



ETHICAL AND AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS IN PHOTO-EDITING AMONG MASS COMMUNICATION STUDENTS OF ESUT AND IMT, ENUGU

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ABSTRACT

Photography is an important means of disseminating both visual and verbal messages and its aesthetics plays an essential role in capturing the essence of an event and maintaining the attention of the audience. There is great concern about the ethical implications of the advanced technology that makes it easier for photos to be manipulated, thus making the public doubt the credibility of such photos. Therefore, this study examined the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing among Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT, Enugu. Deontology and Aesthetic Pleasure Theories provided the theoretical foundation for the work. The survey method was adopted for the study and the population was 2,845, the total number Mass Communication students in both schools. A sample size of 340 was drawn using the online sample size calculator provided by Wimmer and Dominick (2013) through the systematic random sampling technique. Questionnaire served as the measuring instrument and the mean statistic was used in analysing the data. Findings from the study showed, inter alia, that to a moderate extent, ethical and aesthetic considerations were known and applied in photo-editing at ESUT and IMT Mass Communication Department photo studios. The study recommended, among other things, that photojournalism lecturers and photo editors should emphasise the ethical and aesthetic aspects of photo-editing to help students imbibe them fully and the institutions should acquire state-of-the-art technologies for photo-editing that can help the students to learn how to improve the technical qualities of pictures with ease without doctoring them to mislead the public.

Keyword: Aesthetics, Ethics, Photo-editing, Photography, Photojournalism

Introduction

In the contemporary world, so many people use photographs on regular basis. Most individuals possess a camera both in smart phones and as an individual device. In as much as there are numerous benefits accruable from photographs, we live in a world where there are photo-editing problems and an avalanche of images online taken without consent (Arete, 2018).

Photography is a visual form of communication. It is utilised for several purposes ranging from individual acts of reminiscence to the global exchange of ideas. Photographs are displayed in albums, complimentary cards, serve as themes on computer systems, and are used as art decorations in our respective places of residence.

Photographs are admitted as evidence in proving court cases and they are published in newspapers to confirm news stories. They are equally utilised for identification purposes especially for driver's licenses and passports. Adopting photos as evidence depends on their suitability to capture the genuine occurrence of events (Fasheke, 2004).

A photograph is one of the relevant ways an individual can communicate a story to others. Photography over the years has played a sensitive role in telling narratives subsumed either in a news story, feature, or other editorial matter. In news about different topics like politics, and sports, stories emanate through the medium of a still shot. Events happen every day and the desire to stay up to date with what is happening becomes inevitable (Lowndes, 2018).

With the advent of technology, taking a photograph has become as easy as owning a smartphone. Prior to the digital era, people used film cameras, took photographs without knowledge of how the picture will turn out and processed the film in a dark room before viewership. Even then, people still had the power to manipulate the outcome. Now photographs can be taken easily, edited with an application, and shared on multiple platforms in a matter of seconds, thus increasing the impact of any manipulation done on them (Coffaney, 2011).

The possibility of editing compels the photo recipients to query if an image has been altered and if so, to what extent? What is the rationale for the manipulation, what are the objectives and intention? What are the ethical yardsticks in the digital editing and alteration of a photo? To get answers to these questions, aspiring scholars in the field of photojournalism must logically evaluate why the image was captured and what will become of it. If the photo was captured solely for artistic purposes, then it will be appealing for aesthetic considerations. If the photo was adopted for documentary or journalistic objectives, then ethical measures come into focus (Allan, 2005).

Although pictures could be altered from the earlier stages of photography, the number of deceptive news photo alterations has seemingly increased in recent years due to the fact that it is simple for anyone to photoshop an image (Liu et al., 2004). With efficient photo processing software such as Adobe Photoshop, one can easily expunge/edit some attributes in a photo without any obvious trace (Liu et al., 2004). Even some of the most outstanding news agencies in the world have had their reputations stained by allowing these manipulated images to be published (Liu, et al., 2004).

Despite the simplicity of photo alteration software programmes, the increased demand for pictures from students in tertiary institutions, photo recipients, and media organisations has created a world where ethical standards can be easily crossed with just a click of a mouse. For this purpose, it is salient to appreciate what those ethical standards entail and examine how photographers explore their skills to ensure that they themselves do not violate those standards.

Owing to the fact that the concept of ethics in photo-editing is such a sensitive terrain, it is up to individual photographers, photo editors, aspiring photographers, and even those who are in charge of media organisations to always be circumspect and examine the ethical implications of their actions (Garrison, 2015). Furthermore, the same ethical implications apply to the two schools selected, for instance the Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) which was originally established as Anambra State University of Technology (ASUTECH) in 1980, and later renamed ESUT in 1991, is a well-respected and reputable state university located in Agbani, Enugu.

