



Y.Ozer

Suleyman Demirel University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan
(E-mail: yassemin.ozersdu.edu.kz)

Visual framing of unauthorized rallies and protests in Kazakhstan

Annotation. *Press photography is a way to communicate ideas and messages to audiences during different social situations and rallies are no exception. The problem here is that taking photos of such political issues and selecting them to be included in the article is a difficult and complicated process. Choosing shot angle and distance, selecting important subjects to focus on while taking photos and choosing several photos among many for publication is a subjective matter for photojournalists, journalists and editors. This article presents an analysis of press photography during unauthorized rally in Kazakhstan using a model of visual framing analysis. Although we don't analyze audience perception and impact of press photos to how people consume the news, we argue that there is visual framing in press photography which can affect news consumption and that photo cameras which are supposed to show only truth can distort the reflection of reality presented by journalists.*

Keywords: *press photography, visual framing, rally in Kazakhstan, photography, photojournalism*

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Introduction

On September 21, 2019 dozens of people were detained for being in the places that were indicated as points for anti-government protests by banned movement in Kazakhstan. The detentions took place mostly in Almaty, Nur-Sultan and Shymkent. The head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan, Yerlan Turgumbayev, said that about 100 people were detained for participating in unauthorized rallies [1]. As reported in *Tengrinews* 3 days later 15 violators were brought to administrative responsibility across the country, 9 of them were taken into administrative detention. Other participants were released after a preventive interview [2].

Many photos and videos were taken during detention not only by journalists but also by witnesses. Some showed violent acts of detaining people, fear of police, while others were presenting only objects or inactive and dormant police and special forces. Visual representation of demonstrations and protests are essential for protesters. It gives them an opportunity to show their identities and messages [3]. Those images are not only addition to news, but as Machin and Polzer state, they can also form ideas of people about the world and thus impact public opinion [4]. Walter Lippman also argues that being unable to see everyday

events firsthand, people perceive any social, political, or military event through a particular prism (photographer, cameraman, blogger, etc.), which then affects “picture in our heads” and emotional reaction to an event [5, p 35-36].

Selecting photos for publication is a daily thing for journalists and editors. As technology evolves, choosing a “good” image that “attract the recipients’ attention, evoke emotions and get them to read their stories” becomes an important factor for journalists [6]. Therefore, this study examines visual coverage of an unauthorized rally that took place on September 21, 2019 in *five* Kazakhstani online news media (Tengrinews, Zakon, KazInform, Radio Liberty(Azattyq) and Vlast). Main research questions and aims for this research are to understand how the issue was visually framed by media in Kazakhstan, which groups, objects or people are shown in different light or perspective and what were the characteristics of photos included in different media.

Theoretical framework

Photography is one of the elements of representation, which needs interpretation as text, music and other symbols [7, p 2]. But as photos are supposed to show only what is really out there, press photography is considered to be “unbiased. Factual. Complete. Attention-getting, storytelling, courageous” [8, p 6]. Photography has an ability to make us believe that something is happening, it can justify somebody or be a proof for slander [9, p 14-15]. But many forget that photography is a form of communication of the photographer with the environment and this communication is not objective. Photo itself can be cropped, edited or even manipulated [9, p 13-14].

When talking about press photography we should make a distinction between photojournalism and photography. As mentioned above, Becker states that photojournalism should be factual and unbiased [8]. So we must be aware that photography is about making visual images of anything and anybody, which mostly is a part of business, when photographers need to sell those photos. Although photos in the media might include stock photography for some of the articles, press photography and photojournalism mostly deals with taking photos of events, people and making them closer to reality, not beautiful. The photojournalists ability to show the reality and diversity of perspectives shouldn’t be ignored.

Veneti also stated that photography during protests is a way of fulfilling the bear witnessing mission of a journalist [3]. And Parry’s research on images of Iraq invasion showed that “the selective and repetitive portrayals of events and people during wartime can contribute to dominant news framings on informational, affective and symbolic levels” [15].

