

# Professional photographers and their use of Instagram

**How Instagram influences professional photographers' mindsets and contribute to their rethinking of creative practices**

By: Alesia Klimenka

Supervisor: Patrik Åker

Södertörn University | School of Culture and Education

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# Professional photographers and their use of Instagram: How Instagram influences professional photographers' mindsets and contribute to their rethinking of creative practices

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## Abstract

Professional photographers who actively use Instagram in their work notice its influence on various aspects of their professional and creative activities. The present thesis examines the manifestations of such influence noticed by a group of professional photographers. The results of five personal in-depth interviews, determined by the thematic analysis, revealed the peculiarities of work of professional photographers on the Instagram platform and beyond it, and their notice of Instagram influence on such practices as photography creation, photo shootings, retouch, and inspiration search. It appeared that the photographers' practices are adapting for the better account performance on the platform under the "threat of invisibility". Besides, to achieve audience recognition, modern photographers need to actively participate in the race for higher metrics, which, due to the algorithmic features of Instagram management, are not guaranteed. All the professional photographers' practices adapted for better Instagram performance and visibility can be considered as unpaid part of the photographers' work, that is taken for granted.

Keywords: Photography Profession, Photographic Practices, Bourdieu, Instagram Algorithms, Metricated Mindset, Threat of Invisibility.

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## 1. Introduction

“It seems that I have not posted anything on Instagram for several days, for sure the traffic on my profile has dropped...” — I often start my day with this pseudo-motivating thought. At such moments, I usually force myself to travel to the city, in search of locations suitable for my Instagram style in terms of colors and mood for future photo shootings with a professional camera at the ready. My profession is a creative photographer, I consider myself a professional freelance photographer with seven years of experience, four of which Instagram is the main platform for posting a portfolio, finding useful contacts, and promoting my services. For all the time I actively maintain my business account, I inevitably come across not only visible Instagram metrics, but also expect the work of platform algorithms: I know that these algorithms determine the relevance of published photos for other users. It always seems to me that the number of my followers and “likes” is not of strong value; however, at least for some of my clients these visible metrics still matter. In this regard, various modern photoblogs and photography schools offer not only to master the skills of photography, but also consider both visual tricks and actual marketing tricks for successfully promoting a photographer on platforms like Instagram.

At the source of my scientific curiosity lies the work of Taina Bucher (2012) on the formation of new forms of participation by the algorithmic architecture of social networking platforms that organize the user experience. Active users, in their desire to be visible to other users, interact with algorithms that create “certain form of social practice” (Bucher, 2012). As for the algorithms themselves, Bucher says, they are used to make decisions, sort, and meaningfully display vast amounts of data on the Internet, resulting in new ways of perceiving the world, reproducing stereotypes, recreating practices, and worldviews (Bucher 2018, pp.2-3). Having studied the methods of algorithmic visibility, the author notices that we are not dealing with constant observation of our actions, as Foucault’s “Panopticism” suggests, but with the threat of invisibility: “The problem as it appears is not the possibility of constantly being observed, but the possibility of constantly disappearing, of not being considered important enough” (Bucher, 2012).

O’Meara (2019) suggests that the “threat of invisibility” manifests itself in different contexts and through various positions of the creative worker, which can be both a user and a worker whose income depends on constant visibility on social platforms. According to Cotter (2019), Petre et al. (2019), Duffy (2020), creative users whose income depends on the visibility of the content they publish on the platform anticipate algorithms. Creatives do not just interact with algorithms — they also structure themselves in anticipation of algorithms (Duffy, 2019; 2020); looking for ways to resist (O’Meara, 2019), trying to make themselves “algorithmically recognizable” (Gillespie, 2017), and playing the “visibility game” (Cotter, 2019; Petre et al., 2019). Against this backdrop, researchers Duffy, Pinch, Sannon, and Sawey (2021) even coin the term “algorithmic precarity” to “capture the turbulence and flux that emerge as a routine feature of platformized labor” (Duffy, 2020). Duffy (2020) suggests that the experience of independent cultural workers with “algorithmic precarity” may lead to irritation, as well as anxiety due to the loss of stability of their income.

In addition, the practices of a creative user can be considered not only under the influence of algorithms, but also metrics. Due to datafication, it is possible to “visualize” human behavior and transform almost any activity into data, that van Dijck (2014, p.198) describes as “new paradigm for understanding sociality and social behavior”. The universalization of metrics, or quantitative indicators, determine the social value of oneself and others. “Metrics are a deeply woven aspect of everyday lives and the social world in which these lives are conducted,” claims Beer (2016, p.4). Interfering with many areas of life, metrics determine the social behavior and subsequent users’ actions in the digital space, which Bolin and Andersson Schwarz (2015) call a “metricated mindset”. Discussing the importance of metrics, Brighenti (2018) talks about their discretionary nature, believing that they are infinitely applicable, comparing them to the “air” that we breathe. Social media users are used to compare their metrics with each other, and their low scores can cause frustration and desire to perform better and improve their content (Grosser, 2014).

I believe that professional photographers’ practices on Instagram can be related to “creative workers” mentioned above. By saying “professional”, I mean that a person chooses photography as the main kind of activity — namely, profession, without delving into the aspects of creativity and genres. There is no vertical hierarchy in the profession of a photographer, there are no subservient and subordinates. Membership in unions and photographer clubs are not obligatory indicators of professionalism; the main markers of success are respect from colleagues and the size of the audience. This mass recognition by others may seem important for self-awareness as a professional photographer, so in this case it makes sense to use a popular platform to offer photography services to a large audience. One of these platforms is the Instagram social platform (1,130.2 million users for May 2022), which prioritizes visual content. However, Instagram visual research has already been done on a large scale. Manovich (2017) conducted a quantitative study of 15 million Instagram photos from around the world, combining them into databases according to various visual style characteristics, thereby making an important contribution to understanding changes in the visual culture and creative styles of users. His understanding of professional photography on Instagram, modern trends and aesthetics of professional photographers is key to my research, that allows me to focus rather on the qualitative experiences and practices of photographers, considering the quantitative visual research implemented earlier.

In this way, having designated professional photographers as creative users of the Instagram platform, I assume that they may fall under the influence of its algorithmic systems and metrics. However, there have been no earlier studies of such influence from the point of view of professional photographers who offer their services through Instagram on the regular basis so far. In this study, I am also interested in exploring the implications of metric and algorithmic influence on the photographer's mindset and creative practices.

## 1.1 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present thesis is to examine the practices of professional photographers constantly interacting with Instagram. Herewith, the emphasis is on studying those practices that are manifested in the professional and creative activities of professional photographers. With this understanding, I will try to define the influence of Instagram for photographers to understand their profession and photographic creativity.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The main research question is: *How professional photographers interpret their constant interactions with Instagram in relation to their work and creativity?* In this regard, and to fulfill the purpose of the study, it is necessary to obtain answers to the following sub-questions:

- 1) What are the opportunities and limitations of Instagram for the photography profession?
- 2) How does the “metricated mindset” explain professional photographers' judgments of their own worth to their audiences?
- 3) How does the “threat of invisibility” discipline and motivate professional photographers?
- 4) What is the significance of adapted professional practices for understanding the role of Instagram in the photography profession?

## 1.3 The Thesis' Structure

The introduction outlines the prerequisites for this study, as well as presents the aim, questions, and structure of the work; discusses the importance and relevance of the study from the perspective of professional photographers. The next section considers photography as profession, features of photographic creation in the digital age, and the peculiarities of representation of photographers' works in social media based on the previous research. This is followed by an overview of Instagram as a visual platform and a discussion of previous research on its features for creative users. The fourth section has the in-depth discussion of previous research on algorithmic and metrics influence. It presents the core concepts of this study: “metricated mindset” and a “threat of invisibility”, through the theoretical prism of which further research has been conducted in relation to professional photographers.

The fifth section presents the methodological part, discusses the necessity for conducting in-depth interviews, applying thematic qualitative analysis for the material, as well as covers limitations of the chosen method. The sixth section presents the interview analysis and results, following with the discussion in connection to the theoretical framework. The final parts are the study conclusion, limitations, and prerequisites for further research.

## 1.4 The Thesis' Relevance

“Conceptualizing photography as practice is necessary to understand the complex entanglements of humans, photographic technologies and visualities”, say Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz (2016, p.152). The comprehension of photography as a practice as a result of the manifestation of an increased interest in the study of the phenomena of everyday reality has been discussed in Becker (2016); Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz (2016); Lehmuskallio (2020); Manovich (2017); Sandbye (2012); also exploring everyday photographic routines through the habit of noticing (Forrest, 2016), photography as a connective interface (Gómez Cruz, 2016), and even the features of digital photography among the elderly (Schreiber, 2016). The study of the undoubtedly important photographic norms and practices of ordinary people also proves the great popularization of photography and its accessibility, which can cause competition to professional photographers who make a living from their photographic activities. In addition, in the endless stream of mass photography presented online, it can be challenging for professional photographers to stand out and find their audience. Since the art of photography has become accessible, it has become problematic to distinguish it from the standpoint of one's professionalism, as also indicated by Bourdieu's (1990) book firstly written in 1965. Bourdieu's work, and the study of photographic practices of both professional and non-professional groups of photographers of his associates, Boltanski and Chamboredon (1990), provide valuable notes for my research. Given the fact that, unlike in Bourdieu's time, today's professional photographers live in a digital era and use digital platforms in their work, it is necessary to take a closer look at the research on the impact of digitalization on creative practices.

The photographic practices of the digital age are dealt with mainly in photojournalism. Solaroli, based on Bourdieu (1990) in his studies, notes that with the spread of digital technologies and new practices of news production, the boundaries between fine art and news photography are becoming increasingly blurred, “posing a deep challenge to the already scarcely institutionalized and legitimated field of professional photojournalism” (Solaroli, 2016, p.51). Accordingly, in the digital environment, photographic practices have become fluid; there is a need for photographers to adapt to new conditions, but also to adhere to existing standards in order to increase their value and emphasize a special professional status in relation to “forms of non-professional photographic production”, considers Solaroli (2015).

However, in the present thesis, I see the need to consider changes in photographic practices precisely in connection with the influence of the algorithmically steered Instagram platform and the peculiarities of its infrastructure. I believe that Instagram, being a potentially friendly environment for creative users, makes it possible to adapt its environment to the needs of users, but it also adapts them. Instagram can be compared to a prism through which creative users who depend on it, see, and perceive a photo, as if associating it with a camera viewfinder. The camera as a means of focus is studied by Lehmuskallio (2020), paying attention to the fact that the process of creating, processing and visualizing photographs affects the images that we see, and therefore can also determine photographic practices.

An obvious bonus of Instagram for photographers is the ability to publish photos since they can be noticed by potential clients and representatives of the creative industries. In addition, the absence of an intermediary between the author and the audience on Instagram allows transactions to be carried out without the participation of a third party and simplifies the process of selling / buying photo services. The variety of visual languages and art movements that exist on Instagram is incalculable, and the most notable of them could be classified, that is of an interest of Manovich (2017) in his research. Despite being a platform for promotion, Instagram has also entered the arsenal of artistic tools. By eliminating the need to be tied to a specific space, creative users can take photos and edit them directly online in the application. Even though creative practices on Instagram are limited by the screen type and image standards, for some users this only opens new paths of development, it makes it possible to focus on one specific style or genre. Thus, it can be assumed that apart from the photographic practices, Instagram provokes creative experiments, which have not been previously studied from the perspective of the perception of professional photographers.

O'Meara (2019) notes that Instagram's impact on particular user communities has been little studied, especially given their conscious regular interaction with the platform's algorithms. The works of O'Meara (2019) and Cotter (2019) study the use of Instagram algorithms, their interaction and interpretation by the group of influencers and creative users. Some previous studies are exploring how the ever-changing environment of the platform, its new algorithms and functionality affects the way creative workers perceive themselves and their published content (Arriagada and Ibanez, 2020). For example, Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020) examine the interpretive processes of a group of Chilean content creators and look at how the evolution of platforms is affecting the cultural producer community, entailing professionalization processes and the constant reorganization of content creators within 'circuits of commerce' metaphor (Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020). However, no research has been conducted that examines the perception of algorithms and metrics by a group of professional photographers who use Instagram for their work. In addition, the attitude of professional photographers to their work and creativity through the prism of "metricated mindset" and a "threat of invisibility" have not been considered before. To do this, it seems necessary to collect data a) on the attitude of professional photographers to their profession, their understanding of Instagram tools, algorithms, and metrics; b) on their attitude to Instagram and reasons for regularly using this visual platform; c) about the observation of professional photographers about the probable influence of Instagram on their work and their creative mindset. The resulting data on the photographers' opinions can help to explain the real depth of interaction with Instagram, can reveal the nuances of the probable influence on the photographers' mindsets, as well as show the consequences of such influence.

## 2. Photography as a profession and practice

### 2.1 Development of photographic practices

In all probability, the starting point in the profession of a photographer should be considered 1839, when the French artist and inventor Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre (Peres, 2013, p.28) presented a new way of capturing an image at a meeting of the Paris Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Arts. Until the end of the 19th century, photography was not perceived and recognized as an art form, and only at the turn of the century, due to the emergence of lighter devices for shooting and methods of reproducing frames, photography made a noticeable step forward. Photography can be considered as a mechanical art because of its dependence on technology, but it is not a fully automatic process – with its all limitations, such as depicting existing objects rather than imaginary or interpretive views, the skilled photographer can introduce creativity into the mechanical reproduction process (Newhall et.al, 2021). At the moment of creating an image, a photographer is able to perceive the object qualities and interpret it according to their own judgment, taste and involvement, that can capture the visible world and contribute to the expansion of human knowledge. That is why photography is called the most important invention since the printing press, as noted in the Encyclopedia Britannica (Newhall et.al, 2021).

It is hard to imagine what life was like before photography, since nowadays it has penetrated the daily life of families in the form of “everyday photography”, it accompanies every person from childhood to old age, capturing all significant events, forming a kind of diary, photo chronicle of human life. That is why, looking at my family photo album, I feel disconcerted about the absence of my father's childhood photos, since in the Soviet orphanage of the 80s, where he grew up, photography was not a necessity. Now these “holes” in the photo album serve as a silent reminder that different social groups have had and maybe still have different attitudes towards photographic practices. Whereas the photographs of my mother and her family, made mainly in the traditional style, in strict chronological order and “standing at attention”, are an example of ritual, mandatory photography that is functional in nature and does not particularly provide for the creative self-expression of the photographer. Only when I bought my first personal film camera, beautiful pictures appeared in our photo album, devoid of the traditional function, which were even going to be printed in the form of postcards, but then they remained the decoration of the album. Bourdieu (1990) differentiates such photographic practices subordinate to the family function from practices subordinate to the *aesthetic function*. In this study, it is not of my interest to consider the family function as it is associated with exceptional personal moments. On the contrary, it is essential to consider photographic practice, driven by aesthetic intentions, that is unlimited for reproduction, since it is associated with technical and aesthetic searches. Today’s photographic practices cannot be considered completely inseparable from aesthetics, it is not pure realism and not just a document of reality, as some studies from the field of photojournalism note – the conflict between photographic realism and aesthetic photography is fluid (Griffin, 1999, p.150).

Bourdieu (1990) is not only discussing how the image of a photograph being shown, preserved, and studied, but also looking at a photograph taken by *someone*, who spent some resources to obtain the photograph, that is of interest for this study. Photographers' intentions and attitude to photography determine the development in the field of photography and the perception of their photographic practices. Not all photographers have the same attitude towards photographic practices due to the very nature of photography, since, according to Bourdieu, the position of photography in the hierarchy of cultures is in the middle, between "vulgar" practices with arbitrary taste, and cultural practices with strict rules (Bourdieu, 1990, p.97). Photography is a case of actualizing an aesthetic position, but because photographic practice, even in its most advanced form, ranks very low in the hierarchy of artistic practice, individuals do not feel compelled to display an aesthetic sense (ibid, p.65).

