CITIZEN PHOTOJOURNALISM: MOTIVATIONS FOR PHOTOGRAPHING A NATURAL DISASTER AND SHARING THE PHOTOS ON THE WEB

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CITIZEN PHOTOJOURNALISM: MOTIVATIONS FOR PHOTOGRAPHING A NATURAL DISASTER AND SHARING THE PHOTOS ON THE WEB

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ABSTRACT

This study examined what citizen photojournalists describe as their motivations for documenting a natural disaster and their descriptions of why they think they shared their photographs with an online community. This study extends and utilizes the uses and gratifications theory to explore new media gratifications rather than older models of the theory. Eight citizen photojournalists who documented the Spring 2011 Alabama tornado outbreak were interviewed for the study. The results revealed four themes relating to the citizen photojournalists’ descriptions of their motivations for documenting the tornado. These themes were (1) filling the void of professional media, (2) exposure for small communities, (3) showing progress and rebuilding, and (4) documenting personal memories. Five themes were revealed as to why they thought they shared their photographs with an online community. These themes were (1) visual communication with friends and family, (2) initiating discussion with photo, (3) receiving praise from online community, (4) becoming a better photographer, and (5) entertainment value. The purpose of this study was to examine the motivations of a citizen photojournalist and to also further integrate new media utilization of the uses and gratifications theory in relation to why the citizen photojournalists share their images with online communities.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the strong and resilient people of Alabama who were affected by the tragedy of the Spring 2011 Alabama storms. I would also like to dedicate this to the people who lost their lives during the storms and to their family and friends.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Citizen journalism has played a significant role in the media industry in recent years. Citizens now have the opportunity to become reporters rather than being an audience who just receives news. According to Glaser (2006), citizen journalism is the idea that citizens without professional journalism training can use the tools accessible through modern technology and the Internet to create and fact-check their own media. A citizen journalist can post newsworthy information to a social media Website, a blog, or even submit content to a professional news organization in hopes of getting the piece published in a professional publication.

There are citizen journalists who report without professional media training, but do so in a visual manner. One would call these people citizen photojournalists because they communicate their content visually. Media expert, Jay Rosen (2010), stated his thoughts on citizen photojournalism, “The onset of social media was kind of a shock because you had so many more participants, so many more producers and certain first wave uses of that have become standard. For example user generated content as in videos shot by people of news events because they were there, or photographs taken of a disaster by amateurs who happened to be walking by” (Silverberg, Interview). It is important for one to understand that citizen photojournalists are a type of citizen journalist because
these photojournalists are still reporting information like a citizen journalist. However, the label citizen photojournalist more specifically describes the practice of citizens using visual media to communicate information, analogous to traditional reporters and photojournalists. Citizen photojournalists can use photography or videography to report. This study is concerned with exploring the still-photography component of citizen photojournalism. Citizen photojournalism has been given recognition in the professional field. Former BBC journalist Richard Sambrook (2005) said of citizen photojournalism, “Our reporting on [a terrorist bombing story] was a genuine collaboration, enabled by consumer technology – the camera phone in particular – and supported by trust between broadcaster and audience. And the result was transformational in its impact: We know now that when major events occur, the public can offer us as much new information as we are able to broadcast to them. From now on, news coverage is a partnership.” People are now able to document events with the click of their cell phones, digital cameras, or video cameras and almost instantly share them with a broader, online audience.

Citizens with cameras have always been documenting events, but today, one can easily spot a citizen photojournalist because the Internet is available for citizens to share their photojournalistic images with an online community of other citizens. However, questions arise. Why are citizen photojournalists motivated to document certain events, and with the explosion of the Web, what drives them to share their images online? Citizen photojournalists have social media Web sites like Flickr to share their photojournalistic images. Flickr has emerged as one of the top social media Websites for citizen photojournalists to upload their still-image pictures to share with an online community. When one goes to Flickr’s photograph upload counter, one can see that
approximately four to five thousand photographs are uploaded by users each minute. That means about seven million photos are being uploaded to Flickr each day. When comparing Flickr to YouTube, which is a social media Web site designed for video uploading, YouTube users upload about 50,400 hours of video each day (Houghton, 2010). Flickr is a social media Web site that was designed exclusively for sharing photographs online. According to CNN (2010), Flickr reached the five billion photo-upload mark in late 2010. Flickr was launched in the first quarter of 2004 and traffic grew 448% (3.4 million hits) from December 2004 to December 2005 (Graham 2006).

According to Graham (2006), “Chad Hurley, CEO of video-sharing site YouTube, is a Flickr fan. He says the site has resonated so quickly with the public ‘because it brought innovation to a problem people thought was already solved; how to share photos online.’”

According to Cox, Clough, & Marlow (2008), since Flickr is based on users uploading their own images, it reflects the move from consumption to mass participation in the media. To put Flickr in perspective with other social media Web sites, nearly 80% of active Internet users visit some type of social media Web site, while social media Web sites and blogs account for 22.5% of users’ time spent online (Nielsen, 2011, p. 2). With these numbers on the rise every year, one can see the importance of social media’s presence in the everyday lives of citizens.

Citizen photojournalists document different types of events, but citizen journalism often happens in times of crises and catastrophic events (Gillette, Taylor, Chavez, Hodgson, & Downing, 2007). Flickr’s search engine received a substantial amount of natural disaster and crises photographs from nonprofessional, citizen photographers. According to the researcher’s count, Hurricane Katrina fetched 116,000 images on Flickr.
Searching the ‘Gulf Oil Spill 2010’ fielded 22,000 images. The Joplin, Missouri tornado fetched almost 20,000 images and the Tuscaloosa, Alabama, tornado received more than 15,000 images. By these preliminary searches on Flickr, one can see that citizen photojournalism is popular during times of specific crises and destructive events; which supports Gillette et al.’s (2007) findings.

Scholars have researched citizen journalism as a whole but they have not specifically explored citizen photojournalism. It is important for the journalism industry to understand and for academic research to explore what motivates people to visually document a specific event. If the journalism field is accepting of still-images created by citizen photojournalists, academic research needs to better understand what motivates citizen photojournalists to do what they do. Since there is evidence to show that citizen photojournalists are documenting a substantial amount of natural disasters across the globe, then a natural disaster such as the 2011 tornado outbreak in Alabama would be appropriate to use for exploring citizen photojournalists’ motivations for documenting natural disasters.

Alabama Tornado Outbreak

The 2011 Alabama tornado outbreak devastated communities throughout the state, so much so that United States President Barack Obama declared a state of emergency after seeing the destruction himself. According to Drye (2011), “The mile-wide (1.6-kilometer-wide) Tuscaloosa tornado may have had winds exceeding 260 miles an hour (418 kilometers an hour), which would make it an F5 storm on the Fujita scale. The scale ranks tornadoes from F1 to F5 based on wind speeds and destructive potential.”
More than 130 people were killed by the Alabama tornadoes with the main series of storms happening on April 27. The tornadoes were spawned from an unstable storm surge in the Southeastern portion of the United States. According to Renfrew (2011), more than 160 tornadoes ripped through states such as Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Georgia. Small communities were harder hit in terms of death counts per population. According to Renfrew (2011), at least 12 people were killed in a town that is populated by about 1,000 people. Statistics and death tolls vary depending on where one looks because that’s how unpredictable and how bizarre these tornadoes were. The Birmingham News, The Huntsville Times and the Press-Register put together an online database of Alabama tornado victims separated by counties. According to their database (2011), there are approximately 250 casualties listed. Even smaller communities such as Hackleburg, a town with approximately 1,500 residents, had 18 deaths.

Alabama meteorologists James Spann of ABC 33/40 sparked a social media frenzy during the Alabama tornadoes. Spann (2011) said about the Alabama tornadoes, “No doubt this is the most significant tornado outbreak I have worked….my first TV weather job was in the summer of 1978. I have worked major hurricanes, big severe weather outbreaks, and crippling winter storms. But nothing, like this in terms of the widespread nature of the event and major life loss” (Bergman, Interview). According to Spann (2011), he utilized social media to connect with the residents of Alabama to hear citizen stories, gather pictures, get details and his follower count jumped by the thousands during the Alabama storms (Bergman, Interview).

Since there is evidence that shows citizen photojournalists gravitate towards natural disasters and also gravitate toward social media, this study is interested in
exploring what motivates citizens to visually document crises and their motivations to share those photos with an online community.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Citizen journalism can be deconstructed to look at how citizen reporting is incorporated with the use of journalistic abilities and tools that are readily made available to citizens. According to Berger (2011), an important aspect to consider when looking at citizen journalism is that citizens utilize the already existing media to become the journalist. The citizens are not exclusively using journalism skills. They still report on events, but will not receive the credibility that professional journalists receive. They are taking what is given to them and are driven to report an event by their own free-willed motivations. Berger (2011) notes that just as a citizen takes the role of a journalist, one should not forget that the term citizen also represents a community. The citizen journalist can serve as a link between the mainstream media and the citizen body by giving a “citizen angle” to an otherwise recycled news story. A recycled news story is any event that is constantly being oversaturated and over-reported by the mainstream media. The citizen angle gives the news coverage a different, unique angle to the story because a citizen doesn’t have an agenda. Berger’s study sought to differentiate citizen journalism from co-opted journalism or alternative journalism. According to Berger (2011), “Citizen journalism thus far has produced the lesson that providing technological access, skills training, citizenship awareness, and even small financial incentives is not on
its own sufficient to mobilize a major investment by young people into citizen journalism” (p.722). Berger’s study shows that citizen journalism has a place in society and it contributes to mass media. Berger is critical to note that the younger generation has not fully embraced citizen journalism as a practice even though they subconsciously utilize the tools that can produce citizen journalism, noting the transformation of the audience (citizens) to informers. Rosen (2006) stated that citizens “graduate from wanting media when we want it, to wanting it without the filter, to wanting media to be way better than it is, to publishing and broadcasting ourselves when it meets a need or sounds like fun” (p. 1). Rosen’s statements outline the transformation from audience to producers. No longer are citizens the receivers of information, but now they can also be distributors of information.

Citizen journalists can adopt a subconscious routine of reporting information. Participation of citizen journalists in the reporting of information can be grouped into the following stages: 1) access and observation, 2) selection and filtering, 3) processing and editing, 4) distribution, and 5) interpretation (Domingo, et al., 2008, p.337-338). Although Domingo et al.’s (2008) study did not analyze citizen journalists’ motivations for each stage, the study shows that there is a thought process in a citizen journalist’s decision to report information to an audience.

Citizen journalism has the ability to influence professional journalism. According to Kaufhold, Valenzuela and Gil de Zuniga (2010), “The well-established function of professional journalism in producing knowledge and motivating political participation is a benchmark to measuring the role of citizen journalism, which has been referred to as participatory journalism” (p. 515). According to Allan (2007), “There appears to be little
doubt – in the eyes of both advocates and critics alike that citizen reporting is having a profound impact on the forms, practices and epistemologies of mainstream journalism, from the international level through to the local” (p. 18). It is important for citizen journalists to be aware of common reporting practices. As noted by Deuze, Bruns and Neuberger (2007), “Convergence culture in journalism relies on the readiness of both sides of the equation: participants must bring and/or build an understanding of how to operate in a news environment just as much as journalists must develop a sense of how to reinvent themselves as co-creators of culture” (p.335).

Lasica’s (2003) study grouped citizen journalism into six different forms of usage: “(1) audience participation at mainstream news outlets; (2) independent news and information Web sites; (3) full-fledged participatory news sites; (4) collaborative and contributory media sites; (5) other kinds of thin media such as mailing lists and email sharing; and (6) personal broadcasting sites.” Social media Web sites are ideal for citizen journalists because they allow citizens to share information with a larger audience that they would not have without social media. Citizen journalists can utilize different sharing features on social media Web sites to enhance their participatory experience. According to Allan (2007), “Some critics contend that using the phrase ‘citizen journalist’ to describe what so many ordinary people were doing on the day is too lofty, preferring the derisive ‘snaparazzi’ to characterize their actions. In the eyes of others, serious questions need to be posed regarding why such people are moved to share their experiences in the first place” (p. 16). Allan’s statements are important, especially in the constraints of this study because a citizen journalist’s motivations are different from
the occasional “passer-byer” with a cell phone. Citizen journalists and citizen photojournalists are sharing their stories and pictures with others for a certain purpose.

Academic research has left citizen photojournalism unexplored. Whether a citizen or professional photojournalist, the fundamentals of photojournalism are being actively practiced. Kobre (2004) defines photojournalism as the act of capturing a moment in a single photo or a series of photographs. Whether a citizen photojournalist or a professional photojournalist, the act of efficiently documenting an event to transmit to some type of audience is an objective. According to Kobre (2004), ingredients for good photojournalistic coverage include assessing the most important issues at the event, taking appropriate time and displaying the event in the most effective way possible to communicate with the audience.