As Knightley stated, “although in most cases the camera does not lie directly, it can lie brilliantly by omission”. This means that even press photography can show some events in empathetic light, whereas shot angle and distance can affect what is in the photo, and news photographs can reinforce prevailing news narratives [10]. By interviewing several photojournalists, Veneti concluded that each photojournalist tries to find their own distinctive visual vocabulary by “focusing on individual protesters, groups of people, marches or violent confrontations”, and using visual metaphors, color contrast and audacious frames are only some techniques to create ‘iconic images’ of an event [3]. That’s why framing theories should concentrate not only on text, but also on other elements that can be frames, including press photography.

Framing theory is a good way of examining approaches and perspectives of mass communication when including, excluding and emphasizing some content [11]. Despite the fact that visual communication research is gaining popularity, framing studies usually do not include visuals. Matthes examined 15 years of framing studies from top communication

journals and found out that while 12% of them talked about visuals as interpretation of frames, only 5% directly coded visuals [12]. Thus, we can see a *research gap* in studying visual framing and visual communication not only in Kazakhstan, but even in international communication journals.

Bowe and others concluded researches about visual framing and suggested *shot angle*, *shot distance* and *shot focus* as some of the main elements, which can affect audience perception of images and events [13]. They state that shot angle creates a relational effect between viewer and image subject. That is, when viewer sees an image subject from above (above eye-level) he/she is given power over image subject, when image subject is photographed below eye-level, i.e. viewer is seeing it from below, viewer is lesser compared to image subject and eye-level shot angle creates same level relationship between viewer and image subject. When it comes to shot distance, Bowe and others concluded Coleman's study on "Framing the pictures in our heads: Exploring the framing and agenda-setting effects of visual images" and stated that close-up shots give the feel of closeness to the subject, which leads to liking the subject of an image more compared to long shots. Berger says that in TV visuals medium shots are considered neutral, while long shot is negative [14].

Methodology

This study draws research method from models of visual framing analysis. Quantitative visual content analysis is used in this research to show dominant matters in press photography of rally and to see how photojournalists framed events in terms of shot angle and shot distance. The sample here includes articles of 5 different governmental and non-governmental news portals and information agencies in Kazakhstan. We analyzed articles published on the day of the rally and 3 days after in *Tengrinews*, *Zakon*, *KazInform* (governmental), *Radio Liberty* and *Vlast* (non-governmental). Articles for the sample were searched using a search function in each website in kazakh language except *Vlast* by looking for "rally, protest" keywords and limiting the results to 21-24 September, 2019. So only news articles in *Vlast* were in the Russian language. Even though language is also an important feature of audience perception, here we focus on images only, that's why differences of language communication are not covered. 22 articles and 51 photos (41 unique photographs) were coded in total, as long as articles included photoreportings and some news articles had more than one photo in it. We need to mention that one of the photographs in *Tengrinews* was a GIF image made of two short video scenes, for the sake of the research we took the beginning part of that.

Coding variables included shot angle, shot distance, photo subject/theme, news headline, source and caption. These variables will not help us to claim how press photos influenced audience perception of the rally, rather they will give us an opportunity to see dominant frames in photographs that were published in articles, corresponding to the topic. Shot distance included three categories: close-up, medium shot and long shot; while shot angle included categories as above eye level, eye level and below eye level.

Presence of caption and source were also coded not only because it is a part of photo ethics, but because images from other events presented as rally we are studying can also distort the picture in viewers' heads. Photo subjects were described and studied to see dominant things, which include but are not limited to 'police and special forces detaining people (aggressively and not)', 'police and cars', 'politicians' close-ups', 'police and special forces trying to put people on the bus' and others.

