PHOTOGRAPHERS' PERCEPTION AND INFLUENCE OF THEIR PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTIC ON PHOTO MANIPULATION

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Abstract

The impact of Photoshop has greatly revolutionized photographers' life by enabling them to produce visually pleasing photographs in most economic & quicker way. But at the same time, photo manipulation has damaged the credibility of photographers in public as some cases have surfaced in media where integrity of image has been compromised. The objective of this study is to enquire perception of photographers and Photoshop users about what is the impact of photo manipulation on photography. How photographers' personal characteristics influence their ethical judgements on photo manipulation is another aspect of this study. Author has conducted two surveys of 100 photography professionals from various genres of photography and Photoshop users. Author has concluded that impact of photo manipulation is a subjective phrase and its impact depends on its application. Majority of respondents was in favour of balanced and ethical use of photo manipulation. They agreed that lack of awareness and sensitivity on photo manipulation is damaging the credibility of photographers.

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1. Introduction

The revolution in digitally image editing has enabled photographers with unparalleled power to transform their photographs into amazing visual experience. With few clicks photographers can perform colour correction, explore hidden composition, lighting adjustments, blur backgrounds etc. These techniques can transform an average looking picture into aesthetically rich photograph. This photo processing is performed on pixels of image and this practice is called photo manipulation. According to Mike Rossnerand Kenneth M. Yamada, (2004) "Photoshop has made it all easy. In the darkroom age it was all manual and demanded considerable efforts and experience to make adjustment to image. Now it is very simple and quick, thus tempting to modify digital image". Photo manipulation has empowered Photographers to achieve professional quality images with providing cost efficient and time saving solutions. But is it all about visual beauty of photograph. Isn't this idea of artificial beautification is against the purity and ethics. Photo

manipulation has shaken the credibility of photo journalism in public perception for authenticity since cases of unethical use of photo altering techniques are surfaced in global media.

Only photographers are responsible to keep a balance between unethical photo manipulation practices and basic essential photo processing which is ethically accepted (colour correction or simple crop). This issue is still being argued by two groups of photographers. One group of purist photographers like photo journalists and wild life photographers feel cheated when they see large number of photographers unethically processing hard news and wild life photographs. Why they have invested in photography equipments or even risked their life in wild to get an original glimpse of wild life. For a true photo journalist, it is a matter of journalistic ethics. On the other side, for other group of Photoshop users like graphics designers and fashion photographers, photo manipulation is a creative expression of their skill and demand of their profession. This research paper is an attempt to enquire perception of photographers from various genres on photo manipulation.

Though academic research is available on photo manipulation and its impact but it is majorly focused on editor's opinion instead of the real practitioners of photo manipulation who are photographers and graphic designers. There is a clear void in research on enquiring photographer's perception on impact of photography. Author has tried to fill the gap by surveying photographers from various genres. The objective of this research is to investigate the impact of photo manipulation by enquiring photographers' perception. The analysis will also explore inter relation between photo manipulation and personality characteristic of its practitioners like occupation in media, photography genre, age, educational background and professional experience etc. How these factors influence their ethical judgement on photo manipulation; is major objective of this survey.

Media ethics and journalistic code of conduct play an active role in safeguarding the credibility of media in public. S. Fosdick &Fahmy (2003) asserted, "The ethics of photography need not be divorced from the ethics of text". Reaves (1989) pointed out that "Since digital alteration involves craftsmanship, a new type of worker is evolving who may not have training to traditional values of documentary photography". Gladney and Ehrlich (1996) warned, "As photo manipulation getting easier, faster and traceless, there is a fear of increased temptation in media professionals for more alteration". Further they suggested that photo manipulation in digital form should be included in list of ethical pitfalls. These researches indicate that photo manipulation in ethical limits is increasingly being acceptable but on other hand credibility of media has deteriorated steeply in the 1990. Greer &Gosen, (2002) observed that increasing trends of digital photo manipulation is responsible for lower public confidence for photographs. Greer and Gosen (2002) asserted that like text editing is acceptable to readers; minor photo manipulations like dodging and burning are also being tolerable to news paper reader. Huang (2001) states that "To date, no industry wide standards have been accepted regarding what level of photo manipulation ethics and practices are acceptable". Dr David Campbell supported him in his report by stating, "prior to 2014 no one had researched whether or not there are accepted industry standards about what alterations (if any) media organisations around the world permit". In 2014, World Press Photo commissioned David Campbell to enquire contemporary practices and accepted standards of photo manipulation. This report provided most relevant observations of photo manipulation trends among documentary photographers.