The university has a photo studio within the Department of Mass Communication, which is essential for training in photojournalism and photography training. The department also partners effectively with West Africa Broadcast and Media Academy (WABMA), providing students with access to practical skills training in areas such as photography, photo-editing, video editing, investigative reporting, broadcast presentation and more.

On the other hand, the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Enugu, was established in 1973 as an offshoot of Edict No. 10 of 1973. Like ESUT, IMT has a photo studio in the Department of Mass Communication. The studio provides training in photojournalism and photography. It is a state-of-the-art facility, equipped with modern photographic tools and staffed by highly qualified professionals, grounded in the aesthetic and ethical principles that govern photo-editing.

Moreover, if the over-editing of photographs is accepted for any image no matter how appealing it is creative-wise, the photo recipients will obviously query all photographs and captions within all publications. This will particularly hamper the credibility of news organisations whose duty it is to carry and report vital information to the public in textual and pictorial forms. Thus, this study examined the ethical and aesthetic considerations of photo-editing among mass communication students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) and Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Enugu.

Statement of the Problem

In as much as photo-editing is an indispensable aspect of the photographing process, the issue of ethics and beauty are sensitive areas germane to it in order for the photographers, media experts and students of photojournalism not to violate ethical boundaries.

According to Cohen (2015), the truth is constantly sought for, but instances in the media or human endeavours indicate a departure from the truth. This is because people can easily twist, showcase, remove, or alter their work in ways that can stray from the original and this can happen in photography.

As an illustration, most archival pictures that are in international museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, are far from true but they are being admired regardless of their narrative. An instance is the iconic photo taken during World War 2 “Raising a Flag over the Reichstag”. This picture is in fact altered.

The photographer sent by the Soviets to capture a moment of victory as the Soviets were closing in on Berlin had his picture manipulated and highly superimposed with dark smoke in order to change the ugly narrative of looting, murder and rape which was the original display of what happened in Germany. As a matter of fact, the looted watch worn by one of the Soviet soldiers in the picture was expunged (Lowndes, 2018).

The utility of photo alteration in photojournalism, is assumed to have in due time diminished the credibility of print media content. Even some of the most outstanding news agencies in the world have subjected their images to disrepute due to publication of photos that eroded ethical boundaries (Liu et al., 2004). Some Pulitzer Prize winning images which have been hailed for their aesthetic contents also crossed ethical boundaries due to the fact they were manipulated (De Santis, 2008).

Similarly, students are not excused from the issue of photo-manipulation as the majority of them edit pictures for aesthetic reasons without weighing the ethical implications. Although there appears to be a dearth of research on ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing in Nigeria, it remains obvious that digital images are prone to alteration due to various visual manipulations. These manipulations have ignited critical debates in the press, classrooms, and public discourse. Hence, the rationale for this study is to examine how ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing are applied by students of ESUT and IMT, Enugu.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT aware of the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing?
2. How knowledgeable are Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT regarding the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing?

3. In what ways are ethical and aesthetic considerations applied in photo-editing at the Mass Communication Department photo studios of ESUT and IMT?
4. Are there edited photos in ESUT and IMT Mass Communication Department studios that fall short of ethics but are aesthetic in content?
5. What are the challenges in upholding ethical and aesthetic considerations at ESUT and IMT Mass Communication Department photo studios?

Literature Review

Photographs

Photography as a concept was developed from the two Greek words, *photos* and *graphos*. *Photos* represents light and *graphos* means drawing. Therefore, photography indicates drawing with light (Bateman, 2019).

Photography is the art, science and the systematic skill of developing stable images by capturing light or other electromagnetic radiation either by chemical process of light-sensitive material such as photographic film, or electronic process of an image sensor (Asemah et al., 2021). Basically, a lens is adopted to concentrate the light emitted from objects into an actual image on the light-sensitive surface embedded in the camera during a timed exposure. The outcome in an electronic image sensor is an electronic charge at each pixel which is processed and stored electronically in a digital image file for later display (Nkwam & Asemah, 2020).

However, as part of the evolution of photography, Joseph Niépce from France first discovered that silver nitrate and silver chloride would turn black when exposed to light in 1835 (Braden & Eugene, 2023). Niepce came near to producing the initial permanent image. But within the same year, William Henry Fox Talbot discovered the procedure of operating negatives for printing after spending numerous years researching and experimenting with silver nitrate and silver chloride (Wills, 2006).

Hence photography began to take shape in the communication process. However it was Louis Daguerre, who discovered the first real photographs referred to as Daguerreotype by exposing image on metal in 1837 (Cohen, 2015). Daguerre discovered that mercury vapour, focused on a silver coated copper plate, helped to attach the image to the plate (Beilis, 2005).

