

The Power and Potential of Photography as a Profitable Hobby for the Photographer Community

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ABSTRACT

The creative economy has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the global labour market, and photography occupies a distinctive position within it as a cultural practice and commercial service. This article explores how hobbies can evolve into profitable freelancing, focusing on photography and the role of community in skill development and networking. The study aims to describe the process by which photography is converted from a leisure activity into a source of income and to analyse the functions performed by photography communities. The research uses qualitative methods with a qualitative descriptive design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving five photographers with more than five years of experience, supported by six interview questions and relevant literature. The results show that photography can develop from a hobby into an additional source of income and professional activity through interest, experience, continuous learning, and opportunities to provide photography services. Photography communities also play an important role in knowledge sharing, skill development, networking, access to jobs, training, photography activities, and determining selling prices. These findings imply that photography communities can support the transition from personal creative interest to sustainable freelance work by strengthening photographers' competencies, relationships, and economic and professional opportunities.

Keywords: freelance; photography; hobby; network; community

INTRODUCTION

The creative economy has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the global labour market, and photography occupies a distinctive position within it as simultaneously a consumer technology, a cultural practice and a commercial service. Ha & Trong, (2026) records that global exports of creative services reached USD 1.4 trillion in 2022, an increase of twenty-nine per cent over 2017, and that creative industries account for between 0.5 and 7.3 per cent of gross domestic product and between 0.5 and 12.5 per cent of employment in the economies surveyed.

A comparable pattern is evident in Indonesia. These figures indicate that independent, project-based creative work is now a structural feature of youth employment rather than a marginal supplement to it, a conclusion also reached in the international literature on freelancing as an innovation-driven mode of self-employment (Burke & Cowling, 2020). Recent systematic reviews of the freelance literature likewise position independent work as a knowledge-intensive and innovation-driven business mode rather than a residual form of employment (Baitenizov et al., 2025).

Photography comes from Greek "*photos*" which means Light, and "*Grafos*" which means Painting/writing. The general term, photography means method/way to produce a photo of an object/subject from the result of the reflection of light hitting the object/subject recorded on light-sensitive media. Medium for capturing This light is

called a camera. So photography is a process painting/writing using camera media utilize light sources. Photographer itself is actually not a new profession in the world, like the history of photography, of course there is a history of photographers, namely people who immortalize all the great moments in a photo. No matter how good the existing equipment and technology, if it is not handled by a reliable and good photographer, it will not be able to produce photos or works that are as expected. Photographers must be clever in finding the angle or precision needed so they can produce extraordinary photos.

Towards the end of twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century, digital photography continued to be one of the significant breakthroughs in this technology dominating world. The field of photography underwent several developments in terms of camera quality, image quality, image clarity, image transfer, image storage, and other sensitive surfaces (Lu et al., 2022). Ongoing incremental technological changes have disrupted the profession, empowering consumers to capture and widely share high-quality photographs (Munir & Phillips, 2005). The resulting limited growth in demand has compelled photographers to vie for the remaining sales (IBISWorld, 2017).

In this landscape, platform businesses specializing in photographic services have flourished, seemingly offering photographers boundless opportunities to generate income. For many people, photography can be used as a hobby to fill a void, form a community of photo lovers or even become a profession. Even though development has been that fast, not many people still know how photography actually developed from before its appearance until it became what it is today. In fact, it turns out that photography activities have been around for a long time in the world.

A risk assessment by IBISWorld in 2017 for Professional Photographic Services indicated a medium-to-high combined risk level encompassing structural, growth, and sensitivity factors. This risk is linked to social elements such as constrained household discretionary income and, akin to the graphic design industry, lower entry barriers intensifying competition among freelancers (Le T, 2019). Under these conditions the boundary between amateur and professional photography has become increasingly blurred, which has led photography educators and practitioners to re-evaluate the meaning of professionalism in a digital attention economy (Voronova, 2026).

In this article, the author will raise the theme of how the process from what started as just a hobby can develop into a profitable hobby or what can be called freelancing. Many freelancers have appeared in society and each of them works according to their respective fields of ability. Freelance is a status condition that has no ties, so freelancers are those who commit themselves to their own abilities and have no ties to any agency. Because they are in the early adulthood stage, they are expected to be able to play new roles more responsibly. Freelancing or working part time is an alternative for developing independent, productive and responsible behavior. Freelance work is usually in the form of projects or tenders and is only paid after completing the work. However, there are also those who are paid with a down payment first, and the remainder is paid after the work is completed. Recent empirical evidence indicates that this shift is not automatic, because leisure passion tends to develop into entrepreneurial aspiration mainly when practitioners

become aware of the recognition and positive attention they receive from other members of their community (Cutolo & Grimaldi, 2023).

