UNIT – 7: ETHICS IN PHOTOJOURNALISM

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9.1. Learning objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- discuss the topic of ethics in photojournalism
- narrate ethics in use of Photoshop and digital manipulation
- explain photojournalism in relation to Internet
- discuss the problem of ethical concerns of photojournalism over Internet

9.2. Introduction

In the previous unit we have introduced to the concept of privacy along with the concept of sensationalism and its impact on the electronic media besides the concept of sting operation, paparazzi and restrictions imposed by law and finally the concept of yellow journalism.

Photojournalism is a particular form of journalism (the collecting, editing, and presenting of news material for publication or broadcast) that

creates images in order to tell a news story. It is now usually understood to refer only to still images, and in some cases to video used in broadcast journalism or for personal use. Lots of complex issues have come up in recent years in the domain of photojournalism, such as the issues concerning copyright violations, plagiarism and observing code of ethics. In this unit you are being introduced to the ethics of photojournalism, digital manipulation by using Photoshop and ethics concerning it. You will also be introduced to the ethical concerns of photojournalism over Internet.

9.3. Ethics in Photojournalism

What is Photography?

Photography is the process, activity and art of creating still or moving pictures by recording radiation on a sensitive medium, such as a film, or an electronic sensor. Photojournalism is a particular form of journalism (the collecting, editing, and presenting of news material for publication or broadcast) that creates images in order to tell a news story. It is now usually understood to refer only to still images, and in some cases to video used in broadcast journalism or for personal use. Photojournalism is distinguished from other close branches of photography (such as documentary photography, street photography or celebrity photography) by the qualities of – Timeliness, Objectivity and Narrative.

Ethics in Photojournalism:

Ethics in Photojournalism (or Photography) could be described as the principles of the best practice that any photographer should adopt in carrying out their practice. The majority of these *principles are based on common sense, goodwill, and morality rather than on laws and*

regulations. However, there are areas where the law may provide a framework in which the photographer has to operate, e.g., copyright, contract law, etc. and, in some countries, privacy legislation. Privacy laws provide a legal framework in which the *ethics of privacy* resides. However, for those photographers not bound by legal constraints, it is in their interest not to misuse any photograph they have taken. Clearly "paparazzi" sails close to the wind in this regard, often acquiring images using long lenses and other devious means which can bring the profession into disrepute. The events leading to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in Paris in September 1997 are a case in point.

Plagiarism in Photography:

Plagiarism is another important issue. Basing an image on the work of another photographer without reworking, or using the text authored by someone else without giving credit, is plagiarism. This is not fraud; it is copyright infringement and comparable to theft. Care should always be exercised when receiving a brief for new work, especially if the example provided by the client is based on the work of another photographer. It is in the photographer's interest to point out to the client the difficulties of 'copying' the ideas of another. Both the photographer's and the client's reputation may be at stake, and legal action may also ensue.

Photographers' Code of Professional Conduct:

Most professional bodies that represent photographers have a *code of professional conduct* that all members agree to be bound by, and which provides a standard of ethics to which they conform when working. It usually covers matters like *confidentiality*, exercising due skill and which provides a standard of ethics to which they conform, the *upholding of professional status*, *issues of corruption*, and so on.

Photojournalists (basically war photographers) are regularly confronted with ethical issues of an extreme kind. In photographing

identifiable victims of conflict or disaster, for example, they may have to consider whether they would wish themselves or their families to be shown in such circumstances. Or, in another kind of situation, the photographer may have the choice of intervening to protect life instead of taking pictures. A third type of predicament arises when a photographer suspects that, for publicity or propaganda reasons, an atrocity or other criminal act may be taking place in order to be photographed. Finally, the photographer must ensure that his or her pictures show what they purport to show, without staging, restaging, or manipulation in the darkroom or by digital means. In practice, all these issues involve difficult grey areas, and implicate editors and newspaper proprietors as well as photographers.