The procedure was not designated for several printing, rather it was a direct positive image on a smooth coat of silver plated onto a copper sheet captured by placing the image over iodine crystals inside a box. As Daguerreotype was becoming known among the population, Talbot emerged with his own experiment. He introduced the mechanism of putting his images on paper in June 1840. This informed pattern would become the basis for modern photography, and by being polished, the procedure is still utilised today (De Smaele et al., 2017).

In 1871, R. Maddox, an English amateur photographer, developed a dry film plate which kept light-sensitivity after drying. This novel pattern of swift emulsions would be regarded as a new approach in photography, paving the way for quicker exposures and more realistic images (Bateman, 2019). Photographers discovered new, smaller, quicker, and more handy cameras which were purchased throughout Europe. Photographs were thus captured in larger quantities. Among those who experimented with the quicker shutter speed was Eadweard Muybridge, who was the first to initiate this venture in the field of motion-picture projection.

George Eastman introduced the new style of processing photographs, he invented a pattern based on a gelatin emulsion known as the dry-plate in 1878 (Beilis, 2005). In 1888, he came up with the plan to be the first among his contemporaries to simplify the use of camera in the hands of consumers with the catch statement, "You press the button, we do the rest." His camera mechanism consists of a simple light-

tight box with a simple lens, loaded at the factory with film, produced by Kodak, and return reloaded with fresh film (Feininger, 2015).

Eastman made cameras accessible equipment for everyone to use and made Kodak a household name. In 1900, the Kodak Brownie was initiated as the first mass marketed camera, followed by the pioneer 35mm still camera that was produced in 1913 using black-and-white film and in 1935, Kodak invented the Kodachrome, the first colour slide film. Cameras passed through refinements with the added features of quicker shutter speeds, variable film speeds, goal-oriented cameras, and compact 35mm versions (Feininger, 2015).

No doubt, photographers are shifting from analogue-based film cameras to advanced compact digital cameras with improved capabilities. In 1988, only 4% of cameras marketed in the United States were digital; in 2000, that figure gradually increased to 30% (Irwin, 2016). In 2003, digital cameras were sold more than analogue cameras for the first time (Halstead, 2003). On January 12, 2006, Nikon Corporation informed the public, that it will soon stop the production of film cameras and concentrate its resources in making digital cameras (NPPA, 2006).

Photojournalism

Photojournalism is a coinage from the combination of two major words, photo and journalism. While photo represents pictures, journalism indicates the skill of gathering and reporting information on events, people or places, primarily as news. Therefore, photojournalism means using images or pictures to report news. According to Asemah et al. (2021), photojournalism means information, education, communication and entertainment through images. It is a form of journalism that utilises pictures to disseminate a news story.

Photojournalism is a practice adopted to report an interesting story through a series of images or photos that capture and disseminate the relevance of a particular event or activity. No wonder Sebastian (2021) sees photojournalism as the practice of telling a story through photographs. A photojournalist is the same with a reporter, but utilises a camera rather than the written word to disseminate news stories.

Furthermore, photojournalism is the graphical representation of all elementary news. It plays a sensitive role in influencing public opinion and reporting visual documentation of events around the globe (Bateman, 2019). In connection with the ethical measures expected in photo-editing, photojournalism put into consideration the three vital principles of accuracy, objectivity and transparency in order to uphold the integrity of the profession (Okoye, 2011).

As sensitive as the ethical measures of photo-editing are in photojournalism, the same is applicable to aesthetic considerations. This is because, the aesthetic enhancements such as brightness, colour balancing, contrast and sharpness as executed on pictures, should be carefully done by photographers not to affect the factual content of the pictures, thereby eroding the ethical measures to be adhered to in the editing process (Enahoro&Agbana, 2012).

Photo-editing in the Context of Photography and Photojournalism

Photo alteration has been in existence since the invention of photography (Benjamin, 2012). The mere fact that the photographer demands from the subject to smile in front of a camera is an act of alteration thereby manipulating the subject's true emotions by unveiling only what the photographer desires to reveal (Baradell & Stack, 2008; Lester, 1999). A peculiar case is the 1800's photo manipulation of President Abraham Lincoln's head affixed on another body (Irwin, 2016). This photo was edited prior to the invention of digital technologies and skillfully developed in a darkroom.

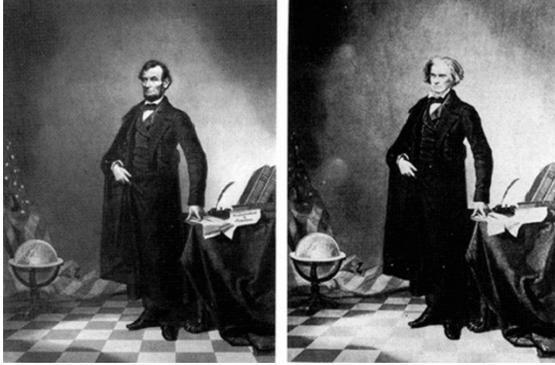


Fig. 1: Fake photograph of US President Abraham Lincoln

(Source: Parveen et al., 2019, p. 19)

In 1929, Winchell and Sullivan introduced a photographic procedure referred to as comosograph which could help photographers to capture multiple photographic images to represent one photo for a scene (Baradell& Stack, 2008).

