

Analysis of Key Photo Manipulation Cases and their Impact on Photography

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Abstract

A Photograph has an ability to connect with viewers on a relatable level with credibility, but this power comes with ethical responsibility. As a viewer, we are getting comfortable with accepting this flow without enquiring its authenticity. We are used to see enhanced or manipulated version of reality. Most viewers are aware about the existence of photo manipulation but it is an acceptable norm now. Technical advancement has helped photography to be more aesthetically appealing, but has also formed ethical challenges in curtailing cosmetic approach over promoting honesty in photographer's attitude. Due to increased cases of photo manipulation, the credibility of photo journalism has been eroding in public domain. The main objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of photo manipulation on photographers and photo journalism. This paper will analyze some prominent cases of photo manipulation in global media & investigates their impact. Further, this paper tries to understand photographers' perspective behind doing photo manipulation.

Keywords: Photo journalism, Media ethics, Photo manipulation, impact of Photoshop, digital media

Introduction

A Photograph has an ability to connect with viewers on a relatable level with credibility, but this power comes with ethical responsibility. For making a sensational & true storytelling photograph, one has to be present at the right scene, at the right angle, at the right time. Sometimes one have to risk his life, put his expertise, efforts & then only a story worthy photograph is clicked. But what if, all this can be simply achieved by using photo manipulation where two or more images can be composed in a single photograph, creating an artificial or fake story, sitting in comfort of your bedroom by clicking tools in Photoshop. In early days, the impact was narrow as it was achieved by daunting manual darkroom techniques, which required craftsmanship and expertise. But Impact and frequency of manipulation practices increased with amplified comfort of digital intervention.

The temptation of digital processing has lead photojournalists to compromise with media ethics. The credibility of photojournalism is at stake. The main objective of this paper is to critically analyze some famous photo manipulation cases in history to understand impact of photo manipulation on photo journalism. This paper discusses ten cases of photo manipulation in global media and one case from Indian photo journalism. This paper investigates their impact on photographer and publication. Out of these ten cases first four cases

are discussed to analyze the history of photo manipulation to understand how this practice has taken its shape where it is today. The visual study of further seven cases has been done to prove that how this practice has hampered credibility of publishing institute along with photographer. This is a point of discussion in the paper that how it has sparked criticism from fellow photographers community. This study also interrogates photographers' perspective behind committing photo manipulation, to know why they did it. In this research paper author has chosen the time period before and after the invention and widespread implementation of Adobe Photoshop. A critical assessment of these most prominent photo-manipulation case studies and their aesthetic, functional and other far reaching implications will play a major role in making a final conclusion in this research.

Review of Literature

Photo manipulation is the skill to incorporate desired changes in photograph by performing pixel based alteration or tonal adjustment using image editing program. The Cambridge Dictionary defines this "to make small changes to a picture, photograph, especially in order to improve it," and "to represent something as being different from how it really is." In initial days of news photography, artists were creating engravings to be used as references of news events. (Lowery 142). But with the arrival of camera and film, capturing candid events became easier which lead to change attitudes towards news photography and manipulation. Photographers and artists continued to pursue altering images by darkroom techniques and airbrushing for various compositional and content motives. (Lester 42). Most of them were politically motivated and had their impact on social and political domain. Oriez asserted that technological advancement is held responsible for the recent rise in photo manipulation cases of photo journalism during past decades. "Starting in the 1980's, electronic imaging (mostly images scanned from film into computers at that time) made it possible to seamlessly move, add or delete every element within a photograph, thus bringing image manipulation to a whole new level" (Oriez). There are both negative and positive applications of photo manipulation which have influenced our society in both negative and positive ways. "Since digital alteration involves craftsmanship, a new type of worker is evolving who may not have training to traditional values of documentary photography" (Reaves). The New York Times' photography editor, Andy Grundberg forecasted a shaky vision for photojournalism: "In the future, readers of newspapers and magazines will probably view news pictures more as illustrations than as reportage, since they can no longer distinguish between a genuine image and one that has been manipulated".

