PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE CREDIBILITY OF NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE ERA OF PHOTOSHOP (A STUDY OF RESIDENTS OF ENUGU URBAN)

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ABSTRACT

The authenticity and integrity of photojournalism in digital photography and the Photoshop era are concerns of many different media houses. Photographic manipulation practices have gradually diminished the credibility of print media content (photos and news reports). This study, however, assessed the public perception of the credibility of news photographs in the era of Photoshop, with a focus on residents of Enugu Urban. The study was anchored on the Gatekeeping theory. The survey research method was employed for the study's execution. A population of 820,000 was studied using a sample size of 400. The researchers discovered, among others, that there is a high level of awareness of the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms among residents of Enugu Urban. The researcher recommended, among others, that photojournalists check their photos' authenticity before posting them.

Keywords: Public Perception, Credibility, Photography, Photoshop, Enugu Urban)

INTRODUCTION

The use of photography in journalism is called photojournalism. Over the years, photography has played an increasingly important role in the various mass media that use visual messages to disseminate information (i.e., books, newspapers, magazines, films, television and television). internet-based media) (Ijeh, 2015; Oparaugo, 2021). Photographs are known to strongly stimulate public interest in current events and stories from a human perspective presented through the visual means of mass media while also making significant contributions to civilization and human progress (Yaroson & Asemah, 2008).

Before technology gave most people access to some form of camera, only a few could bring photography to the masses (Gayle, 2020). Photography has traditionally been seen as a reliable expression of reality because it has been presented and received by the public as such and "photography as a means of leaving no doubt about the actual existence of reality" (Batchen, 1994, p. 48). People believe the adage that cameras do not lie, even though image manipulation has been around since the invention of photography (Vernon, 1997, p. 5). Historically, unlike other media, such as painting and coloring, photography captures actual events objectively, and, except for complicated and time-consuming retouching techniques, photography cannot be manipulated without a perceptible seat (Potter, 1995, p. 497). Photography is a fundamental tool of forensic science.

Photoshopping/photo manipulation is to photojournalists what fake news is to the news media. The distortion of forensic evidence in photographs reduces the results of analytical procedures for forensic dentists (Bowers & Johansen, 2002). Digital imaging questions reality because "digital processes lead to pure inventions with no other origin than the computer program itself; they produce images that are only signs of signs" (Batchen, 1994, p. 48). Whereas photography leads to a form or at least an interpretation of reality, digital processing leads only to inventions that are mere simulations leading to virtual and non-reality (Vernon, 1997). , p.6). The debate over the photo's authenticity has widened.

The adage "photography never lies" seems less accurate today than ever. The fact that the camera cannot lie is valid because the images it captures must have existed in some form at some point, but it is not always clear whether those images were manipulated. It does not somehow alter or stage an event that never happened (Malizu, 2010). Before the 1980s, photographs were mainly edited by skilled darkroom technicians and airbrush artists. The widespread availability of easy-to-use software for editing digital images brought about by the rapid technological advances of the 21st century has dramatically reduced the time, cost, effort and skill required and needed to create attractive fake images. Often disseminated through trusted sources such as the mass media, perhaps unknowingly, these edited images are spreading on social media with increasing frequency and sophistication (Shen et al., 2019).

The question of reliability in photojournalism is a personal matter for the photojournalist because a photojournalist is partly defined by his photography. If the photo is unreliable, so is the photojournalist. Renowned French photographer Hemi Cartier-Bresson believes that any photograph will be an autobiographical statement: "Self-discovery co-occurs with an exploration of the world around us, which can shape us, but can also be influenced by us" (Cartier-Bresson quoted in Stoekl, 1994).

This study, therefore, assessed the credibility of news photographs in the era of Photoshop by focusing on the residents of Enugu Urban.