### 2.1.1 Aesthetics function

A photographer's understanding of his or her artistic intentions can be seen through the formation of photography clubs. Some photo clubs are formed by photographers who see the goal of their practices in improving photographic equipment, while others, "aesthetic" photo clubs, reject the supremacy of technology and perceive photography as an art (Bourdieu, 1990). The "aesthetic" photographers believe that technology threatens the freedom of the photographer and can turn photography into a method of primitive technical reproduction of reality (ibid). Such photographers often work with the same technical equipment for many years and may be dismissive of the pursuit of technical improvement (ibid). However, there is also a group of photographers who put technical importance in photography on a pedestal. For example, in his research, Manovich (2017, pp.61-69) defines a category of photographers, where one can observe the desire for technical excellence, what makes the photos look "too staged, too contrived, with too much detail and too perfect (ibid, p.62)", "super-realistic" (ibid, p.69)<sup>1</sup>. Photo technology, which was originally created for the purpose of strict fixation of the desired object, is tuned to convey the individual perception of the person photographing (Lehmuskallio, 2020); therefore, it is possible to challenge the understanding of photography as a primitive technical reproduction. Lehmuskallio (2020) believes that the photographer performs an algorithm of actions during photo shooting, based on previously acquired skills. At the same time, the author says, the photographer acts based on the availability of technical artifacts, that is, considering the technical features of the camera, sometimes relying on its automated properties, which ultimately affects the perception of the visible image (ibid). Thus, technical means may not be a threat, but rather a limitation, leaving room for photographers to express themselves, albeit technically mediated. It seems that mastering the technical algorithm for creating photographs is momentary, especially in view of the

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<sup>1</sup> The aesthetics of photo-realism – that is, they [photographers] control or chose appropriate natural lighting, exposure, and use editing to achieve certain effects that we identify with "realistic photography" in the current historical period", explains Manovich (2017, p.69)

availability of photographic equipment and the popularization of photography; it is easier than proceeding from aesthetic motives, considering that a person either has an aesthetic taste or it fosters over time (Bourdieu, 1984).

The aesthetics of the vast mass of photographic works can be reduced to the sociology of groups which give rise to them, the functions that are attributed to them, and the meanings that they attach to them, considers Bourdieu (1990, p.98). That can be expressed both in photographic practice and in judgments about photography by various groups. Any conversation about photography takes place in “an exercises in rhetoric” atmosphere because feelings and tastes are involved without being applied to their subjects (ibid, p.65). According to Kant, the “judgments of taste” are socially determined and involve different life experiences (ibid, p.85). “Disinterestedness, Kant insisted, is the sole guarantee of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from the “interest of the senses” which defines “the agreeable”, and from “the interest of Reason” which defines “the Good” (ibid, p.86). Today, professional photographers are challenged to demonstrate their aesthetic intentions to be able to convey the meaning of photographs to their audience in order to distinguish themselves and identify the features of their artistic skill, since Bourdieu (1990) insists that it is the viewer who can give value to a photograph, who can promote a photograph to the status of an artistic object, because it pleases them, and not because it is dictated by cultural correctness. The group of professional photographers with intentions and ambitions of an artist is of particular interest in my study, since they are likely to be more inclined to organize their photographic practices to express their aesthetic position better, and, as Manovich (2017) notices, even develop their own algorithms for creating photos in their own style.

Today's photographs are generally well-executed technically, regardless of the assigned aesthetic function, so it is complicated to distinguish between amateur and professional photographers in this regard. Therefore, in understanding the professionalism of a photographer, I choose a different approach, starting from the position of the author's *awareness* of photographic activity as work, a full-fledged profession.

## 2.2 Defining professionals

Boltanski and Chamboredon (1990, p.151) notes that the profession of photographer includes both independent photographers, and employees, and businessmen, and craftsmen; they have a variety of occupations and different levels of income. However, their reality is "the utopia of the organized profession" (ibid). They consider that photography is not part of any institutionalized education system, does not involve an academic communication environment; and it is not a “profession” in the sense that a person who has passed an apprenticeship is granted the right to cultural consumption and practices usually reserved for the most exalted people and denied to the man from the street (Bourdieu, 1990, p.43).

“One can become a photographer whenever and however one chooses. Neither the possession of the most basic state diploma, nor attendance at a school, nor even apprenticeship with a photographer is legally required for the practice of the profession.”

(Boltanski and Chamboredon, 1990, p.152)

Although, in the 21st century professional education is available; everyone can study at training programs and courses in various photographic areas, not to mention the huge number of master classes and training courses and videos, that, for instance, Manovich (2017) considers in his study. However, the understanding of professionalism is not determined by the presence of special education. A professional photographer, claims Manovich (2017, p.58-59), is not necessarily someone who has received the right education; rather, it is someone whose photography style conforms to the rules recognized long before the advent of Instagram, such as “rule of thirds”, proper exposure, line orientation, balanced colors, etc., as well as someone who has developed his own style on based on knowledge of these rules or as a result of imitation. Following the Bourdieu’s approach, Manovich believes that distinguishing professional from non-professional photographers is problematic. “Professional photography is photography where authors get paid”, claims Manovich (2017, p.51). Although in modern realities, where a professional photographer can make a profit not only by interacting with clients, but also by working with photo stock sites, where financial rewards are not always guaranteed (ibid). Thus, the professional photographer can be characterized as profit-driven, in anticipation of the promised commercial success, though not always guaranteed.

Another point is that the education of a photographer does not guarantee competitiveness in view of the large number of self-taught and hobby photographers offering their services, since it is problematic to recognize the photographic work of an educated and non-educated person. Rather, the experience of working as a photographer will be noticeable, and this is what the Boltanski and Chamboredon (1990) admit as well. However, the educational process can provide those useful social connections in the professional circle, which are often difficult to find from the outside, so some photographers today still choose this path. To make photographs "tasteful" without special education, and to successfully apply fashion trends in photography is possible for the photographers who belong to the upper class and have an initial sense of fashion, claim Boltanski and Chamboredon (1990, p.167). Since the profession of a photographer is largely closed and characterized by the inaccessibility of information and models, it is the cultural photographer (from the upper class) who may be aware of new movements, schools, and processes. “They know, before word has filtered through to the mass of photographers, that “grain”, for example, or “accentuation of contrasts” signal refined photography, at a given point in time.” (ibid, p.168). The rest of the photographers, being “fashion behind”, increase the distance from the great photographers both in appearance and in lifestyle.

Back in times, the photographers acquired specific and fragmented knowledge, separated from the theoretical principles on which they are based; they acted according to these principles and put

them into practice not after abstract training, but rather after observation in an experimental situation and during assimilation in experimental application (Boltanski and Chamboredon, 1990, p.154). “Apprenticeship was necessary for all those who wished to practice the profession; apprentice photographers had to become familiar with the complete range of tasks, even the most humble. The complexity and length of this training conferred a certain homogeneity to the professional group, [...] the hoi-polloi of amateurs and unqualified people was unable to join the profession”, claim Boltanski and Chamboredon (ibid). It seems that if apprenticeship exists now, most likely, due to the scale of the photo shooting projects and the responsibility for the quality result. Many successful photographers got their start through assisting, for example, Camilla Åkrans in Sweden (Female Fashion Collective, 2021), which helped them learn by doing, build portfolios, and make useful social connections. Therefore, it could be said that today the professionalism of a photographer is determined primarily by the skills acquired as a result of work experience; and education and apprenticeship, not being compulsory but possible, are associated primarily with the acquisition of social ties, with entering the community. In addition, in contrast to France in 1990, studied by the authors, in modern times there are photography communities, such as the Swedish Association of Professional Photographers, which is an undoubted sign of the recognition of photography as a profession, and which puts this profession on a par with all other professions in the face of law.

The improvement of photographic equipment contributed to the rationalization of labor: the tasks of formerly professional photographers were simplified; the use of sophisticated equipment became the specialty of qualified technicians (Boltanski and Chamboredon, 1990, pp. 152-153). Photographers, apart from implementing photo shootings, retouch, and photographic equipment sales, started to divide into specializations, such as industrial photography, fashion photography, photo portraiture, etc. These specialties, Boltanski and Chamboredon believe, make it possible to stand out equally as photographers, although the diversity of photographers makes it difficult to define this profession rigorously and exhaustively (ibid, p.152). At the same time, such specialties do not depend on the personal qualifications of the photographer (ibid, p.155). So, the peculiarity of professional photographers lies in the fact that they do not represent a generally accepted, ordered set of certain qualifications and personal qualities, have different levels of income, education, and are driven only by the desire to be in the profession and develop their skills according to their own worldviews.

The study of photographic practices conducted by French sociologists showed the fragmentation of the professional photographic community and the lack of unity. According to the researchers, this was due to the variety of ways photographers entered the profession. Requiring less knowledge and simplifying the tasks of photographers, photography turned into an affordable way of earning money and became attractive to specialists from different fields. Representatives of different social groups maintain differences, distancing themselves from each other. The upper class, appealing to such categories as "taste", demonstrate its imposing social and cultural capital, that is a necessary condition for a successful professional career. The success of a professional

photographer is ensured not by being included in professional unions, but on their self-positioning and promotion skills by communicating with the audience.

### 2.2.1 Striving for success

Success, characterizing the leading tendencies of human adaptation in society, correlates with the achievement of a specific goal. During the interviews, Boltanski and Chamboredon (1990) discovered that the photographers have confidence either in success or at least in minimal acquisitions from their work. The difficulties in determining success and status in the profession of a photographer are since the profession itself does not require a mandatory diploma and qualifications. Therefore, according to the authors, the hope for an increase in status is “as if always possible” (ibid, p.161). Even though success does not depend on the great talent or special qualities of a fine art photographer, this may not be enough to elevate a photographer's status. Even though professional success is reflected in the degree of creative originality of the final result, Boltanski and Chamboredon claim that the success of photographers is never achieved once and for all (ibid, p.162-169). Also of interest are the authors' observations that even very modest photographers readily recall their resounding successes, but there are also few successful photographers who would not fear a return to a more modest situation or would not even prepare for it (ibid, p.169). That ultimate success is out of reach may mean that a photographer's working photographic practices can adapt and change endlessly. The desire to increase social status and the desire to become “one of the few” in this essay can also be considered as one of the motivations for using Instagram in the work of professional photographers.

### 2.3 Accessibility and Democratization of Photography

The weakening of traditional functions in society, as well as active tourism and the availability and simplicity of cameras – these are the main criteria for the democratization of photography, noted by Bourdieu (1990). He claims that the practice of photographing has become widespread and has become generally available not only due to the reduction in the cost of technical equipment and the ease of its use (ibid).

“With the photographic image, industrial technology has given the most dispossessed people the opportunity of owning portraits which are not images of the great men of this world or the figures of the next. The Portrait Gallery has been democratized and each family has, in the person of the head of the family, its appointed portraitist.”

(Bourdieu,1990, p. 30)

In addition, the popularization of photography has become closely associated with holidays and tourism – photography seems to confirm that a person has taken holidays. “Photography is

what one does on holiday, and also what makes a holiday,” – says Bourdieu (ibid, p.36). The practice of frequent photographing "on holidays" also contributes to the acquisition and accumulation of some photographic experience, which may later lead to the emergence of a professional interest in photography. In addition, the neutralization of the traditional function, i.e., function of integrating the group, contributed to the spread of photographic practices.

If to take a closer look at the democratization of photography from the standpoint of accessibility and the reduction in the cost of cameras, then it is worth noting that the modification of photographic practices also occurred in connection with the advent of compact cameras, light and easy to use. Subsequently, the profession of a photographer spread rapidly since science and technology developed, giving society new devices and technologies. Alongside with that, news organizations and schools of journalism have established a variety of awards for photojournalists: since the middle of the last century, the Pulitzer Prize has been awarded in several categories of photojournalism, and from 1997 – in online journalism (Topping and Gissler, 2022). Another example is World Press Photo (2022) established in 1955 by a group of Dutch photographers to expose their work to a global audience. Thus, photography has become the main mass medium, occupying an important place in journalism, in print, is used in science, technology, advertising, design and many other industries. Today, photography faces challenges: the crisis of "paper" publications (Soirinsuo and Hetemaeki, 2008), the influence of the photobank industry on the profession (Manovich, 2017), mass amateur photography, and the development of digital technologies. “As the new millennium dawned it became increasingly clear that digital technology, far from being implicated in photography’s demise, was being harnessed to the production of more, not less, ‘photography’”, claims Lister (2007).

Indeed, as it was mentioned before, photographic practices are more accessible to a wider population today. Among photographers, there is a large part of those for whom photography is only one of the possible areas of activity – these are people who often see photography as a profitable hobby and who separate themselves from professionals. In this case, I assume the practice of photography is attractive as a cultural pastime, especially for the lifestyle it offers. Besides, the popularization of the social networks has led to wide opportunities for all types of photographers, even more equalizing amateurs, and professionals. A social media platform such as Instagram gives all types of photographers the opportunity to publish their photos, to communicate with a wide audience, search for customers, discuss shooting, post ads about their services, talk about their work, and generally engage in promotion and image formation. Photographers have a possibility to attract the audience attention with their photography style, which will distinguish them from other authors and will increase their recognition, reputation, and earnings.

### 2.3.1 Opportunities in practicing digital photography

With the widespread introduction of digital technologies, it has become easier to take a photo – modern cameras do not require mandatory knowledge and application of settings. Digital technologies make it easier to work due to the availability of an image preview and instant settings

adjustments. However, at the same time, special attention is paid to the need for an author's vision; a photograph that claims to be a piece of art must meet the requirements of artistry and express the specific idea that the photographer wants to convey to the audience. It can be said that photography in digital age leads to a change in the essence of the structure of the image, turning it into a set of millions of variable pixels; this set of preliminary data can be changed during retouch.

Taffel (2021) in his work “Google’s lens: computational photography and platform capitalism” raises the important question of whether digital photography today is a revolutionary breakthrough in the history of its photographic practices or is it an ongoing development. For example, Rubinstein and Sluis (2013) believe that there has been a cultural shift from visual to algorithmic imagery: if we consider a photograph as a visual image, then it will be the result of applying a set of certain rules to achieve maximum resemblance to reality. From the point of view of the algorithmic approach, the image never ends, never reaches the end (Rubinstein and Sluis, 2013, p.11). Because the image is continuous and multiple, it cannot be decompressed by the tools of semiotics and structuralism designed to work with finite and static images, note Rubinstein and Sluis (2013, p.14). In database-driven imaging systems, linear storytelling becomes subservient to the logic of computer-generated database modeling, which is especially noticeable on Instagram, where the user can endlessly scroll down the update feed (Rubinstein and Sluis, 2013).

In addition, it seems that the value of a digital photograph largely depends on retouch. This is used by most photographers I know today – such practices of constant rethinking of their work often lead to the inevitable re-processing of digital photo archives and giving photography a new creative status that currently reflects their aesthetic. The possibility of photographing in RAW format has contributed to an even greater fascination with digital retouch by professional photographers, which, moreover, can compensate for many technical shortcomings (Fitzgerald, 2013, p.123). This image file recording format, also known as "digital negative", is almost raw data coming directly from the camera's sensor. RAW is proprietary and tied to the camera manufacturer, which means that each camera manufacturer that supports RAW has its own file format (Fitzgerald, 2013, p.32). The biggest advantage of the raw format is the greater freedom in many processing options. It could be said that photography is changing along with technological progress – cameras are getting more compact, the matrix becomes larger, the lenses become more sensitive to light. Often a modern professional photographer, depending on the tasks or current trends, can photograph either on a digital camera or on analogue or a mobile phone, that I have noticed with my own photography experience as well. Today's smartphones provide a large photo resolution, which is enough for publications and exhibitions in galleries with the aim of further sales. The key to mobile photography is smart algorithms. Their essence lies in the fact that algorithms such as HDR+ work on the principle of image stacking, that is, several shots are taken very quickly and glued into one, due to which the amount of noise is reduced, and a dynamic range is formed. Due to this, it is possible to qualitatively compensate for the small size of the phone's matrix – the noise level becomes equivalent to an APS-C format matrix, that is, a much larger size (Coleman, 2021). Despite such mobile technologies, professional "large" cameras are still relevant and will continue to be relevant due to the impossibly large sensor and fast lenses (Kielsen, 2021). However, as it

is possible to create a great picture on both types of cameras, and each camera has its own advantages and disadvantages, this again emphasizes the democratization and accessibility of photography, and implies greater competition in the market of photo professionals for the attention of the viewer. Besides, Instagram has attracted a huge number of people to photography. If earlier photo clubs were quite small, and exhibitions were held for a narrower circle of interested people, today amateur and professional photographers can regularly show their photographs to millions of users around the world.