In most cases, photo manipulation has impacted photographer and photography in negative ways like credibility loss of publication. Sometimes it even led to terminate photo journalism career of photographers. For instance, the publisher of The Topeka Capital Journal had to apologize for publishing a misleading altered photograph of a dunk shot from a basketball game. The photographer

had to resign and took responsibility by admitting that he altered the photograph to depict the ball going through the net. The publisher John Goossen apologized by writing that representing the truth is a newspaper's responsibility to its community. (Greer 13)

Arthur stated "Photoshop has, like Google, transcended its origins in the world of computing, and become a verb. But whereas 'to Google' is almost always used positively to express usefulness, Photoshopping is almost always a term of abuse". Philip Jones Griffiths observed in 1999 that "we are probably the last generation that will accept the integrity of the photograph". Mia Fineman proposed a narrative on photography manipulation development, which spans from earliest days of manipulated photography to the realm of digital revolution by Photoshop. She offered a stimulating view on photographic manipulation history of 200 photographs created between 1840 to 1990 from genres like news, art, entertainment, commerce etc. In her exhibition titled "Faking It: Manipulated Photography before Photoshop" she demonstrated the final image is not identical to what the camera saw.

Photo manipulation cases in history of photo journalism and their impact.

- Pre digital (Photoshop) period

Case 1. Circa 1860. History of photo manipulation can be traced back to invention of photography itself. The credit of first manipulated photographs ever created goes to the iconic photo of Abraham Lincoln. (Figure 1.2). This photograph was composed with images of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln and the Southern politician, John Calhoun's body. (Figure 1.1)

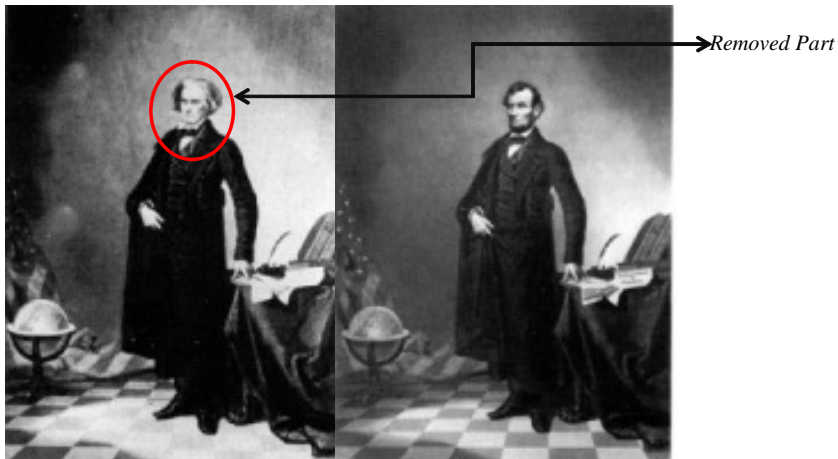
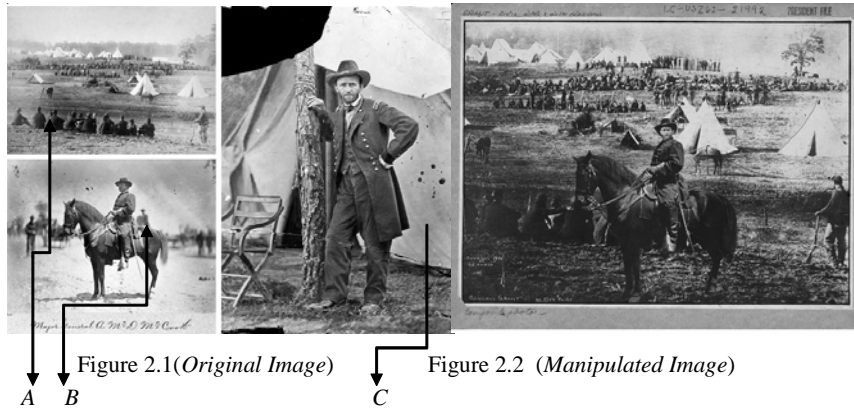


Figure 1.1 (Original Image)

Figure 1.2 (Manipulated Image)

Case 2. Circa 1814. Below is an example of composing 3 images into one photograph of General Ulysses Grant with his army at Virginia, during the Civil War of America. (Figure 2.2) This was revealed by a result of research done at

Library of Congress after finding original 3 photographs & tracing them back. (Figure 2.1) Here portrait of Grant (image C) the horse and body are of General Alexander M. McCook; (Image B) and the backdrop is of war prisoners captured at the conflict of Fisher’s Hill. (Image A)



Case 3. Circa 1930. Pictorial falsifications of reality have obvious political objectives uses. Below one is a famous & early example of photo manipulation. It is the famous photograph of Stalin. (Figure 3.2) He used to airbrush his enemies out of photographs. See (Figure 3.1) Joseph Stalin used photo manipulation for propaganda purposes. Stalin’s photographer erased a popular communist out of this picture to project the propaganda; It was obvious due to collapse of the Soviet Union, as communism was losing its appeal.



