

REUTERS PRESENTS

Leveraging User Generated Content for Success

The importance of UGC verification in building trust in news





Key takeaways for broadcasters, publishers, and news platforms

UGC in modern journalism

User Generated Content (UGC) plays a core role in modern journalism by providing diverse, real-time, on-the-ground perspectives that are increasingly essential for breaking news and crisis reporting. But with this unmatched speed and local access comes a level of risk, and the proliferation of inauthentic content emphasizes the need for effective content verification.

Advanced verification techniques ensure credibility

Tools and methodologies, including Open Source Intelligence (OSINT), metadata inspection, geolocation, and satellite imagery play an important part in verifying the authenticity of UGC and ensuring content is accurate before it reaches newsrooms.

The role of technology in fighting misinformation

Emerging technologies, including AI and metadata analysis, are vital in combating misinformation, especially with the rise of deepfakes and manipulated content. This technology, combined with human expertise, is crucial in identifying manipulated content and verifying UGC effectively.

Ethical and legal responsibility in using UGC

The ethical implications of using UGC cannot be ignored, particularly concerning privacy, consent, and the potential for harm. Legal challenges, such as copyright and liability, also need careful consideration and reinforce the importance of adhering to legal and ethical standards.



What is User Generated Content?



“UGC is footage filmed by civilians,” Senior Visual Verification and Newsgathering Producer at Reuters Nur-Azna explains. “With the accessibility of smartphones and the internet, there is a lot of demand for real-time news. It’s not just civilians who are using it - journalists are using it as a tool to capture and broadcast real-time events.”

But the incessant demand for speed in a 24/7 news environment means that there is always a danger of misinformation being shared. For example, during the India-Pakistan border conflict in 2020, a video surfaced

on social media that showed what appeared to be a military strike. The footage was widely shared on social media and believed to be real, but was later identified as a clip from the video game *Arma 2*.

“These are the [sort of] problems that we can expect if we do not verify footage,” says Nur-Azna. “There were some people who actually believed that this was an accurate representation.”

Use of UGC for news

Advantages:

- UGC can provide real-time, on-the-ground, first-person perspectives, enhancing the authenticity and impact of breaking news coverage.
- Using UGC for location reports and interviews reduces the need for extensive in-house production, saving valuable resources and complementing coverage for news teams.
- UGC has the potential to bring varied viewpoints to a wider audience, enriching news coverage while fostering inclusivity and diversity.

Disadvantages:

- UGC can vary in quality (depending on the device used and the operator), potentially affecting the professionalism and journalistic standards of news content.
- Using UGC involves navigating issues like copyright and consent, which necessitates careful management to avoid future usage problems.
- Ensuring the authenticity of UGC requires rigorous verification processes to be in place to prevent misinformation and the spread of ‘fake news’.

UGC in a changing media landscape

An increasing number of consumers are now getting accessing news from alternative, non-traditional platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp and TikTok, where verification processes are decreasingly important. The [2024 Digital News Report](#) found that only a fifth of respondents go directly to news websites or apps for news. At the same time, 59% are concerned with what is real and what's fake when it comes to online news globally.

Proportion of respondents concerned about what is real and what is fake when it comes to news online



All markets
59%
+3pp



USA
72%
+8pp



South Africa
81%
+6pp



India
58%
+5pp

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024

Qualitative examples from the Reuters Institute research illustrate the concern customers have with AI-generated content:

"I have seen many examples before, and they can sometimes be very good. Thankfully they are still pretty easy to detect but within five years they will be indistinguishable."

Male, 20, UK

"AI-generated videos, pictures, and audio can easily misrepresent any person and is already being used to trick people globally."

Male, 25, US

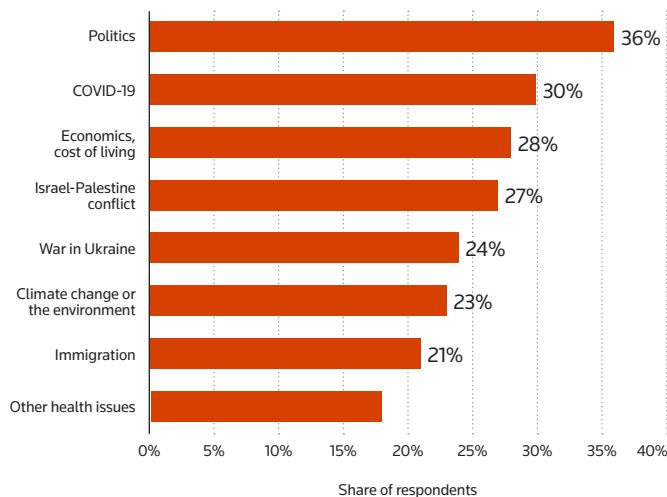
Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024

UGC is often shared online before it can be verified.

A [2024 UNESCO study](#), for example, revealed that a significant portion (62%) of digital content creators admitted to not checking the accuracy of information before sharing. Worryingly, respondents reported that they "mainly use popularity when evaluating the credibility of online sources: 41.6% use the number of likes and views of the online content as the primary factor to determine online source credibility."

