PHOTOGRAPHS AS RESEARCH TOOLS IN STUDYING PHOTOJOURNALISTIC WORK PRACTICES

METHODS FESTIVAL 2017

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Research in a nutshell

- **What:** Empirical survey on practices of photo alterations in Finnish press.
- **Who:** A web-based questionnaire was sent to professionals of photojournalism in Finnish newspapers.
- **How:** In the questionnaire, pairs of images were used to measure the respondents' acceptance of different alterations.
- **Background:** The discussion about the credibility of news photographs has been re-heated since digitalization.
- **Useful:** for example in developing journalistic work practices.
Outline of the survey

I Background information
- Gender, age, occupational title, education, years in the field

II Work process of digital photo editing
- Who makes the decisions about photo editing, how often does the respondent do photo editing in his/her daily work, how does the respondent evaluate his/her skills in photo editing, how much the respondent is able to influence, what kind of photo editing is routine-like and which procedures need special consideration.

III Pairs of images
- 14 photo editing examples, solely made for the research purposes.

IV Practical issues
- How the readers are informed about photo editing, is there a need for common guidelines for photo editing?

V Procedures in Photoshop
- Questions only for photographers and photo editors: A list of photo editing techniques to find out how regularly different tools are used.
EXAMPLE: In the right image, the colour of the wall was changed.

In which of the following photograph types would you accept this editing change?

a) News photograph  Yes  No
b) Reportage photograph  Yes  No
c) Feature photograph  Yes  No
d) Photographic illustration  Yes  No

Comment: ___________________________________________
In the right image, the persons were removed from the background.

Percentage of respondents accepting the photo-editing change. (N=182)

(a) News photograph  4 %
(b) Reportage        5 %
(c) Feature          29 %
(d) Photographic illustration  64 %
In the right image, the people were emphasized by adjusting the tones of their faces.

Percentage of respondents accepting the photo-editing change. (N=182)

(a) News photograph 96 %
(b) Reportage 96 %
(c) Feature 98 %
(d) Photographic illustration 98 %
In the right image, a blackboard seam was eliminated from behind the person's head.

Percentage of respondents accepting the photo-editing change. (N=182)

(a) News photograph 46 %
(b) Reportage 59 %
(c) Feature 74 %
(d) Photographic illustration 85 %
In the right image, the picture has been reconstructed by placing two persons to a new composition and leaving the third person out of the picture.

Percentage of respondents accepting the photo-editing change. (N=182)

(a) News photograph  
(b) Reportage  
(c) Feature  
(d) Photographic illustration

4 %  
10 %  
34 %  
54 %
In the right image, a graphic element was added to a photograph.

Percentage of respondents accepting the photo-editing change. (N=182)

- a) News photograph 26 %
- b) Reportage photograph 36 %
- c) Feature photograph 73 %
- d) Photographic illustration 99 %
Pros and cons of the method

Advantages:

- The use of images enabled a very detailed and specific phrasing of a question.
- The images made the responses more comparable, because the respondents took a stand on the same specific photo editing examples.
- The use of images enabled a nuanced and rich data that would not have been possible with e.g. interview questions or verbal examples.
- A time-saving and effective way in studying the actual work processes.
- The use of images made the research more concrete, interesting, and more fun!
...Pros and cons of the method

Challenges:

- Some respondents got stuck with the images not being real (=published) photo editing examples but rather extravagant ideas.
- Some respondents had difficulties with the news, reportage, feature and illustration contexts.
- Images are culture specific to some extend. International use of the same images might cause challenges.
- Copyright issues have to be dealt with when publishing images.
References

Project publications:


Related reading:


Thank you for your attention!

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