Figure 3.1 (Original Image) *Removed Part* Figure 3.2 (Manipulated Image)

Case 4. Year 1942: To create a more heroic image of him, Benito Mussolini (Figure 4.2) removed the horse handler from the original photograph. (Figure 4.1)

After observing these historic cases, this fact can be observed that photo manipulation practice has been effectively applied to deceive public and persuade viewers for the purpose of storytelling. In more accurate sense, these strong leaders have used photo manipulation to portray their heroic image in public. Very subtle alterations in image can have a profound influence on how the

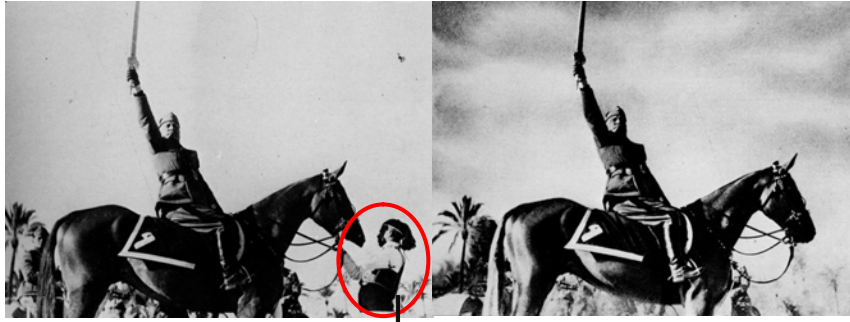


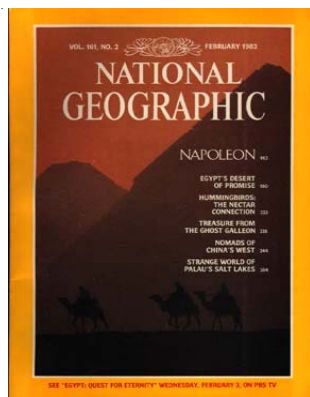
Figure 4.1 (Original Photo) (Removed Part)

Figure 4.2 Manipulated version

target audience interprets a photograph. The practice has been used to design photographic evidence by eradicating some element which is not in the alignment with their propaganda strategy. The outcome is an image which serves the truth but not the complete truth. These cases are classic examples of the strategy where leaders have rewritten their political narratives.

Digital Era

Case 5. Year 1982: This National Geographic magazine cover created huge uproar in photography critics & fetched so much embarrassment to magazine that they had to apologize for this act. For doing this story on Egypt, photographer Gordon Galen took a horizontal picture of the Great Pyramids of Giza, which had to be "squeezed" together to fit the magazine's vertical format. (Figure 5.1)



Squeezed image of pyramid to fit in magazine layout

Figure 5.1

Tom Kennedy, the director of photography at National Geographic stated that, "We no longer use that technology to manipulate elements in a photo simply to achieve a more compelling graphic effect. We regarded that afterwards as a mistake, and we wouldn't repeat that mistake today." Lester writes, "National Geographic magazine, long known for its reputation of photojournalism excellence, used the Scitex computer digitizer on two recent occasions. On a cover story of Egypt, pyramids were squeezed together to fit the cover's vertical format. A picture story on Poland contained a cover photograph that combined an expression on a man's face in one frame with a complete view of his hat in another picture. Both cover images were altered without a hint of possible detection and without a note to readers that such manipulation was performed".