### 2.3 Instagram as a media form

Since Instagram, with approximately one billion monthly active users (Statista, 2022), is one of the most popular social networks in the world and the most popular photo-sharing application, it is logical that studying its use by various types of social groups is of interest among scholars. As mentioned earlier, in this master's thesis, my interest is focused on those professional photographers who actively use Instagram in their work, and therefore are potentially affected by it. To do this, it seems necessary to consider the features of Instagram as a platform for posting photos, without affecting the aspects of video publications and texts. Perhaps the most detailed descriptions of the Instagram platform could be found in the book “Instagram Power” written by Miles (2019), which has a marketing approach, but more on the interaction of professional photographers with Instagram is discussed in the work of Manovich (2017). Manovich and his Cultural Analytics Lab quantified 15 million Instagram photo posts from around the world, sorting them in databases of various visual styles, that allowed him to study changes in the visual culture and users’ creative styles (Manovich, 2017). These relatively recent observations seem to be appropriate for this essay, since Manovich’s visual study of photos of Instagram, which he defines as a medium, perfectly complements and compensates for Bourdieu's conclusions discussed earlier. Manovich (2017) admits that Instagram is more about casual photography, which gained popularity because of mass mobile photographic practices. The photos that users publish are combined by Instagram into a horizontal photo grid of three photos, which creates a common atmosphere, or tone, or narrative, making it also easy to trace the style of a particular user (photographer).

[Instagram is] “the media form that combines lens image capture and design techniques goes along with particular content, that together create particular “sensitivity”, “attitude”, or “tonality.”

(Manovich, 2017, p.73)

Since the first thing that noticed when studying Instagram is the uniqueness of its form, it should be mentioned that photographic practices are closely related to any form of the chosen media. In connection with the transition to a new preferable form, the professional practices of the photographer are expected to adjust and change. Thus, in the last century, a photojournalist adjusted mostly to newspaper formats; from twenty to ten years ago photographers adjusted their works to

the formats and requirements of computer sites where they published, and now such conditions are often dictated by the mobile platforms, such as Instagram, that has strict frames to image form. This is both the maximum aspect ratio of 4:5, the preferred vertical format, grid layout and so on (Instagram Help Centre, 2022). Instagram, driven by the development of mobile photography, also does not offer high-resolution photos, because images are compressed on the phone screen. Since Instagram is designed primarily for viewing photos on small phone screens, photos do not produce the same spectacular effect as in a magazine or on a large screen, which is why proficient users may recourse to additional compositional tricks and tools to give more visual impact to published photos (Manovich, 2017, p.110). Manovich compares Instagram photos to the cover of fashion magazines – the image should be noticeable from afar, and for this there are certain design tactics such as increasing brightness and contrast, and more. In addition, a small screen or the technical features of the Instagram platform also implies a loss of quality in terms of pixel detail, which professional photographers must remember before publishing, and even at the time of creating the image itself, to avoid quality loss. However, since Instagram as a platform combines a lot of functionality beyond photo presentation, it has become the main gathering place for professional photographers.

It follows that in order to demonstrate their visual style to their Instagram audience, a professional photographer should publish their photos in accordance with the form of Instagram. Miles (2019, p.180), looking at creative content strategies, argues that there are proven (photo) content styles on Instagram that can guarantee audience success. In addition, Manovich (2017) considers the emergence of exceptional styles that have gained popularity on Instagram. Thus, the popularization of kinfolk culture and the slow lifestyle aesthetic has led to what he calls “Instagramism” – the focus on mood and atmosphere rather than representation or communication of emotions (Manovich, 2017, p.119). If to google the word "Instagrammable", the search engine will return over 4 million results. It is likely that people want everything that surrounds them to look aesthetically pleasing when photographed. Active social media users are trying to capture every step of their lives, forming one of the main visual trends that has become a global aesthetic, “a life form” (Manovich, 2017). This aesthetics significantly affects not only everyday life, but also leisure, since every active user is supposed to make a creative decision before posting something on Instagram and can get motivated and inspired by Instagram photos of other users.

I believe that such practices contribute to the rapid development of the Instagram aesthetic, but also influence the mindset of creative users. Accordingly, I can assume that that professional photographers on Instagram are also inspired by its aesthetic. Manovich (2017, p.89) believes that it is currently impossible to say exactly what is the cause and what is the effect, whether it is the Instagram aesthetic that influences the work of photographers, forms their understanding of style, or it is photographers who themselves bring new styles to Instagram – but the fact is that they are invariably interconnected. Thus, Instagram aesthetics is supported and approved by the users themselves – creatives, and ordinary people, i.e., potential customers of professional photographers; therefore, Instagram styles do not lose their attractiveness, popularity, and this is most likely why such content quantitatively prevails in Instagram recommendations.

### 3. Engaging with Instagram Algorithms and Metrics

#### 3.1 Interaction with platform algorithmic systems

As mentioned earlier, professional photographers face the work of algorithms during their interaction with Instagram. Therefore, it seems relevant to consider the essence of Instagram platform algorithmic systems; to discuss interactions with algorithmic systems and its consequences, and to determine what position the professional photographer takes in relation to the Instagram platform due to peculiarities of their work.

In this study, Instagram is considered as a digital platform, since platforms take responsibility for media content, the order of communication of users and provide the society with many effective ways of socio-cultural organization, implementing elements of technocratic control (Gillespie, 2018). Platforms are a place for social interactions, they also form certain actions based on the work of open and hidden algorithms built into the design, the conditions for accessing services, as well as the data consumed. In addition, digital platforms can organize the workflow (O'Meara, 2019). Platforms are neither neutral nor value-free but follow a certain ideology. Companies that own major digital platforms strive to create the impression that their sites support freedom of expression for each user and that they do not welcome restrictions (Gillespie, 2010). However, while the platform presents itself as a democratic process, it is actually based on techno-commercial black box strategies (Bucher, 2012; 2016; Diakopoulos, 2015). According to van Dijck (2014), platform moderation is controversial, and the introduction of new social categories and selection mechanisms leads to a reorganization of value regimes and economies. Moderation of user-generated content forces users to adapt to predetermined algorithmic patterns, point Andersson Schwarz and Larsson (2018), and platforms, carrying out technocratic control and subsequently deriving commercial benefits, influence the social interaction of users.

Activities of digital platforms can take various forms: from the creation of technological tools that facilitate communication between users, to the development of advertising and personalized rating of information based on a certain logic. Considering the content and forms of social processes on digital platforms, van Dijck (2013) emphasizes that platforms can change the very nature of sociality. Ideas, values, and tastes of people are spread through social networks, but these networks themselves, as automated systems, influence how people behave and how they think. Many habits that previously appeared to be informal manifestations of social life are now spreading to digital media platforms. Thus, van Dijck (2013) considers platforms act as a kind of regulators that organize and determine social life not only in online but also offline environments, change the nature of private and public communication, and affect social behavior and everyday life practices.

Digital algorithms are shaping a new cultural experience for people. Users are recipients and consumers of information, as well as producers and participants in socio-cultural processes. Algorithms are crucial today, suggests Striphos (2015). The author, studying the influence of platform algorithms on the social and cultural life of a user, speaks of the “algorithmic culture”

(Striphas, 2015). Using Amazon as an example, that started as a retailer but has evolved into an institution that delegated culture by “sorting, classification, hierarchy of people, places, objects, and ideas”, Striphas (2015) argues that people began to delegate cultural work to computational processes: “Shopping, merchandising and other everyday cultural activities are data-driven and subject to machine-based information processing”.

Instagram not only sets its own platform algorithms, but also collects user data, based on which content is ranked in the Feed. These algorithms consider engagement (comments, “likes” and reposts), relevance (using photo recognition, keywords and hashtags, the social network shows the post to users who were interested in similar messages), interaction (posts are seen by people with whom the user communicates most often), publication time, search (posts are suggested based on the user's last search queries), messages data (your posts will be shown to the person you write to more often), view time (takes into account the time spent by the user viewing the post and shows similar ones more often in the future). According to the head of Instagram Adam Mosseri, algorithms are technologies that personalize the user experience:

“Instagram doesn’t have one algorithm that oversees what people do and don’t see on the app. We use a variety of algorithms, classifiers, and processes, each with its own purpose. We want to make the most of your time, and we believe that using technology to personalize your experience is the best way to do that.”

(Mosseri, 2021)

Since Instagram’s official blog states that its feed “ranks posts based on what you care about most” (Mosseri, 2021), it makes sense that as a user, a professional photographer would like to post photos that are interesting to their audience in posts and stories. Therefore, driven by the desire to unravel the algorithms and make oneself “algorithmically recognizable” (Gillespie, 2017), a professional photographer strives to ensure their publication has the greatest reach and virality, focusing on the requirements of the platform’s technical infrastructure. In addition, with a need for recognition and success, professional photographers who have Instagram as their preferred platform for portfolio and promotion contribute to the value of the platform through their active activities such as posting photos, interacting with clients, and occasionally buying ads. The published photo content is designed to engage and inspire other users, which only contributes to the popularization of Instagram and photography in general. However, O’Meara (2019) argues that Instagram's black box logic is an unmanaged, closed, and inaccessible infrastructure. Consequently, O’Meara (2019) argues, there is a power gap between platform holders and those who bring these spaces to life with their social and economic value; and when changes are made to the infrastructure, "cultural producers are profoundly affected by the new visibility conditions that characterize their work." Bucher (2018) also notes that changes in platform infrastructure affect users’ participation rates. In addition, learning to understand Instagram content ranking mechanisms, and regularly checking for updates to the rules of operation of the algorithms, only adds hours of work to the photography profession, which is not mandatory, and not even paid, but

which is perceived by creative workers as an inevitable action for achieving visibility and success. The difficulty of predicting algorithms explains the existence of many forums and chats where anyone interested can suggest and discuss techniques to increase the loyalty of algorithms (O'Meara, 2019).

### 3.1.1 A Threat of Invisibility

What Cotter (2019) calls the “visibility game” and Bucher (2018) understands as the “threat of invisibility”, has similar foundations. Cotter (2019) argues that Instagram influencers consciously participate in the game of which Instagram is the master and facilitator, setting desirable forms of participation and certain rules. The winner is the one who correctly interpreted and guessed the algorithm, receiving visibility as a reward (ibid). The author believes that although the influencers she studies have some freedom to do actions in attention-getting tactics, “they still have to play the game, operating within algorithmically enforced rules” (ibid). At the same time, algorithms parameterize rather than determine user behavior, according to Cotter (2019). Being “visible” means being chosen by the algorithms, “visibility acts as a reward” because the algorithmic architecture does not guarantee visibility for everyone (Bucher, 2018, pp.85-87). Users’ active actions on the platform are not related to the desire to be visible, claims Bucher (2018) but to the potential threat of disappearance for their audience (ibid, p.84). Bucher (2018) contrasts the relationship between discipline and visibility explored in the “Panopticon” effect of Foucault with the operation of Facebook's algorithmic systems. The author argues that the understanding of “visibility” as a threat is not relevant in relation to a subject since algorithms do not guarantee ubiquitous visibility (ibid). In other words, a perceived “threat of visibility” has turned into a “threat to invisibility”, where users need to make an effort to gain attention, or to get more followers to see their publications.

Thus, the “threat of invisibility” requires continuous production of data – i.e., constant publication and interactivity. It turns out that the platform disciplines its active users and imposes its logic of work on them. Bucher (2018) along with O'Meara (2019) in their research suggest that participation norms manifest themselves differently depending on the user's position in relation to the platform: for example, influencers are both users and workers whose income depends on visibility; therefore, it is logical to assume that the professional photographers I am researching can also manifest themselves from the position of a user and a creative worker, whose income is also driven by visibility to potential clients. In general, it is difficult to clearly define a position for the active participation of professional photographers on Instagram, especially in advance to empirical research. Under certain conditions, professional Instagram photographers can be associated with influencers: for example, a “threat of invisibility” can stimulate more active photography content production (Bucher, 2018). They also interpret success as a constant increase in engagement, the number of subscribers. In terms of earnings mediated by the platform, there is a partial coincidence here, since influencers can profit as a result of publications involving customer’s brand, while for photographers, the publication of photography works is already a consequence, a result of their

work, which accumulate in the portfolio to attract further clients. For an influencer, an audience always means symbolic capital, which attracts employers due to accumulation (Cotter, 2019), while for a commercial professional photographer, each user is a potential client. Probably, it is possible to assume that professional photographers have a lower level of engagement with Instagram, as they use fewer tools for promotion without focusing on, for example, video content. Thus, for the theoretical basis of this work, it seems possible to use the concept of the “threat of invisibility” when considering “engagement modules” (O’Meara, 2019) or “visibility tactics” (Cotter, 2019) in relation to professional photographers on Instagram.

### 3.2 Metrics Matter

Apart from the algorithms, for professional photographers, visible Instagram metrics can influence the perception of their work, and as a result, be a kind of indicator of success. Realizing for the first time my dependence on metrics as a professional photographer and determined to somehow change this, I went to the central library of Stockholm to “return to the roots of photography” and read about the values and success indicators of photographers in the pre-Instagram era. However, I ended up with an entertaining copy of a book by Swedish photographer Christoffer Collin, also known as @wisslaren, with over a million followers on Instagram. After scrolling through his Instagram for a while, I learnt that he makes a living through Instagram, being an ambassador for prestigious camera manufacturers, and his photos are printed on Swedish postage stamps.

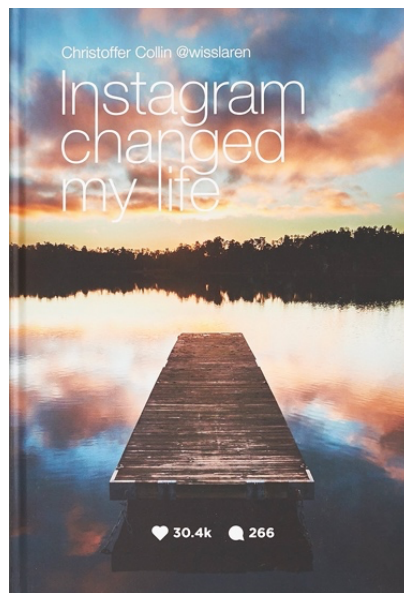


Figure 1. Collin, C., 2017. *Instagram changed my life*. Lava Förlag, 184p.

The book "Instagram Changed My Life" contains his best photographs, unique in that they were selected *by the number of users reached*. In addition, there is an author's Instagram success story along with tips for those who also want to achieve user recognition. Each of the photos in the

book contains a mention of the number of “likes” and comments. Such an unexpected and obvious intervention of Instagram metrics into the creative life of a photographer, into his book publication, demonstrates both the absurdity and normality of the fusion of these processes. The users’ opinions about the photo works of Collin in his account are of paramount importance, come to the foreground, are fixed on the book pages, and here it is difficult to say what the author's opinion about his works is. Collin’s followers have become the curators of his printed publication, they impose their will on readers: leafing through the book, it is impossible to challenge the dignity or merit of the author's photographs, because the judgment has already been made in the form of numerical meanings, or metrics, fixed below.

In fact, metrics have become an active component of the daily life (Beer, 2016, p.3). Discussing the importance of metrics, Brighenti (2018) talks about their discretionary nature, believing that they are infinitely applicable, comparing them to “the atmospheric component of society”. In addition, the author argues that metrics lead to such undesirable results as observation and vulnerability to manipulation by business and government (Brighenti, 2018). Believing that metrics are inseparable from power, Beer (2016) examines how governments have used measurement as a strategy for public scrutiny back in time. According to the researcher, it was the governments that designed the norms and made decisions whether to make measurements visible or not: “Measuring for setting standards became new normality” (Beer, 2016, p.57). Thus, the author argues, metrics carry values and also create new values that are consistent with the ideas of neoliberalism (ibid). “Modern neoliberal metrics, fluid and adaptable, are based on measuring people to achieve optimal efficiency and productivity”, adds Beer (2016).