Citizen photojournalists report on an array of events, but some types of events draw more citizen photojournalists than others. According to Allan and Thorsen (2009), citizen photojournalists gravitate toward crises because they feel a need to document what they hear on the news themselves. Allan and Thorsen (2009) also used the photo sharing Web site, Flickr, to analyze photos from six separate crises to show how Flickr has effectively evolved since its development (p. 44). However, Allan and Thorsen did not address what motivates citizen photojournalists to document these natural disasters.

Natural disasters draw citizen photojournalists and professional photojournalists alike. In 2011, Damon Winters, a professional photojournalist from The New York Times, was selected as the National Press Photographers Association’s Photographer of the Year. Winters documented a natural disaster which is a common form of citizen photojournalism. He won the award with his images of the earthquake in Haiti.
According to Donald Winslow of *News Photographer Magazine* (2011), “Winter’s photographs of Haiti after the earthquake are intimate, personal, and yet artistic and compassionate.” Smiley Pool, one of the judges who critiqued Winters’ work, said about the Haiti images, “A tremendously strong field of portfolios. [Damon Winters] exemplified excellence in diversity, storytelling and creativity. [His work] has an international feel with tremendous stories from Haiti and U.S. military efforts around the world. The images are tied together by a visual sophistication and an attention to detail that is second to none” (Winslow, 2011).

It is also important to consider what motivates citizen photojournalists to share their images and interact with an online community. Social media Web sites craft their features to allow photo sharing. According to Hutton and Fosdick (2011), the focus of social media sites should be why people engage in social media and what motivates them to use social media, rather than the actual social media page itself. Hutton and Fosdick (2011) found different motivations for peoples’ uses of social media, “Video sites are great for having fun and being entertained, whereas message boards are strong for seeking alternative opinions and changing those of others, and blogs are powerful platforms for self-expressions and self-promotion” (p.566). Five needs and desires of people using social media are “1) to promote themselves, 2) to share new experiences with others, 3) to simply have fun or waste time, 4) to stay in touch with friends, and 5) to meet new people” (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011, p.566).

It is important to consider the interactivity aspect of sharing information on a social media Web site. Ha and James (1998) found, “Interactivity was construed as consisting of five dimensions: 1) playfulness, 2) choice, 3) connectedness, 4) information
collection, and 5) reciprocal communication” (p.457). According to Ha and James (1998), “For self-indulgers and Web surfers, the playfulness and choice dimensions of interactivity fulfill self-communication and entertainment needs. For task-oriented users, the connectedness dimension can fulfill information needs. For expressive users, the information collection and reciprocal communication dimensions of interactivity allow them to initiate communication with the web site representatives or people of common interest online” (p. 456). Ha and James five dimensions are important to consider when trying to understand motivations for uploading content because the users are essentially interacting with an online audience. According to Steuer (1992), connectedness is the feeling of being connected to a world outside your own and expand on previous knowledge through text and images that are being shared.

Quan-Haase and Young (2010) suggested that the uses and gratifications theory was appropriate for exploring the motivations for people using social media tools:

In new media, the distinction between consumer and producer tends to blur, which has led to the introduction of the term ‘prosumer’ to describe users’ ability to take control over the production and distribution of content. This provides audience members control over content and its use, making it important to examine the gratifications new media provide to users in comparison to traditional media. Focusing on social media is important because we need to understand what motivates users to switch from one tool to another. Moreover, the concurrent use of various tools suggests that each fulfills a distinct need making an analysis of uses and gratifications essential. (p. 531)

Quan-Hashe and Young (2010) found similar differences in gratifications obtained from the use of different social media Web sites.
Uses and Gratifications Theory

In the early research, Elihu Katz (1959), brought forth that the uses and gratifications theory suggests that people selectively utilize certain communication platforms to fulfill or gratify specific needs. According to Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) It is the researcher’s job to clarify the extent to which certain kinds of uses set boundaries to the over-generalization that any kind of content can be shaped to fit any kind of need. Studies show that audience gratifications can be derived from at least three sources: media content, exposure to the media, and the social context that typifies the situation of exposure to different media (Katz et al, 1974, p. 514). Katz et. al (1974) findings made a significant contribution to the field, breaking down uses and gratifications to the fundamental building blocks. They thoroughly explain what gratifications are and where they emerge from in the theory.

Over the past several years, the uses and gratifications theory has seen a resurgence in its utilization for Internet related studies rather than generally using old models of the uses and gratifications theory for research that deals with newer technology (Stafford, 2005, p. 2974). Ruggerio (2000) noted that uses and gratifications “may have lost some ground to theories that are primarily used to deal with the content and impact of mediated messages such as framing theory, cultivation analysis, and the agenda setting approach. Yet, one can confidently say that U and G is still the standard perspective for studying audience activity, and that it is likely to remain so in the coming years” (p. 13). In addition, the uses and gratifications theory can be used to track the transition from audience activity to citizen photojournalists. According to Stafford (2005), “It has been
known for decades that individuals are motivated in their use of media; it is not a random or undirected activity” (p.2973). In the case of this research, the communication platform is citizens selectively utilizing cameras and the Web to document and share images of a natural disaster. The media context is formed in two stages; the use of the digital camera and then the use of social media to share the images. According to Zeng (2011), “During the past quarter century, as new media technologies were developed and enhanced, U&G has been fruitful for gaining insight into the uses of new media technologies, especially media formats that enable various degrees of user control that range from video recorders to commercial Web sites” (p. 98). Internet-applied uses and gratifications are also important when exploring citizen photojournalism with social media. According to Stafford (2005), “With the interpersonal social factor identified as an aspect of Internet usage motivation, the Internet can be considered as both an interpersonal and a mass exposure medium, with simultaneous commercial and noncommercial opportunities to users” (p. 2974).

In the past few years, scholars have utilized the uses and gratifications theory to answer foundational questions about the motivations for using new media practices (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011, p. 2323). According to Smock et al. (2011), the theory can be used to explain motivations to a content-generated online community and results showed different motivations of usage were associated to various patterns of contribution by social media users. This shows the communication field that there is reason to further expand on the uses and gratifications theory with this rebirth of new media practices.
Exploring why citizen photojournalists document a specific event as well as their gratifications and motivations for sharing their images on the Web is an important contribution to the communication field. With the uses and gratifications theory being reshaped to cater to new media practices and the lack of citizen photojournalism research, this study fills several gaps in communication research. Since this study is media related, the components of the uses and gratifications theory are a fundamental backbone to the study. The theory shows that people selectively utilize media for certain gratifications, which is what this study is exploring by analyzing citizen photojournalists’ gratifications for documenting a natural disaster and sharing the disaster photos on the Web.

Research Questions

RQ1: What do citizen photojournalists describe as their motivations for documenting a natural disaster?

RQ2: What reasons do citizen photojournalists give for sharing their images with an online community?
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative interviews were conducted with citizen photojournalists from the state of Alabama who documented the 2011 tornado outbreak in Alabama. This study is concerned with researching the citizens’ descriptions for their motivations of documenting a natural disaster and their motivations for sharing their pictures in online communities.

Recruitment and Participants

After The University of Akron’s Institutional Review Board approval was gained (See Appendix A), all of the participants were purposively selected due to their posting of their own photographs of the Alabama tornado outbreak on the social media, photo-sharing Web site, Flickr. Only citizen photojournalists who practice still-photography were considered for this study. Video and other multimedia users were excluded as possible participants. The reason only still photographers were recruited for this study was the recruitment tool, Flickr, is composed of still photographers and it gave the study a focused set of participants to interview. Flickr was used to recruit participants for the interviews because it is a social media site exclusively for still-photographers. Purposive sampling was appropriate to ensure that each participant; (a) was present during some
aspect of the Alabama tornado; (b) documented the natural disaster with some type of still-image camera; and (c) uploaded at least five original images of the Alabama tornado outbreak to Flickr. Having at least five images of the tornado on Flickr was important because it showed the participants’ diversity of covering the tornado and that there was enough substance that they would have strong thoughts about why they documented the tornado. All images that involve some aspect of the tornadoes in Alabama were considered during the recruitment process. This includes citizens who took photographs of (a) the actual tornado itself; (b) any type of devastation caused by the tornadoes; (c) people’s reaction to the tornadoes; and (d) commemorative events. Citizens who took photographs from the date of the tornado up until the date of the interview were acceptable as possible participants. All of the participants were over the age of 18 years old. Any professional journalists with past or present experience were excluded as participants. Higher education students studying journalism during the time of the tornado were also excluded as participants. These groups were excluded because they have training in journalistic situations. A person with journalism experience or training that are working for a media outlet and have a different set of media agendas and motivations for documenting events like the Alabama tornado.

Citizen photojournalists who met the requirements on Flickr were contacted through Flickr’s private messaging system with a brief outline of the study and given some detail of what they would be asked to do, were told the qualifications and exclusions to be a participant in the study, and were asked to contact the researcher if they were interested in being a participant in the study. A bulletin with the same information provided in the private messages was posted on Flickr’s community message
boards. Only message boards relating to Alabama or the tornado outbreak were used. In the message board post to the possible participants, they were told to contact the researcher if they wished to be a participant in the study or needed any further explanation. The message board respondents were cross-referenced by the researcher to ensure they met the qualifications of being a participant in the study. None of the Flickr members who contacted the researcher through the group posting and also met the requirements were excluded from the study. A total of eight citizen photographers were interviewed. After eight interviews, the data was saturated enough to analyze the research inquiries.

Pseudonyms were given to all eight participants to protect their identity. The cities in Alabama that the participants documented the tornado in are not protected as they relate to the results of the study. The gender of each participant is also not anonymous. The eight anonymous names are Mrs. Smith from Huntsville; Mr. Jones from Bear Creek; Mr. Lance from Russellville; Mrs. Lincoln from Tuscaloosa; Mrs. Rodgers from Tuscaloosa; Mr. Foster from Birmingham; Mrs. Rice from Montgomery; and Mr. Robinson from Montgomery.

Procedure

All of the recruited subjects participated in one-on-one, face-to-face interviews that were conducted by the researcher. A semi-structured interview guide of primarily open-ended questions (See Appendix B) was created to formulate structure during the interview. The open-ended questions were derived from the two research questions, theory, and previous academic research. Participants were invited to share as much detail
regarding their feelings as to why they think they were motivated to document the Alabama tornado, as well as why they think they were motivated to share their images on the Web.

All of the interview sessions were conducted in the Alabama towns where each participant resided. The interviews were conducted at a neutral, public location that was agreed upon by both the researcher and each participant. The participants who agreed to be interviewed for the study were contacted with the option of several different dates and times to choose from for their one-on-one interview. The interviews ranged from 28 to 75 minutes. All eight of the interviews adhered closely to the interview guide. Each interview was digitally recorded with an audio recording device for verbatim transcription purposes. The participants were given a consent form (See Appendix C) and asked to sign it prior to the interview session. Permission to digitally record each interview was obtained by the participant when each participant signed the consent form prior to the interview.

Analysis

The constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to identify and extract key themes from the interviews. Themes were selected based on topics related to what citizen photojournalists describe as their motivations for documenting a natural disaster and what they describe as their reasons for sharing those images online.