Statement of the Problem

The manipulated images have undoubtedly caused much natural, significant and lasting damage. Digital photography is discredited for its content (Alla, 2013). Using it as recorded evidence in the digital age is no longer possible. The authenticity and integrity of photojournalism in digital photography and the Photoshop era are concerns of many different media houses. Using photo manipulation is said to have gradually diminished the credibility of print media content (photos and news reports) (Malizu, 2010). Digital still images are vulnerable to manipulation due to well-known image alterations that have caused fierce debate in the press and public discourse. However, several studies (Alla, 2013; Shen et al., 2019) have examined how individuals rate the authenticity of the images accompanying live stories. This study, therefore, assessed the credibility of news photographs in the era of Photoshop by focusing on residents of Enugu urban.

Objectives of the Study

The study's general objective was to assess public perception of the credibility of news photographs in the era of Photoshop. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the awareness level of residents of Enugu Urban on the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms.
2. Find out the level of exposure to photoshopped images by online media platforms among residents of Enugu Urban.
3. Ascertain the motive behind using photoshopped images by online media platforms.
4. Assess the influence of photoshopped images on the credibility of online media platforms.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been raised to guide the study:

1. Are the residents of Enugu Urban aware of the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms?
2. To what extent are the residents of Enugu Urban exposed to photoshopped images by online media platforms?
3. What is the motive behind using photoshopped images on online media platforms?
4. Does the use of photoshopped images influence the credibility of online media platforms?

Use of Photo Manipulation by Online Media Platforms

Thanks to innovations in print and photography between 1880 and 1897, attaching news stories to photographs was made possible. While notable events were photographed as early as 1880, in the 1850s, printers could only publish engravings in the 1880s. Early news or photographs require an engraver to reinterpret them before they can be published. Before computers, image manipulation was achieved by retouching with ink, paint, double exposure, compositing photos or film negatives in a darkroom, or scratching Polaroids (Adewumi & Onuorah, 2012).

In recent times, especially in this age of digital photography, online media platforms have been observed to be at the front of media platforms using photo manipulation/photoshopped images, especially sports sites. During every transfer window in European football, the moment a particular player is reported to be courting interest from another club, the reporting media immediately photoshops the player in the jersey of the reported interested club.

Samples of Photo Manipulation/Photoshopped Images as Used by Online Media Platforms
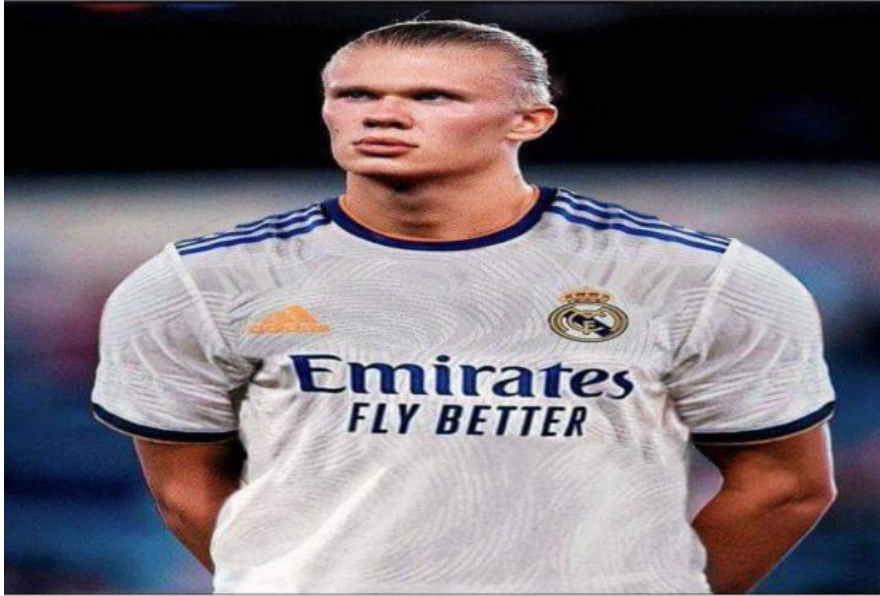
Photoshopped: Then Borussia Dortmund striker Erling Haaland in a Real Madrid jersey. He later joined Manchester City instead. The picture's relevance is that most readers believe the picture, if not now, later, that he played for Madrid.

Photoshopped: Then Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo in a Manchester City jersey. He, however, re-joined Manchester United and now plays for Al Nassr in Saudi Arabia. The relevance of the picture is that most readers might believe the picture, if not now, later, that he played for City.