### 3.2.1 Metricated Mindset

In their work “Heuristic of the Algorithm” Bolin and Andersson Schwarz (2015, p.9) say that “the metric is an agent of the system, a thing with intention that adheres to various powers, be they designers, programmers, Facebook the corporation, or the system itself”. In addition, metrics “place us within a graphopticon, asking us to evaluate the metrics of our friends while at the same time internalizing our need” (Grosser, 2014). Visible metrics on digital platforms seem to appeal to the user’s need to measure the activity of other people. At the same time, the user falls into the trap of becoming dependent on the metrification of their own online social network activity, which Fisher calls a “growth fetish” (Fisher, 2010, cited in Grosser, 2014). Besides, the metric is both a driver and an expression that determines certain types of social actions and behavior in the digital space, which Bolin and Andersson Schwarz (2015) call a “*metricated mindset*”. Such way of thinking intervenes into many spheres of life, but the authors in particular look at the example of the active production of clickbait journalism as an intervention in traditional editorial processes (ibid). Accordingly,

“Media users are less interested in “who they are” and more concerned with how to navigate in the face of the growing ability to collect data on their daily behavior.”

(Bolin and Andersson Schwarz, 2015)

It seems that in the present thesis the concept of “metricated mindset” is the best suited to describe the digital behavior of professional photographers on Instagram, whose aspects I have yet to study in the practical part. Moreover, studying the perception of metrics even by groups of ordinary digital platform users provides valuable material for my subsequent analysis of the interactions of professional photographers with metrics.

To experimentally prove the dependence of users on metrics, several studies have already been conducted involving the use of the Demetricator. This is a browser extension, created by Grosser, that is able to modify the code served by Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to remove various key metrics from the site, that create a “networked society independent of quantification” and ultimately “see what happens when we can no longer judge ourselves and others in metric units”, Grosser (2014) says. In 2020, the Bolin and Velkova study described an experiment where Facebook Demetricator promoted self-reflection by hiding the numbers of time, “likes”, comments, shares, and friends amount, so that the user would not get stuck in cycles of feedback and rewards. In general, discussions on the topic of dependence on metrics led to the fact that Instagram is practicing hiding “likes” from the pages of its users (Instagram, 2021). Already in 2019 Instagram chief Adam Mosseri said that the aim was to create a less stressful environment in which people feel comfortable expressing themselves (Mac and Nguyen, 2019). However, a little later, the “like” function was even added to stories, that is an additional motivator for users to create more attractive stories for their audience (Mosseri, 2022).

Both “Demetricator” studies of Grosser (2014) and Bolin and Velkova (2020) show that the participants perceive metrics as a guide; and confirm Bourdieu’s theory of a one’s desire to accumulate the capital of “social connections, honor and respectability” (Bourdieu, 1991, quoted in Grosser, 2014). Thinking of value creation, the author stresses the role of “likes” for the user:

“Likes given demonstrate our taste and culture to others, [...] likes received suggest that our statements and collections are worthy of recognition.”

(Grosser, 2014)

The “desire for more”, as Grosser (2014) explains, means that users tempt to make their own metrics go higher: “more friends, more likes, more shares – better than less”, because they are dissatisfied “with stability in the face of quantification”. This desire of users to increase their platform metrics, which for them is evidence of achieving a certain level of success, also correlates with the above discussion of the profession of photography that the photographers’ success “is never achieved once for all” (Boltanski and Chamboredon, 1990, p.161). Thus, metrics are endless in their improvement, and users will always strive for more.

Esposito and Stark (2019) claim that metrics have a “big impact on decision-making, provide orientation about what others observe and don’t inform about how things are”, and it also correlates with the so-called “like economy” (Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013). According to Gerlitz and Helmond (2013), “likes” are central measurements for user engagement showing expression of affective responses; that are also needed for competition to exist (Beer, 2016). Users regardless of their intentions fall into the area of the platform metrics, which is “both driver and expression privileging certain types of social action and guide behavior in the digital space” (Bolin and Andersson Schwarz, 2015). The authors add: “The increased use of various media via digital platforms, which are premised on this automated, continual tracking, brings with it that media audiences participate in the metrification of their habits either wittingly or largely unwittingly” (ibid). In turn, today’s digital reality works in such a way that user behavior is in any case included in the logic of both constantly evolving algorithms and big data (Striphas, 2015).

### A brief summary of the theoretical framework

Thus, as a theoretical basis for this study, I take Bourdieu's (1990) notion about the universal accessibility of photographic practices, especially in connection with the processes of digitalization and democratization of technologies. Distinguishing professional photographers from amateur photographers in terms of their creativity is problematic today, however, professionals can be called those photographers who have defined photographic practices as a professional activity for themselves and who are motivated by development in the profession, which is associated with the recognition of the audience and the desire making a profit. The accessibility of photography has led to competition in the photography market, so it can be challenging for a photographer to grow as a professional, especially with the rise of digital platforms like Instagram.

Using the digital visual platform Instagram, the work of which is determined by algorithmic systems, professional photographers, along with other users, have the same potential for promotion, portfolio placement, and social networking. However, driven by the criteria of their own success and the desire to prove their creative affiliation, professional photographers strive to stand out on a platform which has its own requirements and rules for publication, and that enforces certain forms of photographic content. It is assumed that the form affects the creative thinking of the photographer in the course of professional activity. In addition, the algorithmic nature of the Instagram platform does not guarantee visibility to every user, so professional photographers structure their work in view of the “*threat of invisibility*”; they expect algorithms, and therefore adhere to certain rules, which later become a non-paid part of their professional activities. The practices of professional photographers can be linked, among other things, to the desire for a high metric presentation on Instagram since metrics can be accumulated into social capital and serve as an indicator of recognition of their work by the platform audience. The concept of “*metricated mindset*” serves to describe the changes in the practices of the modern professional photographer on Instagram, connected with the association of their own success with the numerical indicators of

Instagram profile statistics; and which influences the decisions made by photographers at different stages of their professional activities.

Linking the issue of ambiguous understanding of professionalism in photographic activity with the concepts of the “*threat of invisibility*” and “*metricated mindset*”, I build a theoretical context for further empirical research. I foresee that such ambiguity in professional photography, combined with the influence of Instagram algorithms and metrics, becomes even more ambiguous, which is reflected in the professional practices of the photographer.

## 4. Material and Methodology

### 4.1 Interview as a method

The goal of interviews, Jensen notes, is to grasp knowledge from within (Jensen, 2002, p.264). For a better methodological and methodological understanding of how it is necessary to conduct a research interview, I also chose for consideration the study of a specialist in qualitative research Steinar Kvale (1996). His main idea that new content is formed during the interview, and not just brought to the surface, still seems to be relevant, especially for the present study. Interview is literally “inter view”, says Kvale, it is a mutual exchange of views between two people talking on a topic of interest to both (1996, p.2). Thus, the purpose of the interview is to describe the life world of the interviewee, which implies the interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. Jensen (2002, p.240) is of the same opinion, specifying that in-depth interviews are suitable for identifying the point of view of social agents on media, since language is the main, convenient way of social interaction.

I take into consideration that in-depth, semi-structured interview has its own structure and purpose, that also involves asking and listening carefully to obtain thoroughly verified knowledge, and that is conducted according to a predetermined pattern. As an interviewer, I have a list of questions (see Appendix 1), and the interviewee has the freedom to respond. Then the interview is transcribed, and the text, together with the audio recording, serves as material for further semantic interpretation. Since interview is inherently hermeneutical in nature, its purpose is to interpret the meaning, clarify the desired meanings and draw attention to the questions that are posed to the text (Kvale, 1996, p.50). As hermeneutic interpretation of the resulting text requires knowledge of the topic of the text, argues Kvale (*ibid*), conducting a quality research interview requires a solid knowledge of the subject of the conversation, so that the interviewer can feel the semantic nuances of statements and the different contexts in which the interviewer can fit meaning. That is why not only is mastery of the subject of the interview and of the study in general essential, but also being a representative of a group of professional photographers in my study is of great advantage. This fact, in my opinion, implies a complete understanding of the inherent meanings of each other, which ensures a full-fledged dialogue and comfort in communication. Since I am both an interviewer and an experienced professional photographer at the same time, I can be sure that I will be able to explain many of the nuances of my research questions along the way, and immediately decipher the meanings of the respondents' statements and their possible non-verbal cues. What is more, I am more able to compose understandable questions that encourage positive interaction, keep the conversation flowing, and stimulate the interlocutor to tell (*ibid*, pp.131-133). Besides, due to the factor of personal acquaintance, all interviews were scheduled fast and without any inconveniences. In general, it was my conscious decision about the choice of method, based on knowledge of the research topic, available methodological tools (*ibid*, p.100).

A good research interview can be a rare, enriching experience for the interviewee; it may happen that during the interview the respondent changes his description of the situation or its meaning, claims Kvale (1996, p.28). The respondent may discover new aspects of the issue he is talking about, suddenly see connections that he was not previously aware of (ibid, p.112). During the interviews, I tried to follow the guide in order to process a good semi-structured interview, that include: consideration of *moral aspects*, as the interpersonal interaction during the interview affects the interviewee (Kvale, 1996, p.305); *informing respondents* about the general objectives of the study and its main points, as well as obtaining the *voluntary consent* of the respondent (ibid, pp.70-72); *confidentiality* of personal information, since potentially recognizable information must be obtained for the publication of recognizable data (ibid, pp.63;72). Besides, *personal bias* at the stage of interpretation should be considered (ibid, p.170). Apart from this, the specific objectives of my research had to be initially hidden to get the respondent's natural perspective on the research topic and avoid imposing certain answers on them (ibid, p.71); that is why my aim was to keep a careful balance that avoids extremes and omission of those aspects of the plan that may be important to respondents.

The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews in this thesis was also influenced by the authors' work in a similar field of study and their methods. Previous studies on the experience of creative workers / media creators / influencers interacting with platform algorithms have mostly used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the creators (Duffy, et al. 2021; Arriagada & Ibanez, 2020; O'Meara, 2019). The interviews mentioned above were carried out within quite a long period of time (about a year or more) and assumed participation up to 35 respondents, which in my case does not seem reasonable due to the time limit. Arriagada & Ibanez (2019) also suggest combining this method with data collection of media material, however, from my point of view, the time limit, and the focus primarily on the opinion and experience of the creative worker does not allow me to apply this combined method. Cotter (2019), in order to determine what actions of influencers resemble a game built around "rules" encoded in algorithms, used a thematic analysis of online discussions of Instagram influencers. Considering this, I conducted a research based on the empirical data that I gained from conducting a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews (online and offline) with professional photographers, who actively publish their work on the Instagram platform and use Instagram for inspiration and presentation of their photographs.

Five professional photographers were interviewed, that were found through my own Instagram page. Each of the participants was briefly acquainted with the topic of my scientific research, and verbally agreed to participate in the interview. All respondents wished to remain anonymous in this study but allowed the age group to be mentioned. Thus, five professional photographers, men and women, aged 20 to 35 took part in face-to-face interviews. It should be noted that the interview participants were not selected according to their nationality, demographic, or gender. All the online and offline interviews took place in Sweden, and all the participants, professional photographers, verbally confirmed their working experience in Swedish realities. One of the requirements for participation was the active use of a professional Instagram account by the photographer, so this was also included in the main list of questions for the interview. As already indicated in the previous

chapter, it was also important to make sure that photography for the interviewed respondents is not a hobby, but a profession, even if their income is not constant due to factors. Three personal interviews took place in a cafe in Stockholm using a voice recorder; the other two interviews were conducted online using Zoom. All five interviews took place from February 23 to March 8 inclusive; and took an average of 45 to 70 minutes. I collected a sufficient map of respondents' opinions when the "moment of satiety" came, and the meaning began to repeat itself. I assume that the interviews can be considered valid, as I as the interviewer clearly followed the principles of its conduct and followed the methodology while maintaining the original topics and questions. Transcriptions of three interviews recorded during personal meetings on a phone voice memo were carried out manually; words and phrases not related to the topic of the interviews and directly to the questions were not considered. Transcripts of the two interviews, recorded using the Zoom program, were made using YouTube's automatic subtitle generation tool in private mode. After successful decryption, the videos were removed from YouTube to maintain anonymity.

## 4.2 Method reflections

As mentioned earlier, I deliberately invited professional photographers to participate in the face-to-face interviews, whom I know through Instagram and whose work experience is somewhat familiar to me, being a professional photographer myself. This helped to avoid potential problems in conducting quality interviews such as the difficulty of finding suitable respondents, as well as possible stiffness and tightness of the respondents during the conversation. On the contrary, the factor of personal acquaintance contributed to confidential communication, a friendly atmosphere and provided a level of comfort close to a simple conversation. The participants did not hide their sincere emotions and tried to be honest. Among the shortcomings of the conducted personal interviews, I would identify the external noise and music of the cafe, which slightly complicated the further processing of audio recordings; the distraction of respondents for drinking and food, which led to some pauses, as well as the episodic distraction of respondents to other topics in the process of dialogue. Regarding the conducted online interviews, no obvious shortcomings were found, as a stable Internet connection provided favorable conditions for conversation and recording of the dialogue in real time.

## 4.3 Arguments for material collection

By following the Questionnaire (see Appendix), I was interested in studying the respondents' attitude to the photography profession; how they determine themselves in the profession, characterize their working practices and routines. It was important to allow the respondents understand the vector of the dialogue that was directly related to their professional experience, and to provoke further discussion about the practices of a professional photographer. The respondents were also asked about the difference between a professional and a non-professional photographer. They were expected not only to identify themselves as a professional, but also explain why this is so. Since the phrase "professional photographer" can be interpreted by respondents, including from

the standpoint of reaching a certain point of success, or having many years of successful practice, education, etc., it was supposed to be explained. It was significant to study the respondent's understanding of professional success since it is the awareness of one's desire for success or popularity that acts as one of the motivators for using Instagram. In this part, the respondent could freely share plans and aspirations both regarding development in photography in terms of business and profit, and from the point of creativity. After that, the transition to the further topic of the interview was indicated — namely, about Instagram and regular practices of using it.

Talking about the importance of Instagram, its pros and cons, and regularity of use paved the way for further discussion on algorithms and metrics. Photographers told about what Instagram features they use and what platform tools they consider important, as well as they generally talked about their Instagram experience. Among other things, I believe that the question of whether the respondent could delete the Instagram account or not determined the importance for the respondents of being present at this visual platform and realize the level of their dependence.

The next part of the interview was dedicated to a detailed examination of the professional photographers' understanding of their visual photography style, that provoked discussions of the creative practices under the Instagram influence. Since Instagram in this study is understood as a global visual platform, which has already been identified by Manovich (2017) as having and shaping visual trends, the respondents shared their opinions on whether they feel pressured of certain visual trends imposed by the algorithms or by Instagram as a media form. Here, the interviewer's goal was to explore the extent to which respondents understand the effect Instagram has on their work: is their own style in photography changing, consciously or unconsciously? In general, the questions of this topic could be divided into three blocks: 1) the photographer's understanding of the visual style in photography, the attitude to curation of their Instagram profile, and the curation techniques; 2) how the respondent apply Instagram trends in their work, and whether it is caused by the desire to be recognized by the algorithms; 3) visual techniques and tactics that respondents use to be more attractive to Instagram users.

The following section was devoted to the respondents' interaction with Instagram metrics. The concept of “metricated mindset” was explained, so the respondents shared their understanding of the importance of metrics and described their interaction with them. At the very end, the participants confirmed the presence of their “metricated mindset” and discussed it.

At the final stage of the interview, the respondents formed an understanding for the course of the conversation, so their reflections on the previous stages gradually led to a discussion of their interaction with Instagram algorithms, and, as a result, to the phenomenon of the “threat of invisibility”. The participants shared their opinions on how algorithms work, reflected on the impact on their working practices on and off Instagram, and dwelled on creative practices that structure photographers in anticipation of algorithms.

## 4.4 Thematic Analysis

To analyze the material obtained as a result of the interview, the classical method of thematic analysis can be used. Thematic analysis is an exploratory approach, the purpose of which is to obtain information about the opinions, knowledge, experiences, and values of people from data obtained from a set of qualitative interviews in my case. Topic analysis gives flexibility in interpreting data and allows to work with datasets sorted by broad topics, although, it can be subjective depending on the researcher's judgment. The product of a thematic analysis is a detailed description of each topic, with corresponding illustrative quotations from the respondent's speech. It is not simply the segmentation and categorization of the constituent parts of the text for subsequent conclusions, but a new "synthesis", a general analysis, which implies a rethinking of the object of analysis (Jensen, 2002, p.245). My analysis mostly involves the use of a semantic approach that is based on the opinions expressed, alongside with the latent approach, that involves interpretation of the respondents' assumptions and social context.