The range and variety of photographic work is such that it is hard to generalise too broadly about standards of conduct. However, ethical requirements of photojournalism is that it should be legal, decent, honest, and truthful; prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and society. It must have regard for the principles of fair competition generally accepted in business. Based on these background the U.S. National Press Photographers Association (NPPA), and other professional organizations, maintain a Code of Ethics to address what are thought to be the proper approaches to these issues. The NPPA places emphasis on photojournalism, or journalism that presents a story through the use of photographs or moving pictures. The NPPA encourages photojournalists to reflect high standards of quality in their professional performance and in their personal code of ethics. The NPPA believes that photojournalists should operate as trustees of the public. The primary role of photojournalists is to report visually on the significant events and on the varied viewpoints in our common world. The NPPA Code of Ethics is intended to promote the highest quality in all forms of photojournalism and to strengthen public confidence in the profession. Following are the main points of this Code:

- Be accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects.
- Resist being manipulated by staged photo opportunities.
- Be complete and provide context when photographing or recording subjects. Avoid stereotyping individuals and groups.

Recognise and work to avoid presenting one's own biases in the work.

- Treat all subjects with respect and dignity. Give special consideration to vulnerable subjects and compassion to victims of crime or tragedy. Intrude on private moments of grief only when the public has an overriding and justifiable need to see.
- While photographing subjects should not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence events.
- Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic images' content and context. Do not manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects.
- Do not pay sources or subjects or reward them materially for information or participation.
- Do not accept gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage.
- Do not intentionally sabotage the efforts of other journalists.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – A

1. What is photography?

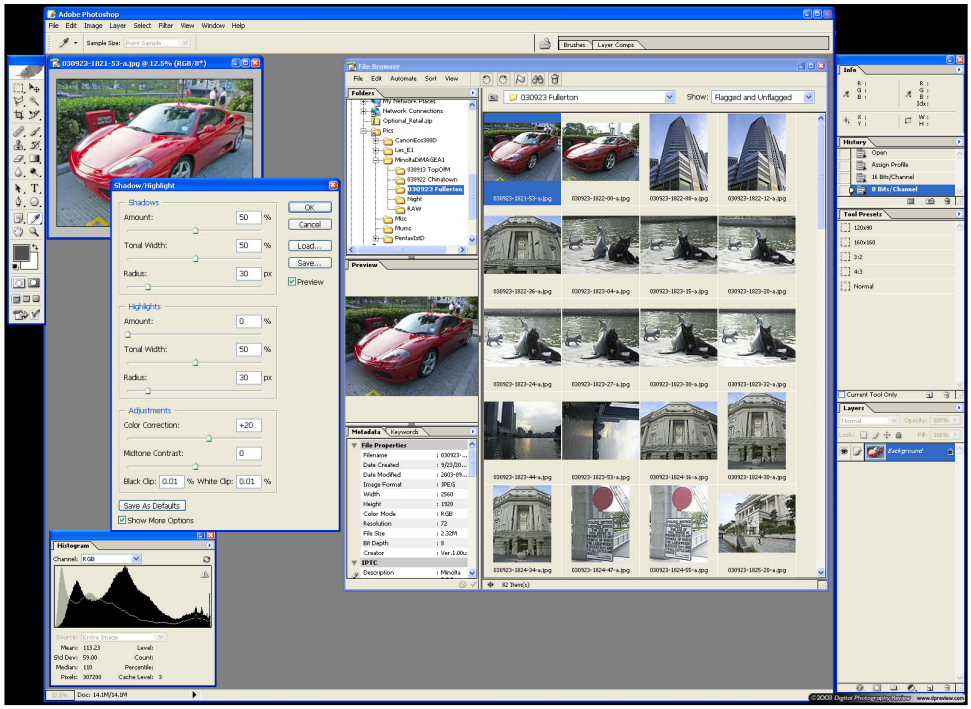
2. What is photojournalism?

