

# POST-DIGITAL EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE (PEPI): PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUTH FOLLOWING THE DIGITALIZATION OF THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE



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The PEPI project studies the media society by focusing on the reliability of the photographic image.

The truthfulness of the photograph has long been one of the most debated issues concerning photography studies as well as different practices. The core questions have revolved around the problem of image transparency. What are the conditions under which a photographic image is conceived as being a more or less accurate translation of our visual reality into the two-dimensional picture plane?

This question was considered by the pioneers of photography in the 19th century. Today, we are still facing the same problem, albeit in a totally new historical and technological context. There are heated debates concerning the limits of digital photo editing in the field of journalism. To what extent is it acceptable to edit a news photograph and claim that it still remains an accurate reflection of reality?

Simultaneously, recent years have witnessed the massive proliferation of various camera-based technologies featuring the automated management of visual patterns and metadata for purposes ranging from industrial production processes and medical diagnostics to social networking and surveillance.

In this context, PEPI examines the truthfulness of the photograph from three closely related perspectives. First, we will scrutinise the psychological processes by which people make judgements regarding the truthfulness of photographs. Second, we will concentrate on 'fake news' visuals and their production. Third, we will address the question of the veracity of the photographic image in the light of photographic aesthetics. Our multidisciplinary consortium combines journalism/media studies, experimental psychology and artistic research.

The main research question is: How does a photographic image become accepted as a truthful description of reality in the 'post-digital' culture?

The main research question is divided into three sub-questions: How do people judge the veracity and truthfulness of a photographic image? How do 'fake news' websites construct the impression of truthfulness through photographs and textual narratives? How is the human point of view constructed in the expanded field of photography?

We will analyse the questions by using different materials and methodologies from laboratory experiments to close reading of media contents and visual experimentation.

At Tampere University, the PI will be Professor Janne Seppänen. He is also the PI of the whole consortium. The postdoctoral researcher will be Dr Jenni Mäenpää.

At the University of Helsinki, the team will be led by Docent Jukka Häkkinen. The researcher will be Dr Tuomas Leisti.

At the University of the Arts Helsinki, the research will be led by Professor Mika Elo, head of the doctoral programme in fine arts and vice-dean (research). The researcher will be Tuula Närhinen (DFA).



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