to describe the labour involved in housework during feminist debates in the 1970s. Free labour occurs in forms such as the labour spent to produce use value at home, distribution processes undertaken by the consumer, creative works for self-expression, and voluntary or unpaid internships (Huws, 2014). This type of labour has the characteristics of being free, autonomous, and exploited by capital (Wittel, 2012). Unpaid labour is found in many types of media products, such as movies, games, television shows, and news (Fast, Örnebring, & Karlsson, 2016).

Dallas Smythe (1981) was the first to focus on the role of the audience in media. Smythe focused on the relationship between media organisations, advertisers, and audiences. According to him, media provide capital accumulation by creating an audience that can be sold to advertisers. This approach is critical to our understanding of unpaid labour in today's Internet-based environments and in traditional media that use such products. However, in Smythe's approach, the role of the audience begins after a programme is produced and broadcast (Cohen, 2013). Nevertheless, on digital platforms, user labour occurs both in the production and consumption of content.

Commodification has become more visible in social practises with the advent of digitalisation in communication-based areas. In this way, people's capacities to produce information and communicate have been harnessed by capital in the form of 'economic externalities' (Prodnik, 2012). The ability of users to create content through digitalisation demonstrates the involvement and exploitation of free labour in the creation of commodities (Petersen, 2008; Fast, Örnebring, & Karlsson, 2016). This situation indicates that value production is no longer confined to places and times where paid work (Terranova, 2000), exemplifying the concept of the society factory, where business processes extend beyond the factory to society (Negri, 1989). This concept, first used by Tronti (1962/2019), emphasises the penetration of capitalist production into social relations. The spread of the factory into the general structure of society causes production and social relations to become more intertwined. This begins the process of internal colonisation. Although it does not fall within the realm of paid labour, value production through online activities has become feasible (Andrejevic, 2012). This new reality illustrates capitalism's ability to find alternative avenues for expansion (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) and necessitates a reevaluation of how exploitation operates (Andrejevic, 2012).

Citizen journalism has been defined as alternative media and alternative perspectives (Atton, 2009; Deuze et al., 2007), civic participation (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2018; Nah et al., 2017), audience engagement (Chung et al., 2018), news sources (Noor, 2017), and participatory news (Deuze et al., 2007; Singer, 2011). In another study, *WhatsApp* notification lines have also been regarded as a practise of citizen journalism, but this study only addressed their impact on television news (Karaman & Önder, 2017). Citizen journalism is considered a form of free labour in this study, and it aims to reveal how media organisations use this resource. Therefore, this research makes a new contribution to the existing literature.

## Aim and methodology

Before the research began on May 9, 2022, the ratings were analysed, and *the Show TV* news bulletin was chosen as a sample because it was one of the most watched programmes on May 7 (Medyafaresi, 2022a) and 8 (Medyafaresi, 2022b), 2022. The broadcasts of the corresponding channel between May 9 and May 15, 2022 and between May 9 and May 15, 2023, were studied using content analysis. The aim of selecting these periods is to collect a large dataset and reveal the state of unpaid labour through citizen journalism. To support the data in the research, an in-depth interview was

conducted with the manager of the *WhatsApp* Notification Line of *Show TV*. The Istanbul Aydin University ethics committee approved the in-depth interviews performed as part of the study.

This study analyzes the potential for media organisations to benefit from free labour through citizen journalism. This will be explored by examining: The extent to which *Show TV* utilises user-generated content. The extent to which *Show TV* uses security cameras that automatically capture images without the need for an employee's presence in the news production process. For this reason, the research was conducted on the following research questions:

**RQ<sub>1</sub>**: What is *Show TV*'s tendency to use images from sources other than staff members of the organisation (such as security cameras and cell phones) in news broadcasts?

**RQ<sub>2</sub>**: Is there a difference in the use rate of cell phone and security camera recordings in news production between the years examined?

**RQ<sub>3</sub>**: Does *Show TV* benefit from the free labour provided by citizen journalism activities that it receives from *WhatsApp* Notification lines?

## Coding

Content analysis was used to identify the sources of images in the news. The source of each image projected on the screen was determined by watching the news on the analysed dates. Two academics independently conducted the content analysis coding process for the sake of validity and reliability. The coding process was repeated until a 100% consensus was reached between the two coders. This approach was used to assess the accuracy of the coding process and to ensure the consistency of the obtained data. In this context, 12 different image sources were identified, and the broadcasts were analysed based on these codes.