3. What is plagiarism?

9.4. Use of Photoshop and publishing of digital photographs

Photojournalism works within the same ethical approaches to objectivity that are applied by other journalists. What to shoot, how to frame and how to edit are constant considerations. In this respect the emergence of digital photography is worth mentioning because it offers new opportunities for the manipulation, reproduction, and transmission of images. In the process it has complicated many of the ethical issues involved.

Let us discuss this point in some detail.



(Digital photos how it looks in a computer)

Digital photography by definition relies on being processed with photo editing software such as the popular Adobe Photoshop which makes manipulation or sometimes distortion easier. With the availability of applications like Photoshop, an important point of discussion from ethical point of view one of the most common within the photographic

community is about the appropriate use and extent of photo manipulation. Even within the world of nature and landscape there are some who feel that digital manipulation is part of the art form; there are others – the purists – who feel that minimal editing should take place to accurately represent nature. But things have been different in recent years. There is a growing number of photographers who have been found to be bending or breaking the ethics of photojournalism. An example is Reuters' freelance photographer, Adnan Hajj who was dismissed for his digitally altered images of Beirut. A former Pulitzer Prize nominated photographer, Allan Dietrich, has been caught publishing digitally manipulating photos in PDF (Portable Document Format).

Code of Ethics and Photoshop:

The guiding principle of journalistic profession is accuracy, and therefore, it is wrong to alter the content of a photograph in any way that deceives the public. Photojournalists have the responsibility to document society and to preserve its images as a matter of historical record. It is clear that the emerging electronic technologies provide new challenges to the integrity of photographic images. In light of this background, the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA), affirms in its Code of Ethics that the accurate representation is the benchmark of journalistic profession. It believes photojournalistic guidelines for fair and accurate reporting should be the criteria for judging what may be done electronically to a photograph. Altering the editorial content is a breach of the ethical standards recognised by the NPPA.

People have been faking photos since the invention of photography – this is nothing new and photojournalists have grappled with the credibility problems created by altered images since the early days of photography. But since the 20th century computers are wondrous machines and there are Photoshop artists who can digitally manipulate photos. But these Photoshop artists should remember that photo manipulation is not just about using the technology, it is about understanding our society as well. One can redecorate his/her whole

house, loose ten kilos of my weight or even ten years, and leap tall building at a single bound – using a computer. This is simply magical, but people gradually would be losing faith in what they see in a photograph. And because of this ease in manipulating digital images with Photoshop, some people are questioning whether images are "real" or "art", and wondering if they can believe anything they see anymore.

Each day when a photojournalist steps out onto the street, he/she should remember that he/she has been granted a sacred trust to be truthful. Photojournalists have the responsibility to produce only honest images. It is their responsibility to show people the world and what happens in it good or bad. They have no right to distort or manipulate facts in a photograph. Fellow citizens trust them, and, if they destroy the credibility of their work, even in small ways, it destroys the credibility of their newspaper or TV station in the eyes of the people they are covering.

In the days of Photoshop and other equally good photo editing softwares, photographic truth is an elusive, often subjective concept. Photoshop is useful in many ways but must never be used for the altering original photographs to deceive people. Photoshop can be used as a medium of artistic creations and as long as the purpose of the "art" is not to intentionally mislead or misrepresent, and the artist is clear about his methods and intentions, no one gets fooled. Of course, there are some art forms, such as magic, where the intention is specifically to deceive, and the viewer willingly goes along with it.

Therefore, a universal code of ethics is definitely something photojournalists need, but it should not restrict their options and creativity. Of course, the best way to approach a situation like that is to ask oneself if it will benefit others to see that photograph. It only becomes a problem, and a question of ethics, when the artist or photographer lies about his motivations, methods, and conclusions, and presents images with the purpose to intentionally deceive.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – B

4. Digital photography relies on what that makes manipulation distortion more easier?

5. What is Photoshop?

9.5. Photojournalism, Internet and Ethics

What is Internet?