There is sufficient study available on the issue of photo manipulation which enquires perception of readers, publishers and editors from media ethics angle. But in contrast, very fewer studies are conducted which put light on photographers' perspective over impact of photo manipulation. Hoffman (2008) found that "current research on image manipulation has identified a clear need for tools that can measure and explore image manipulation." The major question in literature is still under wraps that where does enhancement end and deception begin? (Fahmy, 2005). In other words, where to draw the red line? He asserted "Future studies should focus not only on news professionals and news photographs, but also on other types of photography, where digital manipulation is controversial, especially wildlife and natural history photography". A very relevant part of this study is to investigate personality characteristics of photographers and digital artist which influence their ethical judgement towards photo manipulation. Weaver &Wilhoit, (1996) found that size of media organization plays a big role in photographers' perception. Taking personal characteristics into consideration, Reaves (1992) established that editors' attitude toward manipulation is impacted by factors like journalism experience, education and age. Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) did not found any trend to make a strong opinion on whether gender plays any role in manipulation judgements. Though, Pritchard (1993) observed that male editors were more prone to accept manipulation practices. There is sufficient study available on the issue of photo manipulation which enquires perception of readers, publishers and editors from media ethics angle. (Fahmy, 2005) asserted "Future studies should focus not only on news professionals and news photographs, but also on other types of photography, where digital manipulation is controversial, especially wildlife and natural history photography". Most of available literature has still not enquired the perception of real practitioners of photo manipulation who are largely photographers and digital artists. In

this study, only photographers of various photography genres and Photoshop artist are investigated about their attitude towards manipulation.

2. Research Method

The survey method is inspired by available relevant literature on photo manipulation. Following two research questions were surveyed to enquire perceptions of Photoshop user's:

RQ 1. What is the influence of photographers' personality characteristics on photo manipulation.
RQ 2. What is Photographers' perception on positive and negative impact of photo manipulation?
The questionnaires were sent to around 195 professionals from following categories –

1. Wild life photographers
2. Creative Photographers
3. Landscape Photographers
4. Fashion photographers
5. Photography and Graphic Design Students

5. Photo journalists
7. Graphic designers
3. Academicians and Researchers
9. Photography enthusiast

The opinion of north India's 45 well known photographers has shaped this survey conclusion. Like photographer Mr. SudhakarOlwe who has been awarded *Padamshri* award for his exceptional work in documentary photography by govt. of India. Semi structured interviews were also conducted with India's top 5 photographers based in NCR region and Rajasthan. The answer rate in this research survey is 40% (79 respondents from 195 respondents) which is a remarkable response rate to generate results.

3. Results and Analysis
Demographics and Characteristics
In this survey, 80 respondents participated, where mostly have a graduate or higher degree (47% graduate, 46% post graduate). 8% respondents have PhDs who are academician (Figure 1 (A)).Figure 1 (B) portrays that all respondents have understanding of photo manipulation. Figure 1(C) represents occupation categories of Photoshop users where 24% participants were professional photographers, 28% respondents were animators and creative digital artists. Graphic designing were 14%, and 20% respondents were media academicians. Rest categories like fine artist, amateur photographers, and photo journalists were less dominant in pie. Majority (94%) were consistent users of Photoshop (Figure 1(D)).

When enquired about genre of professional photographers, 76% participants practiced all types of photography. Wild life genre consisted 6%, and wedding/fashion photography genre was practiced by 13%. Figure 1(E)). In figure 1 (F), age group distribution of respondents shows that younger age groups of 20-30 & 30-40 years represented 70%, where only 30% respondents were from elder group (beyond 40 years). Figure 1(H) represents that 45% respondents participated in photography contests and 55% have never participated.