In general, this article is divided into several sub-topics to make it easier for readers to understand the context of what is happening in the community around them. First, the introduction, in this section the author tries to explain a general overview of this article and the author's background in conducting this research and a little understanding of photography. Second, it will explain how the process that occurs from a hobby can become a side job. Third, the importance of the community for training skills and as a 'job' network. Starting to increase interest in starting a business in photography, there is an increase in demand from photographers.

Apart from that, many people who drive this business usually start from their hobby in the world of photography and then create a business that revolves around photography, whether it's a photo studio, wedding/pre-wedding photography, or a freelance photographer. Indeed, there is no limit to who can become a photographer, if someone really loves and has an interest in the world of photography, they can do so without exception. Everyone must have their own reasons why and how they ended up taking up a particular job or profession. Just like photographers, everyone definitely has certain reasons why they want to jump into the photography profession. It could be because they think that's where their passion lies, so they choose to become photographers, they want to work based on their hobby, so they can travel around the world for free, and so on.

As a freelance worker who is studying, you definitely have many needs and other requirements that must or must not be met, for example paying tuition fees, the need to make assignments, and don't forget the need to fill your stomach while on campus. So this accidentally turned a hobby into a side job, namely being a photographer. This side job in the field of photography has become an economic phenomenon among students whose lifestyle is in the upper middle class. Because capital to become a photographer requires tools such as a camera, tripod, lighting, laptop/computer (for editing images), and so on, which are not cheap. Studies of the online commodification of leisure similarly show that converting a hobby into a source of income introduces new forms of additional work and gradually transforms the leisure activity itself (Jourdain & Naulin, 2026). The importance of taking risks, creativity, and the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity. Opens opportunities to evaluate options and decide what steps should be taken (Ford-Eickhoff & Cress, 2022).

'Freelance' work has long been a defining characteristic of the creative sector (McDonald et al., 2021). Worker enthusiasm for the creative economy has given rise to a set of labor practices that diverge from the more routine aspects of traditional employment relations. Emphasizing flexibility, informality, individuality, and autonomy, these practices are hailed as essential prerequisites for innovation in the digital age, often at the expense of collective protections for rights and fair pay (Salamon, 2020). While there has been some exploration of questions surrounding the unpaid labor of digital media users, particularly in relation to commercially produced content, surveillance, and corporate control. The reluctance of many photographers to engage with digital platform work, be

it for pragmatic or ideological reasons or both, is illustrative of the contested space of digital labour politics (McDonald et al., 2021).

Three strands of recent empirical scholarship inform the present study. First, McDonald et al. (2021), drawing on interviews with professional photographers, demonstrate that practitioners simultaneously engage with and resist digital platform work, and that such resistance is grounded in professional identity as much as in economic calculation. Second, on the basis of qualitative interviews with thirty-two Australian freelancers, show that the boundary between the freelance media professional and the generic self-employed media worker has become porous, so that occupational identity is increasingly assembled from a portfolio of heterogeneous commissions. Third, Mäenpää (2023) argues that the contemporary hybrid media environment obliges photographic professionals to extend their practice beyond a single institutional field into commercial photography, public relations and non-governmental work.

Ford-Eickhoff and Cress (2022) complement these accounts at the level of the individual venture by showing how risk-taking, creativity and resilience shape the trajectory of a young photographic entrepreneur, while Herrmann et al., (2023) demonstrate that formal educational credentials are a weak predictor of income in gig work, where experience and self-directed learning matter more. These studies converge in identifying precarity, portfolio work and identity negotiation as defining features of contemporary photographic labour. They diverge, however, in their unit of analysis: the first two privilege the platform and the labour market, whereas the third privileges the professional field, and none of them takes the voluntary photographic association as its point of departure.

What this body of work leaves unexamined is the intermediate social structure through which the transition from amateur practice to remunerated work is actually accomplished. Prior research has concentrated on platform intermediation (McDonald et al., 2021), on the erosion of employment security (Salamon, 2020) and on macro-level accounts of freelancing as an innovation mode. Comparatively little empirical attention has been paid to the offline photography community, an informal, voluntary and locally embedded association, as the setting in which technical skills are acquired, referrals are distributed and price norms are negotiated.

This omission is consequential, because the literature on social capital holds that relational resources embedded in durable networks constitute a primary source of advantage. Research is therefore required that examines how community membership, rather than platform participation, underwrites the movement from hobby to profession. The novelty of this study is accordingly twofold. Conceptually, it repositions the photography community as an institutional mechanism of creative entrepreneurship rather than as a leisure association, and connects the hobby-to-profession transition to social capital theory and to human-capital accounts of freelance work. Empirically, it provides evidence drawn from experienced Indonesian photographers whose careers began as hobbies, a population and a setting that remain under-represented in a literature on creative labour that is predominantly Anglophone and platform-centred.

