The image of trust. Readers' views on the trustworthiness of news photographs

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Summary: *After the digitalisation of the photographic process, an ample debate has revolved around one question: can people still trust in news photographs? To answer the question we first need to know what trust is and how it is conceptualised in the visual experience. Therefore, we conducted an empirical reception study in order to find out how people talk about the trust related to news photographs. We found that trust is a complicated and dynamic phenomenon, which is very hard to capture. With the aid of frame analysis, the study elicits four dimensions of trust: 1) Tacit trust is the general frame upon which people act in everyday life, also when watching news images; 2) Measured trust is activated when the viewer takes a conscious risk in that the news image is not representative of reality. Yet this is a trusting approach to the image; 3) Contextual trust is negotiation of trust, comparing different genres and contexts; 4) Finally, doubt comes to the fore when the viewer openly questions the veracity or the purpose of the image, whether it is manipulated or selected in order to persuade the viewer for a certain cause. The study shows that readers' trust is a multidimensional process, yet the frame of tacit trust is the most common among interviewees. Trust in the case of news images can be expanded to reflect audiences' trust in media at large.*

Keywords: *audience, trust, news images*

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Introduction

The whole existence of society and the reproduction of the social order are dependent on citizens' capability to trust in its basic institutions. If this trust becomes undermined considerably, social instability may rise and lead to serious difficulties in the function of the whole society. Many social theorists (e.g. Giddens, 1990; Mizralski, 1996; Seligman, 1997; Rosanvallon, 2008) have underlined the importance of trust especially in modern societies, which basically draw their legitimacy on different forms of social contract than openly violent or coercive forms of power.

In his theory of modernisation, Anthony Giddens (1990) uses the term 'abstract systems' to describe expertise-based late modern social institutions involved, for example, with health-care and the maintenance of the technical infrastructure of society. Trust in these institutions and their representatives are one central trait in the whole process of modernisation. As a result, we trust doctors, aviation mechanics, police, etc. Media can be seen as one abstract system among others whose importance has actually increased within the media-tisation (see Couldry, 2008) of other social institutions and society as a whole.

If the media and especially news organisations establish a part of society's abstract systems and governmental democracy, the trustworthiness of the media is an essential part of the legitimacy of social systems as a whole. However, there is ample evidence that the public's trust in (news) media is on the decline (see e.g. Vanacker & Belmas, 2009; Harwood, 2004; Tsifti & Cappella, 2003). In recent years, the capacity of the news media to reflect social reality and also take part in it has also been a subject of debate (see Coleman, 2012; Van Zoonen, 2012; Quandt, 2012; Coleman et al., 2009; Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Some scandalous manipulations of news photographs have also been said to undermine the trustworthiness of news media (see e.g. Mäenpää & Seppänen, 2010). Yet, in most studies, the question of trust in media has mainly been treated as a yes/no binary question and answer. Our aim is to broaden the understanding of trust in media as a multidimensional, social process which is constantly renegotiated.

On what grounds, in the first place, can we suppose that people trust in news photographs? If they trust in them, what is the nature of this trust? How is the trust in news photographs related to the wider questions of trust in journalism, media and even society as a whole?

Trust in news media

In most cases, trust in news media has been studied under the label of *media credibility* or *accuracy* (see Bentele, 2008; Tsfaty, 2008). However, many of the studies on trust in news media are surveys which do not recognise the flexibility of trust and its evolving disposition affected by personal, situational, cultural, social and historical factors. In his recent article, Stephen Coleman (2012) proposes that trust and efficacy in the news should be studied as multi-layered discursive constructs that cannot be measured only by surveys. He writes that trust in the news operates at two levels: First-order trust involves an expectation of honesty on behalf of the news producers, i.e. “that they will try to tell us true stories and not made up ones; that they will strive to be accurate rather than approximate; and that they will deliver the news hourly or daily, in a regular fashion, rather than haphazardly” (Coleman, 2012: 36). These first-order expectations are met most often in Central European and Nordic countries. Second-order trust is about whether the audiences and news producers share similar expectations about the function of the news. “This second-order problem of trust is at the core of a prevalent tension between contemporary news production values and news consumption frustrations” (Coleman, 2012: 36).

In an earlier study, Stephen Coleman and his fellow researchers (Coleman, Scott & Morrison, 2009) define three vital functions for trust in the context of news media:

1. Trust serves as an ‘institutional economizer’ which decreases the need for procedures of verification and proof. “We need to be able to rely upon the reputation of the reporter without having to check and recheck every single account that is given to us” (Coleman, Scott & Morrison, 2009: 4).
2. News media take care of the connection between the representative government and the ordinary citizen: “The ways in which news are produced, circulated and made sense of are intimately linked to the enactment of citizenship in confident, timid or withdrawn fashions” (Coleman, Scott & Morrison, 2009).
3. Trust enables the interaction with others (strangers) in a predictable manner: there are some basic rules and norms of conduct which are based – more or less explicitly – on a mutual agreement. This means, in the context of journalism, that the readers of newspapers, for example, have certain expectations that journalists will deliver them correct information about the world. There is a kind of silent agreement between readers and news journalists, whom they normally do not know personally.

In a very recent account, Thorsten Quandt (2012) discusses the role of trust in parallel to the development of media. He makes a theoretical typology of personal trust, institutionalised trust and network trust. However, neither Coleman's nor Quandt's recent writings provide qualitative empirical evidence about the multiple dimensions of trust as socio-psychological process.