“Thematic coding represents an attempt to identify, compare, and contrast meaning elements, as they emerge from and recur in several different contexts. What distinguishes thematic coding from much quantitative content analysis is the emphasis on defining each of these elements in relation to their context.”

(Jensen, 2002, p.251)

Thematic analysis strikes a balance between deduction and induction (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). An indicator of the importance of a topic in a qualitative analysis is the semantic load; and the definition of topics ranges from recognizing, paraphrasing, and briefing, trends of interest to more subtle interpretation that may be hidden behind the respondent's comments. Flick (2009) recommends doing thematic coding for all cases separately, briefly presenting the topics of each of the cases, then reformulating them so that in the end there are several most important topics, but which can be compared between groups of respondents. After reviewing some literature on conducting thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) with more focus on the experience of researchers from the field of sociology (Matthews and Ross, 2010), I found a lot of overlap in the authors' approaches, based on which I made the following plan for its implementation:

- 1) preparation: transcription writing → rereading of data → formulation of initial assumptions and observations
- 2) data coding: grouping of fragments → short summarizing
- 3) turning codes into topics: codes generalization into semantic clusters → creating definitions of each topic
- 4) topics overview: checking the compliance with topics → creating a thematic map
- 5) identification of key topics → interpretation of topics

## 5. Gathered data analysis

Below is a table that summarizes the pre-coded interview result by defining main topics as generalizations according to the importance of their semantic load for further analysis. The results that form the sub-themes are entirely derived from and formed from the material of the decoded interviews in accordance with the thematic analysis methodology, forming the main topics.

Table 1. Thematic map

<b>Markers of successful professional photographic activities</b>	<b>Photographers' style affected by Instagram</b>	<b>Metricated Mindset</b>	<b>Practicing anticipation of Instagram algorithms</b>
Photography experience and constant development	The importance of photographer's profile curation	Practices of Instagram profile metric analysis	Censorship and algorithmic control affect the creative decision-making process
Desire for income	Instagram photography trends and their adaptations	Metrics' value and the desire for high metric presentation	Following experts' advice to please algorithms
Artistic confidence and steady style	Tactics for creating attractive photos for Instagram profiles	Attitude to metrics	A "threat of invisibility" and the need for being permanently active
Photography as a vocation and lifestyle	Instagram affects photographers' creative work and inspiration		Assumptions on the work of Instagram algorithms
The need for public recognition, satisfied clients, and social media activity			Algorithmic anxiety
Instagram routine for professional needs			

### 5.1 Markers of successful professional photographic activities

The participants were ambivalent about defining themselves as a professional photographer, which is associated with the distinguishing between the understanding of "photographer as a profession", and photographer's "professionalism" as a synonym for workmanship/a master of craft. Such a distinction is associated with clear associations of the "profession" as a job, the way of earning money, and a "mastery of craft", as R3 defined, is something superlative, achievable through the tireless practice of photography, the accumulation of experience, overcoming difficulties, a clear comprehension of one's creative path and style. During the interview, it was noticeable that most respondents were confused by the question of defining professionalism, since they had not been engaged in a global understanding of their path in photography or had not thought about the definition of a professional photographer in general before. Most likely, such a reaction of the respondents may be due to the lack of a classical, theoretical photographic

education, which also indicates that the photographers focus their attention on practical activities. Therefore, it seems obvious that *photographic experience and constant development* as mandatory markers of professionalism in photographic activity were the first to be identified by all respondents:

“A professional is more about experience, about those who have been in the field for 20 or even 30 years, someone who has already tried a lot and worked with a lot of people”. R1

“I think it's always good to show how I grow up, which means I am a very serious shooter, I am not just a hobbyist”. R3

“It takes time, and only after time you can become a professional”. R5

These statements show that the respondents believe in the need to go through a long, long journey, and only then their activity will be rewarded with the title of a photography professional. That is why the high predetermined level of confidence and extensive experience did not allow all participants to immediately identify themselves as professionals at the beginning of the interview, since they do not have the necessary experience and confidence to proclaim themselves as “masters of craft”. Thus, only two participants immediately identified themselves as professional photographers without a doubt, which is explained by the subsequent confirmation of having a large, diverse work *experience* in the profession, the desire for professional *development*, strive for higher *income*, having *self-confidence*, and *satisfaction* from their professional activities:

“I consider myself a professional photographer because I am confident in what I do and have been doing it for a long time. Plus, I sometimes teach for others, help to deal with photographic equipment, helped to open a photo studio. What distinguishes a professional from a non-professional is experience, performance, whether it brings income and what level of income. Personally, photography has been making money for me for nine years now. I am growing steadily; I work in two countries, and I am satisfied with everything”. R2

It follows that those of the respondents who unambiguously identify themselves as professionals focus on further development, and do not regard achieving the level of a professional as the final point. Constant development makes it possible, among other things, to raise the cost of their professional services.

*Income, the desire to earn income, and the level of income* through photographic activity were noted as a characteristic feature of professional activity. In general, each participant agreed with the designation of themselves as a professional photographer in terms of the ability to earn income through photographic activities:

“It is my job, and I mean I can use my camera skills to make money, to earn the maintenance for my life”. R3

“Professional is when you're able to make income from photography, and unprofessional it can be that you don't make much money”. R4

It should be noted that the income of professional photographers on Instagram is largely dependent on platform visibility, as Duffy (2020) notes. When Instagram suddenly switched to an algorithmically curated feed in 2016, says Duffy (2020), a huge number of creative users saw not only a drop in “likes”, but also a drop in revenue (also noted by Cotter, 2019; Petre et al., 2019). Therefore, the possibility of generating income from customers found through Instagram makes it necessary to understand the algorithms and their possible changes.

Besides, the respondents want to declare themselves not only as true professionals, but also as creatives and artists. In this connection, subsequent remarks that their artistic desire to engage in photography is not necessarily related to income sounded like a distinction of work and creativity by respondents; such flexibility seems to indicate a fear of being known as a “dry” professional, a photography-maker, instead of the desired recognition as an artist with creative potential. That is why some respondents show shyness and awkwardness in the need to prove to someone that they are worthy of recognition and increase in the cost of their services:

“Money is one of the biggest things because you want to be able to survive of what you do, but I wouldn't say it's the most important, because for me photography brings me joy and I know that sometimes I have to pinch myself and say that I need to ask for money”. R4

“Even if I didn't get paid to take pictures, I wouldn't stop loving taking pictures”.  
R2

*Artistic confidence and steady style* are the features of a successful professional photographer from a creative standpoint, that comes with the experience. Participants also considered the ability to work in a variety of genres as one of the signs of photographic excellence, something to strive for:

“To become a professional, you need to know to what direction and what genre you want to go. [...] Professionals have a very steady style and pattern; they are very clear about what they do. [...] After you have artistic confidence, you can ask for public recognition”. R5

“Sooner or later, a professional is interested in different genres, all a little bit. It is important for me to see both diversity and progress. It is important to show that the photographer wants to explore the world of photography”. R1

The interviewed photographers noted that they have a need to develop their own style in photography, and practical experience helps to make their style even more pronounced, understandable and recognizable to the audience. The formed individual style gives a sense of confidence in the professional activities of the photographer.

Besides, the respondents explain the desire for creative development in photography by the desire for “labor”, for practice, as something that comes only with time, achievable by balancing the client’s desires with their own creative impulses, and only Respondent 4 clearly describes the *photography practice as a vocation and a necessity*, which testifies to the creative perception of the profession, and the self-proclamation of its predestination and inevitability:

“Professional is when it's in your blood and you just want to do photography all the time”. R4

The need to feel *belonging to a certain lifestyle*, which was also noted by Bourdieu (1990), was reflected in the remarks of some respondents. At the same time, Respondent 3 had a sublime, but as if deliberately light attitude towards photography as a profession, as if the process of photographing itself refers the photographer to a caste of creative people living in their own special world – only the opportunity to do what you love and the possibility to share your creative works brings satisfaction and motivation:

“I don't feel like I am working, but I think I am living my life. [...] As long as I still have passion about photography, I would say that I am really living a life, I am not just struggling for income. [...] You're a photographer, you make the setting in your life and it's better than others, because you know how every component belong to the other. Slow living photography is also a kind of philosophy”. R3

The philosophy of slow living identified by Respondent 3 refers to a trend especially prevalent in connection with the lockdown, when accelerated digitalization brought many people to adapt to a new lifestyle, making them “slow down”. According to my observations, the trend for “slow photos” is also actively supported by Instagram users.

Creativity in the photography profession, which is an inseparable part of it, develops in connection with *the need for public recognition*. Audience recognition is expressed in *satisfied customers* and positive feedback on their work, as well as in the form of an audience in social networks. Therefore, love for people, as Respondent 2 noted, is the most important aspect of the profession of a photographer, “without people it is impossible to work as a photographer”. The need for the recognition of the audience, its trust in the photographer as a professional, indicated by all participants, is subsequently expressed in the desire to study more about the audience behavior, for which, undoubtedly, the possibilities of social platforms are suitable:

“The most important is to be able to connect with my viewers, so they can feel my work. I want that they recognize me as a personality and a good photographer, so that means that public recognition is the most important thing”.

R4

Here I would like to dispute Boltanski and Chamboredon’s note that the photographers have confidence either in success or at least in minimal acquisitions from their work (1990). During the interview, the respondents showed the opposite situation: there is no confidence in their own success, but there is a great desire to develop and strive for success, namely, to receive recognition from the audience and high activity in social networks as a confirmation of appreciation. Most likely, receiving recognition from the audience and understanding of success are associated with the use of Instagram, which is characterized by algorithmic instability, and which is used by many photographers of different skill levels. Despite this, the respondents actively use Instagram in their work and adapt the opportunities provided to their needs. According to Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020), the success of creative users is tied to a specific cultural production platform, which means that the interviewed professional photographers are conceptually dependent on Instagram, and their understanding of success is also tied to Instagram.

*Instagram routine for professional needs.* The participants discussed their daily practices of using Instagram, as well as shared their attitudes towards this platform. All the respondents like using Instagram; they open the Instagram application very often; or do not even leave it, being there all the time. The Respondent 3 noted their own Instagram use every two hours, that is understood by the participant as “a lot of time”, which also confirms the serious attitude to the structuring of pastime on Instagram. The participants tried to analyze what actions they perform on Instagram most often, which would then allow them to characterize which of their actions can be attributed to the professional purposes, or “working” routine of professional photographers aimed at maintaining attention to their Instagram profile and for inspiration search.

Thus, the respondents identified such practices as building portfolio presentation, searching for a professional community, communication messaging, looking for models, saving inspirational content to “saved”. Photography portfolio presentation, and the importance of announcement of photography services were highlighted first by the respondents when the discussion came to a necessity of using Instagram for a photographer: “My Instagram is visible to other people primarily as a portfolio” (R2); “the most important on Instagram is a portfolio option” (R4).

The search for a professional community is carried out in the same way by all participants, including jumping from one already familiar account to another in a chain reaction: “I would say Instagram is the best thing for me now to use – also because of community. I have been able to meet so many people through it and I can find other creatives who are on the same boat as me, and we can connect. [...] When I search for inspiration, I just search people I have in mind. Sometimes I click on a “hashtag”, and then scroll through, but not often. [...] I find a photographer on my newsfeed that I really like, I go into their profile and jump from one to another follower” (R4).

Besides, Instagram fulfills its function as a messenger, maintaining communication with clients, the professional community, and friends: “I spend a lot of time on Instagram, I constantly look for ideas there, get inspired, and communicate” (R2); “it's a perfect platform for me to showcase my work, to reach more people, and for self-presentation, and for professional community, I mean, communication” (R3).

The respondents highlighted the importance for search potential models' search. The use of “search” tool, hashtags and geolocation allow to find suitable models by keywords: “I am constantly in touch with creative people with whom we are doing projects, together we are looking for models on Instagram” (R2); “I am also hunting models, deal with collaborations and communication via Instagram chats” (R4).

The “add to saved posts” tool, which allows users to save favorite Instagram posts to folders that are not visible to other users, is both a professional necessity and an inspiration. The interviewed professional photographers save posts with posing recommendations, useful tips, and inspirational content, that is valuable for their work: “I save other photos, if I like the style, the colors if I feel inspired. I also collect “saved” photos to use it on my photo shootings to be able to help clients with some poses” (R5).

For inspiration purposes the respondents also scroll the news feed, click on hashtags, and actively check the content of other creative users. Inspiration, direct or indirect, is what each of the respondents uses Instagram for: “I can get inspired by a random idea, a model photo, an agency photo” (R1); “I think that Instagram is not a targeted source of my inspiration, for me it is the people themselves” (R2); “I mainly just scroll because I follow a lot of photographers and I get my inspiration from Instagram” (R4). Instagram, being a visual platform, can influence the inspiration of professional photographers if they regularly watch Instagram content, that could be not only visually attractive images, but also people, places, and events.

In addition, Instagram is used by all the participants to attract the attention of potential customers to their profile. The respondents actively publish posts and stories, but also frequently “like” and comment other users. So, all the participants actively publish posts and stories, the frequency varies from daily posting to once a week. This is done both to fill the professional portfolio, to keep the profile active, and to attract the followers' attention: “I can post some stories every day, but for some posts... I probably post once a week” (R3); “When I post, I think about whether the client will “like” it. Of course, I am aware of the nuances in terms of publication time, and I try to adapt” (R2).

Besides, “liking” publications of other users is an action of all the respondents aimed at drawing attention to their approving action, to their ‘voice’: “If you really think the content is great, it's just very good to leave a “like” or sometimes just a simple emoji, so I often do that,” – R3. In addition, some of the respondents actively like all the publications they come across – it is understood that a new user will be flattered by the attention, and can “like” or follow in return, or even better, become inspired and order a photography service. In order to “mass like”, the respondents find users by using Instagram “Explore” section, “Search” function, geolocations, hashtags. Since the ‘like’ feature has a social approval value, the trick with “mass-liking” is aimed

at potential followers (clients) to make them feel self-worthy, as their posts are “liked” by the photographer. However, in the case of Respondent 5, it is only indeed worthy publications that get “likes”: “I press “likes” only when I really like someone’s content, not because we have a good relation, the only exception is my mother’s posts”.

It is following that such actions of professional photographers require a lot of time and some effort, which was also noted by the participants: “you can lose track of time” (R4); “sometimes it is time consuming” (R5). This fact, as well as the constant comparison of themselves with other users, leads users to frustration: “you can't stop comparing” (R1, R5); “the disadvantage of Instagram is that you compared sometimes your unsucess with someone else else's success” (R4). Despite this, the respondents admitted that they would never delete their Instagram, and they don’t even need a detox: “to delete your account means to immediately lose your job” (R1); “that would be scary” (R2); “once it disappears, I lose everything” (R3); “I am not ready” (R5); “I would rather change something in my works” (R5). Thus, the interviewed photographers admit their dependence on Instagram and bet on it in their profession.

The fact that the interviewed professional photographers consistently use Instagram shows that it has become an indispensable part of the photography profession. Motivated by a desire for professional growth and development, accompanied by expectations of increased income, increased confidence, and satisfaction from doing photography, the respondents are adapting the Instagram tools available to them to gain the desired audience recognition. Audience recognition is associated with understanding one's own success, but success on Instagram is not guaranteed for everyone, which forces respondents to be more active for algorithmic visibility. Such activity forms an individual Instagram routine, consisting of the practices of regular portfolio replenishment, active communication, searching for models and inspiration, and tactics to attract users' attention to your page. Such a number of active actions are not controlled by strict time frames either by the respondents or Instagram, which is addictive and cause platform dependency, which means that it has become an irregular and unpaid part of the work of a professional photographer, perceived by the respondents as a granted.