The constant comparative analysis is a process in which categories are developed through an ongoing process of comparing similar units of data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 250). According to Lindlof and Taylor, “Codes, categories, and category definitions
continue to change dynamically while the researcher is still in the field, with new data altering the scope and terms of the analytic framework” (p.250). Each interview was recorded and then transcribed. After the interviews were listened to several times, transcribed and re-read, a line-by-line analysis was conducted to identify and compare potential codes to look for similarities throughout each interview. Similar codes relating to both research questions were found throughout all eight interviews during the open coding process. When a participant answered a question that even remotely related to the documentation and sharing of the tornado, it was coded. During the open coding process, organization of the themes was minimal. This portion of the coding allowed the researcher to simply label what each participant discussed in their interview. After the open coding, axial coding was used to determine the most important themes that were derived from the codes during the open coding. Axial coding allowed the researcher to strengthen and minimize the themes that directly impacted the research inquiries. During the axial coding process, the themes were strictly defined because they impacted the research inquiries. The codes that didn’t seem to fit well into any theme were dropped at this point because of their lack of contribution to the research. After each theme was carefully reviewed and defined, it was clear which theme answered which specific research question and that allowed each theme to be presented in coordination with the specific research question that the theme answered.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Although each citizen photojournalist described unique differences in motivations for documenting the Alabama tornado and sharing their photos online, there were several common elements that emerged from the data. These themes were defined from the constant comparative analysis and broken down into the two research questions. Nine total themes emerged from both of the research questions. Four common themes emerged from the citizens descriptions of why they believe they were motivated to photograph the tornado. The four themes were defined as: (1) filling the void of professional media; (2) exposure for small communities; (3) showing progress and rebuilding; and (4) documenting personal memories. Five common themes emerged from questions relating to the citizens descriptions of why they believe they shared their photographs with an online community. Those five themes were defined as: 1) visual communication with family and friends; (2) initiating discussion with photo; (3) receiving praise from online community; (4) becoming a better photographer; and (5) entertainment value. Seven of the eight participants primarily took pictures of the destruction from the tornado. One participant took pictures of the actual funnel cloud as it was happening.
Citizens’ Motivations for Documenting a Natural Disaster

Four themes relating to citizen photojournalists’ descriptions of why they were motivated to document the tornado emerged from the data. According to Allan and Thorsen (2009), citizen photojournalists are drawn to natural disasters because they want to document what they see on the news. The four themes defined in this section of the study related to the citizens being affected by the media’s coverage or lack of coverage of the tornado. According to (Katz et. al, 1974), audience gratifications can be derived from media content and exposure to the media. In this study, audience gratifications are the citizen photojournalists’ gratifications and motivations for documenting the tornado. Relating to the following themes, the uses and gratifications shows that exposure to the available media by the citizens such as exposure to the professional coverage of the tornado, can influence their motivations to document the tornado themselves.

Filling the Void of Professional Media

No matter the region of Alabama, most participants acknowledged they, as well as other citizen photojournalists, can aide the professional media with a unique, citizen angle of natural disaster coverage. All of the citizens discussed the importance of their own community and how it is viewed by the public. By taking pictures of the event, the citizens are able to become the gatekeepers of how their community is portrayed. They are not leaving the coverage to only the professional media. It is important to note, however, that while all of the participants admitted citizens helped in the coverage of the natural disaster, the professional journalists do not have as many risks as an untrained
amateur would have. Mrs. Smith questioned the grey area between the professional photojournalists and the citizens. She said:

When I went out to take pictures of the tornado wreckage last Spring, I found myself shoulder to shoulder with some TV crews and reporters and a few times I asked myself, “Am I one of them?” … But yes, I do think of myself as a citizen photojournalist sometimes and rightfully so because I think citizens can give other citizens better information than some of the real journalists. I think citizen journalists are just as important as real journalists, if not more. … Citizen journalists and photojournalists cover aspects that the main, big, professional media people always seem to forget about.

Mr. Jones also said he thought the coverage of the Alabama tornadoes lacked a citizen angle that the professional news organizations are unable to emulate. He said:

Mainstream media doesn’t have the peoples’ point of view since the, a professional takes pictures of what the media wants the people to see. Whereas a citizen photojournalist would take pictures of other things to, like I said relive the moment and show others how important and truly devastating [the tornado] was. In a lot of my pictures you can see rescuers looking for things and people bringing food and supplies to others. I don’t remember seeing a lot of the helping hand in newspapers and such in the days after the tornado.

He added that he felt that because he was from the local area that was hit by the tornado, he had an upper advantage in knowing how to get around the area because the professional photographers were in unfamiliar territory. He said, “I feel like I knew the area better than someone coming from New York. I know my boundaries as a citizen and other citizens respect that more than a reporter shoving a microphone in their face after their son or mother just died.”

Mrs. Rodgers talked about the importance of photographing the tornado because the media just doesn’t have enough bodies to be everywhere at once. She said:

It’s important because media can only be in so many places at so many times and they have to be, they’re supposed to be; I think journalism is getting more subjective but it’s supposed to be objective. We’re talking about a city that has I don’t know, hundreds of thousands of people in it and they’re going to go where
the most impact was which is usually, or it was the area of Alberta, and I think [that’s] where a citizen journalist comes in.

She went on to talk about the importance of newer technology allowing citizen photojournalists to be able to have the ability to take pictures and saturate the media with visuals. Mrs. Rodgers added:

The citizens are shooting things without that filter there that a journalist has. I mean like is this right to shoot this, is this really the way we want to tell the story. Sometimes it’s good and sometimes it’s bad, but I think in this case with the tornado, technology really served a purpose with telling the whole story. I think that, I don’t care how many news media organizations were here, you almost found them bulking up in certain places.

Like Mrs. Rodgers, Mrs. Smith talked about the professional media not having enough journalists to possibly cover everything that was going on in Alabama. Mrs. Rodgers lives in Tuscaloosa, which is a bigger city, and Mrs. Smith lives in a smaller town. So both mentioned that the media presence was not sufficient to efficiently cover all aspects of the tornado. Mrs. Smith said:

[Professional journalists] aren’t the size of the Army. I mean I have no idea if this is accurate but you figure for let’s say every one professional photographer, there are about 100 citizens taking pictures with their phones and cameras. The pros’ photos will obviously be compositionally better, but I honestly think that citizens can do a better job of telling the story of a disaster like the tornado last year. Our photos are unfiltered. They aren’t cropped, edited or presented in a way that makes something look better or worse. What’s on my Flickr is what happened and that is the bottom line.

Mrs. Smith also talked about the professional media being unable to replicate a visual citizen angle to the Alabama tornado. She, like Mr. Jones, discussed a citizen viewpoint being important to inform the public with a different set of nonprofessional eyes. Mrs. Smith stated:

I think it’s important for normal people like me to take pictures because it gives the rest of the world a different viewpoint, a normal citizen viewpoint. When you
open up a newspaper or go to a newspaper’s Web site, you see a few of the professional photos. You know those photographers are constantly on deadline, they do this for a living, it is almost like they become immune to stuff like this and the pictures look so similar. When someone like me goes out and spends the whole day taking pictures of what I’m going through, what I see, how I feel, it can really give someone who was never here a different perspective on what it was like to be in Alabama during the tornado.

Mrs. Smith added that she felt that the citizen photographers had better access at times because members of her community shunned the professional media because they frowned upon the motivations of the professional media. She explained:

It was definitely hard taking pictures of peoples’ homes. A lot of people were still in their homes and you had people driving around taking pictures of what was left. A lot of people didn’t like it, but the citizens were blending in with the professional media. Members of the community were more open to having other [citizens] taking pictures of their houses rather than the pros. We just want to tell our story for no profit.

Mrs. Rodgers stated that she felt citizen photojournalists are more important than citizens who write stories, because the pictures are harder to manipulate and they can tip the professional media to cover a story that will reach a broader audience. She said:

I think that you can trust a citizen photojournalist over a citizen journalist who writes an opinionated blog. You do a picture or a video, then it is what it is, but if you’re writing about the tornado; like right after the tornado hit there were so many stories and rumors out there…It just wasn’t truth at all. These rumors would get started on blogs, on Twitter, not necessarily the photo sites and blogs because like I said, the pictures don’t really lie. I think citizen photojournalists do serve a purpose and they help. They can aide mainstream journalists. They really can make professionals stronger if done right. I need to make that clear that I’m talking about the citizen photographers not the writers and bloggers. So any picture of what happened that day and the time after really gives anything that the media continues to not cover.

Mrs. Rice gave an analogy of how she thought citizen photojournalists incorporated themselves into the media coverage of the Alabama tornado. She said:

I pretty much have pretty much taken pictures as a citizen photojournalist of everything in my life, and my city, and my timeline and everything I see. I know I
Mr. Foster said he thought it was important for citizens like him to take pictures of the tornado because it brought more eyewitness accounts to the disaster. When asked why he thought it was important for citizens to document the tornado, he said, “I think the most important reason is that a picture tells its own story. If you have five witnesses to something then you are going to have five different stories. If you have a picture then it’s going to tell its own story.” He talked about citizen photojournalists giving the people a picture to interpret but it all boils down to a picture doesn’t lie. Mr. Foster added, “People may interpret parts of the picture differently, but for the most part if you take a picture of a tornado then it’s going to be what the tornado looked like, not what Mr. Johnson said it looked like and then Mr. Johnson number two said it looked like something else.”

Mr. Robinson was in agreement that professional photojournalists overlook the details that a citizen photojournalist could be aware of. He said, “Um, sometimes with professional photographers, I feel like they lost sight of a lot of things and they miss details. Yes, they’re professional for a reason because they have that eye, that trained eye, to catch certain things, but sometimes they lose it because they are also thinking about the dollar sign at the end of it.” He went on and said that citizen photojournalists like himself
aren’t being motivated by photojournalism being their job. Mr. Robinson added,

“Whereas an amateur, or citizen photographer, we are pretty much taking pictures of everything and capturing every single detail, whether it be good or bad and we’re not thinking about a dollar sign or trying to keep the audience engaged by telling a story with that photograph.” Mr. Robinson went on and said that the pictures he was seeing in the newspapers motivated him to go out and get his own pictures because he felt an accurate story was being missed. He said:

Because the amount of devastation that was there, it was hard to put it into words, it really was. You know that’s what really drove me to going up there because the images I was seeing in the *Birmingham Post or the Montgomery Advertiser*, the images weren’t doing justice and I wanted to go up there and take pictures to give it justice because it was so hard to translate it into words of how bad it was. It was easier, and I feel it was easier, for people to see an image and then you tell the story and they get an accurate view of how it was in their head.

With the emergence of newer technology like smart phones, Mr. Foster said he thought citizens served an important role in the coverage of the tornado. Mr. Foster stated, “…I think so just because there’s more [citizen photojournalists]. There’s more citizens out there with their iPhones than there are professional photographers or journalists. They can’t be everywhere.”

Mrs. Rodgers also talked about smart phone cameras playing a pivotal role in aiding the coverage of the tornado in Tuscaloosa. She said, “I mean the media staffs are cutting back so they’re depending more and more on the citizen journalists. It’s obviously something that’s evolving. Anyone who has an iPhone now can be a journalist or a photojournalist.”

Mrs. Lincoln, who lives in Tuscaloosa, said she questions the professional journalists’ authenticity and time spent while covering the tornado. Mrs. Lincoln felt that
since she didn’t have to worry about outside influences from the media, she was able to document freely as a citizen and not worry about getting the perfect picture. She said:

I don’t need to get the front page photo. It’s not about the most shocking or most horrifying photo. It’s what’s real, it’s what you as a person sees versus…I get so irritated at newspaper photography because it’s cropped, and it’s edited, and it’s so tainted, and it’s photoshopped, and it’s whatever. You know I think that’s wrong. I think it should be one hundred percent what’s real. It should be an untouched photo and that’s what I do is just take a picture as it is and I share it as it is. It’s not something that I want someone to see a certain way. That’s what made me the happiest about people’s photos on Facebook and stuff…. Don’t get me wrong because I think for certain situations a citizen’s picture of any event can be more descriptive in context than a picture of the same event in a newspaper. Me personally, I don’t have a political agenda, a social issue, or anything when I’m taking a picture. It’s just what I saw at that moment.

Mr. Jones also questioned the media’s intentions and time-spent covering the tornado in Alabama; leaving room for himself as a citizen photojournalist to photograph what was happening. Mr. Jones said:

They weren’t, my photos weren’t as clear and precise as [professional photojournalists], but mine were more of the devastation and I feel, I feel they told a better story of what truly happened and how bad of a disaster it truly was. Even though the pictures from the helicopters flying over had great views of the devastation better than I could get because they had a birds-eye view. Although, I mean I was right there. I mean I feel like I had a story because I lived it. I didn’t fly in from New York to take pictures then hop on a plane and fly back home and forget about it.

However, Mrs. Lincoln made a point to note that even though she felt she filled a void that the professional media lacked, the professional media still serves a purpose.

Mrs. Lincoln added:

The citizens who take pictures and upload them do give a different perspective on things but a citizen doesn’t attach a story with the picture. I didn’t interview anyone along with taking their picture. I know I have my opinions on the media and they miss facts all the time, but there is a back story to go along with the professional photos. You don’t get the full coverage in the pictures that I take. Of course my pictures are real and unedited and they serve their purpose for my family and the community but as much as I don’t want to admit it, we need the
trained journalists to do their job. You know if I went and I took a picture of a battlefield, I don’t know what those people are battling about. I just took their picture and kept walking. I don’t know the full research behind why they are fighting or what’s going on. The risk is there are dumb citizens that don’t ask questions and they don’t know what they’re ethically doing with their cameras.

All of the participants admitted there are drawbacks and limitations of being a citizen photojournalist. While they can help in telling a more complete story, they all admitted to being limited by no training, ethics, and not having the right equipment. Mr. Foster talked about being limited by his equipment. He said, “You know there’s technical aspects of it like composition, the lenses that they…the technical skill. I wouldn’t say I’m arrogant but I think I’m as good as anyone else at being in the place that I need to be to get the good shots. [Professional photojournalists] just have better technical skills and equipment than I do.”