Photographers' perception on positive and negative impact of photo manipulation:
Photoshop has increased the quality standard of photographers; this fact was supported by 85% respondents in survey. (Figure 2(A)). Next question about job satisfaction in post processing revealed that 51% photographers enjoy photo processing. (Figure 2(B)).
According to figure 2(C), majority of photographers consider role of Photoshop as a positive tool for their profession. Figure 2(D) depicts that 65%% respondents preferred digital Photoshop processing over manual darkroom manipulation techniques. Figure 2(E) shows that 68% respondents were willing to learn latest techniques of Photoshop, where 16% were not ready for it. 85% respondents acknowledged that majority of photographers regularly practice photo manipulation. (Figure 2(F)).

According to 78% photo manipulation users, photo manipulation was a positive term, while remaining 22% perceived it in negative way (Figure 3(A)). Figure 3(B) depicts that 44% photographers were ready to use heavy touch up to make their photograph look visually rich while 32% were against this practice. When asked about their reputation as a photo manipulation user, 64% didn't wanted to be associated with the image of heavy photo manipulation user, where 14% considered this reputation positive (Figure 3(C)). Figure 3(D) illustrates that 70% respondents considered the practice of shooting in RAW format and later processing in Photoshop ethically right. Nearly half population of respondents expressed detestation on award winning photographers unethically use photo manipulation. (Figure 3(E)). On asking about feeling guilt for posting manipulated photographs in social media, 28% photographers accepted that they have no ethical dilemma while 72% respondents agreed that they will feel guilt (Figure 3(F)).
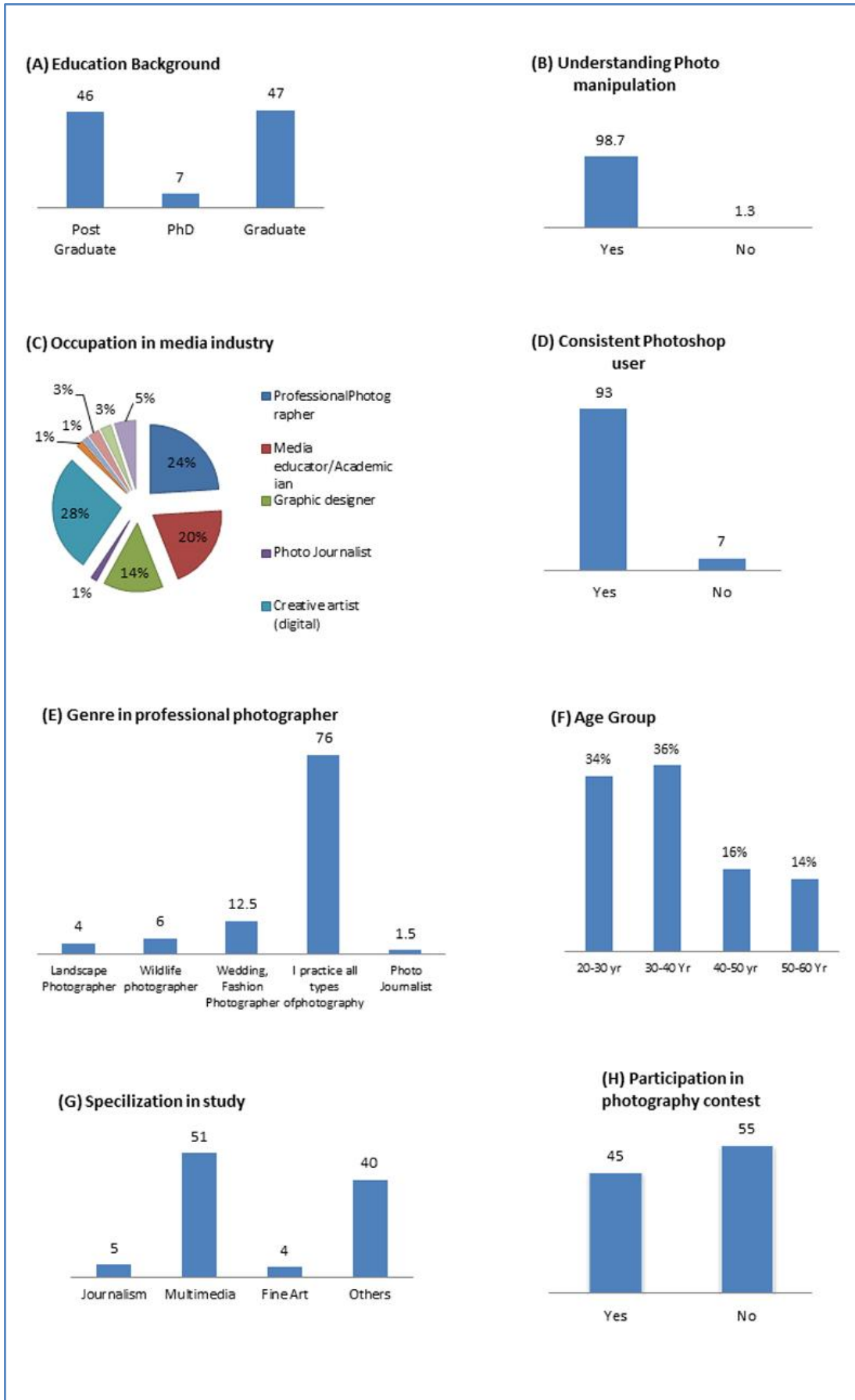
(A) Education Background