Case 6: Year 2007. One of the most well-known and discussed case of photo manipulation is considered the case of photographer Allan Detrich. In April 2007, he published a digitally altered photo of Bluffington baseball team in Ohio newspaper Toledo Blade. (Figure 6.2) The photograph was missing the pair of another photographer's legs behind the fence. It was discovered when original photograph was published by another newspapers with legs still in place. (Figure 6.1)



Figure 6.1 (Original photograph)

Removed part



Figure 6.2 (Manipulated version)

Detrich explained that he accidentally submitted the wrong copy, but the publisher, as well as the public, displayed stricter response by forcing Detrich to resign. (Winslow)

Toledo Blade had to suffer embarrassment and ridicule after Detrich's scandal which had a decisive impact on the integrity of journalism. After this event 70 other photographs were surfaced which were altered to enhance the story and boost his reputation as a photographer. (Winslow) This case sparked a chain of events by igniting discussions on the betrayal readers felt and how the credibility of journalism was declining. Though the credibility loss of photo journalism was present in public consciousness, but the Detrich case was a turning point as it remained a burning issue for longer period. This case might had a minor impact on journalism in bigger picture but it surely attracted focus on degrading ethical standards of journalism.

Case 7. Year 2008: There are plentiful of cases where scenes & stories are fabricated which never happened; nations have thumped their chest by publishing cloned weaponry photographs of military might & releasing them into global media, though getting their share of embarrassment after truth being revealed. A very recent example of photo manipulation can be taken from Iran media who tried to give an image boost up to its national pride rhetoric, which crossed the limits & created much hype all over world media. Here four missiles are shown being launched in the manipulated photo with a launch pad truck removed in foreground. (Figure 7.2) Original photo shows only three missiles actually left the ground. (Figure 7.1) This photo was published in several newspapers such as The Los Angeles Times, The Financial Times, The Chicago Tribune and prominent global media like BBC News, NYTimes.com etc. This case made a huge dent in reputation of media as a trustworthy source of information & Iran army's real strength. This image reached to masses and projected a false hype which could have been saved if the editors have been wary of photo manipulation ethics issues.



Figure 7.1 (Original image)

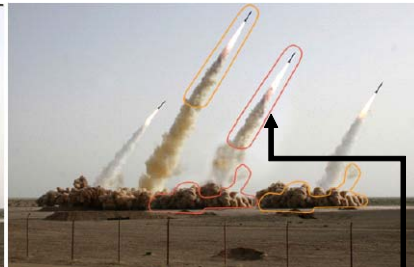


Figure 7.2 (Manipulated image)

Cloned pixels

(Illustration by The New York Times; photo via Agency France-Pressed)" (Pizza, and Lyons).

The point is – this photo manipulation has boomeranged to its creators & made a dent to their reputation despite aiming for opposite. In 2014, The World Press Photo research project on "The Integrity of the Image" was commissioned to Dr David Campbell with objective to examine contemporary trends and acknowledged standards in photo manipulation practices from a global perspective in photojournalism and documentary photography. Dr David

Campbell asserted in his report “We have to ask whether ‘manipulation’ and ‘post-processing’ are synonymous with each other, or whether manipulation is a specific, negative form of post-processing. In addition, we need to recognize that the question of possible manipulation is far from exhausted by the focus on post-processing. Almost every stage in the photographic process, from capture and production to the publication and circulation of photographic images, contains the potential for manipulation”.

Case 8. April 2003. Below composited image of two shots is example of improving the composition & adding story to photograph. (Figure 8.3) In the photograph, Iraqi civilians are instructed to seek cover by a British soldier in Basra. Los Angeles Times gave its front page coverage to publish this photograph. The photographer Mr. Brian Walski was fired when his editors discovered of his manipulative act. This photo manipulation was achieved by compositing two photos shot in duration of moments. (Figure 8.1 + Figure 8.2)



Figure 8.1 (Original image)



Figure 8.2 (Original image)

Removed pixels



Figure 8.3 (Manipulated version)

Case 9. Year 2012. There’s nothing worse for a photojournalist than to have his or her integrity questioned. Hanry Fisch who was announced winner of National Geographic “Places” category award 2012 for this photo. (Figure 9.2) He was immediately disqualified after being accused of pixel alteration. See below picture (Figure 9.1), in left side a yellow plastic bag is removed from original image. After declaring winner, national geographic realized their mistake & disqualified his entry. He states his feeling on his blog “I have won the Grand Slam, but was

disqualified for removing something, that in fact, would have not changed the final result. And, worst of all, should I have been the jury, I would have acted in the same, exact way! Which brings us to another issue: the authenticity of photography and how much can it be altered: darkened, enlightened, sharpened, reframed, etc. Furthermore, the extent to which rules should apply without prejudice to the spirit of what they are trying to protect" (Nomad Expeditions)