The single composite image was called a photomontage. In the 20 century, images were skewed and altered with the use of photomontages. The photographer that had the most salient influence on the creation of photomontage was Raoul Hausmann (1920).

Also, computer photo alteration got its foundation from the photomontage. Photomontage was traditionally executed manually, whereas computer alteration is performed with the assistance of the computer. To make the work simple, photojournalists started capturing their photos; scanning them in a system and converting the images into millions of pixels that could easily be edited using software such as Photoshop. The pioneer edition of Photoshop was initiated in February 1990, produced originally by Professor Glenn Knoll (Baines, 2012).

Photo-editing means the expunging of unwarranted subjects or insignificant details from a photo, altering its aspect ratio, or the advancement of its total composition. Photo-editing has been widely utilised. For instance, in printing outlets, photos are trimmed from a panoramic view to improve their visual aesthetic effects; in telephoto photography, a photo is edited to improve the elementary subject.

Editing is an obvious and accepted form of image alteration. Pertinent pattern of editing can enhance the features required for the photo to have the required effect on the photo recipients (Baines, 2012). Photo-editing within the confines of ethics is incidental in attaining photographic value. Painstaking editing will improve the values of precision and integrity (Irwin, 2016). The other prominent pattern of editing includes dodging and burning which brightens or darkens selected aspects of a photograph in order to give prominence to a given subject within it.

Some of the important goals of creative photo-editing as seen in Braden and Eugene (2023) include:

- a) Cropping and cleaning of images
- b) Adjusting the colour of the images
- c) Improving the sharpness of images
- d) Adjusting the brightness and contrast of images

Aesthetic Considerations in Photography

The aesthetics of any photographic image can be evaluated from two angles: visual appearance and contents' message transmission. In order to develop a visual effect, image graphics require comprehensive styling and effective digital editing, while content must be accurately embedded, well-structured and properly disseminated, whether or not it accompanies a caption (Hjort & Pink, 2014).

Whether a photograph has been aesthetically designed, be it for print or online, is to a large extent dependent on the skills of the photojournalist. Besides this, a number of aesthetic principles must be duly observed to ensure its graphic quality.

Generally speaking, a creative team, made up of a number of specialists, namely the photographer, the editor and the layout designer or the web-designer, contribute to and develop the final editing of journalistic photographs (Feininger, 2015). From an aesthetic point of view, Udoh (2014) opines that photography that attracts readers is composed of the following elements:

Sharpness: This element indicates the initial aesthetic field in photography. In order to captivate the interest of the readers or photo-recipients, the photography should not be noisy. A photograph becomes noisy if it introduces extraneous features that encumber the message the photograph tells. In other words, if the photograph betrays the concept of clarity, then it is said to be noisy (Udoh & Obot, 2013). Sharpness in a photograph, magnifies and indicates reality, there should be no doubt as to the image or event depicted in the photograph.

Bluntness: As part of the aesthetic element of photography, bluntness represents originality and truth. A photograph falls short of bluntness, if it is over manipulated for artificial effect. The vogue in today's digital photography has introduced the situation of manipulating the image of a person or event into a different entity or incident. This is usually executed to give a false representation of the person or the object and this negates the aesthetic element of bluntness. Instances of alteration of body type, figure and facial expression of a person from their original selves deviate from the element of bluntness. This type of photograph even if it obeys the aesthetic principle of sharpness and it is not blunt, should not be published to avoid violating the ethical principles of photo-editing.

Protocol: The proper placement of photographs in any medium indicates its aesthetic element. According to Kobre (2004), photographs should not be carelessly displayed on pages. The display should be done in orderliness. Photographs that observe protocol in placement convey stories about events aesthetically without hitches. Just like a news story appreciates the structure of the inverted pyramid, photographs used for events are arranged in their order of decreasing importance for easy follow of events.

Specificity: An edited photograph should be direct on the issue it is emphasising for the appreciation of its viewers. In other words, the photograph should not betray the idea or point it stands to convey. The idea must be salient in the picture. For instance, if specificity is on the size, kind and colour of eyeballs possessed by a person in an event, the person's face, in connection to the position of the eyes, must be projected during the editing or trimming by the professional photo editors (Ikpe & Anim, 2006).

Freshness: Just like currency is appreciated as an attribute in developing a news story, the same is applicable to this aesthetic element in photography. Edited photographs must be fresh in outlook, to address recent issues. Freshness does not fall short of old pictures, rather the old pictures should be edited and packaged to reflect the essence of smoothness to complement the information they are disseminating to the photo-recipients.