## 5.2 Photographers’ style affected by Instagram

Previously, it was studied how Instagram provides various tools for the respondents, who adapt them depending on the professional needs. It was also shown how the features of the Instagram infrastructure and its algorithmic nature make the photographers adapt, accept their “rules of the game” (Cotter, 2019), that contribute to organization of their professional practices. The photographic practices can also be inseparable from Instagram, the features of its infrastructure, its media form. The peculiarity of Instagram *media form* (Manovich, 2017) causes practices of curating professional profiles. Platform design requires the user to post photos of a certain shape and size that form rows and a so-called Instagram grid, in which photos cannot be swapped, but which allow for photo previews (discussed by Manovich, 2017). The respondents see this as an opportunity to creatively demonstrate their vision, they try to use the given form as an

opportunity to demonstrate their visual taste. The interviewed photographers find this of high importance, since previewing photos before opening them in full format is already able to interest a new visitor to the profile, to draw their attention to the work of a professional photographer. To attract, each creative user forms their own tactics based on their understanding of style. These tactics adapting and changing with the experience of the photographer, the study of other users' experience, and due to the platform changes.

Thus, *the importance of photographer's profile curation*, and compliance with a single style of photo publications on Instagram, was noted by the respondents, that is, maintaining a unified style of photos published on the Instagram grid, when the author does not upload all the photos for the sake of uploading, but with the understanding that the published photos are the "face", the photographer's portfolio. The respondents admitted that profile curation is mandatory; photographs must look organic, providing diverse images, but keeping recognizable photographer's visual style:

"Making everything beautiful is one of the aspects of your professional work. It is also obvious that there should be some variety of work in the Instagram grid – you can't just take pictures of faces and publish them in a row. [...] I do not publish all the photos, but I try to select those pictures that look good and match with colors and tones in my Instagram grid". R1

"I can't publish only photos of blondes in a row, alternating with brunettes, with children, for example. I try to adapt the colors too. If I understand that the photo in the grid stands out from the others (is too dark), I archive it and choose another one". R2

"I enjoy looking at a well-created Instagram grid, but it's each person's choice of how they choose their grid to look. I think it's nice when there's a flow, when you see that the photographer has a style. Do I think it's important for potential clients to see? Definitely. That's how they choose". R4

During the interview, it was noticeable that the desire to make profile "beautiful" greatly excites the respondents. They put themselves in the place of the audience to imagine how they would perceive the style of their profile from the outside, but they form judgments about the tastes of their audience either by browsing other people's pages on Instagram, or by trying to analyze the metric activity of their subscribers. Curation, like the use of various visual trends, is aimed both at distinguishing from other creative users, and at attracting and holding the attention of the audience in order to gain their recognition.

*Instagram photography trends and their adaptations.* All the participants noticed certain visual trends, and fashion for various retouch on Instagram. When discussing the most popular trends, the interviewed photographers showed a slight disdain in their voice, as if condemning

others for using the same visual techniques for their photos on Instagram. For example, “the craze for presets”, noted by Respondent 1, who was also quick to clarify that such way of editing photos is “hopelessly outdated”. Probably, because of such popularity of presets trend made some of the respondents complain that Instagram photos have become “the same and boring” (R2). Indeed, there are a huge number of presets with the help of which one can make fashionable effects: “to make photos older, grainy, with motion blur, or double exposure” (R5). Photography fashion in the style of analogue simulation and retro was noted by all the respondents as a current trend. Interesting is the observation of Respondent 5, who even observes differences in the style preferences of European and American Instagram: “I can see the difference in photography styles and color perception on Instagram photos from American and European users. Americans have different trends, different filters, and presets, they are more likely to use warm colors in comparison with Europe. European photography is more natural, and I like it more” (R5). According to Respondent 5, it is likely that the geographical factor may determine the visual preferences of the majority, which in general may also be due to the fashion trends of specific regions.

However, for those photographers who do not want to apply trending techniques in photo retouch, it is necessary to develop their own unique style:

“I am trying to discover my own style. So maybe I am taking bits of everything from other photographers, but I think photography is beautiful because you create it yourself. There are no people who photograph the same thing in the same way, you still choose your own angles and everything”. R4

Respondent 4 expressed a reluctance to apply trends in their work, insisting that “photography is beautiful because you create it yourself”. However, at the same time, the respondent suggested that the style is formed under the influence of other creative users works (who can be inspired by trends). It can be assumed that it is not possible to completely escape the influence of Instagram trends — for this one should not use the platform at all. Although in this case, if the majority of the photographer’s clients are active users of Instagram, they can request a photo shooting expecting results based on their familiarity with the visual techniques that prevail in their Instagram feed.

The respondents indicated that they could try any of the trends, either at the request of a client or in order to try something new. At the same time, they condemn plagiarism and repetition. According to the interviewed photographers, everyone should adapt Instagram trends, but not copy them. In photography, the main thing is to keep your vision: “you still choose your own angles” (R4):

“I understand that there are visual trends, people connect to them and copy each other. I am inspired, but I do not copy, I try to change or add something. [...] I even refuse some shootings, for example, pregnant women in puffy dresses or male nudity. [...] Sometimes I try ideas that I spied on Instagram, for example,

black and white photos with nuances of retouch — when it is not pure black and white, but a little warm”. R2

“I am not worried about being copied. I think, a good inspiration can inspire everyone, it's a good idea, and if I have the condition to recreate this idea, why not? I can try it. It's all for good content. But if you mean plagiarism, it's the thing I hate”. R3

Such remarks indicate that Instagram is fully used as a source of creative inspiration by the respondents who, to varying degrees, adapt the creativity of other users to their own artistic ideas. At the same time, each of the respondents claims the originality of their photos, perceiving the adaptation of ideas from Instagram in their work as a natural process.

As it was mentioned above, Instagram trends affects photographers' perception of creativity. Besides, some of their photographic practices, such as processes of planning and conducting photo shootings, and further retouch can be attributed to the changes triggered by Instagram. According to the respondents, the realization that their photos will be used on Instagram influences their creative thinking during taking photographs, as well as affect their attitude to photography retouch. The interviewed photographers, accepting in advance the inevitability of encountering the invariable form of Instagram, develop their own tactics for adapting their creativity, adjusting to the platform infrastructural features.

Thus, taking into account the estimated size and quality of an Instagram photo post, the respondents make adjustments during the photography process, minding subsequent photo crop and compression: “While on a photo shooting, I pay attention that the photo would be cropped for Instagram” (R5); “I always consider that the photo on Instagram will be cropped, so I take pictures with a margin” (R1); “Instagram spoils the quality, but you can adapt to this – for example, save the photo initially in a worse quality” (R1). At the same time, during the interview, photography was implied not with a mandatory purpose for Instagram, however, the photographers noted that, just in case, they always provide a “margin” in the photo, if suddenly the photos still need to be published. It turns out that photographic practices of respondents provide for the possible need for publication on Instagram.

Adapting photography retouch in favor of Instagram is caused by the habit of curating Instagram profiles discussed earlier. It means that, having determined the curation style or pattern, the respondents are forced to adhere to them, visually adjusting all the photographs they make, if there is a need for their subsequent publication:

“I add brightness on some of my photos because they may look too dark for Instagram”. R5

“I prefer not to photograph the sky or crop it during retouch, because I don't like how it looks on my Instagram grid”. R1

“I have noticed that my style and color attitudes may be changed because of the use of Instagram. [...] When I see something beautiful, I already compose it in my mind and think about the color grading, the post-production and how I post on Instagram. This is just happening within some seconds”. R3

It follows that if the practice of adding brightness to photographs, which Respondent 5 uses, can be provoked not only by Instagram, but also by the mobile phone screen, then the deliberate avoidance of photographing blue sky is definitely caused by the peculiarities of curating an Instagram profile. Respondent 3's response demonstrates photography perception as if through an Instagram “viewfinder”, which means a complete adaptation of the photographic practices that Instagram predetermines.

In an attempt to structure their work, as well as save time scheduling Instagram posts, some of the respondents use third-party services for the Instagram profile preview feature. That allows professional photographers to pre-plan future posts, which makes it easier to maintain a consistent visual profile style:

“I use third party apps to organize my posts in Instagram grid and plan my future photo publications. Sometimes I can spend several hours trying to figure out which photo is worth publishing, which one fits better. This is a lot of time. And then which of the photos to put on the cover of the carousel? So sometimes I just post one photo. These planning apps somehow do not make life easier, but on the contrary, it becomes harder”. R1

However, it turned out that such applications do not save time, but consume it even more, so the practice of planning an Instagram feed can cause dissatisfaction and annoyance among the respondents. It can be concluded that the use of such planning tools can be considered a sufficient part of the work of professional photographers, that is not paid either.

The rethinking of photo retouch practices by the respondents is linked to their long-term active use of Instagram, where the photographers regularly look at other accounts and compare the photographs of other users with themselves:

“I have noticed that my style and vision have been changed during the past years after using Instagram for a while. And I can admit that it can be connected, that I scroll a lot on Instagram and watch other people's work, that it influences my visual style. I think it's a never-ending thing, because you learn a lot of new things, and then you rediscover yourself. I have been re-editing some pictures that I didn't like from a couple of years ago, because my style changed”. R4

“I notice that while using Instagram, it affects my visual style, I gradually change something in retouching”. R1

“I realize a contribution of Instagram to my professional work. When I started, I was looking at others a lot, trying to copy their style from their best works, that helped me a lot. And then I started to be more on my own. Currently I find new styles all the time, and I don’t like my old works anymore”. R5

The rethinking of their old photographs noted by Respondents 4 and 5 may indicate that they are constantly developing their style and creativity, noticing improvements compared to their former self. But this practice can also be caused by the need for frequent posts on Instagram, which means that if the respondent does not have enough photos to post, then some of the old works can be adapted, giving them a new, relevant look.

The respondents believe that individual creativity rethinking is inevitable due to the fact that Instagram is a visual platform designed for inspiration. Thus, Instagram, acting as a “visual aid”, affects the visual taste and photography in general:

“Instagram affects photography and will continue to do so. Because photographers are people who work with images, they are “visuals”. R2

“Before we had magazines, and now we have Instagram, and I am curious of the input of Instagram because it's a visual platform, and it's about images, and looking at these images makes some influence”. R4

“Instagram is influencing on our visual taste. It's kind of aesthetics, and it will direct the way you live your life”. R3

It turns out that the Instagram aesthetic is generally accepted by the respondents. Some of them notice a desire not only to rethink the creative principles, but also the influence of Instagram on the lifestyle, “behind the scenes” of photographic practices. But at the same time, as Manovich (2017, p. 89) notes, the influence of Instagram on the photographer, and the photographer influence on Instagram are interconnected. In parallel with how Instagram influences the visual preferences of photographers, photographers themselves bring new styles to Instagram that are gaining popularity with the audience.

Thus, the Instagram aesthetic, formed from the variety of published photos as a result of the activities of creative users, consists of visual styles, the popularity of those are supported by loyal users. Instagram, which is recognized as a visual platform, algorithmically promotes the most popular photos, acting as a visual aid that serves as inspiration and influences the formation of the visual taste of active users. According to the respondents, the realization that photos can potentially be published on Instagram influences their creative thinking in the process of planning and conducting a photo shoot, photos selection and retouch. This means that photographers’ perception of their photographic practices is inseparable from the influence of Instagram.

The respondents' rethinking of creative practices is associated with the active use of Instagram, where photographers regularly study other accounts and compare photos of other users with their own. The respondents form their visual techniques and tactics based on their understanding of visual taste, which can change with the experience of using Instagram, studying the works of other users, and changes in the platform itself.

The existence of visual trends on Instagram is recognized by the respondents as inspiration and experiment, although their massive use and copying causes condemnation, expressed by remarks: "the craze for presets" (R1), "hopelessly outdated" (R1), "same and boring" (R2). At the same time, not even copying trends, but adapting them, alongside with regular contemplation, forming observation, has an impact on one's visual taste, which is likely to affect the work of a professional photographer. In the meantime, it seems that if the client audience is actively scrolling through the Instagram feed, regularly contemplating photo content with high metrics that only increase their trust – this will influence the formation of their expectations from the work of the photographer when ordering a photo shooting.

### 5.3 Metricated mindset

*Practices of Instagram profile analysis.* When discussing Instagram metrics, it becomes necessary to consider the interaction of respondents with the marketing functionality of the Instagram platform. The respondents demonstrated their interest and knowledge of the availability of Instagram Insights analytics for their business profiles, which shows the best published posts; the number, gender, age of followers; and the best time to post. Instagram Insights reveals impressions of publications and account, i.e., how often publications are reviewed, that helps to draw conclusions about the usefulness of publications; reach, which means the number of unique views; profile views; "likes", comments, "saves" and the sum of all these metrics engagement is a metric for the success of publications with the audience. This is an algorithm for the self-analysis practice of professional photographers: Instagram Insights show the best photo publications, and then the photographer needs to determine on what basis these publications became the best in order to repeat the success in the future:

"It is important to know the activity of the profile — how many people visit the profile, what coverage, how many of your photos have been saved by users, – this is the total reach". R1

"I always check "likes" because that shows what people like to see and what they don't. It helps me analyze my own work. I always check how many views I have on my stories and how many interactions, because I like to keep the engagement going. That's the purpose of social media, and if people engage more, that means they remember you more". R4

According to Respondent 4, it appears that the purpose of social media is to enable user engagement. Thus, creative users should use this opportunity to be remembered by the audience, and their followers should respond with “likes” and comments if they are impressed. The more users paid attention to the post, the more likely it was that the post was remembered. This justifies the algorithmic logics of promoting content that got higher audience engagement, since if a post is actively responded to, it has the potential to elicit similar reactions from other users.

The *desire for high metric presentation* was noted by all participants during the interviews. High metrics that are visible to other users increase the photography value for its creator, give confidence and serve as a motivation for further posting. The number of followers was unanimously noted by all interview participants as the most significant, determining factor in their success, causing pride: “My number of followers I am proud of is a kind of achievement” (R3); “I think it does impact on how you view the person in some way, like depending on how many followers they have” (R4); “if you have more than a thousand followers, that makes you legit” (R5). Therefore, the fall in the number of subscribers is a concern and frustration; and the excess of the number of subscribers over subscribers looks suspicious and does not inspire confidence. The respondents prefer that the number of their subscribers exceed the number of those they subscribe to, as this gives a sense of correctness, customer trust, and looks respectable:

“If I see that the number of followers has decreased, I feel uncomfortable and scared. [...] Once I cleaned “bots” from my Instagram followers. But then I saw how much the difference before and after affected the final number, although I deleted only about 30 accounts. I was so worried. These bots are hard to tear from the heart, you get used to them and even love them”. R1

“You shouldn’t follow more people than the number of your own followers, it looks weird and suspicious that you are buying followers”. R5

This confirms that the respondents are concerned about their reputation and the impression they make on others. Another indicator of audience recognition is a high number of “likes”. “Likes” were noted as an important indicator needed to better understand the preferences of their audience. There is also a dependence of respondents on the number of “likes”: “if a post doesn’t get more than like 30 “likes”, I would delete it” (R4). At the same time, it was indicated that hiding “likes” also leads to disorientation: “once I wanted to hide the “likes” number, but then I was dissuaded. It looks strange from the outside, especially for potential clients who may be interested in checking your activity for authenticity” (R1). Story view count is also under the scrutiny of the interviewed professional photographers:

“I always check how many views I have on my stories and how many interactions depending on what topic I bring up, because I like to keep the engagement going”. R4

“This work as a kind of encouragement for me, like people really viewed your story, they really interacted with it, which means I am living in a real society, that we can support each other, so the viewers can be supportive to me”. R3

In addition to “likes”, the respondents expect their followers to express support in the form of feedback, which can be expressed through reactions to stories, or a message. In general, all existing Instagram options that allow users to give feedback, qualitatively in the form of comments or quantitatively in the form of “likes”, are welcomed by the creative users.

The possibility to know how many users have “saved” photos posted on Instagram was noted by the participants as one of the most significant indicators of audience approval, because it means that someone was inspired by the work of the photographer and wants to be able to review this inspiration: “The number of “saves” is more important than “likes”, because the user directly took and purposefully saved your photo. Because both “like” and “comment” – it’s just a click” (R1).

Thus, respondents may prioritize the importance of various metrics in different ways, but they invariably expect their constant growth.