(B) Understanding Photo manipulation

(C) Occupation in media industry

(D) Consistent Photoshop user

(E) Genre in professional photographer

(F) Age Group

(G) Specilization in study

(H) Participation in photography contest

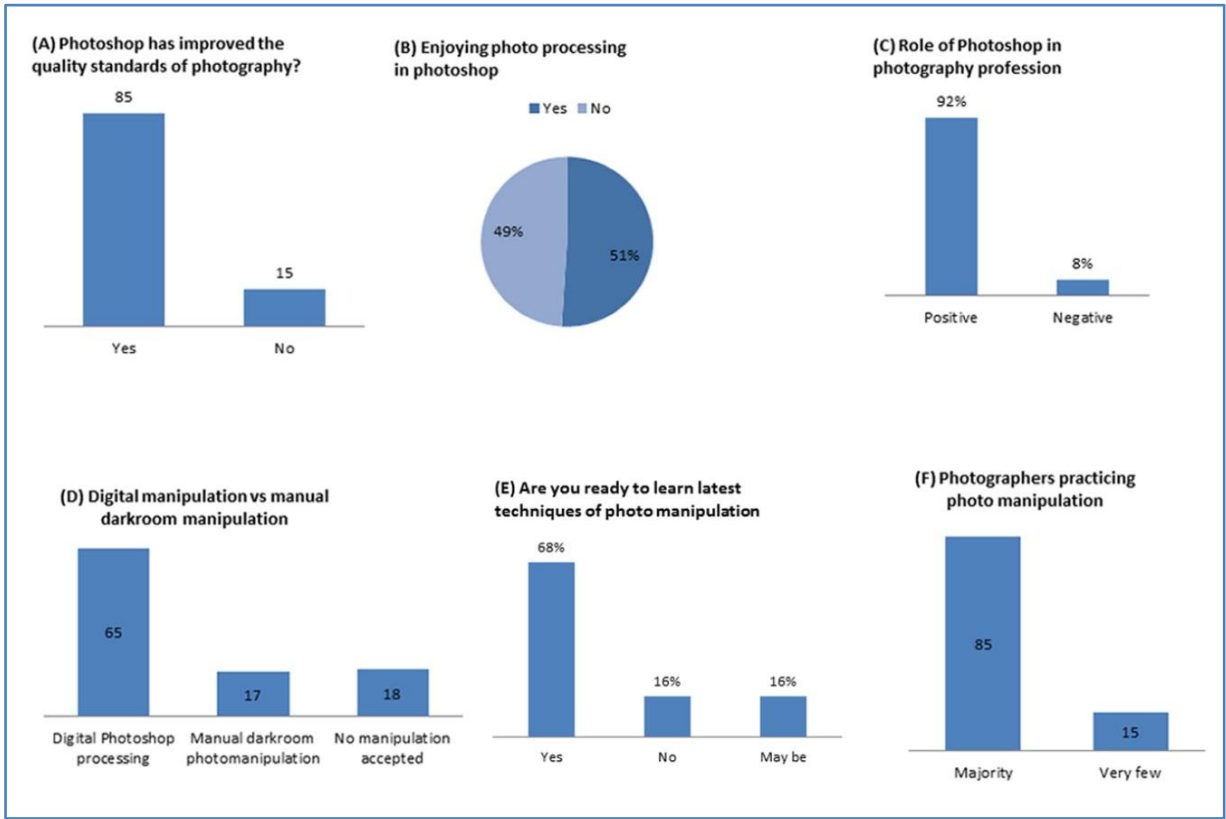*Figure 1- Demographics and characteristics of respondents*