Space: Space management is an ideal aesthetic element in photo-editing. A photograph just like humans should be given space to breath. It should be placed to allow white space around it. There should be spatial contrast between a photograph and the textual embellishment placed near it, to enable the photo to breath.

Space management is salient in photo-editing to enable the picture to complement the textual space or size proportional to a news story.

Mood: This should complement the mood of the event or news story. A properly edited photo should represent the mood of the cutline it is bearing. A sorrowful story or event should be accompanied with sorrowful pictures. This will go a long way to define the pains, anguish and sadness in the picture.

Completeness: A photograph that is both blunt, original, specific, spatial and mood sensitive, inter alia, communicates completeness and is aesthetic.

Ethical Considerations in Photo-Editing

Etymologically, the coinage "ethics" is derived from a Greek word *ethos* meaning character, habits, customs, rules or code of values that regulate human conduct and co-existence (Nweke, 2001). According to Ohaja (2014), ethics is an offshoot of Philosophy that is centered on the principles of right and wrong influencing human behaviour or action. Ethics is closely linked to the virtues of responsibility, trust and credibility.

Ethically, photographers and photo editors, are expected to utilise images as an avenue to convey information and convince viewers on distinct issues. This can be achieved either in artistic or inartistic ways. Presenting the photograph in an artistic way would depict only surface manipulation of the photo to improve qualities such as contrast, brightness, saturation, sharpness, etc. so long as it does not alter the true essence of the image. Any alteration of the image beyond what it originally represents results in an inartistic representation of the image (Garrison, 2015).

The digitalisation of photographic procedures has some regulatory principles, codes of conduct and norms, which assist journalists to keep up their roles as professionals who capture images that are not far from the truth. The Digital Manipulation Code of Ethics, issued by the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) as incorporated into the NPPA Bylaws of the United States in June 1995 stipulates that journalists should be guided by the principle of accuracy.

It is wrong to manipulate the content of a photograph in any way to deceive the public. A survey conducted by Reeves in 1992 on over 500 visual editors in the United States revealed that photographic editors largely considered any computer manipulation of photographs unacceptable, except for manual practices of printing such as burning and dodging.

Photojournalists are saddled with the duties to capture society and to preserve its images as a matter of historical record. In so doing, they are to imbibe the photojournalistic principles of fair and accurate reporting in judging the electronic alteration of the content of a photograph. These guidelines were equally highlighted in the study carried by Keith et al. (2006). Through a survey of directors of large circulation newspapers in America, the study showed that 40.5% of the directors unveiled instances of unethical digital manipulation of photos in their own newsrooms.

Photojournalists subject themselves to risk while altering their photographs to the extreme. There have been instances where professional photojournalists have been relieved of their jobs due to excessive photo alterations; Brain Walski, a respected *Los Angeles Times* staff photojournalist was fired in 2003 for combining two pictures while in Iraq to create one photograph with better outlook (Van Riper, 2009; Kobre, 2008).



Fig. 2: Los Angeles photographer Brian Walski combined two photographs into one composite.
(Source: Baker, (2007, p.103)

According to Henning (1998), photojournalism takes alteration of photographs seriously because the society expects the pictures published in newspapers to be the reality of the world and truthful to the events portrayed. Instances of a doctored picture of the then Labour Party (LP) flag bearer, Mr. Peter Obi, and the then All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential candidate, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, fall under the category of eroded ethical boundaries in photo-editing.

Mr. Peter Obi's image, dressed in a Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) uniform, shared on a WhatsApp group, was used to spread false information that he had been appointed as the head of the Lagos Agency by Governor BabatundeSanwo-Olu.



Fig. 3: A screenshot of a doctored image of Peter Obi

(Source: Omotaye (2023).

According to Omotaye (2023), this type of photo manipulation falls short of the ethical principles that govern photo-editing, especially as it concerns the alteration of the photo's originality.

Similarly, Fig. 4 below shows the doctored photo of then APC flag bearer Senator Tinubu (now President) published in the *Vanguard* newspaper by the opposition to showcase how unhealthy Tinubu was to run for the seat of president in Nigeria. According to Ajiboye (2021), *Vanguard* was criticised for such an act as it was seen as an avenue to tarnish and discredit the image of Tinubu.



Fig. 4: Photo manipulation of Tinubu in an unhealthy state

(Source: Ajiboye, 2021).

The British National Union of Journalists, London Freelance Branch, proposed a motion in February 1998, stating that: “No journalist shall cause or allow the publication of a photograph which has been altered, unless that photograph has been vividly labeled. This means unless the image is marked as altered, then the image should not be published to deceive the recipients (National Union of Journalists, 1998).