This study pursues three objectives. The first is to describe the process by which photography is converted from a leisure activity into a source of income for freelance practitioners. The second is to analyse the functions performed by the photography community with respect to skill formation, network extension, access to assignments and the determination of service prices. The third is to interpret these findings in the light of existing theory on freelancing, social capital and the creative economy, and thereby to formulate implications for photographers, community managers and creative-economy stakeholders.

The study offers both academic and practical contributions. Academically, it extends research on creative labour by specifying a community-level mechanism that mediates between individual creative interest and market participation, thereby responding to calls for closer attention to the social infrastructure of the gig and creative economies. Practically, the findings furnish photography communities with a rationale for formalising mentoring and referral practices, provide entrant freelancers with a realistic account of the capital, competence and relational investment that professional practice requires, and give creative-economy agencies an empirical basis for programmes that support community-based skills development.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used by the author is a qualitative method with in-depth interviews with informants. In conducting interviews, the author focuses on informants who have experience in the field of photography to better obtain a research focus that is believed to provide accurate and relevant data to support this article. The informants consisted of five photographers who had more than five years of experience in the field of photography. Apart from using interview data, the author also uses several references and literature studies in order to enrich the material and support the interpretation of the findings in this paper.

This research uses qualitative methods with a qualitative descriptive design format. Qualitative researchers aim to comprehend the meaning individuals attribute to their experiences and how they construct their understanding of the world. This form of research is contextual, placing the observer within the world and employing interpretive practices to render the world perceptible. Through methods such as observations, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and field notes, qualitative research transforms the world into various representations. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings and attempt to interpret them in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

To obtain data related to this research, data was collected through in-depth interviews and observations. The in-depth interviews were conducted using six questions related to the focus of this study. An in-depth interview bears resemblance to a conversation, where individuals engage in a discussion on a shared topic. Ideally, this exchange is characterized by a relaxed and open atmosphere, fostering honest

communication (Mason, 2018). Essentially, the process involves a researcher posing questions and delving into the interviewees' responses to extract comprehensive information.

The interviewee, possessing expertise rooted in direct experience with the subject matter, contributes what (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) term as 'interview knowledge.' The nature of an in-depth interview is envisioned as a flexible and spontaneous interaction, allowing the interviewee considerable freedom. Simultaneously, the interviewer subtly guides the conversation to ensure the interviewee shares pertinent information within the allotted time, covering topics deemed important by the interviewer. Unlike casual conversations, research interviews involve more probing by the interviewer, prompting the interviewee to elaborate or clarify answers an effort aimed at gaining enhanced clarity and detail on specific subjects.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively by examining the information obtained from interviews and observations in accordance with the research focus. The interview responses were reviewed and organized according to recurring information concerning the transition of photography from a hobby into a source of income and the role of photography communities in skill development, networking, access to jobs, training, and service-price determination. The findings were then described and interpreted in relation to the objectives of the study and supported by relevant literature. This analysis was conducted to provide a systematic description of the experiences and perspectives of the informants without altering the meaning of the information obtained during data collection.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with 5 resource persons who already have experience in the field of Photography for more than 5 years, the results obtained are very clear and descriptive. The data was taken by providing in-depth interviews with support from 6 questions related to the title of this study. The findings generally indicate two important aspects, namely the process of developing photography from a hobby into a source of income and the important role of the photography community in supporting photographers' professional development.

Starting from a hobby and the emergence of interest in the world of Photography, they want to do business in the field of the creative world. In the end, they ventured to join and open their own photography business, then with their ambition that the world of photography would not become extinct because every day, every week, and every month there would be opportunities for photography-related work. This finding indicates that personal interest in photography can gradually develop into an economic activity when photographers have sufficient experience, skills, and opportunities to provide photography services.

Photography is not only a means or tool to capture an event but can also be a means of business opportunities. Photography can be a business in the field of services ranging from events, weddings, graduations, and so on. Therefore, photography is one of the

hobbies that many millennials like, but actually from this hobby can be an additional income to meet financial needs. This hobby is very profitable because behind it photographers learn a lot about photography and can visit tourist attractions in Indonesia, while obtaining various experiences from the world of photography. Basically, this represents a form of a paid hobby in which personal interest and acquired competence can be transformed into an opportunity to generate income.