*Attitude to metrics.* Despite the understanding of the importance of analyzing metrics, it was noted that the respondents do not attach great strategic importance to them, being guided by metrics rather to determine momentary attention to their publications. They can also attribute low engagement to the fact that the audience does not share the same sense of taste, and vice versa – somewhere there is always a person who can appreciate the respondent's photos:

“To me it's good to have high metric presentation, but it's not that necessary. I am doing what I am happy with, and I don't want to change myself much just because I want to cater for my viewers”. R3

“Sometimes I post photos that are not for everyone’s understanding, because I know, I would still find those minors with a good taste who would like it”. R5

However, such statements that metrics do not cause a desire to adapt the respondents’ creativity in order to increase them contradict other statements of the same respondents, that still proves the metrics importance:

“I pay attention to a view count – it means I reached a lot of people, even though they don't like it. There's an option to see how many people this photo reached [...] My number of followers I am proud of is a kind of achievement”. R3

“The number of saves and shares are the most important for me, because it helps to further promotion. “Likes” and comments I always check before reviewing the number of followers. Sometimes I open insights and see the performance

there. I think my potential clients care a lot about the number of followers I have. I think if you have more than a thousand followers, that makes you legit”. R5

Most likely, the respondents desired not to pay so much attention to metrics, otherwise it could have a negative impact: “If you care too much about the results, you will be crazy” (R3).

Some respondents also expressed compassion for users who, in their opinion, do not have enough followers or “likes”: “I started following one photographer recently, and the pictures are so good, and then I checked how many followers he has. And he has like 1 800 followers, and I thought: wow, this person needs to be seen! I like sharing work of people who are less well known, because I think that people need to see them, and I know how hard it is to build that community, and some people are just lucky with it” (R4).

Due to the inability to long-term marketing analytics of metrics, some of the respondents also note the need to listen to the opinion of experts who share tips on improving their profile metrics: “I watch some vloggers that give advice on [...] how to support your high metric presentation all the time” (R4); “I follow some experts” (R5).

It turned out that the respondents became aware of their “metricated mindset” only during the discussion of account analytics practices during the interview process. Most of the participants reacted unexpectedly and emotionally: “Oh my god, I seem to have a metricated mindset!” (R1); “I think I’m depending on metrics on Instagram” (R5); “Metrics are important, and [...] I depend on them” (R4). Such an emotional reaction indicates a negative attitude towards their dependence on Instagram metrics, as it is unpleasant for respondents to admit that the focus from creativity, which is the default for photographers, is moving to studying their own indicators of success. I believe that the factor of acquaintance and their awareness that I am “one of them”, I am also a photographer, helped me to receive such recognition from the respondents, which means that I face the same difficulties during my professional activity.

To summarize, for professional photographers, visible Instagram metrics act as an indicator of success, influencing the perception of their work. The respondents perceive metrics as a guide, that have a “big impact on decision-making” (Esposito and Stark, 2019). In addition, their practice includes the study of various ways of analytics of Instagram indicators in order to better understand the preferences of their audience. The metrics are endless in their improvement, and the respondents are striving to increase them, at the same time a little fearful of their impact on their mental health.

#### 5.4 Practicing anticipation of Instagram algorithms

The respondents admitted that they were aware of the algorithmic management of Instagram. The algorithmic knowledge, gained mainly from opinion leaders, shapes the respondents' perception of how their photographs are considered by the platform. The attitude towards algorithms from the perspective of censorship was immediately noted by some of the respondents at the beginning of our discussion of Instagram algorithms. The Respondents 1 and 4, whose

photos balance on the verge of the “nude” genre, claimed against strict policy of Instagram algorithms: “Instagram often deletes my posts with nude photos, I think this is a tough policy. It's annoying, it's too much control. People have the right to naked photos” (R1); “senseless censorship, I think it really limits what you can share and what you cannot” (R4). Following censorship, the participants recalled a different function of Instagram algorithms, namely how they determine potentially successful posts for further exposure to the Instagram audience. Of a particular interest here is the statement of “algorithmic game” in the phrase of the Respondent 2, which shows the excitement, causing a desire to adapt algorithms:

“This [Instagram] is a good source of my income, so I accept the rules of the Instagram algorithmic game. I understand that there is a set of algorithms and rules, it's good to know about it for your own benefit”. R2

It also follows from this that the earnings of a professional photographer depend on Instagram, so here it is necessary to “reconcile” with its algorithms and accept their conditions.

Some of the respondents are constantly exploring the possibilities of “*appeasing*” algorithms, for which they appeal to the help of experts or bloggers:

“I have been following one influencer on Instagram who's sharing a lot of tips on how to get seen, and I have tried some of the tactics. He also said that it's good to have once 24 hours fully off Instagram, no stories, no nothing, and then start posting it again. I tried that and that worked: stories views from 200 went to 400, and I thought that's crazy”. R4

“I'm interested in learning tricks how to please my algorithms; I follow some experts”. R5

However, some respondents prefer to predict how algorithms will work on their own, relying on their intuition: “I don't watch bloggers' content, but I have my own feel about algorithmic promotion” (R3). In any case, all the respondents are characterized by a desire to guess the features of the algorithms, but there is no solution that provides algorithmic visibility; no one knows exactly how the algorithms work, since they have a black-boxed nature (Bucher, 2016).

The desire to predict the work of algorithms is caused by *the threat of invisibility and the need for being permanently active*, that is explained by the respondents as a motivation to be in a productive working condition and an obligatory part of their work:

“I always keep in mind that all my clients come from Instagram, so I try to be visible to others as much as I can. It is important for me to be visible all the time; pauses and detoxes from social networks in general are not my relatable to me. [...] Sometimes I force myself to make a photo post to shake things up, to get

back into the routine. Then I get “likes” from the audience, new orders for a photo shooting, and everyone is happy. I believe being visible is part of my job”. R2

“A threat of invisibility I absolutely have. I know what is good and what is bad for my profile. I don’t want to lose my followers, so I want to be visible and force myself to publish more often. Sometimes I think “oh my god, I have to post something, otherwise people will forget who I am”. R5

“If I keep creating good content, probably the algorithm will promote my content to more people, but I know, it takes time”. R3

Creating “good content” mentioned by the Respondent 3, means to take care of the photos a photographer wants to publish – only the best photos that the respondent strived for have a potential to be promoted by algorithms. It is a belief in the fairness of algorithms, in the fact that efforts will always eventually be rewarded with visibility. It should be mentioned here that Respondent 5, announcing the “threat of invisibility”, mentioned that after my explanation and definition of this concept, since during our interview the respondent described its features while sharing the feelings about the necessity of frequent publishing and being constantly present on Instagram in order to be visible.

The continuous experience of the respondents interacting with Instagram algorithms, as well as the desire to anticipate algorithms, lead to the formation of some rules or tactics, *caused by assumptions on the work of Instagram algorithms*. The interviewed photographers have their own tactics, but since these tactics are not well founded and their effectiveness is not proven, the participants have different levels of confidence in their actions on Instagram and continue to come up with new ways to approach algorithms to achieve visibility. Here could be mentioned, for instance, the assumption that Instagram is promoting photos with *certain visual characteristics*, that brings some users to deliberately create photos in a potentially successful visual style: “algorithm promotes brighter and sharper photos. I hate when people just photograph whatever and it looks good because it has a smooth background and sharp, but it's senseless, and they always have a lot of engagement” (R4), “algorithms do not like a lot of details in a photo” (R1).

Besides that, the respondents mentioned the necessity of *active use of Instagram tools*, that would probably cause better algorithmic promotion of their photo publications: “I use geotags and hashtags to make my photos more attractive for Instagram. If I figure out how to promote them better, I will definitely try it” (R3). It also means that the respondents are always in search for better techniques in pleasing algorithms to perform on Instagram better.

Another assumption is that the *algorithms track users’ digital movements*, since they are supposed to determine the worthiness of the subsequent promotion of a photo on the platform based on the users’ activity: “if one viewer spends more time on your photo, the algorithm will detect this situation and it will attract more viewers to come to your post. If a viewer does something like

zoom in or zoom out on your photo to take a closer look at your photos, then the algorithm will know this, so it will be promoted, this is my guess” (R3).

Apart from that, the respondents assume that algorithms are considered to contribute to greater promotion of publications of those users *who already have many subscribers*: “If you have lots of followers, algorithms make you visible on explore page to bring more attention to your work” (R5). Respondent 5, speaking about the promotion of the best posts to the tops of Instagram, suspects algorithms do not contribute to promotion of professional photographers and content creators: “algorithm works better for ordinary users”, assuming that Instagram aim is to contribute to grow of users who create non-professional content.

Some of the respondents *organize photo shootings* to be able to post regularly on Instagram, which is also dictated by the “threat of invisibility”. Respondent 4 takes photos in the self-portrait genre, as such photos resonate with the audience: “When I want to boost my profile, I know that I just need to publish my self-portrait – I do the shooting intentionally, then I think I need to do it for my Instagram. I don't like it. I don't want to do something because I need to post something” (R4). Respondent 1 uses the chances of shooting in suitable conditions for Instagram: “Sometimes I wake up in the morning and notice the sunny beautiful lighting, some interesting details, and I decide to organize a photo shoot for Instagram. [...] Whenever I go out, I try to take a photo for stories” (R1). Publishing photos in Instagram stories, that last for 24 hours only, does not require that much effort to create a suitable photo, because it is considered to be more informal in terms of style. Anyways, it is considered to be one of the most suitable instruments to gain the audience attention, that is why it is not enough already with posting photographs on the main feed.

*Strict timing* for posting was determined by most of the participants – this is how they assume at what time the algorithms will be able to show their posts to more people:

“I never post in the morning, afternoon, or Sunday. I always post around 6-7pm. Later than nine in the evening I will not publish either. There are rarely exceptions”. R1

“I post photos only at 2 pm in CES time, because most of the world is awake. So, in America they already woke up, and in China and Japan they are still not asleep, so you will get more attention. You must wait until everyone wakes up, and they can like your post”. R3

“Especially on weekends, like Friday night and Saturday people spend their time in real life, they don't spend too much time online, so I think it's a bad idea to post during that time, because people won't pay attention to social media”. R3

This practice of posting at certain times of the day is caused by the respondents’ own assumptions, the advice of experts they listen to, and the use of Instagram’s analytical tools. It turns out that despite they previously characterized the work of algorithms as unpredictable, the

respondents do not have awareness, or they deliberately ignore the fact that the algorithmic feature of Instagram is to rank the published content – this is the official position of Instagram. Ranking means that the users’ posts can be shown to their followers at different times based on individual preferences and interests, and not necessarily at the same time the post is made. Probably, the plan of scheduled publications makes sense to do not in order to reach the largest audience, but for the sake of organizing the working practice of a professional photographer.

In this way, the anticipation of algorithms and the forced need to apply certain tactics to be visible can be considered additional duties in the work of professional photographers. In addition, constant thoughts about the nature of algorithmic activity cause *algorithmic anxiety* for some of the respondents: “Algorithms give me a lot of anxiety, because some people don't see my work, and it's so hard to get seen, because Instagram has so many people” (R4). However, although they realize that the ability to predict algorithms will increase popularity, some of the respondents prefer not to think much about them: “if you always think about these algorithms, you can go crazy” (R1); “algorithms make you feel anxious because you're constantly thinking about it” (R4).

Thus, the described rules or tactics for predicting algorithms are caused by the desire of the respondents to be algorithmically recognizable and visible. Visibility is associated with success by the interviewed professional photographers (same associations have cultural workers in Duffy, 2020, and digital influencers in Cotter, 2019). The fear of getting lost among other creative users on Instagram, as well as to disappear from the audiences’ line of sight, is provoked by the “threat of invisibility”. The respondents believe that being visible is a motivation for taking new photographs, and an indispensable part of the work of the photographer's profession.

## 6. Discussion

The interviewed professional photographers noted their desire to develop in the profession, which means they want to achieve photography mastery, grow in a professional way. They indicated that between the profession of a photographer and a mastery of craft, a thorny path is expected, associated with the accumulation of experience and the development of one's technical and artistic skills. There is no sense of limit in development as a photography professional here, this process is assumed to be active, requiring constant attention and interest in photographic activity, in the development of genre and style diversity, according to the respondents. This correlates with what Bourdieu (1990) calls the constant technical and aesthetic search in photographic practice.

According to the respondents, in order for a photographer to be called a professional, one needs to strive to gain photographic experience, and also to be able to confidently demonstrate a variety of creative skills and show genres diversity in their portfolio. This demonstration, visible through the portfolio on the Instagram platform, is designed to give the respondents satisfaction from the photographic activity, which means it gives a reason to declare themselves as professionals and raise prices for their services.

Since photography education, internships or clubs do not promise further employment and earnings, it remains to be optional. Perhaps the lack of relevant education among many professional photographers, as well as different levels of background and worldview, are the reasons why the respondents, when describing the profession of a photographer, prioritize certain qualities over others in different ways. This may confirm the "utopia of the organized profession" discussed in Bourdieu's book; there is no common fixed set of mandatory photographic qualities and principles; photographers have the right to designate themselves as professionals if they wish to be in the profession and develop in it, regardless of the amount of their experience and the presence of special education (Boltanski and Chamboredon, 1990, pp.152-155).

At the same time, the desire to be a photography artist introduces some uncertainty into the profession of a photographer, which is caused by an ambiguous attitude of the respondents towards creativity. The respondents agree with Bourdieu (1990) that true artistic photography involves aesthetic intent and does not fall within the logic of established artistic practices. The interviewed photographers need to be recognized for their creativity; so the opportunity to work for the sake of creativity can push aside the need for a high salary. However, the desire for higher level of income and strive for continuous creative implementation balance each other, caused by the fear of being branded as a mercantile photographer or a poor artist. These fears can be caused in connection with the popularization and democratization of photography, especially due to Instagram, which means that it is more difficult to get the attention of the public and its recognition.

In addition, Boltanski and Chamboredon (1990, p. 171) argue that the photographer not only creates works of art with an arbitrarily determined value, but also provides services that are subject to rational evaluation; however, the services of the interviewed professional photographers are mainly related to photography and digital content creation, where prices are always arbitrary.

Therefore, it is complicated to say, following the authors, that a photographer, by virtue of the profession, will not be left without a livelihood, since in modern times, constantly growing competition, and a large number of people who want to provide their services even at the minimum price range, brings them to make concessions and be prepared for a possible loss in the battle for the client in advance.

Creativity in the photography profession, which is an integral part of it, develops in connection with the need for public recognition on Instagram. As noted by the respondents, the recognition of the audience is expressed in satisfied customers, positive feedback, in the manifestation of audience confidence, which was also noted during the interviews as the most important indicators of the photographers' success. The remark of Boltanski and Chamboredon (1990) that photographers are either confident in success or in the minimum gains from their work can be challenged here, since the respondents did not have a firm confidence in their own success but expressed a great desire to develop and strive for success, namely, for the recognition of the audience on Instagram. Receiving recognition from the audience and understanding of success in general the respondents associate with the use of Instagram, which is characterized by algorithmic instability and a huge variety of photographers of different skill levels.

All participants justified the need to maintain the activity of their professional profiles on Instagram. Regular practices of using Instagram are caused by the desire to maintain the attention of an existing audience, and to attract a new one that can be seen as potential customers. These are the practices of building a portfolio, presenting photography services, searching for a professional community and potential models, communication, and searching for inspiration. Each of these practices involves the formation of certain tactics that are perceived by the respondents as mandatory, as part of their work, which is aimed at success, however, does not guarantee it.

To attract and hold the attention of potential customers to their profile, they use frequent publication of posts and stories; frequent liking aimed at drawing attention to their approving action, as well as mass liking and mass following; visual profile curation, often using third-party services. The need to take so many actions on Instagram leads respondents to admit that they lose track of time, they use Instagram all the time and do not feel the need to be offline, they are afraid of losing access to their page or if Instagram suddenly closes. This fact testifies not only to the dependence on the platform itself, but also that Instagram is recognized as the main working tool of professional activity, an intermediary between the photographer and the audience, and a place for inspiration.

The desire to emphasize the uniqueness of one's own style for the audience and stand out among other photographers presented on Instagram provokes individual practices of curating professional profiles, which is due to the media form of Instagram. Since Instagram can be characterized by the uniqueness of its media form, then the photographic practices associated with further publication on Instagram are associated with its form. Adapting to the form of Instagram changes photography technical requirements and shapes artistic practices of the photographer, for example, the transition of the usual aspect ratio of the image 3:2 first to the square, and then to 4:5 and 16:9. It can be said that Instagram also lowers the quality bar by not requiring high image

quality, which is due to the mobility of the application and the small screens of modern smartphones. As a result, photographers use additional compositional techniques and tools to add more visual impact to their photographs (Manovich, 2017, p.110).