Findings

As mentioned in the Methodology section this study made a research on 22 articles and 51 photos published on the day and 3 days after the unauthorized rally which took place on September 21, 2019. Research sample included different amounts of articles and photos depending on the amount of coverage in the selected news media. Although we're not talking about the amount of coverage, agenda-setting and gatekeeping in this study, the overall amount of coverage in each media surely shows attention paid to the event by them. As seen in Table 1, the rally we are studying received more coverage in non-governmental news media compared to governmental ones. While Radio Liberty published most articles, including separate photo reporting on the rally, we found only one article published on Zakon about the event.

<i>New media name</i>	<i>September 21</i>	<i>September 22</i>	<i>September 23</i>	<i>September 24</i>
Tengrinews	0/0	0/0	2/2	1/1
Zakon.kz	0/0	0/0	1/1	0/0
KazInform	1/3	1/1	1/1	0/0
Azattyq	4/30	1/1	2/2	0/0
Vlast	7/8	0/0	1/1	0/0

Table 1. Number of articles and photos published by each news media

Most of the photos published were taken from eye level (39 photos in total) and using long shot distance (31 photos in total), which according to the theoretical framework might mean that the relationship between viewers and image subjects is the same level. While Berger stated that long distance shots are negative, it can be justified by efforts of journalists to show bigger pictures. But still long shots in this coverage were drawing attention particularly on action, excluding the overall picture of what's happening around. The photographs were mostly showing the full length of people focusing on the action, but the action were taking full picture, so even though the shot distance was long, most of the images failed to show surroundings. Table-2 shows percentage and frequency of shot angles and distance in each news media being researched in this article. We can see from the table below that angles from below eye level were published only by Azattyq, all of those photos were of detained people or an act of detention to the car which is higher than the eye level of an ordinary person. Otherwise, no photos were published below eye level which would make a viewer inferior to the image subject. Close up shot was also used only once to show a detailed shot of elements on the body of a police worker with a sign of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan. Most images showing violent or aggressive detention of participants of a rally were medium shots, which make a viewer concentrate on that action only. While most of the shots were long and medium, there were no photos of police and special forces looking directly at the camera, which would mean a closer relationship with the viewers according to visual communication theorists.

	<i>Tengrinews</i>	<i>Zakon</i>	<i>KazInform</i>	<i>Azattyq</i>	<i>Vlast</i>
Shot angle					
<i>Above eye level</i>	33,3% (1)	-	40% (2)	6,1% (2)	11,1 % (1)
<i>Below eye level</i>	-	-	-	18,2% (6)	-
<i>Eye level</i>	66,7% (2)	100% (1)	60% (3)	75,7% (25)	88,9% (8)
Shot distance					
<i>Long shot</i>	66,7% (2)	100% (1)	80% (4)	54,5% (18)	66,7% (6)
<i>Medium shot</i>	33,3% (1)	-	-	45,5% (15)	33,3% (3)
<i>Close up</i>	-	-	20% (1)	-	-

Table 2. Percentage and frequency of shot angle and distance in each news media

Moving to dominant objects and subjects of photographs, we can see that most of the images included police and special forces, detention and actions of protests. Among all 51 photos we can see some showing violent and aggressive detention, detention of old people and peaceful detention as well. Governmental news media (*Tengrinews*, *Zakon* and *KazInform*) included mostly peaceful police, people and special forces gathered in different points and only two images from *Tengrinews* showed acts of detention where military people tried to place somebody to a bus and make a person who was underneath a car come out. As seen in Table 3, most of the images published were images of police and military forces detaining people. Those detention images were usually long or middle shots, without faces of detainees. Main people in those photographs were police and special forces, which might give an audience a feeling of unequal distribution of two sides (demonstrators and police).

