ALJAZEERA MEDIA TRAINING
& DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

News Verification

A practical guide for journalists to verify digital content

This guide has been elaborated by
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News Verification

What is User Generated Content?

We define User Generated Content (UGC) as original photographs, audio clips or videos that are not planned, posed or scripted and are deemed to be valuable by news, creative, commercial and non-profit organisations who seek to distribute them via their own channels.

When reporting major news today, UGC is of undeniable value. Nevertheless, it is also true that it can be easily distorted, forged or taken out of context, especially in terms of time and location. That is why UGC must be validated and verified before publishing it in a news piece. This process, identified as News Validation and Verification, combines the use of editorial skills with technical tools.

Note: The process of News Validation and Verification is not limited to checking video, images or news material. It also has to include reviewing the story and context that accompanies or surrounds said material. For example, media reports about “Sexual Jihad” (Jihad Al-Nikah), based on UGC pictures and comments, were found to be fabricated.

User Generated Content (UGC)

- Breaking News

Translation
Tajoura Speaks
Three children from the same family killed by Egyptian bombing in Derna.

- Natural Phenomena

Translation
Ahmed Alokdeh
Sandstorm sweeps the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, at the same time that temperature rises to record levels and power cuts occur.

User Generated Content (UGC)

- Amazing Videos
  (Accidents, Extreme Sports, Adventures)

- Shared Experiences

Translation
Turkey sponsors mass wedding in #Ghaza
#غزة-المصريون #غزة #غزة_تحت_القصف #غزة_تقاوم

Why Should I Verify?

If you do not verify images from social media, you may end up publishing images that don´t belong to the story you are telling. This is misleading and confusing for your audience, and ultimately damages your credibility as a journalist.

Why Should I Verify?

This is not Sinai in 2015; it is the occupied Palestinian territories in 2012.

Translation
People killed by bombing of an Apache helicopter against terrorists in #Sinai and #Sheikh_Zuweid
#الشيخ_زويد #العريش #سيناء

This is not the 2015 solar eclipse, it is from 2010.

Why Should I Verify?

This is not Nepal, it is Egypt 2015.

This is not Yemen in 2015, it is Iraq in 2013.

Translation
Exclusive from Al Arabiya: #Alhazm_Storm destroys military convoy of Houthis in #Sa'dah
#عاصفة_الحزم #صعدة