Among such techniques of the respondents, an increase in brightness, adding sharpness, and using presets were noted. Several of these techniques combined form the visual tactics, or rules, for photo production and retouch. Visual techniques that have been successful with the audience are subsequently reproduced, which leads to the popularization of various kinds of aesthetics on Instagram and the fashion for certain visual styles in photography.

All the respondents noticed the existence of visual trends, but showed disdain for the most popular of them, confessing their unwillingness to reproduce the already mass style in their photographs. The respondents do not want to merge with the mass of Instagram, they want to maintain their unique vision, even if they are inspired by other users' visuals.

The interviewed photographers' observations showed that it is impossible to completely avoid the influence of Instagram trends, since the style can be formed under the influence of the work of other creative users who can be inspired by certain trends. Especially if photographer's clients got inspired to order a photo shooting from a photographer on Instagram, they expect, if not reproduction, then the use of similar visual techniques to the photos they regularly see on Instagram. This only confirms Instagram's ubiquitous influence on the visual experience of its users. As Respondent 4 remarks, "before we had magazines, and now we have Instagram, and I am curious of the input of Instagram because it's a visual platform, and it's about images, and looking at these images makes some influence".

Thus, Instagram influences the creative thinking of photographers, predetermining the finished result, intervening in the planning, photography creation, and retouch processes. Therefore Instagram affects the perception of reality, where creative users see and perceive a photo, as if through Instagram prism. Some of the interviewed professional photographers admitted that they even reworked the processing of previously taken photos in accordance with the new understanding of visual style shaped by Instagram. Rethinking creativity is inevitable in connection with the attitude to Instagram as a "visual guide", where photos recognized by a large number of users have high engagement rates.

High metric presentation among the respondents is associated with an understanding of whether the audience recognizes or not their photographic content, and, therefore, is associated with their successes or failures. Due to the need to understand the preferences of the audience, the respondents study the analytics of their Instagram profile. The respondents pay attention to their metrics in Instagram Insights, that helps to analyze the user engagement. However, the respondents do not consider it a mandatory practice in their work, however, still check their metrics often.

During the interview, it was also noted that the respondents are not always inclined to consider the metrics' value in the long term, focusing on studying them more to determine the momentary attention to their publications. This is what distinguishes influencers/bloggers from a group of professional photographers: the latter are not so responsible for detailed analytics and do not have a true "marketing approach", believing that it is impossible to unambiguously determine

the reason for the success or failure of a photo publication, and higher or lower engagement metrics can be a matter of chance. The respondents, focusing on the visual component of Instagram, and filling it with photos, do not consider it necessary to actively appeal to “marketing” advice of bloggers to publish various types of content, that means not only photographs, but also videos. They refer to themselves as photo artists who should be recognized mostly through their artistic practice, namely photographs, pointing that “video is a different kind of art” (R2). However, nowadays it is considered to be complicated to gain popularity by posting only photographic content because of the peculiarity of Instagram algorithms, that have recently introduced video-based Reels and IGTV.

The desire for a larger quantitative indicator, or higher metrics, is common to all respondents, pointing to the “growth fetish”. The respondents are very concerned about the representativeness of their profiles and monitor the acceptable correlation of the level of subscriptions and subscribers. That is why, for example, “dead” users are not removed from followers for fear of underestimating their number (R1), and posts with a low number of “likes” are deleted or archived (R2, R4). The option to hide “likes” was deemed “disorienting” (R1), making it impossible for the audience to verify the account's authenticity. The option to “save” a photo is singled out by the participants, since this is “not just a click” (R1), but an indicator that someone is really inspired by the photographer’s work and will return to view this publication again. Metrics carry their own additional meaning for each user, they are social capital, described by Bourdieu (1984) and observed in Grosser’s experiment (2014). “The likes we give show our taste and culture to others, and the likes we get show that our statements and collections are worthy of recognition,” as Grosser (2014) said, which is exactly in line with the mindset of the respondents. All the interviewed photographers admitted that they have a “metricated mindset”, and that it determines their behavior on Instagram.

Apart from “metricated mindset”, the respondents are highly influenced by the logics of Instagram algorithms. The Respondent 2’s phrase “I accept the rules of the Instagram algorithmic game” means the recognition of the importance, inevitability, and acceptance of algorithms. The desire to earn money from Instagram audience leads to the desire to be constantly visible to potential customers, which was noticed by all the respondents.

The fear of disappearing from audience visibility is explained by a “threat of invisibility” considered by Bucher (2012): “I have to publish something, otherwise people will forget who I am” (R5). It seems that, in general, the respondents perceive the “threat of invisibility” as a motivation for active work. Being visible on Instagram has become a full part of being a professional photographer. At the same time, the majority of participants noted that they do not want to think too much about algorithms and bother, because “otherwise you can go crazy.” Duffy (2020; Duffy et al., 2019) suggests that algorithm anxiety may stem from the fear of losing a stable income as a consequence of “algorithmic precarity”.

Duffy (2020) claims that cultural workers in a platforming environment are only as good as their knowledge of the algorithm, therefore, from the interview results it follows that professional photographers are as good as their ability to adapt to algorithms for the sake of visibility. Since a

big number of Instagram users are always visible, the respondents are forced to fight for the attention of their audience, which means considering the work of algorithmic systems to achieve maximum coverage of their publications. The tactics developed in anticipation of the algorithms, however, are not aimed at outsmarting or deceiving them, but rather to appease. The respondents are not always sure that the use of certain tactics will necessarily give a positive result, but they feel obliged to try to apply them and study what is used by successful users, to do “everything possible to be visible” (R1), or “algorithmically recognizable” (Gillespie, 2017); build yourself “in anticipation of algorithms” (Duffy, 2019; 2020). This is because on Instagram, some algorithmic features and innovations are openly announced by the company, and some are “strategically hidden”, which inevitably makes the work of active content creators more complicated, Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020) note.

It can also be noted that many of the tactics used by the respondents do not receive sufficient justification, for example: “If the viewer zooms in or out on the photo, then the algorithm will know about it, so it will advance, this is my guess” (R3). Poorly justified tactics include aimed at a specific visual of photos, which is caused by the judgment that algorithms promote bright / clear / sharp photos, with a “blurry background” or with “less details”. Most justified are tactics related to the use of Instagram tools, the effectiveness of which the respondents can check in the statistics of their profiles. These include the active use of geotags, hashtags, as well as the designation of a posting time. Although the decision to schedule publications is based not so much on statistical metrics, but more on the personal respondents’ judgments about the expected busyness of their active audience in the mornings / evenings / weekends. Strict timing practices bring more routine work activities into the professional life of a photographer, giving a sense of stability.

Subsequently, the organization of regular photographic practices becomes an important part of the daily life of the interviewed professional photographers. Overall, the desire to predict the work of algorithms is caused by the “threat of invisibility”, that is explained by the respondents as a motivation to be in a productive working condition and an obligatory part of their work. Although the respondents would like to guess the features of Instagram algorithms, there is no solution that provides algorithmic visibility for everyone; no one knows exactly how the algorithms work, since they have a black-boxed nature (Bucher, 2016), they are always changing and do not want to be revealed. Thus, the more the respondents try to adapt the work routine, considering their understanding of how algorithmic systems work, the stronger the influence of Instagram on the respondents’ perception of their regular work practices is observed. Instagram transforms the old practices of respondents and organizes new ones, which in platform conditions are part of the work of a professional photographer.

## 7. Limitations

The limitations in the current thesis can be considered a) a relatively small sample of respondents to participate in the interviews; b) the age of the respondents from 20 to 35 years. I believe that a larger sample of respondents would contribute to an even more detailed discussion about the characteristics of the photographic practices of individuals; that means more experience — more interesting examples for the further analysis. Interviewing older respondents would allow for a more detailed analysis of how much professional photographic practices have changed with the advent of Instagram, based on the personal experience of professional photographers. However, here the difficulty would be to find such photographers who would bet on Instagram in their career, since it is likely that older photographers use other platforms and other ways of presenting their work.

In general, even by increasing the number of respondents, I would not expect other, opposite results of my work, since initially I selected respondents who focus on Instagram in their professional activities. In addition, during the interviews, when voicing their opinion, the respondents could have in mind not only their personal experience, but also the experience of those they personally know, because many photographers communicate with each other and share their professional experience. Therefore, I consider their answers sufficient and worthy of attention for study.

## 8. Conclusion

I was able to examine the professional photographers' practices, that are reflected in their professional and creative activities due to the constant use of the Instagram platform. Instagram tools are actively adapting by the photographers depending on their professional needs, that entails in evolving *regular online practices* such as portfolio maintaining, active publishing, communication, searching for inspiring content, "liking" and "following" other users. The practice of visual profile curation, as well as the practice of applying certain visual trends are aimed at distinguishing from other photographers and creative users, even if the other users' works acted as a source of inspiration.

The *influence on the creative thinking* of professional photographers by Instagram is manifested in the practices of planning, conducting photo shootings, and retouch. The practice of rethinking and re-editing the old photographs according to the current Instagram visual trends is caused by the necessity to frequently post photographs on Instagram profile. Even if the photo shooting is not carried out for the purpose of further posting on Instagram, the photographers still consider the current Instagram trends, Instagram image requirements, and the style of their profile.

Apart from that, the continuous experience of the professional photographers interacting with Instagram, cause the desire to anticipate algorithms, that leads to the *formation of practices caused by the assumptions* on the work of Instagram algorithms. For example, the assumption that Instagram promotes photos with certain visual characteristics, brings some photographers to create photos in a potentially successful style. The necessity of active use of Instagram tools is caused by the feeling that it would lead to a better algorithmic promotion of photo publications. The assumption that algorithms contribute to a greater promotion of the users with many subscribers, makes photographers to think of the necessity to increase their followers' number. Although the photographers are guessing the features of the algorithms, their actions cannot guarantee the algorithmic visibility, since the algorithms are changing all the time, and their essence remains inaccessible.

Instagram algorithmic architecture is shaping new behavior for professional photographers on the platform, "organizing users experience" (Bucher, 2012, 2018). The need to be always online and frequently post is explained by the "*threat of invisibility*" for professional photographers. At the same time, the photographers are interested in obtaining approval and recognition from their audience, which is expressed through the number of visible numerical indicators, metric user activity. The photographers' desire to maintain a higher metric presentation and the need to always improve it, is provoked by their "*metricated mindset*". Metrics are perceived by professional photographers as a guide to understanding their own success.

A professional photographer wants to have a successful Instagram account for the opportunities it gives, such as self-confidence, satisfaction from their work, income, potential for a professional growth and development, and public recognition. However, the success on Instagram is not guaranteed for everyone, which forces the photographers to be more active, to be algorithmically recognizable and visible. In addition, some of the practices they use are time

consuming, that can cause photographers' irritation, affect their mental health. All the professional photographers' practices developed for better Instagram performance and visibility can be considered as *unpaid part of the photographers' work*, that is perceived as a granted.

After reviewing the practices and work of the professional photographers of the past and compared them with the present days, I have noticed that the routine of professional photographers has become largely Instagram-mediated. The regularity of photographic practices now depends not only on the need to earn money or because of a creative impulse, but also for the sake of increasing the number of publications and increasing the metrics of the photographer's Instagram account. In addition, it becomes even harder to distinguish professionals from non-professionals due to technological development. Despite the opportunities for professional education, including non-formal education, it remains optional, especially since the technological availability of modern cameras makes it easier to understand the processes of photography creation. It is problematic to define a professional in terms of technical skills, but it is also hard to define professionalism in photography, taking into account its aesthetics. Although, the professionalism now and then can be visible through the way a photographer presents his or her photographs, since the audience's perception of the photography aesthetics largely depends on that.

Thus, the democracy of Instagram lowers entry barriers for those who want to do photography but exploits those who want to achieve success and recognition. The "threat of invisibility" brings professional photographers to become a permanent part of the Instagram ecosystem. Understanding creativity is now inseparable from Instagram aesthetics for those photographers who actively use Instagram. The understanding of success is associated with high metric indicators of the Instagram profile; respectively, the desire to be more successful and increase metrics is manifested in the photographers' "metricated mindset".

The influence of Instagram goes beyond the platform, organizing new routines and transforming old practices, stimulating professional photographers to rethink their work. From the point of influencing the habit of noticing, or creative practices adaptation, Instagram can be seen as a prism through which the photographer defines the surrounding reality. Like the photo camera, which Lehmuskallio (2020) defines as a means of focus, Instagram is so ingrained in the lives of the professional photographers that it also influences the image they see. The image perception and the retouch process have become inseparable from Instagram, and, therefore, the photographic practices are also inseparable from Instagram, from the features of its infrastructure and its media form.

Speaking of photography, it is inseparable from social reality, being in a state of constant interpenetration, so it is constantly changing, adapting. The desire of professional photographers to stand out on Instagram, is manifested in the practices of constant search for different locations and models, which leads to the emergence of a large number of interesting photos with original ideas. At the same time, the photographers largely find inspiration from other creative users on Instagram, which leads to many repetitions of the same visual styles. Besides, an additional value to a photo can be added with text descriptions, music, and other Instagram features that can shift the focus from the image, which means that the quality of the photo is not of that great importance.

However, at present, the priority of the Instagram platform has shifted to video, which may lead to a decrease in the popularity of professional photography on Instagram, but perhaps the photographs themselves will become more meaningful.

## 9. Further research

Based on my research, it follows that under the influence of Instagram, photographic practices are inevitably transformed. However, for a deeper understanding of the changes that are taking place with the practices of modern professional photographers and with the identity of the photographers themselves, including through the processes of digitalization and platformization, the processes of changing the photographic *field* can be considered.<sup>2</sup> The field of photography can be collated with a field of cultural production, as it also has low barriers to entry, high competition, and *agents* have a status that depends on the size of their *capitals*. As photographers use social platforms for their work, the types of capital are adapting, taking new forms. One can look at how photographers accumulate “social” capital (namely, the number of followers), “symbolic” capital (implying the number of “likes”, comments, shares and so on), and “cultural” capital (which includes learning processes, observing other talents work) (Bourdieu, 1986). The professional status and position in the field of the photographer may depend on the size of these capitals. Such positions form the disposition to act in a certain way based on the accumulated social experience, for which Bourdieu (2005) uses the concept of *habitus* as a socially constructed cognitive ability. However, the *habitus* is not constant, changing as new social experience is acquired. Thus, it is possible to study how a new digital experience is included by professional photographers in their *habitus*, reproduced by the *habitus*, changing not only habitual practices, but can influence the photographers’ identity.

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<sup>2</sup>I used the book “The forms of capital” (Bourdieu, 1986), also Bourdieu (2005); Hesmondhalgh (2006); Bolin (2012) for inspiration.

## Appendix

### Interview plan and questionnaire

1. Being a professional and defining professional success.

*Q: Do you consider yourself a professional photographer? What do you think distinguishes the professional from the non-professional today? What is important for you in the profession and why?*

2. Photographer's experience using Instagram.

*Q: What is most and least important to you on Instagram and why? How do you use Instagram? How often do you visit it? What are the advantages and disadvantages of Instagram, in your opinion? Would you be able to delete your account from Instagram and why?*

3. Instagram visual content curation, style, trends, and creativity.

*Q: How strict do you feel about "curation" of your business profile? What do you think about visual trends on certain themes, colors, sharpness, and grain? Are you following trends? Do you have some lifehacks to make your photos more attractive to Instagram users/to please algorithms/to be on top? Have you faced with the requests from your clients to recreate some trendy Instagram photos for them? What was your reaction? Do you feel it may potentially influence your own photographic practices?*

4. Instagram metrics and the concept of "metricated mindset"

*Q: Do you think numbers are important: the number of "likes", comments, "saves", followers, reactions to stories? Which of these is most important/less important to you and why? Do you think it's important for your clients? Why? Do you think you personally dependent on metrics? (have "metricated mindset")*

5. Dealing with algorithms and a "threat of invisibility".

*Q: How do you think, does the frequency of publications affect the work of algorithms, the promotion of your photos on Instagram? How algorithms can influence a photographer, the creative practices, working routine? Have you noticed changes in your creative practices and approaches after using Instagram for a while? Perhaps some style changes? Inspiration from other users?*

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