Mr. Foster helped fill the void of professional media in a different way. He said he enjoyed shooting the tornado to help local meteorologists do their job more efficiently. He said:

I send some of my pictures into the local meteorologists. The radars can only see about 100 feet up off the ground so when we take pictures and we send them to the meteorologists they can actually see what is going on with the radar. It helps them out so that’s how it’s different. A lot of, maybe not so much, the lightning pictures that I take and show to people because I love the reaction that people get from it. The tornado storms are a lot different.

Exposure for Small Communities

The citizen photojournalists who lived in the smaller towns that were affected by the tornado noted that part of their motivation to photograph the destruction was to bring awareness to their area that was hit by the tornado. They photographed the tornado
because pictures were coming out of the big city newspapers, but no one knew how
devastated the rural areas were. Mr. Lance, who lives in Northern Alabama near several
rural towns that were hit hard, said his motivations were partly to show that the small
towns were hit harder than the biggest cities. Mr. Lance said:

Well you know, for myself personally, I posted a lot of photos. First for my
friends to see but also because at the time, this is a very rural area and all the
media was focused on Tuscaloosa and the bigger cities and there was a lot of aide
going to those areas. I don’t think a lot of people realized the damages in this
local area. If you look at per capita, there was probably a higher death rate in the
rural areas than there was anywhere else in the bigger parts of the state. Even then
I think probably Missouri and up in that area. It was scattered in different areas
and different counties so when the data was reported, the data was spread out…. So I posted some of the pictures just from the standpoint of trying to get the
photos out of where people could see that our area got hit and it got hit hard. I
wanted to show that we needed help. You know the photos weren’t of very good
quality but they just showed some damage, and I felt like tagging the local towns
and next to the photo of that devastation they are going to see what happened
here. Maybe they could see that there are people in these little towns that needed
help.

Mr. Foster, who lives in a big city, traveled around to document the funnel
clouds and went to smaller towns to photograph what he said was the biggest tornado he
saw that day. Mr. Foster said:

We took pictures of those, that tornado, and really all the big cities that are up and
down I-65, we stopped and took pictures of the wall clouds there. There’s a small
town off 431 which is where I captured the big one, the one that went through
Tuscaloosa. Most of the smaller areas were hit harder by the same tornado that
went though Tuscaloosa. The pictures we shot of the clouds in, in, those types of,
um littler towns were actually more destructive than when it developed near the
city. We might have been some of the few to get pictures of the funnel cloud
before it reached Tuscaloosa.

Mrs. Smith made it a point to mention the town of Phil Campbell, Alabama. She
said citizens in Phil Campbell were mad about the coverage of the Tuscaloosa tornado
because there were countless other tornadoes in the state. She mentioned that she photographed the day of the tornado in Phil Campbell. She said:

To put it in perspective of how big this event was, there was property that landed in peoples’ yards that were 100 miles away. The sky was sunny and debris was just raining through the skies. It was really the most bizarre thing you could ever imagine. I have a few pictures of that stuff that I took but never posted anywhere. The pictures I got in Phil Campbell were something else. That is where the most devastating tornado took place. Again, back to the national media, everyone thinks of the Tuscaloosa tornado. Well, Phil Campbell got absolutely flattened, like completely torn down. It’s a small town though, so why would The Weather Channel send their crew there? I got a lot of great pictures there, of the devastation beyond recognition….Phil Campbell, like you’ll see later probably, is pancaked. The devastation there and the devastation in Tuscaloosa is the same. People in Phil Campbell and it’s surrounding areas, are, I don’t want to use inappropriate language, but they’re mad that everyone calls all the tornadoes, ‘the Tuscaloosa tornado.’ There was a lot more than one tornado, people.

Mrs. Smith said the national media was only concerned with the big cities because that’s where their important photos were, but they failed to care about the small towns because there is no money in the small towns. She said:

Last April, the national news was in and out once they got their shots of the big city devastation. Well what about the towns, especially the small ones that are left with nothing. The media exposed us for their own financial gain, but citizen photojournalists can keep the story alive. They can share their pictures on their own Facebooks, and Flickrs, and blogs, and Twitters.

When asked directly about his motivations to photograph the tornado, Mr. Lance said he wanted to bring awareness to his small community. He said:

Awareness and to help people out. Helping people out by showing that our smaller towns were hit harder than the bigger towns. Awareness in rural towns like mine are always overlooked when something happens and that’s why I went out and took pictures because people need to see that even though our town doesn’t have it’s own TV station or newspaper, but we are struggling with the same issues and they’re even worse because we don’t have the support here.

Mr. Lance added that he felt taking pictures of the damages in his small town was more important than showing injured bodies. He said:
That’s where the citizen line and the professional line gets drawn. The media doesn’t seem to have any problem exposing those who are physically hurt rather than the damages. So personally, I hoped my photos would bring some attention and bring some help to the local people who needed it and I feel like other people would feel the same way. You know I think in other areas there was a lot more aide so the motivation would be some of the same because there are a lot of people who are more serious about photography than I am.

Mrs. Rice talked about the professional news media not having a personal tie to the area like the citizens do, which puts the responsibility on the citizens to take pictures of the damaged small communities because they are familiar with the town. She said:

A lot of times it is the citizens who live there as opposed to professional journalists that come in and they’re not familiar with what it used to look like, or they’re not as familiar with the surroundings because people who have lived there and have taken pictures will probably get more personal pictures of what is around because they live in their little areas.

Showing Progress and Rebuilding

Progress and rebuilding was described as a motivation by the citizen photojournalists who currently document the rebuilding phase since the 2011 tornado in Alabama. They want the public to see photos that show Alabama is rebuilding and there is progress being made. The participants who described documenting progress and rebuilding all mentioned that the professional media doesn’t do a lot of coverage of the rebuilding phase of the tornado, therefore, the citizen photojournalist plays a role in showing the public that Alabama is bouncing back.

Two of the participants from Tuscaloosa specifically mentioned photographing the grand opening of a donut shop as a sign of Tuscaloosa coming back to normal since the day of the tornado. When asked if she still took pictures relating to the tornado today, Mrs. Lincoln said, “Oh yes, oh yes. Today I took a picture of Krispy Kreme. Krispy
Krispy Kreme reopened. This is a big deal for Tuscaloosa. Krispy Kreme was one of the, it got totally taken out along with a barbeque place that is popular for whatever reason…. So Krispy Kreme was rebuilt and reopened and the line for Krispy Kreme was like hours and hours long.” Mrs. Lincoln went on to say that photographs of the Krispy Kreme symbolize normalcy for her personally. She added, “So I did take pictures today at Krispy Kreme because that’s like a symbol. That’s a symbol of rebuilding to me. I mean that’s important for Tuscaloosa. I’m gluten free, so I don’t care about the donuts, and those donuts when they’re hot is like donut soup, it’s really gross. However, it is a symbol of progress and rebuilding.”

Mrs. Rodgers also said the Krispy Kreme was personal to her and photographing the reopening was therapeutic for her. She said:

For me, it was therapy just working on the pictures and taking pictures of places that were personal to my son and my family. Especially when you go through and choose the photos you want to share, it really made me think of all the good times we had at wherever that picture was taken. They were touchstones in our life that needed to be brought to light and I got other people who see the photos and are like wow, that’s incredible and I feel the same way because even if it’s just the Krispy Kreme…. We haven’t had Krispy Kreme for over a year and a half and it’s just that every little thing that happens now is just a little bit of celebration. So you know whether it’s just like a little thing like Krispy Kreme comes back, that’s a huge thing for us because something’s back. You see all the people taking pictures and you see all the pictures on social media of that Krispy Kreme because it is that big of a milestone.

That’s where social media really affects this process because, because, you know it gives me the ability to produce, and really, you know, get these pictures out there that shows us before, during and after. The local media does do a good job of still covering the rebuilding but it’s really only monumental stuff. They really aren’t out taking pictures of the day-to-day struggles of the community and that’s where people like me, a citizen, who goes out and takes the pictures, takes the pictures of Joe Schmo paving his new driveway, you know that picture is more important than the pictures of the tornado touching down. The big thing you have to know is my story is just one of thousands of stories that could be photographed on a daily basis.
Mrs. Lincoln also said taking pictures of the rebuilding of Alabama helps her heal with what she went through that day. She stated:

I think that you lose perspective if you don’t have something to refer back to. Like I can tell you all day long what happened, and what I saw, and how I felt, and all those things, but to look at all that and have that visual memory of it reminds you of how you; like I look at my backyard today and I’m like it’s a backyard, but I looked at it that day and my dreams were crushed and my little kid’s play land was smashed and all the things that I had worked for and, you know, it’s kind of like a marking of time, a marking of progress. I can look at a picture of my crushed backyard and then look at it now and I can see look how far we’ve came in such a short amount of time. We’re back to where we were and we’re better than we were before. We’re ok and it’s kind of, for me, like psychologically healing to look back at the pictures and say ok, that was a really crappy day, it was really scary, I thought my husband was dead for a while.

Mr. Jones discussed that the major news organizations haven’t really paid much attention to Alabama since the tornado. He talked about citizens needing to share their photos to show the importance of the community coming together. He said:

The big papers don’t even probably really know how much the communities came together. Katrina had loads of rebuilding coverage to a point but who cares about Alabama? We’re just a bunch of rednecks to most people. Us citizens need to share our moments and we need to share our moments next year, and in ten years because you know CNN isn’t coming back unless another tornado comes through and kills more people. It’s important for Alabama people to share moments of things lost and loved ones.

Mrs. Smith also said part of her motivation to photograph the tornado was to inform people that her community was rebuilding. She said it’s important for people to understand the positives that can come of the situation. When asked about her motivations to document the tornado, she said, “I’d say informing people and letting them know that there are people rebuilding and we are ok. People usually remember the bad over the good. Photos are a way to remember the good that comes out of the bad.”
Mrs. Rodgers also discussed that progress was a positive element that is displayed in her photos and citizen photos in general of the tornado. She said:

I want the memories of this place to be more positive every single day. Every time the clock hits midnight it’s a new day and more progress will be made in Tuscaloosa. I really get pleasure out of knowing, that when I share my pictures of the tornado both before and after, that I want the people to see the pictures, I don’t really care who sees the pictures because they’re originally just for me, but I want the people to see that we are coming back and we won’t give up trying to rebuild this town. I think of it like the song ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ because rainbows come after storms …I want people to see these and be like this is Tuscaloosa and not look at pictures of a funnel cloud and be like that is Tuscaloosa.

Mrs. Smith said the pictures of her community rebuilding give her and others a positive outlook on Alabama. She said, “I don’t want everyone to think of Alabama as this devastated state. We take pride in our state, and the feedback I get on my photos is amazing and makes me feel great when others leave such positive responses of pictures of us rebuilding what the tornadoes took from us.”

Mrs. Rice described that she felt the professional media did an average job of photographing the rebuilding phase of the tornado but there was a lot more room for coverage with her photos. She talked about the differences between her pictures and professional pictures:

I thought my pictures were really different because my pictures were months after the tornado hit, so you could see some construction and rebuilding. The pictures that you saw in the newspapers in April and May were just crumbled homes. Most of the pictures I took were of devastation that wasn’t that bad. It was bad, but it wasn’t like the houses were completely gone. That’s something important too because I think when people think of the tornadoes down here, they just think of it as one big wasteland, but there has been a lot of progress made in the area as far as rebuilding and such. The newspapers take pictures of that stuff to a point.
Documenting Personal Memories

Personal memories were described by citizen photojournalists who wanted a personal keepsake of the tornado because it was an important date in their lives. All of the participants talked about having their own images of the events as they took place. To the participants, having personal images outweighs the images that are displayed in the news. They discussed having photographs to remember the tornado because they were physically a part of the events as they happened.

Mr. Jones said his motivations to take pictures of the tornado were similar to taking pictures of everyday life because he was capturing memories. When directly asked about his motivations, he said:

For the memories, and for my personal collection of pictures. I saw online not too long ago they had some, I don’t know what it’s supposed to called, but a montage of photos of a year after the tornado and the day of the tornado. The pictures are of the same thing. People were commenting on it every second. I wonder if without pictures the memories of before and after would start to go away or not. I personally was motivated for the memories. It’s just like when I take pictures of anything, memories.

Mr. Jones went on and said part of the reason for him wanting to have visual memories was to be able to show his family of the future. He said, “I wanted to have the pictures for the rest of my life. I wanted to show, since it was that big of an incident. I want to be able to show, if I have a family, my family what happened and maybe someday their family.”