The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) website contains a specific section for ethics and various newspaper codes of ethics. To mention but a few, The *Los Angeles Times* and *Dallas Morning News* codes require photographs to be used to inform and not mislead. Photos that are manipulated should be labeled as photo illustrations.

The *Denver Post* code provides in segments that all news photographs are to be objective. Photos must not be manipulated, and any basic enhancement such as dodging, burning, contrast and saturation must fall within the confines deemed acceptable as established by the code. The *San Jose Mercury News* code of ethics was revised in 2004 to emphasise its staff's commitment to the highest ethical principles (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 2006).

The Nigerian Press Council Act (2004) also includes ethical standards regarding picture publication in Nigeria, as Section 22 of the Act regulates the use of images to maintain decency and uphold ethical standards in journalism. The majority of the codes above, in summary, mandate that photo content not be altered. The exceptions established as the standard norm for photo alteration involve minor adjustment to photos such as contrast and saturation (National Press Photographers Association, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

The theories that provide the platform upon which this study is anchored are the Deontology and Aesthetic Pleasure theories.

Deontology Theory

This is an ethical theory that utilises rules to differentiate right from wrong. Deontology was initiated by Immanuel Kant in the 18th century and the theory is also called "Kantianism." Kant opines that nothing is good without the efficacy embedded in goodwill and goodwill operates in conformity with moral law (Johnson & Cureton, 2022). Kant further appreciates the fact that ethical actions follow universal principles, such as "Don't lie" or "Don't steal."

Deontology theory expects people to perform their duties and follow the laid-down rules. The theory does not concern itself with the consequences of a given decision in so far as the decision is right. In other words, the idea of considering the costs or benefits of a situation is not of issue to this theory.

According to Kant, the theory prohibits subjectivity and uncertainty because all that matters is for people to observe the laid-down rules. This is to say that moral law is a categorical imperative, that is, it is a strict command that is void of emotion or compromise (Blaschko & Sullivan, 2016).

Considering the relevance of this theory to this study, deontology or Kantianism negates the concept of photo manipulation especially as it affects photojournalism. Notwithstanding the intention, in so far as it affects the picture's bluntness, it is viewed as wrong because it is a dishonest act.

It deceives the public into believing a fake picture is original. Some editing might be allowed in so far as it is to improve the aesthetic elements of the image such as cropping, contrast and brightness, but any other form of editing that alters the photo content or orientation to the extent that it affects the original status of the photo is prohibited and unacceptable.

Aesthetic Pleasure Theory

This theory, as fundamentally proposed by David Hume in his 1757 essay, "Of the Standard of Taste," describes beauty as a concept that invigorates innate pleasure and satisfaction in human beings (Akpan & Etuk, 1990). According to Udoh and Obot (2013), this theory opines that the derivation of pleasure and satisfaction among the audience is dependent on aesthetic objects.

However, the theory opines that aesthetic gratification is not derived from arts, photos or objects alone, but human perception. Anunike (2008) sums up that this theory prescribes action, art and conduct that are good provided they give pleasure or satisfaction to the doer or receiver.

This theory reflects the peculiar essence of this study, owing to the fact that the act of photo-editing brings beauty, pleasure and satisfaction both to the editor and photo-receivers. Pertinent aesthetic elements such as sharpness, brightness, contrast, and cropping are indices of pleasure that are harnessed in altering a given image to sustain beauty, pleasure and satisfaction to both the photo-editor and the viewers.

Methodology

The descriptive survey method was used for this study because it allows the gathering of information that reflects the population's attitudes and behaviours, which cannot be observed directly (Jackson, 2009). The population of this study comprises Mass Communication students of ESUT (1290) and IMT (1555), giving a total of 2,845.

This was the number of students during the 2021/2022 academic session as obtained from the Academic Planning/Statistics Units of the two schools. A sample size of 340 was drawn using the online sample size calculator provided by Wimmer and Dominick (2013) with confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 5.0%. The researchers used systematic random sampling as the sampling technique.

Considering the population of 2,845, and the sample size of 340, the researchers set the nth member of the population at 8, indicating that any mass communication student whose registration number falls within the interval of 8 from first year to final year will be selected for the sample. The measuring instrument used for this study was questionnaire and it adopted a 4-point Likert scale for measurement.

Based on the differential number of students in ESUT and IMT (1290 and 1555 respectively), the sample was proportionally divided into 154 for ESUT and 186 for IMT for the administration of the questionnaire. The researchers made use of mean statistics for data analysis.

The rule assumes that if the calculated mean is equal or greater than the criterion mean (2.5), then the decision is accepted but if the calculated mean is lower than the criterion mean (2.5), the decision is rejected. The researchers administered the questionnaire with the help of the departmental executives of the two departments.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

In this section, the data generated are presented and discussed in line with the objectives of the study.