Internet is such a place where anyone with the necessary equipment and modest technical skill can have an active presence and declare his or her message to the world. It allows individuals to indulge in anonymity, role-playing, and fantasising and also to enter into community with others and engage in sharing. The technological configuration underlying the Internet has a considerable bearing on its ethical aspects. People have tended to use it according to the way it was designed, and to design it to suit that kind of use. In most of the countries major ethical issues are often addressed by law, but laws regarding photography can vary significantly from nation to nation, and the situation is further complicated as photojournalism over the Internet made in one country can be visible in all other countries simultaneously.

Photography on the World Wide Web (www)

Ever since it became practical to print photographs on newsprint, photography has been an integral part of news media. But recent advances in technology, in particular the popularisation of the World Wide Web (www) or the Internet things have become more challenging. Free and simple-to-maintain blog software has allowed anyone who cares to be heard by the world, amplify individuals' criticisms of the mainstream media. At the same time, citizen journalism of a variety of flavours has proliferated as ordinary people become accustomed to taking and uploading images of events that they witness. For the most part, mainstream media outlets seem to have adjusted to these trends, but while photojournalism online may have some troubling consequences for ethics and privacy, overall it appears that the Internet's effect on photojournalism will improve the practice if not the profession.

Examples of Manipulated Photographs on the Internet

The growth of the Internet has contributed to public skepticism about photojournalism. Numerous online communities, populated by thousands of professionals and amateurs, have sprung up around photoshopping and many websites that support digital manipulation of photographs. This skepticism has also found an outlet in the blogs, as Internet denizens critique inaccuracies in the mainstream media and suspect photographs as fakes. One of the most infamous instances of this was the "Burning Building" photograph scandal during the 2006 Israeli-Lebanon conflict. Reuters circulated a photo of Beirut showing thick smoke billowing from "burning buildings destroyed during an overnight Israeli air raid", according to the caption (Blumer). In the photograph, the smoke showed a pattern from which it could be clearly visible that it had been modified with Photoshop's "clone" tool. Some bloggers also pointed out inconsistencies in the arrangement of the buildings on the ground with other Beirut photographs, suggesting that they also had been doctored. After this controversy billowed through the

Internet, Reuters issued a “Picture Kill” and took the photograph down. However, the “Burning Building” photograph remained a hot topic as bloggers wondered why such an obviously doctored picture was able to get past the Reuters editors. It seems, the long-term effect of the presence of the Internet on the mainstream media’s credibility is unclear.



The Internet has also facilitated the distribution of ordinary citizens’ photography, creating the possibility that their work may soon compete with traditional media outlets’ photo essays. The convergence of blogs and digital photography has allowed almost anyone to create and publish his or her own photo essays. A myriad of Internet companies offer services allowing users to upload photographs and show them to the public. One of the most popular photo hosting services, Flickr, has an online community-type feature called “pooling” which makes it easy for different users to group photos related to a particular interest or element.

This has been used to bring together tens, even hundreds of different users' photos of events.

In many cases, the mainstream media has also encouraged its audience's participation in photojournalism. This phenomenon became apparent during the July 2005 bombings in London when camera phones provided some of the most intense and immediate images from the scenes. Since professional photojournalists had little to no access to the blast sites afterward as security officials fenced them off, many news outlets relied instead on amateurs' images to illustrate news. Furthermore, since some of the victims also had camera phones, they were able to document the moments after the bombing – images a professional photojournalist would never have been able to capture. The mass conversion of ordinary citizens into photojournalists, while potentially democratising, could have some negative consequences. Amateur photographs pose the same credibility hazards as professional photojournalist work; news outlets will have to find ways to accurately determine whether or not a submitted image has been doctored. In addition, amateurs do not share professional photojournalists' code of ethics.