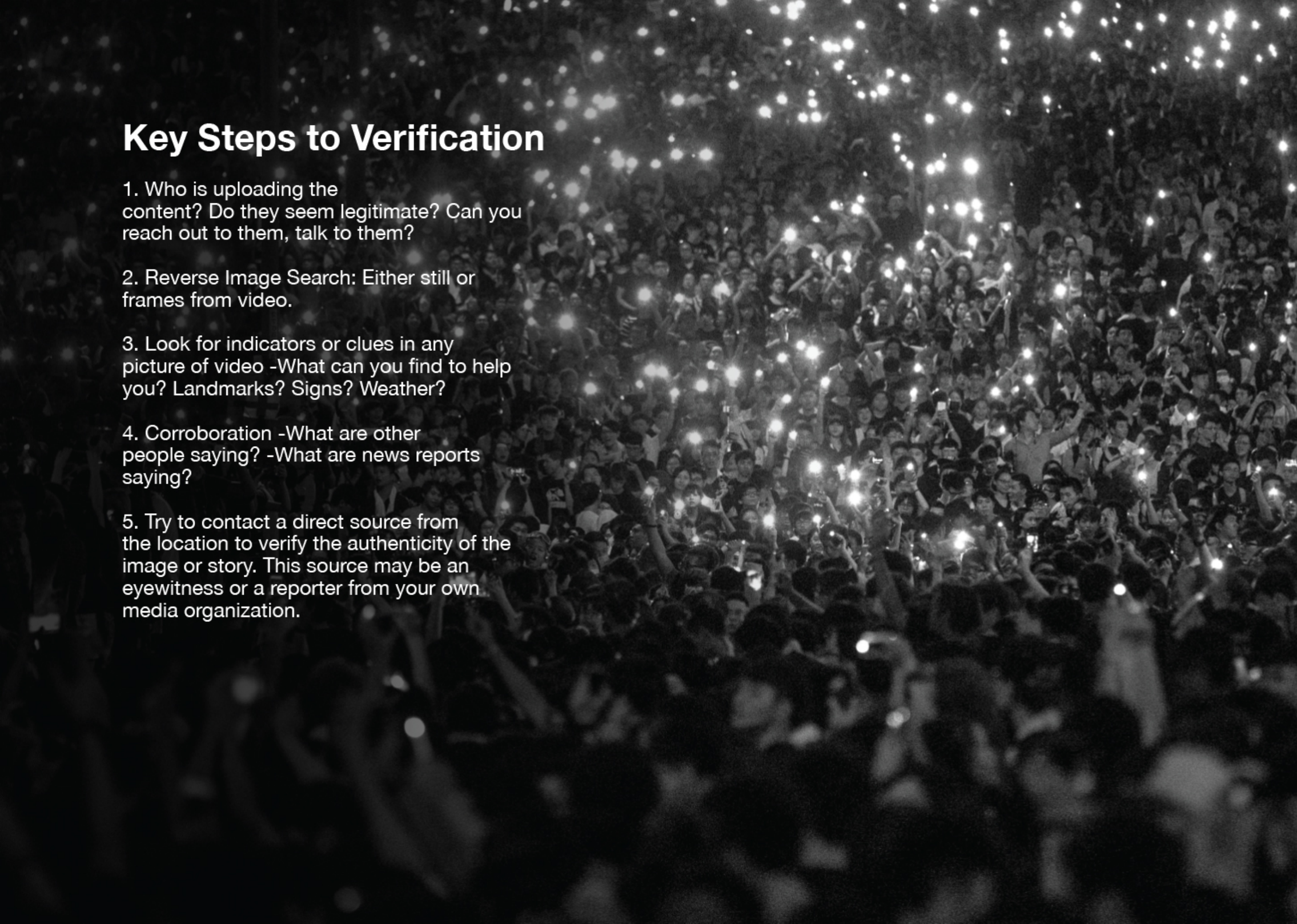
Key Rules Prior to Verification

1. If you want a picture to be true, you'll persuade yourself it is.

2. Understand that you'll never be 100% sure -it is about deciding how comfortable you are with what you are about to publish.

3. Decide your policies now - not when you have to make a decision.

4. Share your steps with the audience - increases engagement / understanding of process.



Key Steps to Verification

1. Who is uploading the content? Do they seem legitimate? Can you reach out to them, talk to them?

2. Reverse Image Search: Either still or frames from video.

3. Look for indicators or clues in any picture of video -What can you find to help you? Landmarks? Signs? Weather?

4. Corroboration -What are other people saying? -What are news reports saying?

5. Try to contact a direct source from the location to verify the authenticity of the image or story. This source may be an eyewitness or a reporter from your own media organization.

UGC´s Author Information

Important questions to think about when you receive a piece of content:

- Does the uploader have other social media accounts?

- Does the uploader show their profile picture?

- What else does the uploader tweet/post about?

Reverse Image Search

There are two tools for reverse image search:

Tineye and Google Image Search.
These help you check if a picture has been published to the internet before and, if so, on which date.

However, if a picture does not appear on reverse image search, it does not mean it has never been used previously; it simply means it has not been indexed on the internet before.

Compare | Link
JPEG Image
180x180, 61.9 KB

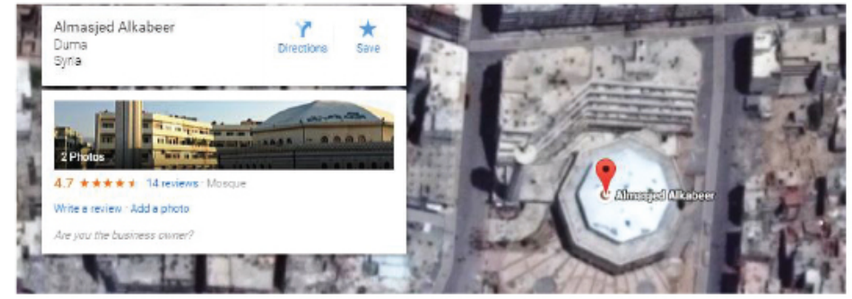
pic.hao123.com
2e1257fa6f0f692893d3e5bb5279526a
pic.hao123.com/album/wumeizhangweiyi
Crawled on 2013-11-03
pic.hao123.com/gaoxiao_menghuo?style=xl
Crawled on 2013-11-02

view all 272 matches

This picture was shot in 2010. www.tineye.com shows it was on the internet in 2013; therefore it cannot have been shot in 2015.