Research Question One: To what extent are Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT aware of the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing?

Table 1: Awareness of ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Score	Analysis
I am aware there are established ethical principles of photo-editing.	105	205	20	10	340	3.2	Accepted
I am aware of the potential negative consequences of over-editing a photograph.	110	120	60	50	340	2.8	Accepted
I am aware of principles acceptable in photo-editing.	107	208	15	10	340	3.2	Accepted
Mean Score						3.1	Accepted

The data above reveal that with the average mean of 3.1, to a moderate extent, a greater number of the respondents agreed that they are aware of the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing. This implies that mass communication students of ESUT and IMT are aware of the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing.

Research Question Two: How knowledgeable are Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT regarding the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing?

Table 2: Knowledge of ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Score	Analysis
I understand the ethical guidelines of maintaining integrity and truthfulness related to photo-editing practices.	106	210	15	9	340	3.2	Accepted
I understand that altering a picture for beauty should not change its essence.	110	124	65	41	340	2.9	Accepted
I comprehend the importance of colour balance and composition in creating visually appealing (aesthetic) images.	112	205	15	8	340	3.2	Accepted
Mean Score						3.1	Accepted

The data above show that with average mean of 3.3, a large portion of the respondents agreed that they are highly knowledgeable about the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing. Thus by implication, mass communication students of ESUT and IMT, are knowledgeable about the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing.

Research Question Three: In what ways are ethical and aesthetic considerations applied in photo-editing at the Mass Communication Department photo studios of ESUT and IMT?

Table 3: Ways ethical and aesthetic considerations are applied in photo-editing

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Score	Analysis
In the photo studio of my department, images of individuals are edited for basic improvement of their technical quality.	130	150	40	20	340	3.1	Accepted
The authenticity of original photos are maintained while editing them in the photo studio of my department.	90	110	72	68	340	2.7	Accepted
Aesthetic alteration of images that change their essence is sometimes done in the photo studio of my department for illustration.	103	200	25	12	340	3.1	Accepted
Mean Score						2.9	Accepted

The data above reveal that, with a mean score of 2.9, the respondents agreed that there are ways in which ethical and aesthetic considerations are applied to photo-editing. Consequently, these applications are distinct in nature, particularly in relation to the ethical and aesthetic aspects of photo-editing.

Research Question Four: Are there edited photos in ESUT and IMT Mass Communication Department studios that fall short of ethics but are aesthetic in content?

Table 4: Aesthetic photos in ESUT and IMT Mass Communication Photo Studios that fall short of ethics

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Score	Analysis
Some of the edited photos in the photo studio of my department are creatively displayed, despite ethical concerns.	140	160	28	12	340	3.3	Accepted
The aesthetic value of some edited photos in the photo studio of my department violate ethical considerations.	120	109	60	51	340	2.9	Accepted
Some edited photos in the photo.studio of my department are visually appealing, with little consideration to the methods adopted in achieving that.	180	130	20	10	340	3.4	Accepted
Mean Score						3.2	Accepted

Information in the table above shows that with a mean score of 3.2, the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that edited photos in Mass Communication Department studios of ESUT and IMT reflect aesthetic value, even though they fall short of ethical standards.

Research Question Five: What are the challenges in upholding ethical and aesthetic considerations at ESUT and IMT Mass Communication Department photo studios?

Table 5: Challenges in upholding ethical and aesthetic considerations at ESUT and IMT Mass Communication photo studios

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Score	Analysis
Desire to show off their graphic skills leads students to edit pictures for aesthetics than ethics.	130	170	25	15	340	3.2	Accepted
Lack of proper training for some staff and students in the photo studio of my department makes it difficult to balance creativity with ethical considerations in photo-editing	122	107	61	50	340	2.9	Accepted
Lack of state-of-the-art technology limits the aesthetic alteration of images in the photo studio of my department.	170	125	30	15	340	3.3	Accepted
Mean Score						3.1	Accepted

The data above indicate that, with the average mean of 3.1, the respondents strongly agreed that there are challenges in upholding ethical and aesthetic considerations at the Mass Communication photo studios of ESUT and IMT. This implies that such challenges erode the ethical and aesthetic principles in photo-editing.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: To what extent are Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT aware of the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing?

The findings reveal that, to a moderate extent, Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT are aware of the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo editing. This aligns with the study conducted by Keith et al. (2006) on Images in Ethics Codes in an Era of Violence and Tragedy, which, through a survey, reported that 40.5% of directors of large-circulation newspaper outlets in America acknowledged instances of unethical digital manipulation of images within their own newsrooms.

Furthermore, the regulations of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (2006), as reflected in the Los Angeles Times code, stipulate that photographs should be used to inform rather than mislead. In other words, digital photography should not be manipulated in a manner that confuses viewers or misrepresents reality.