Photoshopped: Chelsea midfielder Mason Mount in a Manchester United jersey. He, however, later joined them. The picture's relevance is that if he did not join them, most readers might believe the picture that he played for Man United.

Photoshopped: Chelsea attacking midfielder Kai Havertz in an Arsenal jersey. He later joined Arsenal, but as this picture surfaced online, he was still a Chelsea player. The picture's relevance is that if he did not join them, most readers might believe the picture that he played for Arsenal.

Photoshopped: Arsenal winger Bukayo Saka in a Real Madrid jersey. The picture's relevance is that most readers believe the picture, if not now, later, that he played for Madrid.

Photoshop as a Form of Fake News (Misinformation, Disinformation and Mal-information)
According to Okoye and Oparaugo (2021), there are three types of fake news:
Misinformation: This is false information created without the intent of causing harm. For example, a student who comes to tell fellow students that exams will start next week still needs to be fixed. This intends not to cause harm but to encourage them to study their books.
Disinformation: This is false information created with the intent of causing harm. For example, the news of someone's death to a family member could cause harm, as one could immediately have a stroke, high blood pressure or even die on hearing the news.
Mal-information: This is accurate information shared with the intent of causing harm. For example, news of someone's ordeal to a dear one is accurate, but it was shared to cause harm, as it could lead to the sudden demise of another.

Misinformation, disinformation and mal-information are raw materials that form fake news information-sharing systems that are currently and primarily unregulated and have altered with conventional information behavior (Wilson & Umar, 2019).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW
A study by Štefaniková and Láb (2018), titled "*The Transformation of Photojournalism in the Czech Republic in the Digital Age*," investigated the impact of digitization on the journalistic profession, image and its evolution over the past two decades. One of the study's objectives was to examine how photojournalists and photo editors perceive the changes brought about by the

adoption of digital technology and how reporting habits, photojournalism, visual content and professional identity have been reshaped. The results show how Czech photojournalists rate their professional status after digitization.

In a study by Van House (2011) titled Personal Photography, Digital Technologies and Image Use, she found that many people use digital photography and videography technology, including camera phones and online photo sharing.

Kombol (2009) studied *The Acceptance and Dissemination of Digital Photography by Journalists in the City of Makurdi*. The study examined the benefits of digital photography and the challenges photojournalists face when adopting this innovation. They surveyed selected photojournalists at Makurdi TV station, newspapers and magazines. The results indicate that 33.34% of respondents believe that the most significant benefit of digital photography is time savings. In comparison, 26.66% believe that the most significant benefit of digital photography is cost saving. More than 20% said the most important benefit was that it improved image quality. In comparison, 6.67% said the most important benefit of digital photography was making it easier to publish, and 13.33% said that the most crucial advantage of digital photography is compatibility with the computer. Most respondents (46.67%) indicated that the cost of new technologies is the most pressing issue hindering the use of digital cameras.

In comparison, a few (6.67%) respondents believe the lack of service staff is the most pressing issue hindering photojournalists' adoption of digital cameras in Nigeria. They conclude that for photojournalists, the most important benefit of digital photography is that it saves them time as they have to meet deadlines. The cost of digital technology is the most pressing issue because digital cameras are expensive for the average photojournalist and should be provided by the media. These results clearly show that there needs to be more research on the relationship between improved image quality and the use of Kombol digital cameras (2009).

Hamad-Allah (2018), in his study "*Credibility and Connotations of Image in the World of Post-Digital Photography,*" found out that digital image affects the credibility of the image because there are many kinds of files through which it is impossible to verify whether the image is exposed to processing operations and a change in their contents or not.

Shen, Kasra, Pan, Bassett, Malloch, and O'Brien (2018) found that participants' Internet skills, photo-editing experience, and social media use were significant predictors of image credibility evaluation, while most social and heuristic cues of online credibility (e.g., source trustworthiness, bandwagon trustworthiness, intermediary trustworthiness) had no significant impact. Viewers' attitude toward a depicted issue also positively influenced their credibility evaluation.