Figure 9.1 (Original Image)

Figure 9.2 (Manipulated Image)

Removed pixels

Case 10. Nov 2013. Should photo manipulation be seen in bad light always or there are other approaches also. It can be seen in positive light & termed as photo enhancement. In case of Danish photographer Klave Bo Christensen, who was disqualified from picture of the year competition for heavy use of colour correction in his Haiti story. (Figure 10.1)



Figure 10.1

Over saturated colour tones in image. Judges felt that colour is more saturated in his photo entry. He was asked to submit the RAW files. Surprisingly Christensen was happily inviting opinions on the action of judges for comparisons & discussions on web.

Photo Manipulation in Indian journalism

The case of Indian photo journalist Souvid Datta ignited debate on ethical responsibility of photographers in Indian photo journalism, when he himself admitted about his doctored images and infringing other photographers work in his photographs. He was a shining example of early success in photography until 2014. He was a recipient of prestigious grants like Getty Images Editorial Grant and awards like lens culture photo award among many other. But his admission of photo manipulation cost him all his reputation and earned grants. He was held responsible for degrading credibility of photo journalism community among public. It was a regretful state of event for him which was commonly shared by other big names like Steve McCurry, Narciso Contreras and Giovanni Troilo in the history of photo manipulation scandals.

He photographed below image from Kolkata, India during a photo project on violence in brothels. (Figure 11.2) But soon he was caught by Petapixel for doctoring this image by adding subjects which was shot by legendary photographer Mary Ellen Mark in 1978. (Figure 11.1)



Figure 11.1 (Original Image)
by Mary Ellen Mark

Figure 11.2 (Manipulated Image)
by Souvid Datta

He confessed to this act by admitting that he has published many other photographs in past also. Visura, the agency which awarded a grant to Datta, set investigation against him. "Although the altered images in question were not part of his Grant proposal, which has always been set to private to protect the integrity of the project and its subjects involved- Visura does not support lies, deceit, and unethical acts. Period," says Visura's founder Adriana Teresa Letorney. Datta explained the reason behind his confession in his interview with TIME magazine "Now these images are resurfacing, they threaten to undermine any work I have legitimately pursued since and, crucially, all the trust that the people in my photos, my collaborators and supporting institutions placed in me. I am so profusely sorry for this. I hope to begin making amends."

On asking why he did it, Datta admitted that his intention was not to profit from Mary Ellen Mark work. He said " In part, I was also discovering the technology of Photoshop for the first time and the creation of something new excited me. It felt like a very basic artistic achievement. Crucially, this was all done without the consideration of factual accuracy, ethical representation and journalistic

responsibility that I came to learn of properly in the years to come. I didn't understand what a photojournalist was for a long time, let alone the weight of trying to assume that title."

Conclusion

After going through many such cases of photo manipulation, author has realized that photo manipulation is not a modern technique as he initially thought. But it has its roots since the inception of photography itself. As the cases from historic days of photo manipulation indicate that photo manipulation was mostly pursued for political motivation by strong leaders and they effectively used it to boost their heroic image in public perception.

After analyzing photo manipulation cases of digital era, it can be observed that frequency of manipulation practice and volume of its impact has greatly increased after digital revolution in image processing. As technology made photo manipulation in the reach of every photographer, ethical credibility came to stake in photo journalism. Analyzing these cases & their impact, author has concluded that photo manipulation has always dented the reputation of photo journalist & its publishing house. The credibility of media in public comes under suspicion after such incidents. Though it is more crucial for print media, but maintaining media ethics is need of the hour in contemporary web based media also. The impact of these cases has transformed the media world and forced it to take strict look on its ethical conduct, otherwise it would not have been possible to maintain degrading ethical standard of photo journalism. Many news outlets started setting up guidelines to stop changing information for a story as well as altering moving or still images for any purpose. The Associated Press issued a statement to discourage journalist from any manipulation in photo content. (Gladney) Some publications went ahead by setting up categories of photography genres for allowed manipulation and its amount. This is still a debatable issue and has further scope to study that where to draw a line on how much amount and which type of manipulation is ethically allowed. Gladney observed that there are some techniques which always remain in allowed categories considered to be neutral edits like dodging, burning, and cropping.

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