Mrs. Lincoln also said she wanted to have photographs for her son to see when he grows up. She noted the importance of having the personal memories. Mrs. Lincoln said, “Life is too short to not take a second to take a picture. That sounds kind of weird but really. The tornado was so horrific and the pictures I took, my son will be able to look at
one day and understand what he went through and maybe he’ll be more appreciative of his roots.”

Mrs. Smith said she grew as a photographer through her experience of documenting the tornado. She noted that her memories were important to her. She said:

I personally felt that I grew as a photographer during the whole experience. I was satisfied that I got to share my experience with others. My memories and photographs could be someone else’s memories. It was very self-fulfilling to be strong enough to be out there and take pictures. I personally know that I educated a lot of people by photos. People all the time will comment and say stuff like they had no idea it was so bad in other parts of Alabama. I find it gratifying that I informed people through my pictures.

What I meant was my pictures could be the only pictures someone sees of the wreckage. Like on Facebook or Flickr, maybe someone from Arizona came across my pictures on Flickr and now every time they think of the tornado in Alabama or maybe even a tornado in general, they’ll think of my pictures. That might be wishful thinking but I’m sure it happens more than I’ll ever know. Those photo Web sites are getting so big that you never know what kind of impact your pictures will have on another member.

Mrs. Smith also compared her motivations of documenting the tornado to documenting other daily experiences. She explained that documenting her memories served as a timeline to her life events, including the tornado. She added:

I am very motivated to photograph what happens in my life. So yes, in most aspects I documented the tornado like I do other aspects of my life. It’s a timeline of my life. Like the new Facebook design, right. It’s true though. It could have been an earthquake or the birth of a niece or the tornado. I need to document what is going on. I can’t just turn on the TV or read a newspaper and relate it to my life. So what, I’m going to turn on CNN and it’s just going to be a two-hour headshot of Mitt Romney. That means nothing to me or anyone I know.

When directly asked about his motivations for taking pictures of the tornado, Mr. Jones offered a simple response about holding on to his memories. He said, “I have all the pictures. I was able to post them, plenty of comments and I can’t stop saying, but relive the moment.”
Mrs. Rodgers said she was grateful that she has pictures from before the tornado so she can compare them with pictures after the tornado to have a complete memory of the events that took place. She said:

I wanted to document it so years from now I would have the memories and my son would have the pictures years from now because the area looks totally different now from when, before the tornado and after the tornado as we begin to rebuild. The pictures I took make me feel like the people who see them appreciate what they really have because in the blink of an eye it can all be gone. The pictures serve as a reminder to not forget and too not take your daily life for granted. I was even glad we had pictures of the area before the tornado, then you see my pictures right after the tornado, and now you see the pictures a year after the tornado and you get three different sets of what has happened to my house and to Tuscaloosa and it deeply affects my son and the pictures deeply affect others.

Motivations for Sharing Photos with Online Community

Five themes that related to the participants descriptions of why they were motivated to share their images with an online community were drawn from the data. All of the participants responses were related to fulfilling a certain need or gratification. According to Smock et al. (2011), the uses and gratifications theory has been modernized to be used to explain motivations of a content-generated online community and results showed different motivations are linked to varying patterns of social media usage by the audience. The participants who discussed their motivations for sharing their photos online all pointed to social media as being the tool they needed to fulfill their gratifications for sharing their photographs online.
Visual Communication with Friends and Family

This theme is concerned with citizen photojournalists who talked about photographing the tornado to communicate with family and friends on their social media sites. Motivations for visually communicating with family and friends varied slightly, but photographing the tornado and sharing the images online was a way to for the citizen photojournalists in Alabama to put the tornado in perspective to be able to show their friends and family. All of the participants who discussed sharing the photographs with friends and family made note of social media being a convenient component in that visual communication.

Mrs. Lincoln, a wife and mother of a five-year old child in Tuscaloosa, admitted that she took some pictures to let her family and friends know that her and her son were alive. Certain pictures that she posted on her social media sites served as visual proof that they were alive. She said:

I took pictures of my friends in my house that day. I took a lot of those. I took a picture; I might get upset. I took a picture of my friend holding my son and her son on her lap as it hit and you could hear it like (does a sound impression of the tornado) and my house was shaking and it would shake every time a tree would hit the ground. Then I looked at my friend and we made eye contact, and I didn’t even have my hand on my own kid because she both had them on her lap because (pauses), and I took a picture of them because both of them were playing a little video game on her lap, and I looked up at her and she mouthed, “It’s going to be all right.” (long pause, cries) So, I was like, ‘click’ with my camera. It turns out, I put that on Facebook, and it was the first thing I put on Facebook whenever we had our power and Internet restored. The first time we could actually be connected with anyone at all.

My friend’s dad is a fireman and he knew we were here, he knew where the tornado went because he was out in it. He thought we were dead, and he thought my son was dead, and he saw that picture on Facebook and knew that we were ok….He was digging through rubble thinking we were all dead, but after
a long time, he saw that photo on Facebook and that was the first signal he had that we were all right.

She went on to say that sharing her photos online was the only way to let her family know that she was alive and well. She said:

I couldn’t get a text out. I could get on Facebook on my phone before I could connect anywhere else. That’s how my brother knew we were ok too, Facebook, social media. When I finally did get on Facebook, I had like 7,000 Facebook notifications and all these messages, and all this stuff. I don’t know how because everything, all the power lines and cell towers were down as far as I know but we were able to connect the cell phone with data, but not through the wireless calling service or whatever. I don’t know how dispatch at the hospitals got any calls, but I got 3G, thank you AT&T. There was no Internet on the computer, nothing. The impact of social media, Facebook and such, was huge. That’s how everyone knew we were alive. That’s how my family knew we were alive. The picture did a lot more than updating a status with words.

Mrs. Lincoln also said she was motivated to photograph some aspects of the tornado because she wanted to give her family a reference point and put the destruction into perspective so her family could understand what she was going through on a person level.

Mrs. Lincoln added:

My personal sharing of the pictures, of just the stuff I took of my property, of my family that day, you know most of my family lives far away. They were watching CNN and all they could see was like aerial photographs or like overview shots. They had no reference, like they wouldn’t be able to tell this is at the corner or this street and that street. Even people who came to see me months later were like I missed the turn to your house, there’s no landmark. You used to turn by the Kentucky Fried Chicken. There’s no more KFC anymore, it’s not there. My family had been here to visit a week before the tornado and then went back home. That week my sister and I got in a fight with the pharmacist at CVS. After the tornado I went to that CVS, that was completely smashed to pieces, and I took pictures of it and sent it to my sister and was like this is what happened, and she couldn’t believe it. You know we were just there a week ago. I took a picture of the hotel they stayed in. I took pictures of things that they had reference to. I went to the KFC and took a picture of what was left and told them that this the corner of my street. That was big for them because they didn’t get that personalization from the news.
Everyone just thought that it was just another tornado that hit Tuscaloosa. You see that all the time on the news, like oh there was a tsunami in Japan, or an Earthquake in California, but you don’t understand the human aspect to it. That’s where I was going with my family stuff. It was like you guys need to understand this. This is a place where you come and visit twice a year and now it’s gone.

Mr. Jones also used social media to post his tornado photos to let his family know that he was doing all right. Like Mrs. Lincoln, he mentioned that the tornado photos gave his family an honest perspective of the tornado damage because they were familiar with the areas that had been destroyed. Mr. Jones said:

My family up north that lives in Illinois. Their reactions were, um, they felt horrible because it clearly doesn’t affect them directly. It was a way for me to communicate with my out of towners….It really brought it home for them because they visit Alabama a lot and seeing places in pictures that aren’t there anymore really puts it in perspective. My friends in Alabama, we all posted our photos on Flickr and Facebook and Twitter and we shared comments back and forth for a while. I commented on their photos. They commented on mine….You know how it’s usually no more than five comments on a photo, well every tornado related photo had at least 30 comments and like 5,000 views per photo.

Mr. Jones added that part of his motivation and gratifications to upload his pictures of the tornado was to inform his friends and the online community in general. He wanted to give a visual representation to his peers. He said, “….Once I got home and showed my fiancée and saw my friends’ pictures on Flickr that’s when I posted a few and after receiving, like I said 20 comments on one photo, that’s when I decided to post the rest of them. Just to further update people on how we were doing individually and as a town.”

Mrs. Rodgers had a different experience with sharing photos with family and friends. She took pictures of personal tragedies and also got information through other friends’ pictures. She talked about seeing her house for the first time was through a photo:
We didn’t know until about Friday, Friday morning. I got a text, speaking of social media and photos, I got a photo from a friend who lives down the street and that was the first time I saw my house after the tornado. It was crashed in on both sides. The middle was there, but, it was, that’s where technology and social media aided me because it let me know for the first time what my own house looked like. They wouldn’t let us drive in to our street. You know there was certain National Guard there and police everywhere and I understand their reason for that. So we had to park about a mile away and walk in.

Mr. Foster, who considers himself more of a storm photographer, said his pictures allowed his friends to understand why their property was so badly damaged. He thought sharing his pictures helped the people in his life understand the magnitude of the tornado.

Mr. Foster said:

It’s kind of weird with the tornadoes that were going through, they were different than a lot of the other storm pictures that I take. They were different mostly because, especially in a couple pictures that I took there were people being killed at that moment. There were people that were you know. I had a friend that had a home there and we helped him. He was in a mobile home and him and his wife had to work and his home was thrown all across the landscape. When he saw the pictures he understand why his stuff was destroyed.

Mrs. Smith discussed the importance of having her family see the devastation through her camera, which can help them see different angles because they understand her story on a more personal level. Mrs. Smith said:

That was one of my reasons for taking the pictures was to share them with my friends and family on Flickr and Facebook. I wanted them to see what I was going through. Even though a lot of my friends and family saw professional pictures or even saw the wreckage themselves, seeing it through my lens can open their eyes to things they may have otherwise missed. I guess the proper word was that I enjoyed doing it for those reasons.

Mr. Lance talked about having a variety of motivations and reasoning for taking pictures of the tornado but he specifically mentioned being able to show the people he knew what the area looked like through his pictures. He said he was motivated to share his pictures because his friends and family asked him to share the pictures. He said:
Then after the storm occurred because I was around some coworkers whose homes were gone, the emotional standpoint took away from me being able to take nice photos. I was just really taking shots of what was going on in the area. Then later I had people from outside of the area say, ‘well what does it look like?’ So I had people from out of the area asking me to take pictures of the area so they could see, you know what does my street look like. So why I took photos changed throughout the events. I assumed that would be the case for most amateurs or citizen shooters that they were taking pictures for a number of different reasons.

….I wanted to see homes where I had friends used to live there and that have moved to show them what had happened to their old residences and then I also took it with me when I did some volunteer work with the local Red Cross, the churches and the communities to help out, so I carried my camera with me to take pictures just to remember later, so people I know will know what was going on…. I took a lot of pictures for people to help them document various things because they weren’t able to photograph themselves.

Mr. Robinson also said telling his own story helped his family, specifically his grandfather, understand the extent of the damages in Mr. Robinson’s area. When asked about his motivations, Mr. Robinson said:

Because I needed to tell a story. I needed to get, the info, the information out there. The pictures I was seeing in the newspapers and the mental pictures I was getting from my friends in Tuscaloosa just weren’t adding up, and I wanted to go and see it for myself and since photography is fun for me, it’s like duh, I’m going to take my camera and tell a story through pictures. My grandpa told me, and I don’t think it’s just because I’m his grandson. He told me that my pictures were the best and most accurate depiction of the damage that he had seen. He can’t really get out of his house much so he wasn’t able to see a lot of what he knew had been blown away.

Initiating Discussion with Photo

This theme was defined by participants who discussed their motivations for sharing their photos online led to a discussion and led to user comments that were derived from their individual photos. This platform of communication was not limited to individual photographs, but also groups of photos that were displayed in location specific
groups. Meaning groups that relate to the tornado photos or Alabama.

Mrs. Rice said that of the few tornado photos that are on her Flickr site, she currently gets comments that continue a discussion on her tornado photos. She said:

I didn’t post a whole lot of pictures from the tornado like some people did, but I did get a lot of feedback on each picture. I still get comments a year later, and believe or not, some of the same people are still commenting on the same picture and they will go a few months without commenting on the photo, then a discussion will just pop up randomly on that photo. I always wonder why they don’t just personally message each other.

Mrs. Smith said that she feels a part of an online community and a lot of her connections were made in the short time after she posted her photos of the tornado devastation. She said:

I fully feel like I’m a part of a community. There are people on the other side of the world that I talk to on Flickr on a daily basis just because we share a love for photography. Some of the people actually started talking to me the week I posted my tornado photos. Those are still my most viewed photos on my Flickr page. People are obsessed with tornadoes. Even when you google tornadoes from Alabama, you’ll see that peoples’ Flickr pages come up. It is so awesome.