	<i>Tengrinews</i>	<i>Zakon</i>	<i>KazInform</i>	<i>Azattyq</i>	<i>Vlast</i>
<i>Police, military</i>	1	-	-	5	1
<i>People and police walking/gathering</i>	-	1	4	-	1
<i>Detention</i>	2	-	-	22	6
<i>Detainee</i>	-	-	-	4	-
<i>Objects of police</i>	-	-	1	-	-
<i>Other</i>	-	-		2	-

Table 3. Frequency of photo subject/theme

Majority of photos (80%) published in KazInform were photographs of special forces looking to an order and people walking by. An outcome here that catches our attention is that the author of photographs published in KazInform also took photos for Reuters, which were included in Azattyq reportings. Even though we see the same photojournalist, photos chosen for publication in those two media have dramatic differences in level of aggressiveness

and representation of the rally (KazInform included only police gatherings taken by that photojournalist, whereas Azattyq included his photo of detaining people). Photos of police and police cars were published in Azattyq before the rally, when special forces were trying to ban the road and preparing for the rally. Vlast published a police medium shot when an official person (Bakitzhan Malybayev) made a speech about detainees. Other photos include a photograph of two people with black umbrellas trying to interfere the work of a journalist taken by an Azattyq reporter (included in two different articles). Detainee representation was seen in Azattyq reporting by showcasing medium and close up photos of detainees trying to break free from a police bus (one of them held the flag of Kazakhstan). The only photo of a protest itself was published in Vlast, where a woman was holding a paper and other people, including police, gathered around. One photo of a group of people gathered was also published in Azattyq, but the photo was long shot and taken from far away, which didn't give an opportunity to see what those people were doing. But that photograph was among those where the number of citizens was bigger than police and special forces.

Discussion and results

The findings of this study revealed that visual framing of rally is different in five news media considered in the research. Photographs published in Tengrinews and Zakon didn't have captions and names of photojournalists (only one photo in Zakon was copyrighted to zakon.kz). KazInform doesn't include captions either, but they attribute names of reporters who took those photos. Four photographs in KazInform out of five were taken by the same photojournalist, whose photos taken for Reuters were also included in Azattyq reporting. But as mentioned above, the differences in those photos are huge. Azattyq gives captions of all photographs published and attributes them to authors. We can see photos taken by their own reporters as well as photos attributed to Reuters and AFP photojournalists. Vlast doesn't caption photos, but when a mouse is placed on the photo we can see the same caption as a headline of a news article. But all photographs in the sample had attributions to authors, who are mostly their own reporters.

Most photographs of detentions were not taken from a front angle. Front angle shots make the viewer actively engaged with the image subject. This shows us that viewers don't form neutral and positive engagement with the image subjects in our case. Additionally, no photographs were published with people looking directly at the camera, even in photographs of official representatives making a speech.

Above eye level and below eye level photographs were among the least used ones, being used only to show detention to a bus from above and a detainee in the bus from outside (below). This might mean that the relationship formed between image subject and viewer is at the same level and neutral. Long shots are mainly used shot distance in examined samples, which might be used to show the full picture of the event. Even though these photos are supposed to show a bigger picture, we shouldn't think that any camera can show everything around without framing the main action that a photojournalist wants to focus on. So all of the longshots studied in this research are still focused on the matter of subjects reporters wanted

to show.

Among photographs of detentions we can see both aggressive detentions and more peaceful ones. Many photographs of detentions showed 3-4 police and special forces trying to detain one person. Among the most iconic ones we can name photographs (several different ones with the same context) of 2-3 military detaining one old people. All of the detention photos didn't have equality between police and citizens' numbers.

Conclusion

As Hall argues, images are also elements or codes that need to be interpreted by viewers. This means that visuals can also influence how we perceive news and events. Thus visual communication and framing research should be a part of mass communication studies.

This research studied articles published during unauthorized rallies in Kazakhstan which took place on September 21, 2019. 51 photographs published along with news were considered in total. Future visual communication research may build on the findings of this research as well as address its limitations. This article only discusses quantitative visual content analysis findings, trying to find dominant frames, shot angles, distance and features of caption and attribution in five different Kazakhstani news media. Future researches can consider press photography's power to influence audience perception and news consumption.