Vernon (1997), in her study "*The Credibility of News Photography in the Digital Age,*" found out that there is little significant difference between treatment groups, but rather, an agreement among all groups that the credibility of news photography is declining and that digital technology does threaten the credibility of news photography.

Malizu (2010), in her study "*Re-Examining the Credibility of Photojournalism in the Digital Photography and Editing Era,*" found out that digital imaging technology allows

photographers to improve the technical quality of their pictures when shot under less-than-perfect lighting conditions. This technology also gives editors more flexibility and creativity with layouts. However, this powerful technology can damage public reputation when it falls into careless hands.

Similarly, Gayle (2020), in her study "*Perceived Credibility of Professional Photojournalism versus User-Generated Content among American News Media Audiences*," found that audiences distinguish the source of the image, both within the background and the photographer but also consider the category of news images in their perception of an image's credibility.

Theoretical Framework
The study is anchored on the Gate-Keeping theory. Psychologist Kurt Lewin developed the theory. According to Shoemaker (1991), the theory states that there are forces that can facilitate or limit the transmission of stories through access control. Access control generally refers to controlling information as it passes through a door or filter and is concerned with exercising different types of authority (e.g., information selection, resource enforcement, etc.). Status in parliamentary committees, mediating between professional and ethnic groups, and negotiating information from experts (Malizu, 2010). This process determines the selected information and the content and nature of the message, such as news and photos. When applied to current research, this theory describes the robust process by which the media report events by explaining how and why some information slips through the media door or goes unnoticed by the media. Like journalists, photojournalists are gatekeepers because they determine the events they will capture with their cameras, how the photos will look, and even what photos will be published or put in newspapers. Therefore, they control the photo information that passes through their portal.

METHODOLOGY
The survey method was adopted. The nature of this study involved using primary sources, and a questionnaire was used to elicit information. The researchers used the population figure of the Enugu metropolis for 2022, which is available on the Internet. According to macrotrends.net, the projected population of Enugu urban in 2022 is 820,000. The use of the Taro-Yamane statistical formula determined a sample size of 400. The systematic sampling technique was used to select a sample based on equal representation from the respondents.

Data Analysis
Of the 400 copies of a questionnaire distributed to respondents in the study area, 392 or 98%, were completed correctly and returned to the researcher, while eight needed to be corrected or garbled, accounting for a 2% bounce rate. This led the researchers to use a 98% response rate in data presentation and analysis in this study. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents to provide answers to the research questions. Below is the presentation and data analysis related to respondents' responses by descriptive method:

Table I: Awareness of the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms

Response category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	370	94.39
No	22	5.61
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2023.

Data generated from Table 1 above showed that 370 of the respondents, representing 94.39% of them, said that they are aware of the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms, while 22, representing 5.61% of them, are not aware of this use.

This implies that residents of Enugu Urban are highly aware of the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms.

Table II: Extent of exposure to photoshopped images by online media platforms

Response category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	280	71.42
Moderate	80	20.41
Low	26	6.63
Not at all	1	0.25
Cannot say	5	1.27
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2023.

Based on the data generated from Table 2 above, which stated that 280 of the respondents, representing 71.42%, are exposed to photoshopped images by online media platforms to a high extent, 80 of the respondents, representing 20.41%, are exposed to photoshopped images by online media platforms to a moderate extent, 26 of the respondents representing 6.63 are exposed to photoshopped images by online media platforms to a low extent. In comparison, 1, representing 0.25% of the respondents, are not exposed to photoshopped images by online media platforms, and 5 of the respondents, representing 1.27, cannot say to which extent they are exposed to photoshopped images by online media platforms. This implies that many respondents are exposed to photoshopped images on online media platforms.

Table III: Motive behind the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms

Response category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
To generate traffic	250	63.78
Misinformation	50	12.76
Disinformation	30	7.65
Mal-information	25	6.37
Cannot say	37	9.44
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2023.

The data generated from Table 3 above showed that 250 of the respondents, representing 63.78%, said that the motive behind the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms is to generate traffic, 50 of the respondents, representing 12.76%, said that the motive, behind the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms, is misinformation, 30 of them representing 7.65% of them said that the motive behind the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms is disinformation, 25 of them representing 6.37% said that the motive behind the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms is misinformation. In comparison, 37, representing 9.44%, could not express their opinion on the motive behind using photoshopped images by online media platforms.