Security camera images are not included in the scope of user-generated content. However, these are not the kind of images that media companies should be investing in, as they come from sources other than their own staff. As a result, labour is moved to technology, which can use images to create news. Therefore, citizen journalism items and security camera images were evaluated in tandem. During the analysis, it was

found that cell phone recordings were also used for news production in the images originating from the agency. However, since these images were not provided directly to the media company, they were classified as originating from an agency.

In addition, although the names of the cameramen are stated in the professional footage presented in the news, this information is excluded from other amateur footage. Furthermore, the fact that the person who took the video with his/her cell phone was also the person who narrated the events indicates who made the recording. The images recorded on the mobile phone were taken by random witnesses and not reporters.

## Findings

The findings of the content analysis are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

**Table 1.** Distribution of news from May 9 to 15, 2022

Image source	9 <sup>th</sup>		10 <sup>th</sup>		11 <sup>th</sup>		12 <sup>th</sup>		13 <sup>th</sup>		14 <sup>th</sup>		15 <sup>th</sup>		Total
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Newsroom Camera	7	21.2	9	40.9	11	29.7	12	21.4	12	36.4	10	28.6	9	30	70
Agency Images	8	24.2	6	27.3	6	16.2	18	32.1	7	21.2	9	25.7	11	36.7	65
Agency-Sourced Cell Phone Images	3	9.1	1	4.5	3	8.1	7	12.5	2	6.1	7	20	2	6.7	25
Agency-Sourced Security Camera Images	1	3	1	4.5	4	10.8	4	7.1	1	0	1	2.9	1	3.3	13
Images from Foreign Media	3	9.1	2	9.1	2	5.4	3	5.4	0	0	1	2.9	4	13.3	15
Cell Phone Camera	4	12.1	1	4.5	3	8.1	4	7.1	6	18.2	4	11.4	3	10	25
Security Camera	2	6.1	0	0	4	10.8	3	5.4	3	9.1	3	8.6	0	0	15
Police/Military Camera	3	9.1	2	9.1	1	2.7	2	3.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Social Media	2	6.1	0	0	1	2.7	1	1.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Other Channels	0	0	0	0	2	5.4	0	0	2	6.1	0	0	0	0	4
Music Clip	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Movie	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>245</b>

On May 9, 2022, the broadcast featured 15 news items and used 33 image sources, with 18.18% (n:5) from cell phone and security camera footage. A total of 40% (n:6) were produced using these recordings, with two from their own sources and four from news agencies. On May 9, 2023, 16 news items and 40 image sources were available, with 12.5% (n:6) from cell phone footage. 37.5% (n:6) were produced using these recordings, equally split between their sources and news agencies.

On May 10, 2022, there were 15 news items and 22 image sources, of which only 4.54% (n:1) were from cell phone records. On May 10, 2023, 14 news items and 28 image sources were available, with 3.57% (n:1) from cell phone footage. 21.42% (n:3) were produced using cell phone and security camera recordings, with one from their own sources and two from news agencies.

**Table 2.** Distribution of news from May 9 to 15, 2023

Image source	9 <sup>th</sup>		10 <sup>th</sup>		11 <sup>th</sup>		12 <sup>th</sup>		13 <sup>th</sup>		14 <sup>th</sup>		15 <sup>th</sup>		Total
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Newsroom Camera	14	35	11	39.3	16	50	13	30.2	13	28.9	-	-	18	32.1	85
Agency Images	12	30	10	35.7	7	21.9	12	27.9	19	42.2	-	-	30	53.6	90
Agency-Sourced Cell Phone Images	4	10	2	7.1	2	6.3	0	0	5	11.1	-	-	0	0	13
Agency-Sourced Security Camera Images	2	5	0	0	1	3.1	2	4.7	2	4.4	-	-	0	0	7
Images from Foreign Media	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	0
Cell Phone Camera	5	12.5	1	3.6	1	3.1	5	11.6	5	11.1	-	-	4	7.1	21
Security Camera	0	0	1	3.6	1	3.1	1	2.3	1	2.2	-	-	0	0	4
Police/Military Camera	0	0	0	0	1	3.1	0	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	1
Social Media	0	0	1	3.6	0	0	2	4.7	0	0	-	-	1	1.8	4
Other Channels	3	7.5	0	0	2	6.3	8	18.6	0	0	-	-	2	3.6	15
Music Clip	0	0	1	3.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	1	1.8	2
Movie	0	0	1	3.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	40	100	28	100	31	100	43	100	45	100	-	-	56	100	243

On May 11, 2022, the broadcast included 18 news items and 37 image sources, with 18.91% (n:7) from cell phone and security camera footage. A total of 38.88% (n:7)

were produced using these recordings, with one from their own sources and three from news agencies. On May 11, 2023, there were 17 news items and 31 image sources, of which 6.45% (n:2) were cell phone and security camera footage. 23.52% (n:4) were produced using these recordings, of which two were from their own sources and two were from news agencies.