Mrs. Smith also said she participated and uploaded her photos to specific groups in order to reach a broader audience and initiate more discussion with sets of photos. Mrs. Smith added:

I belong to a few Alabama groups that I usually feed all my photos to. It is a great way to meet people and expose your work more. That’s probably where I get most of my Flickr traffic is through the groups I belong to. You find that group boards have better discussions than comment sections on individual photos. You get more diverse feedback on a certain topic or group of photos.

When asked about his motivations to share his images online, Mr. Lance mentioned sharing his photographs to initiate discussion and he also mentioned using groups to aide in this process. He said:
Interaction with other photographers. Being able to influence another person’s thoughts on something just by posting one photograph. To initiate a discussion really. I don’t think I’d be sharing my photos if no one ever saw them or said anything about them…. The initiation of discussions and getting the feedback. Whether it’s good or bad, I like sharing my photos with others. I like being a part of the groups and chatting on the photo message boards. I live in a small, rural community so it brings a bigger culture to something I don’t get to experience else wise.

Mr. Lance said the discussion that he began with his photos were both positive and negative. He said the negative discussion did not influence his decision to post his photographs on the Internet. He mentioned a specific positive story that outweighed the negative discussions. When asked about his engagement in these discussions, he said:

I got a lot [of comments] on a few photos, but I got some that were also negative. Specifically people saying you need to respect peoples’ privacy and that I was being inappropriate. These were people probably from the area that were emotionally traumatized from the tornado and felt like people were intruding. On the other side, I had people who were really happy to see my photos that weren’t from the area but really wanted to know what happened. They wanted to know what it looked like. The comments would start flowing in and people that had access to Flickr would start sharing their tornado stories and linking to their tornado photos. I am engaged in the conversation and you know, probably the people who were offended by my photos, I didn’t change anything, but I explained to them that I posted the photos because the area wasn’t being publicized. In one case there was another photographer, who was, I don’t remember the terminology, one of the people in the Flickr group. They responded and they had rescue dogs and they commented and said that they worked in the area and there wasn’t a lot of publicity and he said it was one of the worst areas they had ever seen. He thanked me for posting the pictures.

…You’d be surprised how much feedback I received from some of my tornado photos. Someone would see my photos and they’d comment on the photos, then one of their friends would comment, and then one of their friend’s friend would comment, and before you knew it, there would be people sharing their thoughts on the tornado, on memories of Alabama, on what was going on with the tornado in general, and to think that a huge gathering of completely different people were having a conversation because of my Flickr page. I didn’t seek advice from anyone, but I got advice from people
Mrs. Rodgers said she felt connected to people who commented on the pictures of the tornado devastation because her photos were personal to her. She said she is fine with sharing personal aspects of her life. Mrs. Rodgers said:

When someone comments on my picture I instantly feel a connectedness because they now have been brought into my life. Then when their buddies comment on my photo too then I’m somehow connected to them because now they see where my son went to school, that isn’t there anymore. I shared some pretty personal things on there and for other people to see it, it’s like wow. It’s almost like reading your diary to a stranger.

Mrs. Rodgers also said that while she is engaged in discussion on her photos, she prefers to communicate on her individual images rather than participate in group discussions. When asked if she participated in group discussion, she said, “Very infrequently but I am involved. I’m more of the chatter on my own stuff. I’m really not too concerned with groups, but I do look at groups and belong to a few, but I’d say most of my discussions happen on my own photos.”

Mrs. Lincoln said a primary motivation for sharing her photos with her online communities was to comment and have discussions on her photos because she knew people were going to her pictures to get updated on what was happening in Alabama. Mrs. Lincoln said:

You know, I take pictures with the purpose of hey, I’m going to be uploading these, I’m going to be getting 7 zillion comments on these. It’s what I do when I’m bored and it all starts with the pictures. Picutres are the first thing I look at when I sign on and I’m always commenting on other peoples’ pictures and they comment on mine and we get into debates. Especially with the tornado pictures because everyone was so glued to what was going here that everyone was checking all my social media pages constantly to see what I was posting and what it looked like in my backyard.

…. Not so much anymore, but I was really involved with circles, or groups if you will on Flickr and Facebook through the pictures I took of the tornado, and originally that’s not why I took the pictures. The pictures were for my family but
when you put something out on something other than Facebook, it’ll get picked up by photo groups and clubs and you get email notifications like every 5 seconds because so many people were talking about the tornado on my photo comment sections. Then there’s all these overlapping circles of people that I have conversations with daily. I end up talking to all my circles more than I do the people that live here in Alabama. I get sucked into the groups on all the social media sites and then I don’t get anything productive done.

Mr. Foster thought that group discussions on particular photos were a motivation for him sharing his photographs online. He pointed out that his involvement in storm photography groups was the most efficient. He said:

I belong to a lot of weather related groups and I’m probably one of the most active members in every weather group. Um, I think that, let’s see, I don’t have many personal friends that understand storm photography, so the group boards are a way to share the storm photos and get responses from people who understand my motivations for why I choose to do this specific genre of photography. At the same time I can see people’s photos from other parts of the world that are weather related and we can talk about our weather situations in a group discussion and it draws more people into the chat.

Mrs. Rice said being a part of social media and online communities allows photographers like herself to see different perspectives of the same place. She talked about one specific instance where she came across someone else’s photo of an area that she photographed and that sparked a discussion and further sharing. She said, “Just the other day I was looking through some pictures and I came across some that someone had taken at a post that I had been before and I made a comment like I’ve been there before and I posted a link to a picture that I took from the same spot. I think that’s interesting to see other people’s perspectives of the same areas that were hit.”
Receiving Praise from Online Community

All of the participants mentioned they appreciated the praise that they received from other social media members. The praise was a motivation for them to post online. The reward of being complimented by a member of their online community was an important motivator to post the tornado images online.

When asked about her motivation for sharing her photos online, Mrs. Smith said she enjoyed receiving compliments from other people. She said:

I’m motivated because I like the feedback, I love the compliments and that is it for me. I know sharing my pictures of the tornado really help tell the whole story. You can search Alabama tornado pictures online and pictures from my Flickr will come up. That is such a reward for me, for anyone I would think. Just because I’m a citizen photojournalist doesn’t make me less of a photojournalist. Wow, Flickr is a powerful tool. I feel like Flickr is one of the most professional, amateur photography sites if you catch my drift. There are pros on it too. I really get constructive feedback from other amateurs and pros about my photographs. It is a lot more open than Facebook too. You can search photos by location and search them by tags. Pictures on Flickr can spread like wild fire. I love getting comments from people I don’t know. It really makes me feel special. That sounds really corny, I know, but it is the honest truth.

Mrs. Rodgers said what motivated her to share photographs online was the praise she got from other online members. When asked why she was motivated to share her photos online, she said:

I get a lot of, what’s the word I’m looking for here, I’m shocked that people are actually interested enough to either make a comment or have looked at it because there is so much to look at on Flickr or wherever you spend your time and the fact that someone took the time to look at photos and then two, made a comment on it and then three, maybe even shared it with someone else. It’s this really kind of, wow, I’m humbled because I never expect that. I’m just so proud that they would want to comment on my stuff. There is so much these days that you can do with social media and so many things that you can see and not see. I mean you can pick and choose what you click to make bigger and really, like actually look at. Some things you just forget about. It’s nice and that’s what motivates me.
Mr. Robinson also said he felt a sense of gratification in receiving compliments from other members from online communities. He cited getting compliments as a primary motivation of sharing his photographs online. He said:

It’s an automatic trigger, an automatic thing. When I take the picture I know I’m going to share it, unless it’s really bad. There’s a drive that when I go out there to take the pictures that I want torush how and share them so other people can see them because I want people to compliment me and like my pictures. I’m always in the mindset of whenever I take pictures, they are going to be uploaded.

Mr. Jones also said he like receiving praise on his photographs. He said, “For sharing online, I really like the compliments. I enjoy reading what other people have to say and I’m open to suggestions.”

Mr. Foster was blunt when asked about his motivations and gratifications of sharing his tornado pictures with an online community. He said it is a sense of selfishness in receiving compliments from other social media users. Mr. Foster said, “I want to be arrogant and I want people to like my pictures. You can’t share pictures without the Internet anymore. You can invite people over to your house to look at a photo album but who is going to fly 3,000 miles to look at a few pictures when you can search Alabama tornado on Flickr and see my photos that way.”

Mr. Lance recalled one personal story of a former Alabama resident who personally thanked him for sharing his photos online. Mr. Lance described the online encounter:

I had someone from, and I can’t even recall the state, but they’re originally from Hackleburg and he contacted me and said he that’s the house I used to live in and I didn’t know this man. He told me he looked and looked for his house on the news and online and he couldn’t find it until he stumbled upon my photos and told me he really appreciated me posting it. He told me that he gets so little information about the small towns because it was just a few articles that said they had help but there wasn’t really any photos they could find.
Mrs. Lincoln also had a similar story where another member of an online community complimented and thanked her for sharing her photographs of the tornado. The difference between Mr. Lance and Mrs. Lincoln’s experiences was Mrs. Lincoln’s commenter had never been to Alabama and Mr. Lance’s commenter used to live in the Alabama area. Mrs. Lincoln said about her experience:

There was one guy from I don’t even know where. Minnesota if my memory is right and he sent me a private message on Flickr, like after he had publicly commented on some of my first photos of the damage, and I don’t even know how he came across my photos because I don’t think he was a member of any groups, he wasn’t Flickr friends with me and I never tagged my photos at first so I’m assuming he must have stumbled upon it randomly. Anyways, he sent me this private message that said you know nothing ever happens in Minnesota besides snowstorms and that he was praying for me, my family, my neighborhood and he thanked me for sharing my pictures and told me I was a strong person for being able to do that. That really was a big self-gratification because that really sums up I think why I’m so involved with social media. You get the haters that always jump in on a discussion of a photo but there’s always someone that makes you feel like you served some purpose.

Becoming a Better Photographer

Through being active with online communities, all of the participants said they felt that the feedback they received on their photos helped them become a better photographer. Even when participants who mentioned that some of the comments were negative; they still admitted they took the harsh criticism in context and used it to their advantage by taking it constructively.

Mr. Robinson, a highly active member of Flickr and Facebook, said he appreciated sharing his photos online because it helped him become a stronger photographer. He said:
When you share your stuff, you can get input; hopefully constructive criticism and that’s why it’s beneficial to share your work because you know otherwise you’re never going to know if you’re really doing a good job. Some people are just nice and they’re just being nice, but when you actually have someone who knows what they’re doing and criticizes it, then you have a better idea of what needs to be done differently to make the picture better or tell a better story.

Mr. Robinson said he also went to social media to view others’ work of the tornado so he could find better ideas and ways of documenting for himself. He said:

Occasionally, I mean when I go to look at other images of the tornado, I try to stick to a professional level of being on social media. Um, because I like to look at those images and think well I could do that better or I’d like to know how that person got that shot. Whereas, if I look at an amateurs work, I would just compare their work to my work because we are on the same level. I feel a connectedness with all photographers on Flickr and social media, not just the amateur, citizen ones. I primarily look at the professional work so, that helps me get ideas in my head as far as what I want to do.

Mrs. Rice also went to Flickr to look at other members’ pictures of natural disasters. She remembered a specific situation in which she contacted someone from across the country in search of advice. She said:

I have asked some people who are my contacts on Flickr. There is this one guy. He lives in Oregon I think and his name is (omitted) and he takes pictures of a lot of the rain storms and flooding situations up there and I had asked him how he dealt with taking pictures of things that were destroyed, and he told me that was an interesting question because people ask him that on Flickr all the time, but he basically just gave me the practice makes perfect lecture. I don’t know how much practice I’m going to get with tornadoes.

Mrs. Rice added that even when she doesn’t get feedback on a particular photo, she still feels like she is becoming a better photographer because there are quality photographers that are looking at her work. She added, “I know it makes me a better photographer because I know people are going to look at them and, I mean they may not actually
comment on them but I know a lot of my contacts I would consider good photographers and I know they’re going to be looking at them.”

Mrs. Rodgers said she felt sharing her photos online and seeking advice from other social media users allowed her to become a better photographer. She even said social media in general makes her a better photographer, not just the tornado experience.

She said:

I’m always looking at iPhone photography tips online. I really can’t think of any specific instances about the tornado specifically, but I’m always trying to learn new ways to take a better picture with this phone. I ask a lot of other iPhone photographers on Flickr for tips on making a picture better, or what type of setting they used in a certain lighting situation.