This implies that many respondents believe the motive behind using photoshopped images by online media platforms is generating traffic.

Table IV: Influence of photoshopped images on the credibility of online media platforms

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	102	26.02
Agree	201	51.28
Undecided	60	15.31
Disagree	19	4.85
Strongly Disagree	10	2.55
Total	**392**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Data generated from the above table indicate that 102, or 26.02% of the respondents strongly agreed that the use of photoshopped images influences the credibility of online media platforms, 201 of them, or 51.28%, agreed that the use of photoshopped images influences the credibility of online media platforms, 60 or 15.31% of them are undecided, 19, representing 4.85% disagreed that the use of photoshopped images influences the credibility of online media platforms. In comparison, 10, representing 2.55%, strongly disagreed that using photoshopped images influences the credibility of online media platforms.

This implies that a more significant proportion of the respondents agreed that using photoshopped images influences the credibility of online media platforms.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The researchers analyzed four tables for the research questions. The result of the first table on the awareness level of the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms showed a high level of awareness of the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms among residents of Enugu Urban. This was proven as 370 of the respondents, representing 94.39%, said they are aware of the use of photoshopped images by online media platforms. This is in line with the findings of Gayle (2020), who asserts that audiences distinguish the source of the image, both within the background and the photographer, but also consider the category of news images in their perception of the credibility of an image.

Findings from Table 2 revealed that many respondents are exposed to photoshopped images by online media platforms to a great extent. This was proven by the analysis, which showed that 280 of the respondents, representing Arehem, are exposed to photoshopped images by online media platforms to a great extent. This finding is slightly similar to the submission of Van House (2011), who agreed that many people use both digital photography and videography technology, including camera phones and online photo sharing.

Table 3 shows that the motive behind using photoshopped images by online media platforms is to generate traffic. This was proven as 250 or 63.78% of the respondents affirmed that the motive behind using photoshopped images by online media platforms is to generate traffic. To generate traffic means to attract online readers to increase engagement on online posts. Other reasons for using photoshopped images on online media platforms are misinformation, disinformation, and malformation. This is supported by the findings of Okoye and Oparaugo (2021), who submit that misinformation is false information created without the intent of causing harm. For example, a student who comes to tell fellow students that exams will start next week still needs to be fixed. This intends not to cause harm but to encourage them to study their books. Disinformation is false information created with the intent of causing harm (Okoye & Oparaugo, 2021). For example, the news of someone's death to a family member could cause harm, as one could immediately have a stroke, high blood pressure or even die on hearing the news. Okoye and Oparaugo (2021) further posit that mal-information is accurate information shared with the intent of causing harm. For example, news of someone's ordeal to a dear one, which was true, was shared to cause harm, as it could lead to the sudden demise of another.

The last table analyzes the influence of photoshopped images on the credibility of online media platforms. Results from the analysis proved that using photoshopped images influences the credibility of online media platforms. This was proven as 102 or 26.02% of the respondents strongly agreed that using photoshopped images influences the credibility of online media platforms. This finding is supported by Malizu (2010), who argued that photo manipulation can damage public reputation when it falls into careless hands. Also, Hamad-Allah (2018) argues that digital images affect the image's credibility because there are many files through which it is impossible to verify whether the image is exposed to processing operations and if there is a change in its contents.

CONCLUSION

Concerns about the reliability of news photography in the digital age inspired this study. The study found that digital imaging technology allows photographers to improve the technical quality of their photos when shooting in less-than-perfect lighting conditions. This technology also gives editors more flexibility and creativity with layouts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that photojournalists check their photos' authenticity before posting. Photographers and their editors should let the public know that while photo editing is a simple process, it is not a widely accepted practice in the industry. Therefore, newsrooms should review their code of ethics and add or update photo editing standards to their list. Sharing these policies with the public can help strengthen trust in the press and prevent the erosion of media credibility in recent years. Photojournalists should avoid using edited images in stories.

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