On May 12, 2022, the broadcast featured 19 news items and 55 image sources, with 12.72% (seven images) from cell phone and security camera footage. A total of 68.42% (n:13) were produced using these recordings, with three from their own sources and 10 from news agencies. On May 12, 2023, there were 19 news items and 43 image sources, with 13.95% (n:6) from cell phone and security camera footage. In addition, 21.05% (n:4) were produced using these recordings, with two from their own sources and two from news agencies.

On May 13, 2022, the broadcast included 18 news items and 33 image sources, of which 27.27% (n:9) were from cell phone and security camera footage. 33.33% (n:6) were produced using these recordings, of which five were from their own sources and one was from news agencies. On May 13, 2023, 21 news items and 45 image sources were available, with 20% (n:9) of cell phone and security camera footage. 38.09% (n:8) of these recordings were produced using these recordings, with two from their own sources and six from news agencies.

On May 14, 2022, there were 19 news items and 35 image sources, with 20% (n:7) from cell phone and security camera footage. A total of 52.63% (n:10) were produced using these recordings, with five from their own sources and five from news agencies. Since there was a Presidential election in Türkiye on 05.14.2023, a special broadcast was made about the election.

On May 15, 2022, the broadcast featured 19 news items and 30 image sources, with 10% (n:3) from cell phone and security camera footage. 15.78% (n:3) were produced using these recordings, with one from their own sources and two from news agencies. On May 15, 2023, there were 19 news items and 56 image sources, with 7.14% (n:4) from cell phone and security camera footage. A total of 5.26% (n:1) were produced using these recordings; this low percentage was influenced by intense election news coverage on that day.

The significant role of mobile phone and security camera footage in news broadcasts demonstrates the use of UGC to support news coverage. This strategy allows the channel to access various visuals at no cost. Such a practise can be seen as a form of exploiting unpaid labour. It can be understood that citizens who capture and share footage contribute to the channel's news production by looking at the sources of the images they use.

Additionally, such footage highlights a shift in the burden of gathering news. The increasing role of mobile phones and security camera footage in news production indicates that the burden is also being transferred to ordinary citizens and surveillance systems. While this democratizes news gathering to some extent, it also allows channels to reduce operational costs by relying on free, crowdsourced content.

It is also important to consider the usage rates of cell phone and security camera recordings between the years examined. The frequencies of specific visual sources used in *Show TV* news broadcasts can be examined to analyse changes between 2022 and 2023. Across all visual source categories, a decrease was observed in 2023 compared with 2022. Usage of agency-sourced cell phone images decreased by 48%, agency-sourced security camera images by 46%, direct cell phone camera images by 16%, and security camera images by 73%. Despite technological advancements, the reason for not using cell phones and security camera recordings in news production could be the lack of events or news topics requiring such visual content. It is also important to note that the presence of a special broadcast for presidential elections on a day examined in 2023 may have influenced this difference.

### ***WhatsApp* as a citizen journalism practise**

This section presents the data obtained from the in-depth interview. Media organizations' use of technology for news production underscores their ability to receive information and documents from citizens via *WhatsApp*. Examination of news broadcasts from television stations found that material recorded using cell phones was often included.

Although the official stated that *Show TV* subscribes to multiple news organisations, obtaining photographs via *WhatsApp* demonstrates that citizens have become an essential source of news production. The advent of digital tools in newsrooms allows the capture of occurrences that were previously impossible to report. When asked about the role and importance of *WhatsApp* in news production, the respondents answered as follows:

For example, during the COVID-19 epidemic in China, we were able to reach citizens there, and during the Ukraine War, we made news using videos that most Turkish citizens had sent to our *WhatsApp* Notification Line. There are also many distressing images that are frequently shared, including images of theft, fighting, murder, war, and epidemics. Videos of natural disasters are also frequently shared.

These discourses demonstrate that images of national and international events are captured. As a result, civilians can capture images even in areas where no reporters are available. Although media organisations subscribe to various national and international news agencies, *WhatsApp* Notification Lines enable the creation of unique news. These visuals help the channel shape its news agenda as follows:

We must make different news from other channels. We achieve this owing to the messages we receive through our *WhatsApp* Notification Line. We receive newsworthy images of fraud, theft, murder, and other interesting events. Sometimes the person who captured the event is not present to provide a detailed report. In such cases, we request a video description of the event, which allows us to create a more detailed news report. This method has many advantages. Some images we receive are unique to us and cannot be found elsewhere. These images help us improve the quality of our newsletter.