Location

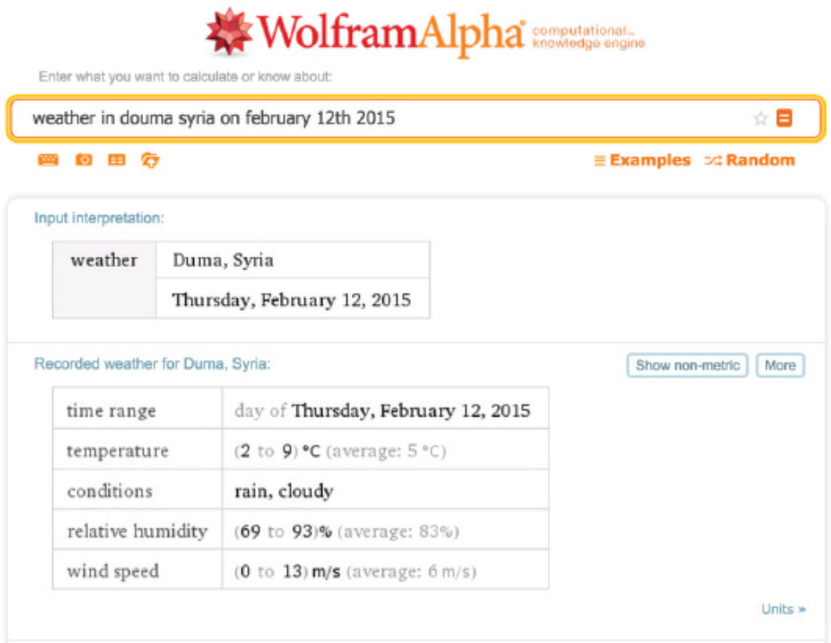
What identifiable landmarks are there in a video/picture? Can you check these on Google Maps satellite view?



This picture on Twitter matches this mosque in Douma.

Weather

You can use WolframAlpha.com to check the weather on any date anywhere in the world.



Dealing with Video Content

- Dealing with videos requires the same techniques as with still pictures.
- Take screen shots of the first frame in the video and do a Reverse Image Search.
- Take screen shots of important frames in your video to check landmarks or weather.

Falling of Russian plane in Sinai

Useful Free Tools

1. tweetdeck.twitter.com - Best Twitter tool for journalists. Tweetdeck helps monitor and track significant accounts for you on Twitter. It also helps find lists of journalists, politicians, etc.

2. Storyful Multisearch as Chrome extension.

3. tineye.com/image.google.com – Reverse Image Search (also Chrome extension), to track the source of the image.

4. wolframalpha.com - Weather forecasts.

5. whois.net - Check website ownership.

6. regex.info/exif.cgi - EXIF data on a still.
This tool helps to view data embedded within images, such as the date an image was taken, the type of camera used, image characteristics, etc.