Mrs. Smith said she appreciated the feedback from other Flickr members because they are honest with her when commenting on her photographs. She said, “It’s important because it makes you a better photographer. The feedback from Flickr members are people just like me and it helps not knowing many of them personally because they will tell you the truth.”

Mr. Lance also mentioned that sharing his photos online is positive because people aren’t afraid to be honest. He said this makes him a better photographer. Mr. Lance said:

It can definitely make you a better photographer. Within certain groups, the one group I mentioned has some very good, it has some professional photographers in it. It gives you the ability to ask them how did you do this or how can I make this photo better. There are a lot of really good photographers out there. A lot of really good amateurs like me. It’s a brotherhood. You don’t have to be afraid to speak your mind.

Mr. Jones said that he thought sharing photos online can help or hurt your reputation of being a good photographer. He said, “It does help your reputation and if it is
a bad photo and you share it, people might think of you as a less creative person but if it is good then people will recognize your photos more and the comments just keep building and building and building.”

Mrs. Lincoln said sharing photos online can help you be a better photographer but only if you are open to negative comments as well. She said, “If you’re open to criticism and understand that people have no filters on the Internet then it can make you a better photographer, but you have to remember even if you think your photos are private, they’re not.”

Mr. Foster admitted that shooting pictures during the storms can get rather tricky because of the dark lighting situations. He admitted that he resorts to social media to achieve advice on technical abilities that allow him to become a better photographer. He said, “When you take pictures of storms and stuff, the lighting and settings on your camera can get tricky because it will get dark really quick and then really light. I seek advice on the chats and on Flickr about the best settings for those different light situations.”

Entertainment Value

The entertainment theme came from participants who discussed just having fun by sharing their photos with an online community. The specific platform of social media wasn’t a factor in their entertainment. The participants who mentioned enjoyment being a motivation for photographing the tornado didn’t point out a specific social media site that related to more or less enjoyment.
Mr. Robinson said that aside from other motivations to document events like the tornado, he finds enjoyment in using social media to share his images. He said, “It’s my hobby to give people stories, ideas. Um, and if they want to use it for something then it’s there, just ask me for it. It’s just something I enjoy doing. It’s good, maybe someone will use my picture for their screensaver or something.”

Mr. Lance said he simply enjoys belonging to local Alabama groups and enjoys the relationships that he builds with other community members on Flickr. He said:

I just enjoy interaction with other people. You find other people that have things in common and there are groups inside of Flickr. You know I posted all of my tornado photos in a particular group, which was North Alabama Photographers and you just sign up for the group and you can post photos. So that really narrows the photos to people from the area, and so there’s a lot in common with that group, so you can go on there and someone can be like, ‘Hey there’s a hot air balloon show in Decatur.’ You can get notice of stuff going on in the area and you can definitely make friends both online and in-person.

Mrs. Lincoln spoke more broadly about her enjoyment of sharing her photos online. When asked why she thought she was motivated to share her photos online, she talked of posting photos in general, not specifically the tornado. She said:

Because I’m important damnit. No really, it gives you a, you don’t disappear. You’re way less lonely. I mean I don’t want to sound like I sit on my phone and upload pictures all day but really, it’s a big part of my life. You know my husband works and I take care of my kid all day so it’s nice to have a creative outlet and another circle of people to be able to interact with at any time and the photos, the tornado photos, photos of my girlfriends, anything, just to spark some conversation. I’m a very social person but I can’t go out every night and see people in person.

Mr. Foster has taken pictures of several different tornadoes throughout his life and he enjoys the rush of taking pictures of the storms and displaying them for others to see. He said, “Nothing is more rewarding than being by a tornado. Shooting storms and lightning and tornadoes isn’t my job, it’s my hobby but I love it. I like the reactions from
people and I like to display my pictures in frames in my home.” Mr. Foster went on and discussed the differences in motivations between the enjoyment of taking pictures of the tornado versus pictures he takes in everyday life. He said:

There really wasn’t a different motivation aside from [the tornado] being the big one. This is what people like me do for fun. We’re sending our pictures to the meteorologists to help them out and we also find it fun to go around and see the storms and document them. There’s obviously differences in storm photography with pictures of my kids, so the motivation from storm photography is different because I actually enjoy taking pictures of that. So I’d say the motivation was different in that I enjoy shooting the storms and I don’t really enjoy shooting anything else, so I’m not motivated to shoot things other than storms.

Mrs. Rice said the entertainment was documenting an event and sharing the photos online because not a lot of other citizen photojournalists have the opportunity to photograph such a major disaster. She said:

I love taking pictures of cemeteries and churches but this was different. I really felt, what’s the word you used, gratified? I really felt gratified knowing I was a part of such a major event and that there were probably a lot of other citizen photojournalists around the country who would have loved to have photographed what I got to photograph and they probably never will. I feel fortunate to have been able to photograph such a once in a lifetime experience. It was exciting and it was definitely fun to do. I don’t live near the major damage so I didn’t have any person ties, but I had a lot of fun just taking pictures of the damage and also posting them on Flickr….For the love of taking pictures and the addiction of putting them on the Internet. There’s tornadoes here all of the time but this was way too different to not take pictures of.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine what citizen photojournalists describe as their motivations for documenting a natural disaster and what they describe as their motivations for sharing their photographs online. The uses and gratifications theory suggests that people utilize communication platforms to fulfill certain needs or gratifications. The results of this study show that there are specific motivations and gratifications that citizen photojournalists obtained when they documented the Alabama tornado and then shared the images online. While keeping in mind the uses and gratifications theoretical approach, the users of the available platforms like social media, allowed the participants to share their images with an online community. All of the participants discussed the importance of having the camera technology and social media platforms to share their photographs. The descriptions of the eight participants in this study shed light on what their specific motivations were when they documented and shared their photos.

All of the themes in this study related to interacting with a community and they used social media sites as their tool for interaction. The five dimensions of online interactivity defined by Ha and James (1998) were: 1) playfulness, 2) choice, 3) connectedness, 4) information collection, and 5) reciprocal communication.
Ha and James dimensions related to the themes that emerged from the participants who photographed the tornado. The participants first made a choice to photograph the tornado for their personal agendas, which is outlined in the first set of themes of why they were motivated to physically photograph the tornado. Secondly, they made a choice to share their photos on the Web to connect with a community and seek reciprocal communication with their friends, family or within their online communities on whichever social media Web sites they chose to utilize.

The idea that community was a driving factor in the motivations for citizen photojournalists to document the tornado can be looked at on two different levels. First, they wanted to help their own towns by photographing their personal communities to bring awareness to the areas that were affected by the tornado. On a second note, they also were motivated by their desire to interact with online communities to further share their images. The participants interacted with their online communities and felt connected with their peers online by sharing the images of the tornado. So not only were they fulfilling their gratification of documenting the tornado to bring awareness to Alabama communities, but they were fulfilling their desire to be a part of an online community.

When asked about his experiences and gratifications of community, Mr. Lance said:

Interaction with other photographers. Being able to influence another person’s thoughts on something just by posting one photograph. To initiate a discussion really. I don’t think I’d be sharing my photos if no one ever saw them or said anything about them….The initiation of discussions and getting the feedback. Whether it’s good or bad, I like sharing my photos with others. I like being a part of the groups and chatting on the photo message boards. I live in a small, rural community so it brings a bigger culture to something I don’t get to experience else wise.
Mr. Lance made a choice to photograph the tornado and felt connected enough with his online community that receiving reciprocal communication and having discussions with his online community were important motivations for not only photographing the tornado and bringing awareness to the community in which he lived, but for making the decisions to share his images online to further his connection with his online peers. By sharing their images with an online community, the citizen photojournalists had other advantages than just interaction with their peers. They sought advice to become a better photographer and they enjoyed the feedback that they received from within the online communities as well as the communities in which they resided.

Feeling a sense of being connected to these communities is what the participants noted in their interviews as being a motivation for documenting and sharing photographs. The photograph of the tornado is not just a picture to be stored away and forgotten. The picture represents a trigger to allow the citizen photojournalists to be an active participant in their online communities. If they didn’t take the pictures and share the pictures, then they wouldn’t have any substance to strike a conversation or feel connected with their community. Mrs Rodgers mentioned feeling connected to her online community through her photographs. She said, “When someone comments on my picture I instantly feel a connectedness because they now have been brought into my life. Then when their buddies comment on my photo too then I’m somehow connected to them because now they see where my son went to school.” This is important because it tells us that citizens who take pictures of newsworthy events are not only capturing moments to help tell the story, but they also want to take the pictures to be a part of a community that would not exist without their pictures. The participants saw an opportunity to boost their
communication when they were taking pictures of the tornado. Some participants made the decision to share their images before they took them and some participants got involved with their online community after they analyzed their photographs. The nine themes defined by the two research questions can be related to two simple motivations. The citizen photojournalists inform an audience with their pictures and then they interact with a community with their pictures. The themes from the first research question, what citizen photojournalists describe as their motivations for documenting a natural disaster, relate to simply informing an audience about the event. Informing an audience coincides with sharing the photos online because it is the easiest way to publish their photos to inform people. When one looks specifically at why they are motivated to share their photos online, then you see they seek out online attention within their online communities aside from just informing people about the tornado.

Social media Web sites such as Flickr, Facebook and Twitter are hosts for the online communities in which the citizen photojournalists belong. According to Hutton and Fosdick (2011), the needs and desires of social media users are to promote themselves, share new experiences with others, to have fun or waste time, to stay in touch with friends, and to meet new people. The five themes that emerged from the research question that specifically addresses the citizens’ motivations for sharing their photos with an online community tie into the needs and desires of social media users. When the participants in this study sought attention in an online community they enabled themselves to meet new people from all over the country, share their stories, spark a discussion, and enjoyed sharing the pictures. Without having social media, the participants said they wouldn’t be able to participate in the online community because
there would be no way to communicate their images with an audience. Social media is the key to allowing citizen photojournalists to report information. Cameras have been around much longer than social media. There have always been citizens taking pictures at news events, but now with the emergence of social media, we see the popularity of the term ‘citizen photojournalist’ because they can now share their photographs instantly. Before social media and newer camera technology, there was no way for a citizen photojournalist to easily and instantly share their images with a diverse population. So without social media, it is nearly impossible for a citizen to inform and participate in an outside community. Social media essentially allows the citizens to become photojournalists because they now have the tools to inform. Without social media, they wouldn’t be able to inform others so conveniently and thus, would make it more difficult to be a citizen photojournalist and have their images published and shared.

All of the participants, whether they had positive or negative views on professional media, were motivated in some way by the professional media to go out and photograph the tornado as a citizen and then share those photographs because they perceived professional journalism a certain way. The four themes relating to what citizen photojournalists described as their motivations for photographing the tornado were directly related to the professional coverage of the event. As Allan and Thorsen (2009) found, the citizen photojournalists document natural disasters because they want to document what they see on the news. The participants in this study documented the Alabama tornado because they wanted to document what they didn’t see on the news or where they thought they could help tell a better story within their community. Some citizen photojournalists in this study didn’t see complete stories of the tornado on the
news. They didn’t see the small communities and rebuilding efforts being shown on the news. These reasons were a major factor in their decisions to actively participate as the role of a photojournalist and to boost their activity in online communities.

The goal of this study was to explore the citizen photojournalists specific motivations for participating in the coverage of the Alabama tornado which related to sharing their photos online. The inquiries of this study were important because with participatory journalism being more integrated in today’s media world, it is important for the media industry and communication scholars to understand what motivates them to do this. Understanding why citizen photojournalists document and share can lead to more effective understanding of journalism and communication on a professional level; as shown in the themes of this study.

The nine themes defined in this study all relate to each other because they all deal with some sense of community. It is the idea that being a part of a town in Alabama and also a part of an online community drives the citizen photojournalists who documented the tornado to communicate with others. The first inquiry of this study was to examine citizen photojournalists’ descriptions of their motivations for documenting the tornado. According to Guosong (2009), the users utilize the available media at their hands for their own information, entertainment, mood management, produce their own content for self-actualization of events, and the users interact with online communities to enhance their own new media experiences. The first theme, filling the void of professional media, shows us that the mainstream media’s lack of coverage in certain areas motivates citizen
photojournalists to photograph and share their own images to tell the stories they felt are not being told. In some way, all of the participants in this study discussed that they felt the need to photograph tornado because they felt they could either help in the coverage of the event or completely tell a new story about the tornado.

Exposure for small communities was the second theme and was mentioned by all of the participants who photographed in rural areas as opposed to the bigger cities in Alabama. This theme was also related to the professional media because the participants noted the professional media usually focused on the bigger cities, which leads the citizens to photograph their own smaller communities to try and expose their own stories. Again, the aspect of community ties this theme with the others because the citizen photojournalists described needing to be a part on an online community to be able to communicate their images to tell the story of the physical community that they lived in.