Verification is a constant challenge. According to a 2024 [survey](#), news consumers had encountered false or misleading information about politics (36%), COVID-19 (30%), the cost of living crisis (28%), the Israel-Palestinian conflict (27%) and the war in Ukraine (24%).

News consumers who saw false or misleading information about key topics in the last week worldwide as of February 2024



Source: Statista

UGC misinformation and the verification challenge

A REUTERS CASE STUDY

When the 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck Ishikawa Prefecture in Japan, causing a significant mudslide, Reuters quickly mobilized its resources to verify the authenticity of the UGC video that was posted online. The Visual Verification team started by checking the metadata of the published video, looking at the device type, date, time and the GPS coordinates.

“Metadata is important to confirm if footage is original. We use tools to read *when* the video was filmed, *where* the video was filmed... Then we can tell if it's a legit source or if it's a legit situation.

Nur-Azna Sanusi
Senior Visual Verification and Newsgathering
Producer, Reuters



However, this isn't always enough on its own. Metadata can be altered to make it appear as if footage is legitimate, that it was filmed in a certain place, with a certain camera, and at a certain time. "But with our expertise," Nur-Azna adds, "we have other angles that we can refer to before actually submitting or publishing to our clients."

In the case of the Japanese earthquake:

- The United States Geological Survey (USGS) confirmed a 7.6 magnitude earthquake in Ishikawa Prefecture on January 1.
- "We managed to speak with the person who filmed the video," reveals Nur-Azna, "and managed to get the original video." The video's location could then be verified using the original file metadata, which provided coordinates corresponding to the filming location.
- Visual elements in the video - such as buildings, trees, fencing and hills - were cross-referenced with Google Street View imagery.
- Satellite imagery taken the next day at the provided coordinates confirmed the presence of the mudslide.

The response to the Japanese earthquake is a prime example of the key verification techniques used by the Reuters Visual Verification team to enhance the credibility, authenticity and inclusivity of its news reporting, and ensure that only accurate and trustworthy content reaches Reuters clients.



UGC verification at Reuters

The Reuters UGC verification process is an industry leader, setting a high standard for other news organizations to follow. It includes:

- **24/7 global monitoring and verification:** Reuters global Visual Verification Team works around the clock, continuously monitoring user-generated content to ensure timely verification of breaking news content.
- **Advanced technology and rigorous investigative techniques:** leveraging Open Source Intelligence Techniques (OSINT) for in-depth verification, Reuters specialists are equipped with the tools and expertise needed for in-depth research and investigation. This includes geolocation, origin tracing and meticulous metadata inspection to uphold the highest standards of news integrity.
- **Seamless content delivery:** after rigorous verification, Reuters prioritizes the clearing of rights, making the content easily accessible.



Nur-Azna Sanusi
Senior Visual Verification
and Newsgathering
Producer, Reuters

“ The whole point of us going through a deeper verification process is that we can have seamless content delivery for clients.

As Nur-Azna notes: “We are [a] 24/7 operation. We have team members based in Beijing, Bangalore, Gdansk, London, Mexico and Singapore.” This ensures a global approach to UGC monitoring and allows Reuters to provide checked and verified content, with all rights cleared for immediate use by broadcasters and publishers.

Summary

User-generated content (UGC) has become a **vital component of modern journalism**, offering real-time, on-the-ground perspectives that **enrich breaking news and crisis reporting**. However, the rapid dissemination of UGC also introduces risks, notably the spread of inauthentic content, highlighting the **necessity for robust content verification processes**. Advanced verification techniques, such as Open Source Intelligence (OSINT), metadata inspection, geolocation, and satellite imagery, are crucial tools for ensuring the credibility of UGC before it reaches newsrooms. These methods, combined with emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, **help combat misinformation and maintain the integrity of news content**.

The ethical and legal considerations of using UGC are significant, particularly regarding privacy, consent, and potential harm. Journalists and news organizations must navigate these challenges carefully to uphold ethical standards and avoid legal pitfalls, such as copyright issues and liability. **While UGC offers numerous advantages**, such as enhancing authenticity and saving resources, **it also requires rigorous verification to prevent the spread of misinformation**. As more consumers turn to alternative platforms for news, the challenge of distinguishing real from fake content becomes more pronounced, necessitating continuous efforts in verification and education.

At Reuters, the verification of UGC is a cornerstone of our news-gathering process. **Reuters employs a global team dedicated to verifying the authenticity of content** through meticulous checks, including metadata analysis and cross-referencing with reliable sources. The organization's commitment to verification is exemplified in its response to significant events, such as the Ishikawa Prefecture earthquake, where Reuters used a combination of expert analysis and technological tools to confirm the authenticity of footage. This rigorous approach ensures that **only accurate and trustworthy content is delivered to Reuters' extensive network of clients**, setting a high industry standard for responsible journalism.

Further Resources

[Watch the 'Leveraging UGC for Success' webinar](#)

[Reuters News Verification Services](#)

[Reuters Agency User Generated Content](#)

[Reuters Fact Check](#)

[Thomson Reuters Trust Principles](#)