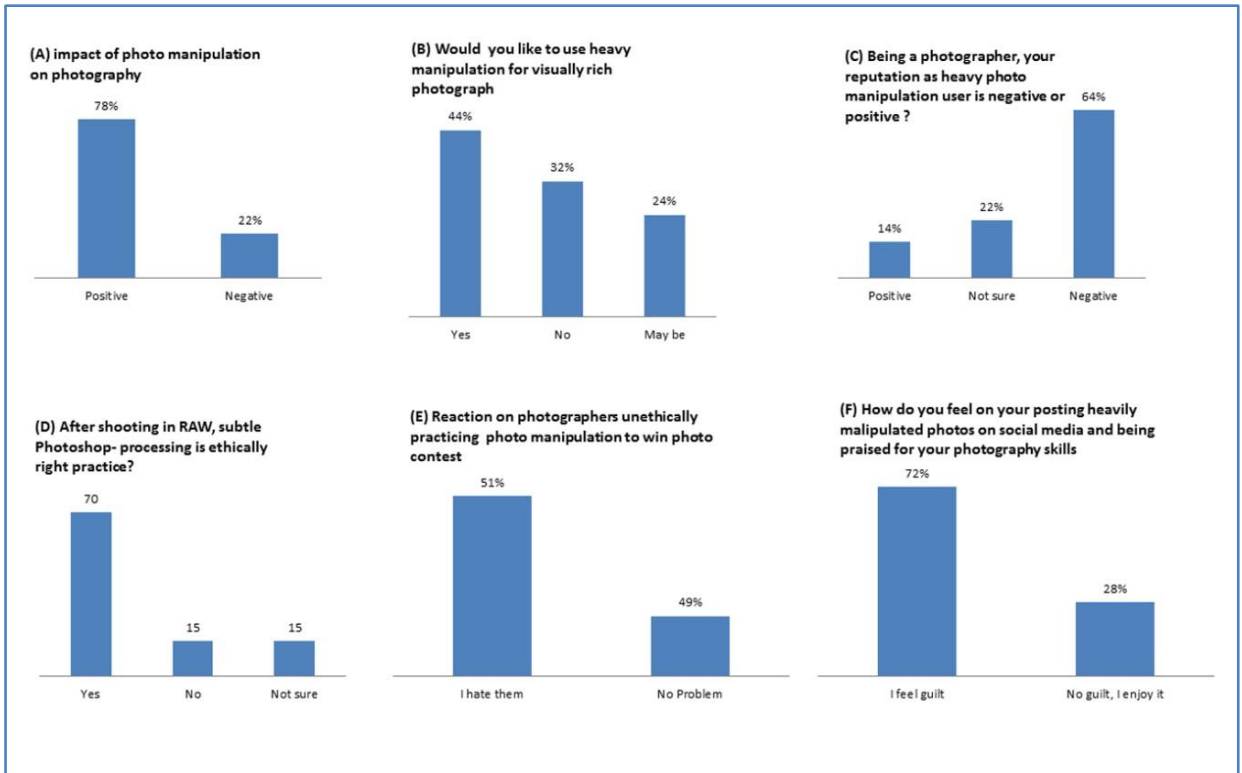*Figure 2.Enquiring the impact of Photoshop in photography*

