

Public Abstract

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Title:Do Readers Believe What They See? Reader Acceptance of Image Manipulation

Since the dawn of the digital age professionals and academics have voiced concerns that the public will lose faith in the images produced by photojournalists. As well known incidents of overly manipulated images have come to light and as the public has become increasingly aware of imaging software, such as Adobe Photoshop, the concerns have grown. The photojournalism profession needs to know what adjustments/manipulations their readers find acceptable. They also need to know what level of trust the public has in news photography in order to be able to track any changes in public attitudes.

This study uses a random public sample to measure the level of acceptance the public has of various kinds of image adjustment/manipulation, to discover how frequently the respondents believe the same manipulations are performed on the news images in the local daily newspaper and how much they trust those images to truthfully depict the scene photograph. The study also looks for a correlation between a person's familiarity with imaging software and that person's views on, or expectations of, digital manipulation of the news images.

The findings indicate the public's acceptance of the various digital adjustments mirrors the profession's though the respondents were less accepting of burning and dodging. The findings also show that many of the readers believe drastic image manipulations are performed far more frequently than they actually are. No correlation was found between a person's familiarity with imaging software and the level of trust assigned to news images. However, a correlation was found between a person's familiarity with imaging software and their acceptance of some of the various manipulations.

There were also correlations found between how often a person believes various manipulations are performed and the level of trust they have for the images in their local newspapers, even if the manipulation is one that had been one of the "acceptable" ones.