The study made several arguments about the visual framing of rallies in Kazakhstan. The rally didn't receive much coverage in information agencies supported by the government, whereas non-governmental news media published articles on the subject including photoreportings. Tengrinews and Zakon didn't caption and attribute photos, which makes it harder to understand whether the perspective and approach to the photos were made by website reporters or other photojournalists. KazInform didn't caption photos, but attributed them to photo reporters. Azattyq included captions, whereas the caption of Vlast's photographs was the same with news headlines and visible only when mouse is placed on the photo. Both Azattyq and Vlast attributed all published photographs.

Dominant subjects include detention of people by police and special forces in non-government news media and photos of police and citizens gathered in news media supported by the government. Majority of photographs were using long shots and taken from eye level, trying to form the same level and neutral relationship with the audience. However, even if photos of detentions were mostly taken from long shots, they still were excluding what was happening around, failing to show the audience the scope of it. So it was not clear whether all of the participants were being detained or only several people among many were subjects of aggressive detentions.

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Я.Озер

Сулейман Демирел атындағы университет, Қаскелең, Қазақстан

Қазақстанда рұқсат етілмеген митингілер мен наразылық акцияларының визуалды фреймингі

Аңдатпа. Баспа фотосуреті – әртүрлі әлеуметтік жағдай мен митингілер кезінде аудиторияға идея мен хабарламаларды жеткізудің жақсы тәсілі. Мұндағы мәселе – мұндай саяси оқиғаларды суретке түсіріп, мақалаға таңдау қиын да күрделі процесс. Түсіру ракурсы мен қашықтығын, фотосуретке түсіру кезінде назар аударатын маңызды элементтерді таңдау және жариялау үшін көптеген фотосуреттердің ішінен бірнеше фотосуреті таңдау фототілшілердің, журналистердің және редакторлардың субъективті мәселесі болып табылады. Бұл мақалада визуалды жақтауды (фрейминг) талдау үлгісін пайдалана отырып, Қазақстандағы рұқсат етілмеген митингілер кезіндегі баспасөз фотосуреттерінің талдауы берілген. Біз аудиторияның қабылдауы мен баспасөз

фотографиясының адамдардың жаңалық тұтынуына анализ жасамасақ та, баспасөз

фотосуретінде жаңалықтарды тұтынуға әсер ететін визуалды жақтау бар екенін және тек шындықты көрсетуі тиіс фотокамералар көріністі бұрмалауы мүмкін екенін дәлелдеуге тырысамыз.

Түйін сөздер: баспа фотосуреті, визуалды жақтау, Қазақстандағы митинг, фотосурет, фотожурналистика

Я.Озер

Университет имени Сулеймана Демиреля, Каскелен, Казахстан

Визуальный фрейминг несанкционированных митингов и акций протеста в Казахстане

Аннотация. Пресс-фотография – это способ донести идеи и послания до аудитории в различных социальных ситуациях, и митинги не являются исключением. Проблема здесь в том, что фотографирование таких политических тем и их отбор для включения в статью – сложный и комплексный процесс. Выбор угла (ракурса) съемки и расстояния, выбор важных объектов, на которых нужно сосредоточиться при фотосъемке, и выбор нескольких фотографий из множества для публикации – это субъективный вопрос для фотожурналистов, журналистов и редакторов. В данной статье представлен анализ фотографий прессы во время несанкционированного митинга в Казахстане с использованием модели анализа визуального фрейминга. Хотя мы не анализируем восприятие аудитории и влияние фотографий в прессе на то, как люди воспринимают новости, мы утверждаем, что в фотографии прессы есть визуальное обрамление, которое может повлиять на потребление новостей, и что фотокамеры, которые должны показывать только правду, могут исказить отражение реальности, представленной журналистами.

Ключевые слова: пресс-фотография, визуальный фрейминг, митинг в Казахстане, фотография, фотожурналистика.

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About the author:

Yassemin Ozer – Master student and assistant instructor of Suleyman Demirel University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan

Ясемин Озер – Магистрант және ассистент оқытушы, Сулейман Демирел атындағы университет, Қаскелең, Қазақстан.