Figure3. Enquiring photographers' Perception on Photo manipulation

4. Discussions

The objective of this study was to enquire about how personal characteristics of photo manipulators influence their ethical decision on photo manipulation. The second enquiry was enquiring about perception of photographers on photo manipulation's impact.

Determining academic qualification of these respondents proposed that the higher education leads to acceptability of photo manipulation and being qualified in digital media approves positive perception about use of photo manipulation. Younger age group perceive photo manipulation in positive way and give credit to Photoshop for increasing quality standard of photography. On the other hand, elder age group who has been practicing photography from its manual film days, still prefer purity in photography. These results support the earlier study by E.Huang (2001) which also established that readers' age and qualification are related to the acceptance level of photo manipulation. Though Huang's study was focused on readers' perception, this study advocates the same theory about photographers. Decoding other personal characteristics like academic background, study specialization and occupation suggests that more exposure to photography and digital media education facilitates to make photographer more tolerant for photo manipulation. This result is in agreement with study by Huang (2001) who concluded that "The more photographic education a photographer received, the more he could accept alteration".

Analysing other characteristics like photography genre, type of occupation in digital media production, it is revealed that acceptance of photo manipulation depends on the nature of media professional's job and photography genre. Photo journalists and academicians were strongly against manipulation whereas graphic designers and fashion photographers were supporters of using photo processing. The findings also suggest that superfluous use of photo alteration practices exist in less experienced amateur photographers and less educated professionals, whereas factors like growth in reputation, experience and specialization in photography genre force photographers to use manipulation in ethical limits.

This study revealed that majority of respondents was agreed on photo manipulation as a positive tool for their profession except photo journalists. One respondent justified it by explaining: "Photoshop enables a designer/photographer with creative freedom and unparalleled control on pixel based editing, which allow them to express their visualisation skills". Most of respondents were not ready to be seen as a heavy Photoshop user, as it affects their credibility and reputation as a skilled photographer. In interview with some award winning photographers, some photographers vigorously criticized other photographer's unethical ways of winning awards by sending altered images to photography contests. By this survey, it can be suggested that ethical conduct is valued and related to reputation and credibility of photographers among peers or public audience. This finding is in line with past literature that increasing levels of photo alteration is responsible for lowering credibility for photography (Greer &Gosen, 2002). Most of the respondents accepted that they want to learn latest techniques for photo processing. This result proves importance of Photoshop for photographers. This study revealed that majority of photographers doesn't consider subtle manipulation ethically wrong. This is in agreement with previous study by Gladney and Ehrlich (1996) which says media professionals see basic & minor photo processing purely technical issue that the audience would not object to.

5. Conclusion

The findings of study concluded that photo manipulation is welcomed by photographers and digital artists unless it distorts the truth in a picture which can jeopardize their reputation. This research also suggests that photo manipulation is a subjective phrase and its impact depends on its application in professional requirement. There was a marked tendency to accept photo processing in younger age group, amateur photographers and digital artists, whereas factors like increase in education, age, specialization, experience and professional reputation are likely to refrain photographers from it. It is evident in photo artists' opinion that photo manipulation should be considered as an ethical judgement of digitally enhancing photograph while preserving integrity of image.

These outcomes are in agreement with World Press Photo project report by David Campbell (2014) which says "minor changes being permitted, while excessive changes are prohibited". Lastly it is perceived that digital artists & photographers' acceptance level for photo manipulation does not match. This difference can be justified considering the application of Photoshop in their respective genre and nature of job. There is an evident scope for further study to explore of common guidelines for photo manipulation ethics and practices which are mutually acceptable to photographers & digital artist.

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