The findings demonstrate that the transition from hobby to paid photography does not occur only because of an individual's interest in photography. Experience and continuous learning also become important aspects in developing the hobby into professional activities. Photographers initially engage in photography because of personal interest, but their experience subsequently provides opportunities to accept assignments and develop photography services. This finding is consistent with Ford-Eickhoff and Cress (2022), who emphasize the importance of risk-taking, creativity, and resilience in the development of a young photography entrepreneur. Thus, photography as a hobby can provide not only personal satisfaction but also opportunities for creative entrepreneurship when supported by skills, experience, and the willingness to take business opportunities. This pattern is consistent with reviews of serious leisure research, which identify leisure-based entrepreneurship as an increasingly important route through which sustained involvement in a hobby is converted into economic activity (Kumar & Ragini, 2023).

The findings are also relevant to the characteristics of freelance work in the creative sector. Freelance photography provides flexibility because photographers can undertake projects according to their competencies and available opportunities. However, developing photography into a source of income requires photographers to continuously improve their competence and adapt to the demands of clients and the photography market. This condition is in line with McDonald et al. (2021), who explain that freelance work has long been an important characteristic of the creative sector and that professional photographers continuously negotiate their professional practices within changing forms of digital and freelance work.

The photography community is one of the homes for lovers of the art of photography. Uniquely, this community is open to all people who are interested in the art of taking pictures. Not only professional photographers, but also those who struggle in other art fields, such as Make Up Artists, Wardrobers, Fashion Stylists, Travel Managers, Tourism Park Managers, and photo observers. The diversity of members provides photographers with opportunities to interact with professionals from related creative fields and consequently expand their relationships and potential collaboration. Research on leisure-based entrepreneurship similarly indicates that ventures growing out of a serious pursuit of a personal hobby frequently draw their partners and collaborators from within the same interest group (Kwapisz, 2021).

In the community, they can share knowledge in operating a camera and especially in terms of relationships, introduction by introduction, can help coordinate and share events and so on. Certainly, community is very important for the development of the photographers who are members of it. Because joining a community has a very broad

development and is faster than people who are self-taught and photography lessons. The role of the community is very important, especially for receiving jobs, courses information and training as well as hunting (taking pictures) and determining selling prices.

These findings indicate that photography communities perform several interconnected functions. First, the community functions as a place for photographers to exchange knowledge and improve photography skills. Second, the community functions as a network that connects photographers with other photographers and professionals from related creative fields. Third, the relationships established within the community can provide information about photography assignments and employment opportunities. Fourth, communities provide access to courses, training, and photography activities that support continuous skill development. Finally, interaction among community members can provide information that helps photographers understand and determine appropriate selling prices for their photography services.

These functions correspond to the mechanisms identified in the literature on learning communities, in which mentoring programmes, training sessions, and communities of practice operate as the principal means through which members exchange both tacit and explicit knowledge (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). Comparable evidence from creative entrepreneurship shows that peer-based spaces are valued primarily because they make feedback, information exchange, goal setting, and mutual accountability available to practitioners who would otherwise work in isolation (Kotturi et al., 2024).

The role of the community therefore extends beyond its function as a gathering place for individuals who share the same hobby. The community becomes a supporting environment for developing skills, relationships, and economic opportunities. This finding strengthens the argument of this study that the transition from photography as a hobby to photography as a profitable activity is supported not only by individual competence but also by relationships established through the photography community. In this context, interaction and knowledge sharing within the community provide practical resources that photographers can use when developing their professional activities. This observation is consistent with research showing that social capital built through direct professional relationships is not readily transferable to platform-mediated settings, in which reputation depends largely on rating systems controlled by the platform (Tóth et al., 2022).

Overall, the results show that photography has the potential to develop from a personal hobby into an additional source of income and a professional activity. The process is supported by interest in photography, accumulated experience, continuous learning, and opportunities to provide photography services. At the same time, photography communities contribute to this process through knowledge sharing, skill development, networking, access to assignments, training information, photography activities, and information related to service-price determination. Therefore, the findings illustrate that the development of a profitable photography hobby involves the interaction

between individual interest and competence and the social relationships developed through the photography community.

CONCLUSION

The insights gathered from in-depth interviews with experienced photographers show how photography has transformed from a hobby into a profitable business opportunity, particularly for individuals who leverage their passion for financial gain. The journey from personal interest to establishing a photography business reflects the resilience and determination of photographers.

Furthermore, photography communities play a crucial role as hubs for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, skill development, and networking among photographers and professionals from related disciplines. In essence, photography is more than a visual art form; it is an ecosystem where passion, business opportunities, and community collaboration converge. These findings demonstrate the potential of turning personal interest in photography into a sustainable professional and economic opportunity.

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