At the end of the broadcast, viewers are invited to submit relevant footage they have captured to the channel. This indicates that the channel values citizen contributions in sourcing content. The number of images sent to the channel daily as a result of these announcements is also an important matter, as it demonstrates the potential to leverage free labor. The answer to this question is provided below:

The number of incoming images can vary greatly depending on the current social media. During peak periods, many users may send the same image. However, on an average day, we receive about 350-400 messages between 8:00 p.m. and 8:30 a.m. In total, I follow an average of 1000 messages per day. I monitor the dynamics of the channel and closely monitor issues such as assault, extortion, theft, and murder.

The large number of incoming images also provides the channel with the opportunity to choose between content. In particular, on days when there is no busy agenda, the broadcast flow can be filled by making choices among the incoming images.



## Use of citizens as free labour

When the media company was asked what topics the news usually requests citizens to take pictures or videos of and whether a fee was paid for them, the following response was received:

We do not pay. If you are the only one who captured the moment the Twin Towers in the United States were hit and you can prove it, I will let the managers. Even in that case, I cannot say for certain whether the person who captured the footage will receive compensation.

The above statements indicate that the likelihood of citizens being paid for footage is impossible. It is stated that footage contributing to exclusive news production will not be compensated. This proves that numerous videos and information provided to the channel daily are used without payment. However, it should be emphasised that by using unpaid labour, the channel has the potential to obtain free content, employ fewer reporters, avoid technological investments, fill the broadcast schedule, and even increase advertising revenue through exclusive news.

We do not offer compensation for images sent to us. Because cameras are so widely available, pictures are readily available. Even if someone says they will not send us an image until we pay them, chances are we'll receive it from somewhere else.

The fact that many citizens were present in the scene and that security cameras were recording shows that channels are not reliant on just a few individuals. In fact, the official has stated that there is no need to pay individuals because these images can already be obtained from agencies. This indicates that footage can be sourced from other sources to generate news. Footage is sent for various reasons, even when no monetary compensation is provided:

Some people may choose to share their images regardless of payment because doing so offers them a sense of pride or the opportunity to contribute to public opinion. People like to say, 'Look, I shot this image that was broadcast on TV!' It has sociological and psychological aspects. Therefore, people often send us images without compensation.

The importance of *WhatsApp* Notification Line as a news source is reflected in the fact that the platform's content is included in every news, making it an indispensable tool for publications. Although many media organisations rely on subscriptions from agencies, using the *WhatsApp* Notification Line allows for unique news stories that stand out from other broadcasts by leveraging information and documents from citizens. This approach relieves the burden on newsrooms to produce content while recognising the role citizens play in creating news. Citizens sharing images do not receive payment; therefore, using their contributions to create publications based on unpaid labour demonstrates that value production is not limited to workers.

*WhatsApp* Notification Lines are increasingly being used as an extension of citizen journalism to collect visuals and information. The images and information received through this platform play a critical role in the production of exclusive news by media organisations. In this context, the visual materials and information citizens provide contribute to the diversification and deepening of news content. However, the lack of compensation for these contributions demonstrates that citizen journalism is being used as free labour.

## Discussion and conclusion

The emergence of smart mobile phones has presented unforeseen opportunities for capturing and sharing real-life experiences worldwide (Pantti, 2013). But, most mainstream news broadcasts tend to limit the use of video footage captured by mobile phones, according to studies (Hadland et al., 2019). The results of the present study provide evidence that video recordings of this nature are regularly featured in news broadcasts on the examined channel. This study aims to investigate not only the frequency of such video integration in news but also the circumstances under which such integration takes place. The media's use of unpaid labour in citizen journalism increases the importance of this study's understanding of where capital derives its value.

As with many businesses, media organisations seek to minimise expenses and maximise profits. Citizen journalism offers a potential solution to this struggle by allowing individuals to capture and share newsworthy events. Despite the lack of financial compensation, citizen journalists can take pride in contributing to public opinion and the dissemination of important images. In addition, citizen journalism can foster a sense of community and

belonging within a local area (Robinson & Deshano, 2011). For broadcasters, citizen journalism provides a source of free content that can be integrated into newscasts and can also lead to the creation of special news programmes that can boost ratings and profits. By relying on the contributions of ordinary citizens, media organisations can effectively turn them into unpaid contributors who help create compelling news content and fill air time.