This resonates with the precepts of Kantian ethics on photo alteration, which argue that although one may understand the processes of image manipulation, caution must be exercised so as not to erode ethical boundaries, as it is morally wrong to deceive viewers with a false representation of reality. Similarly, the awareness of aesthetic elements such as cropping, sharpness, brightness, and colour adjustment, which enhance pleasure and satisfaction in photo editing, reflects the essence of the aesthetic pleasure theory.

Research Question Two: How knowledgeable are Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT regarding the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing?

The finding unveils that Mass Communication students of ESUT and IMT are highly knowledgeable of the ethical and aesthetic considerations in photo-editing. This finding shows that as journalists in training, they are aware of the National Press Photographers Association (2007) policies which reaffirm that photojournalistic principles for fair and objective reporting should be the yardstick for assessing what may be done electronically to a photograph.

Furthermore, the finding corroborates the survey conducted by Reeves in 1992 on over 500 visual editors in America, which indicated that photographic editors largely rejected any form of computer manipulation of photographs, except for traditional practices of editing such as burning and dodging.

This is in line with our earlier interpretation of the Deontology theory or Kantianism in the context of photo-editing which shows that editing that borders on cropping, contrast, tone, brightness and retouching are allowed, but alteration that affects the content and the original meaning of the photo is unacceptable.

Research Question Three: In what ways are ethical and aesthetic considerations applied in photo-editing at the Mass Communication Department photo studios of ESUT and IMT?

The finding shows that the respondents agree that ethical and aesthetic considerations are applied in photo-editing at their departments' photo studios. This finding shows that the students uphold the provisions of the Nigerian Press Council Act (2004) which stipulates that ethical standards should be adhered to in picture

publications. It is also in line with one of the provisions of the National Union of Journalists, London (1998) code of ethics on photo manipulation, which emphasises that photos should not be altered to the extent of deceiving the readers.

The issue of deception emanating from altered images hampers the credibility of the media as well as the practice of photojournalism. The finding further aligns with the Deontology theory that sees photo manipulation as a dishonest act that should be avoided, not minding the intention of the alteration, especially if the editing affects the originality and content of the photo.

The foregoing does not, however, cancel the applicability of aesthetics to photo-editing due to the satisfaction the photo-editors and photo-receivers derive, which is what aesthetic pleasure theory propounds. But seeking of pleasure should be done within boundaries.

Research Question Four: In what ways do edited photos in Mass Communication Department studios of ESUT and IMT reflect aesthetic value while falling short of ethical standards?

The finding shows that there are edited pictures in the photo studios of the Mass Communication Department of ESUT and IMT that are highly aesthetic but violate ethical principles. However, the students explained that these were mostly used to teach them the possibilities of graphic design and photo manipulation which can be used in advertisements and for entertaining articles but not in photojournalism.

Research Question Five: What are the challenges in upholding ethical and aesthetic considerations at ESUT and IMT Mass Communication Department photo studios?

The finding indicates that lack of proper training skills hampers the balance of creativity with ethical compliance among staff and students at the studios as some defer to their egos to display their graphic skills, even when the outputs go contrary to the ethical guidelines for photo-editing. However, due to the rapidly changing technology for picture editing, unavailability of the latest technologies often reduces the possibilities in the aesthetic alteration of pictures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There are no hard and fast rules on the pattern that should be followed in photo-editing, but one thing is certain: any photo alteration that affects the content, or originality of a photo is considered wrong and unacceptable. The believability of a photograph is essential to photojournalism in particular and to the media in general. Therefore, news photo manipulation probably challenges media credibility over time.

It is left for the individual photographers and news agencies to ensure that they present the truth to the best of their abilities. Due to the existence of ethical issues, photojournalists and aspiring photojournalists should be careful about photo alterations, especially through the use of new technology. This is crucial because any tarnishing of the credibility of media outlets have devastating consequences over the integrity of all news photographs they publish.

Based on its findings, this study recommends as follows:

- a. Photojournalism lecturers and photo editors should emphasise the ethical and aesthetic aspects of photo-editing in detail to help students imbibe them fully.

- b. The students of the Mass Communication Departments of ESUT and IMT should be given more practical training in photo-editing to help them confront and handle both ethical and aesthetic issues in photo-editing.
- c. Both ESUT and IMT should acquire state-of-the-art technologies for photo-editing that help the students to learn how to improve the technical qualities of pictures with ease without doctoring them to mislead the public.
- d. The Mass Communication Departments of ESUT and IMT should recruit highly skilled staff who will effectively consider the ethical and aesthetic boundaries in their respective photo studios.
- e. The Mass Communication students and staff of ESUT and IMT who are photo-editing enthusiasts should be properly grounded in the skills required for photo-editing to avert challenges that might erode the ethical and aesthetic boundaries in the practice.

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