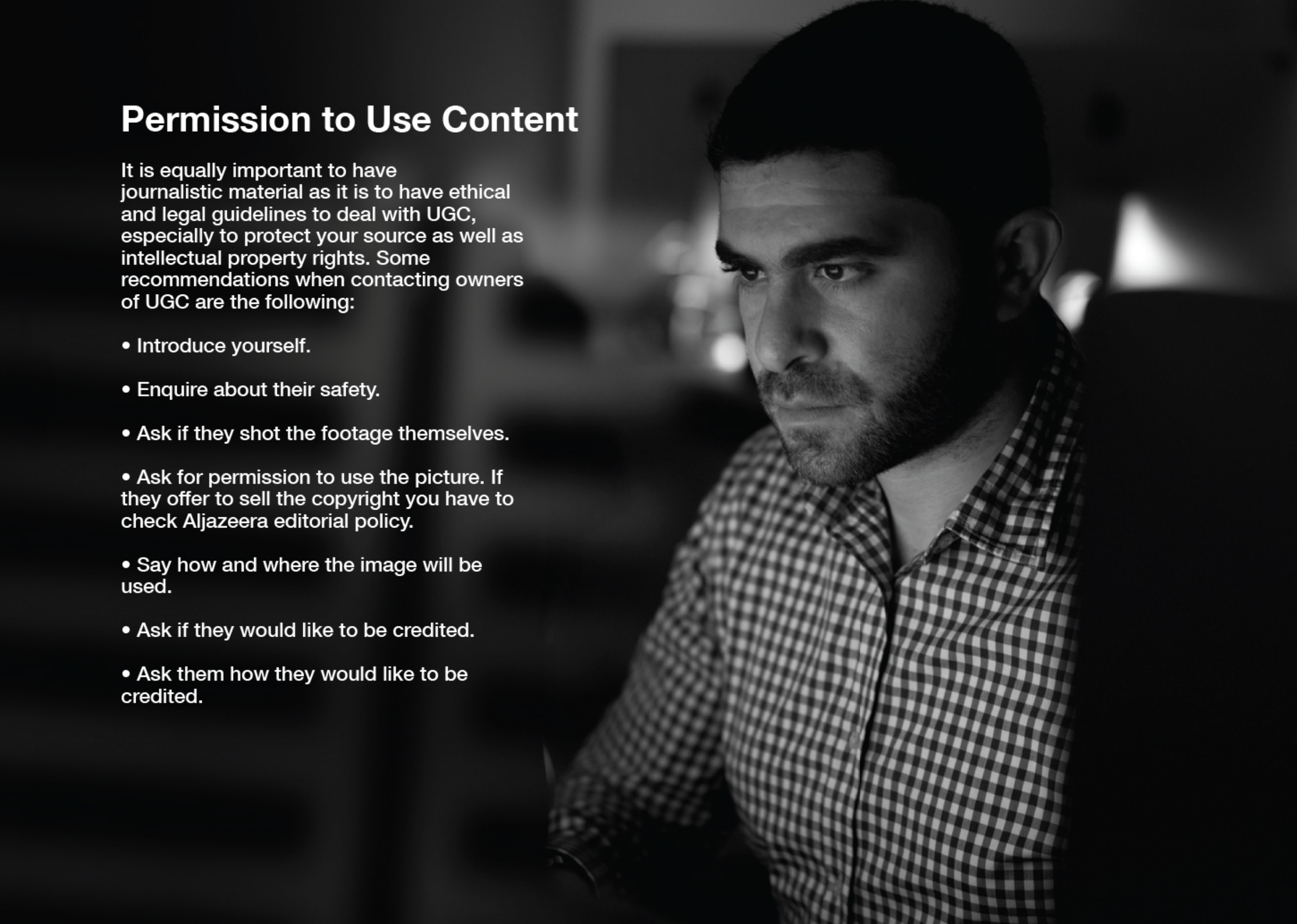
7. izitru.com - Check on photo manipulation.

8. https://www.amnestyusa.org/citizenevidence/ - YouTube video keyframes.

Verification Checklist

- ☑ Have you contacted your correspondent or any potential source on the site/location?
- ☑ Is there a way of confirming the date? (newspaper date, timestamps)
- ☑ Location: Can you map any identifiable landmarks, language spoken, road signs?
- ☑ Weather: Can you double check weather reports for that day?
- ☑ Uploader history: Have you checked other social profiles and previous uploads?
- ☑ Data: Exif, file type, filters. Is there useful metadata that you could use for cross referencing?
- ☑ Check for wider corroboration: Are there other uploads from the same area?

Permission to Use Content

It is equally important to have journalistic material as it is to have ethical and legal guidelines to deal with UGC, especially to protect your source as well as intellectual property rights. Some recommendations when contacting owners of UGC are the following:

- Introduce yourself.
- Enquire about their safety.
- Ask if they shot the footage themselves.
- Ask for permission to use the picture. If they offer to sell the copyright you have to check Aljazeera editorial policy.
- Say how and where the image will be used.
- Ask if they would like to be credited.
- Ask them how they would like to be credited.