Recording, especially through cell phones, enables citizen participation in work processes. Similar to how people objectify subjective information by posting on social media (Yazdanipoor et al., 2022), mobile devices make it simple to turn testimony into a commodity with the potential to become news. This meta-analysis also allows individuals to begin the process of financial gain through publication. In essence, broadcasting newsworthy images becomes a form of unpaid labour and reveals a situation in which profit is made solely through capital. Even people who are not actively working can create news on behalf of media organisations, eliminating the disadvantage of reporters not being able to be on the scene. With the help of technology, even those who do not receive wages or unpaid work are included in the production of surplus value. In this way, every individual can contribute to capital, and the scope of labour is extended to the whole of society.

In addition, security cameras provide valuable resources for members of the media who cannot see an incident in person. These cameras take the human element out of the equation, relying solely on technology to capture moments and circumvent the problem of reporters potentially missing important details. This allows reporters to focus on producing news content from their desks and using images to enhance their reporting.

Mobile phone footage and surveillance camera images are shared through *WhatsApp* notification lines and have become important components of news production. This method lowers costs by not employing paid staff and limiting the use of technical equipment. Citizen journalism is not only a source of volunteer or collaborative contributions but also generates economic input through surplus value created by unpaid labour. Therefore, it is important to recognise that citizen journalism is a product of labour and has surplus value, even if it is produced voluntarily or collaboratively.

When media organisations exclude citizen content from news production, they must produce more news to fill the broadcast slots. This adds costs to media organisations,

such as hiring more reporters, spending more time, and using more equipment. In contrast, citizen journalism can significantly reduce or even eliminate these costs because the content is produced and submitted anonymously. This approach illustrates how capital can be valued beyond working staff.

The process of producing broadcasts and preparing information from social media platforms, which are subsequently viewed, read, or clicked, benefits media firms both monetarily and in terms of reputation (Palmer, 2013). This can be achieved through advertising or special news. However, the people who took the footage and forwarded it to the media companies did not gain financially from this process.

This study shows that media organisations no longer only employ their employees in news production but also include citizens in the process. Although not paying any payment for the images provided by citizens allows media organisations to reduce their content production costs, this reveals the existence of a system in which citizens do not receive compensation for their efforts. Thus, media organisations minimise news production costs by turning citizens into free labour. This shows that media organisations have turned entire societies into tools for capital production through technology, a reflection of capitalist progress.

When citizens become the driving force in content creation through technology, there is an opportunity for the media to make profits from content that they do not produce themselves (Baruch, 2021). To ensure that contributors are fairly compensated for their work, media organisations can eliminate exploitation by paying a fee or royalty to the owners of the images they use for their broadcasts. In this way, individuals' contributions to the news should be appreciated and rewarded, creating a mutually beneficial arrangement rather than one-sided profits for capital.

It was found that on the days under examination, news had images from 12 distinct sources. When examining the image sources, it is clear that cell phone and security camera images were frequently used during the research data in *Show TV's* news bulletin. Even when we examine the images provided by agencies, we find that some of the images are taken from cell phones and security cameras even though the agency logo is present. Not only media organizations but also agencies include citizen-derived content in their news production.

The bulletin showed that certain news stories were illustrated exclusively by images captured by cell phones and security cameras. Reporters often supplemented these images with interviews with those involved in the incidents. It was also noted that some cellphone footage was captured by citizen journalists who covered the events as if they were professional reporters. The media organisation only uses reporters to gather information from citizens and conduct street interviews for news stories published at the end of the bulletin.

Mobile phone imagery continues to play an important role in reporting on the ongoing conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, particularly due to the lack of correspondents in conflict zones. In the absence of war correspondents in conflict zones, visual news relies on foreign media images and mobile phone footage of people on the ground. This shows that *Show TV* uses images submitted by citizens in the region as news rather than assigning journalists to cover the war. In addition, images from mobile phones and security cameras are commonly used to report theft, fighting, and accidents.

From the interview data, it appears that the *WhatsApp* Notification Line is perceived similarly to messages from official outlets and even has the advantage of unique message content that sets it apart from other channels. Indeed, news stories that used these images were labelled as 'special news' when they were released. However, the fact that contributors are not paid for their countless daily posts indicates that the work is performed through unpaid labour. On the other hand, the findings of this research should be evaluated specifically within the context of *Show TV*, bearing in mind that it does not represent the entire media landscape in Türkiye or worldwide.

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**Informed Consent:** Informed consent was obtained.

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**Bilgilendirilmiş Onam:** Bilgilendirilmiş onam alındı.

**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

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