The third theme was showing rebuilding and progress after the tornado. This is significant because this shows the citizen photojournalists are passionate about the coverage of their own towns. They wanted to document and share the images of the communities rebuilding because they said the professional media has lost touch with tornado coverage since the weeks after the tornado. This theme also reiterates that community was a key motivator for the documentation of the event. The citizens didn’t want the public to remember Alabama as a devastated area. The citizens want the public to know that their community is rebuilding and this is why the citizens photograph the rebuilding phase, because they feel they have the tools and access to accurately share their information.
Documenting personal memories was the fourth theme and was mentioned by all the participants. They felt the professional media’s photographs were broad and representational of the whole state. This caused the citizen photojournalists to photograph the events that directly affected them so they could have their own memories to look back on. All of the participants talked about sharing their personal memories with their friends, family and complete strangers on the Web. The tight-knit secure feeling that each participant described as having with their online communities made them feel comfortable with sharing their personal experiences on the Web.

The second inquiry of this study was what the citizen photojournalists described as their motivations for sharing their images with an online community. The important connection in the five themes defined in this research inquiry is that being a part of online communities is the one of the main reasons the citizen photojournalists documented the tornado. All of the five themes that were defined from this inquiry related to having social media available to allow them to achieve their gratifications for sharing the photos. The first theme was visually communicating with family and friends during the tornado. This theme shows the importance of social media because those communication platforms allowed most of the citizen photojournalists to visually stay in touch with family and friends because a visual representation of what was going on in Alabama was a more accurate depiction of what was going on for their friends and family.

The second theme was initiating a discussion with a photo. This study showed most of the citizen photojournalists are motivated to share their photographs with online communities because they participate in discussions that begin with a single photograph.
or a series of photographs. This participation leads to better relationships and gained networking through the social media platforms.

The third theme was receiving praise from the online communities. All of the participants mentioned they really appreciate the positive compliments they received from other social media users and other citizen photojournalists. Receiving compliments was one of the gratifications obtained by the participants which led to sharing their images online.

The fourth theme was becoming a better photographer through sharing their images. This is important because it relates to the theme of receiving praise from an online community because most of the participants said some aspects of receiving praise allows them to become a better photographer. Becoming a better photographer was a separate theme because the citizen photojournalists offered other explanations and examples of how sharing their photos led to becoming a better photographer. The fifth and final theme relating to the citizen photojournalists’ motivations for sharing their photos online was entertainment. Most of the participants described simply enjoying the practice of sharing their photos online.

Limitations and Future Research

There were limitations in this study that could be taken into consideration for future research. All of the participants in this study were from the Alabama area and had taken still photographs of the Spring 2011 tornadoes in Alabama. Future researchers might consider studying another natural disaster in a different part of the country to see how the motivations of citizen photojournalists in a different area are similar or different.
to those in rural Alabama. Future researchers might also want to use the parameters of this study in a more populated area to see if the media coverage and increased population of a city influences the motivations of a citizen photojournalist to cover a natural disaster. Also, this study could be replicated to cater to other news events other than natural disasters. Researchers could explore citizen photojournalists’ motivations to cover a breaking news event other than a disaster or any type of news feature event.

This study included any citizen photojournalist who took pictures with any type of camera device. Cell phones, digital point and shoot cameras and single lens reflex cameras were all used interchangeably by most of the participants in this study. Future researchers might want to explore the differences in motivations of using each form of still-camera recording device in a natural disaster setting.

Final Remarks

While there are limitations in this study, the importance and meanings of the findings are significant to better understand the motivations of a citizen photojournalist. One can see the importance of citizen participation in the coverage of an event because they allow the communities to see more of a story than what is just presented in the professional media outlets. The main observation in this study was the importance of community in the motivations of each citizen photojournalist for documenting the tornado. Not only were they informing the public with images of the tornado from a citizen viewpoint, but they were participating in online communities with the use of their images. They shared the images to inform their audience of the tornado and they also sought feedback and communication from their online communities.
Professional news organizations need to continue to further understand how to integrate citizen journalism and photojournalism into their own media agendas because citizens are clearly out in the field reporting on information and telling their own stories using social media and online communities. Sambrook (2005) said that professional journalism and citizen journalism is a partnership. The findings in this study suggest that there is room for improvement in this partnership. The participants in this study had obvious disagreements with the coverage by professional photojournalists. What is examined in this study is we can begin to understand what drives citizen photojournalists to cover an event like the Alabama tornado and now we can better understand how to collaborate the professionals and the citizens to tell a more complete story. The finding in this study that community is so important to a citizen photojournalist can suggest that professional media outlets who are involved with online communities and user-feedback options on stories and photographs serve a valid justification in the coverage of a story. From the findings of this study, with the displeasure of the participants views of professional journalism and their active involvement with their own online communities, it is noteworthy that professional media outlets still have major strides to connect with citizen photojournalists. Professional media outlets that allow citizens to submit photos of an event might not be enough. For example, if the professional outlets created a Flickr page or a Facebook photo album for an event such as a natural disaster, it would bring the online community aspect that the citizen photojournalists desire directly to the professional media outlets. Tying the professional and citizen coverage together can better tell a story, which is shown in previous research and by the participants who were interviewed in this study.
REFERENCES


APPENDICIES
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

[Image]

Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

April 9, 2012

Daniel Owen
3615 Spring Valley Road
Akron, Ohio 44333

From: Sharon McIntyre, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20120403 "Citizen Photojournalism: Motivations for Documenting a Natural Disaster and Sharing the Photos on the Web"

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects for the referenced project. Your application was approved on April 9, 2012. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☐ Exemption 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 4, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 - Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 - Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Cc: Vel Pipps - Advisor
Cc: Stephanie Woods - IRB Chair

☑ Approved consent form/s enclosed

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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1) How has your week been going?

2) What have you been photographing of late? Anything fun and interesting?

3) What do you usually shoot in your spare time? What do you enjoy shooting?

4) What got you into taking pictures and how long have you been doing it?

5) What are your favorite and least favorite parts of photography?

6) Describe what you think a journalist does.

7) Since you have taken pictures of some aspect of a catastrophic event as a citizen, many people in the media profession would label you as a ‘citizen photojournalist’ or a ‘participatory photojournalist.’ Are you familiar with those labels?

8) Why do you, or don’t you think that’s an appropriate label for what you do?

9) (Optional) Since you are not a professional photojournalist but do take pictures that have photojournalistic qualities, what do you label yourself as and why?

10) Why do you think it is important for citizens to photograph aspects of natural disasters like the Alabama tornado?

11) What type of camera or camera phone were you using to photograph the Alabama disaster?

12) What locations or cities were you documenting aspects of the Alabama tornado from?
13) Could you describe in detail the types of pictures you documented that relate to the Alabama tornado?

14) When did you photograph the Alabama disaster? For example, did you start photographing the day of the tornado? The day after? Weeks after? Did you go multiple times?

15) Professional media outlets extensively covered the Alabama tornado as well as every other natural disaster that happens around the world. Explain your reasoning for taking pictures of the tornado devastation. Do you feel you give the world something to see that the mainstream media lacks?

16) Describe the gratification or satisfaction you got from taking pictures of the Alabama tornado and/or its devastation.

17) Why were you motivated to take pictures of the tornado?

18) Why do you think you chose to go to the site of the tornado and take pictures rather than just see it with your own two eyes and not take pictures?

19) Are the reasons you photographed the tornado similar to the reasons you take pictures in everyday life? If yes, please elaborate on the reasoning for taking pictures in any environment and if no, explain what made photographing the tornado a different experience.

20) So, if the tornado only damaged a few neighborhoods, killed no one and was hardly covered by the professional media, do you think you would have still been motivated to photograph what was going on? Why or why not?
21) If a tornado touched down tomorrow and ripped through Alabama, would take pictures like you did before? If no, please explain.

22) How was the motivation to document the tornado different from photographing other daily events?

23) Describe any difficulties or uncomfortable situations you had while photographing the tornado devastation.

24) If there is one thing you could change about the way you photographed the tornado, what would it be and why?

25) You are being interviewed for this study because you were in Alabama during or after the tornado. Let’s say a hurricane larger than Katrina struck somewhere in the Southeast outside of Alabama. Would you consider photographing something like that? Describe why or why not.

26) If there were any factors. Describe any outside factors or influences that drove your decision to photograph the aspect of the tornado that you did.

27) In your opinion, compare your photos of the Alabama tornado with the professional photos that you saw displayed in newspapers, magazines and online. Do they tell the same story in your opinion? Please explain the similarities and differences.

28) Do you think there were any risks in documenting such a big event without any training in journalism?

29) Was anyone with you when you went to take pictures of the tornado, and what was their purpose of being with you?

30) Did you seek advice from anyone online or any other individuals during the photographing process?
31) You uploaded your photographs of some aspect of the Alabama tornado to Flickr.

    What is it that you enjoy about uploading your photographs to Flickr?

32) There are discussion boards and user-comment sections on each photograph.

    Describe the feedback you received from other Flickr users about the tornado photos.

    Were you engaged in the feedback?

33) Do you participate in any group message board discussions? Why or why not?

34) How active are you involved in communicating with other Flickr members or online communities and social media sites like Facebook. And describe why you think it is important to be able to get feedback from other people on online.

35) There are hundreds of thousands of photographs of natural disasters in the United States on Flickr. Whether you think you are or not, you are part of an online community of citizen photographers. Do you ever feel a ‘connectedness’ with others through Flickr? If yes, describe the feeling of connectedness.

36) Aside from Flickr, where else are you uploading your photographs? Do you submit them to contests? Submit them to professional publications? Share them on other platforms of social media? Are you sharing them in any other way?

37) Did you withhold from sharing any photographs because of any graphic content or withhold sharing any of your photographs? If so, why?

38) Do you believe it is important for the public to be uncensored when natural disasters like the Alabama tornado happened?
39) When you decided to photograph the disaster in Alabama, did you already know that you would be sharing them online? If yes, why do you think you made that decision? Is it subconscious that you photograph with the intent of sharing? If no, what made you decide to share your photographs after you were done photographing?

40) Why do you think you are motivated to share your photographs with an online community?

41) What are the gratifications you receive from sharing your photographs online?

42) Describe why you think sharing your photos online either make you a better photographer or a worse photographer.
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent to Participate in a Master's Thesis Research Study:
Citizen Photojournalism: Motivations for Documenting a Natural Disaster

Introduction: You are being invited to participate in this study because you documented some aspect of the 2011 tornado outbreak in Alabama and because you uploaded at least 5 images of the tornado to the social media Web site, Flickr. Photos that qualified you for this study are any combination of (a) the actual tornado itself; (b) any type of devastation caused by the tornado; (c) people's reaction to the tornado; and (d) any type of commemorative event. I, Daniel Owen, am a graduate student at the University of Akron in the School of Communication. I am doing this study for my Master's Thesis. I am being guided in my research by my faculty advisor, Dr. Val Phipps, from the School of Communication. He can be contacted by phone at (330) 972-7208.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore what citizen photojournalists describe as their motivations for documenting any aspect of the Alabama tornado, as well as your motivations for sharing your images online. You have complete discretion over the questions you choose to answer. The interview could potentially last several hours.

Eligibility: All participants must be at least 18 years of age. Participants are eligible for this study if they are currently or have had professional journalism experience. Students who studied journalism during the 2011 Alabama tornado outbreak are also eligible.

Risks and discomfort: There are no known risks associated with this study. The only possibility for minimal discomfort could be discussing topics relating to being around Alabama during the time of the tornado. You have complete discretion over the questions you answer. The questions do not refer to the actual tornado itself, but only your reasons for documenting the event and sharing your photos on the Web.

Benefits: You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study, but your participation may help us better understand what motivates citizen photojournalists to document natural disasters and why citizen photojournalists share their images with an online community.

Right to refuse or withdraw: Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

Confidentiality: Any information that could identify you will be kept in a secure location and only myself and my advisor will have access to it. You will not be identified in any presentation of this study. This consent form will be kept separate from the data. Nobody will ever be able to identify you from this study.

Audio Recording Release: With your permission, I would like to record the audio of my interview with you. This will better aid me in analyzing the interview and transcribing. The audio recordings will never be released and will be destroyed when I conclude the study. The audio recordings will not identify you or be linked in any way to this consent form. By signing this consent form, you are giving me permission to record the interviews.

Who to contact with questions: Before you choose to participate in this study, please let me know of any concerns you may have. Last, if you have any other questions or concerns, please contact me by email at drdlo@akron.edu or by phone at (330) 773-0001. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Val Phipps at (330) 972-7208. This project has been approved by the University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7066.

I have read the information provided above and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Participant Signature

Date