There are organisations for self-regulation of professional photographers and who have ethical Code of Conduct for their self-regulation. The photographers involved in media normally need to follow these Code of Conduct and the reputed media houses often follow them in strict sense of these codes. But the Netizens or common Internet users do not belong to any group, organisation or media house. Therefore, while uploading a photograph, regulating the Netizens ethically, is a major concern in the coming years.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – C

1. What is “www”?

2. What was the “Burning Building” photograph scandal?

9.6. Let us sum up

Photography is the process, activity and art of creating still or moving pictures by recording radiation on a sensitive medium, such as a film, or an electronic sensor. Photojournalism is a particular form of journalism (the collecting, editing, and presenting of news material for publication or broadcast) that creates images in order to tell a news story. It is now usually understood to refer only to still images, and in some cases to video used in broadcast journalism or for personal use.

Ethics in Photojournalism (or Photography) could be described as the principles of best practice that any photographer should adopt in carrying out their practice. The majority of these *principles are based on common sense, goodwill, and morality rather than on laws and regulations*. However, there are areas where the law may provide a framework in which the photographer has to operate. However, ethical requirements of photojournalism can be – that it be legal, decent, honest, and truthful; prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and

society; and have regard for the principles of fair competition generally accepted in business.

People have been faking photos since the invention of photography – this is nothing new. But the emergence of digital photography offers new opportunities for the manipulation, reproduction, and transmission of images, that has complicated many ethical. Digital photography by definition relies on being processed with photo editing software such as the popular Adobe Photoshop. A universal code of ethics is defiantly something photojournalists need, but it should not restrict their options and creativity.

Internet is such a virtual place which allows individuals to indulge in anonymity, role-playing, and fantasising and also to enter into community with others and engage in sharing. The technological configuration underlying the Internet has a considerable bearing on its ethical aspects. There are organisations for self-regulation of professional photographers and who have ethical Code of Conduct for their self-regulation. But the Netizens or common Internet users do not belong to any group, organisation or media house. Therefore, while uploading a photograph, regulating the Netizens ethically, is a major concern in the coming years.

9.7. Answers to check your progress

A

1. Photography is the process, activity and art of creating still or moving pictures by recording radiation on a sensitive medium, such as a film, or an electronic sensor.

2. Photojournalism is a particular form of journalism (the collecting, editing, and presenting of news material for publication or broadcast) that creates images in order to tell a news story. It is now usually understood to refer only to still images, and in some cases to video used in broadcast journalism or for personal use.

3. Basing an image on the work of another photographer without reworking, or using text authored by someone else without giving credit, is plagiarism.

B

1. Digital photography by definition relies on being processed with photo editing software such as the popular Adobe Photoshop which makes manipulation or sometimes distortion more easier.

2. Photoshop is a software or a graphics editing program (also known as a DPD, Desktop Publishing Program) developed and published by Adobe Systems. It is the current and primary market leader for commercial bitmap and image manipulation, and is the flagship product of Adobe Systems. It has been described as "an industry standard for graphics professionals".

C

1. World Wide Web (www).
2. “Burning Building” was a photograph scandal during the 2006 Israeli-Lebanon conflict. Reuters circulated a photo of Beirut showing thick smoke billowing from “burning buildings destroyed during an overnight Israeli air raid”, according to the caption (Blumer). In the photograph, the smoke showed a pattern from

which it could be clearly visible that it had been modified with Photoshop's "clone" tool. Some bloggers also pointed out inconsistencies in the arrangement of the buildings on the ground with other Beirut photographs, suggesting that they also had been doctored. After this controversy billowed through the Internet, Reuters issued a "Picture Kill" and took the photograph down.

9.8. Further Readings

- **L. Gross, J. S. Katz and J. Ruby (eds.):** ***Image Ethics – The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television***
- **L. Gross, J. S. Katz, and J. Ruby (eds.):** ***Image Ethics in the Digital Age***
- **P. K. Ravindran :** ***Press Laws and Ethics of Journalism***
- **T. Rajsekhar:** ***Ethics and Objectives***

9.9. Possible questions

1. How is Photojournalism distinguished from other close branches of photography? Write a note on ethics of photojournalism.
2. Write a note on ethical concerns as regards the use of Photoshop and digital manipulation.
3. Write a note on photojournalism and ethics in relation to Internet (World Wide Web)?