A useful theoretical starting point for our study has been Niklas Luhmann's (1988) distinction between *confidence* and *trust*. Both notions refer to expectations which may lapse into disappointments. Confidence is a tacit and, in a sense, passive stance: "You are confident that your expectations will not be disappointed: that politicians will try to avoid war, that cars will not break down or suddenly leave the street and hit you on your Sunday afternoon walk" (Luhmann, 1988: 97). People cannot live without forming expectations to contingent events and they tend to neglect, more or less, the possibility of disappointment. If you do not consider alternatives you are in a situation of confidence. Trust, on the other hand, requires a previous engagement and presupposes a situation of risk. If you choose one action in preference to others in spite of the possibility of being disappointed by the action of others, one defines the situation as one of trust (Luhmann, 1988: 97–98).

Luhmann's ideas offer a theoretical view on trust as a situational and multi-dimensional process, yet, we find it incomplete. Luhmann's distinction between confidence and trust is also quite evident in the respondents' discussions in our empirical interview study. Yet, we find the process of trust more complicated and we have decided to call the dimensions *tacit trust* and *measured trust*. Moreover, we have delineated two more frames: *contextual trust* and *doubt*.

It is also obvious that the semiotic qualities of the photographic image affect how the question of trust is expressed in the interviews. As a sign – or as a combination of different signs – the unique attribute of the photographic representation is indexicality. Charles Sanders Peirce (1960: 137) defined the indexical sign: "If the Sign be an Index, we may think of it as a fragment torn away from the Object, the two in their existence being one whole or a part of such whole." Peirce summarised his conception:

"Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection" (in Doane, 2007: 134).

The indexical power of the photographic image proved to be very useful in the service of different documentary practices – including journalism – from the mid-1800s onwards. Indexicality goes hand in hand with the eye-witnessing function of journalism (Zelizer, 2007) and, hence, strengthens the presence of the whole news story. It is the material evidence of ‘having been there’, where the actual news scene has taken place.

From this point of view, it is understandable how strongly media houses react against the infringements of indexicality in the news context. Photojournalists have lost their jobs after having taken liberties to digitally manipulate their pictures in an inappropriate manner and, hence, violate the indexicality of the news photograph. The infringement has undermined the trustworthiness of news photographs and media houses as well. As a consequence, news agencies and media houses have launched different kinds of codes of conduct for photo editing to limit the threat caused by “digital darkrooms” (see Mäenpää & Seppänen, 2010).

Study

In the study, we conducted 30 qualitative individual interviews with readers of print and online newspapers in Finland in 2009-2010. The interviews were conducted in three cities – Helsinki, Tampere and Jyväskylä – and the respondents’ demographics range from 15 to 65 years, half of them women and half of them men. The interviewees were found using a so-called snowball method. This means that the first interviewees were found through acquaintances and Facebook announcements. The informants were then asked to recommend someone they knew, and these people were used for the following interviews. Still, the demographic sample was kept as representative as possible.

The average length of the interviews is 45 minutes each. All of the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed with the Atlas.ti qualitative tool. In the interviews we used a design which is related to the method of photo elicitation, making the topic of the interview present and tangible (e.g. Rose, 2007; Harper, 2002). To relate the interview situation to real media content, the respondents were exposed to examples of news images. The role of the news photo was even more important in our study, as the reception – the viewing situation – was the object of research. The topic discussed via photographs was the photographic image and the medium itself in the context of trust. The interviewees were exposed to ten examples of news images in print and online newspapers. These images served as examples of news photographs and repre-

sented all news sections (domestic, foreign, entertainment/culture and economics) from the ten largest Finnish newspapers as well as two foreign newspapers.

In semi-structured interviews, the informants discussed their trust in news images from various angles. They were first shown the images without the context and then with the context of headline, text and newspaper logo. They were not asked directly about their trust in the images at first. Instead we asked them to talk openly about the feelings and thoughts evoked by the photograph. It turned out that in most cases people did not talk about their trust in the image during this phase, but needed to be prompted to ponder on the question as to what types of trust they felt in these pictures.

The interviews were analysed by a close reading method, first dividing the interviews into emerging themes and then observing how the informants talked about their trust in images. For a closer analysis of the audience's references to trust we used frame analysis based on Erving Goffman (1974). The frames can be defined as culturally shared ways of structuring perceptions and understanding and talking about various issues and situations. By framing, a person makes an interpretation and definition of a situation. People make observations for signs or cues through which they – both consciously and unconsciously – choose the frame of interpretation (Goffman, 1974: 25–27). The units of frame analysis can be various situations of social interaction. Our analysis will focus on the frames expressed in interview speech. In other words, we analyse the interview talk as text – as a written transcript – and therefore will not consider the other situational factors.

The four frames of trust are not, of course, clear-cut categories, but they are often overlapping. The speaker might start speaking in a certain frame then quite rapidly move to another. Moreover, we are aware that our analysis is also a way of framing the research object, i.e. the interview speech. It is important to keep in mind that the questions of the interviewer impose a certain frame to which the informants reply.

In the analysis of the interviews, we noticed that not all the regular news images evoked much talk about thoughts or feelings, and neither did they evoke discussion on the veracity of the photographs. For this reason we chose to focus on interview excerpts concerning two particular news images which evoked the most discussion about trust. Both images deal with foreign news. Obviously, distant conflicts in foreign countries are issues which are difficult for the reader to verify. The reader is then heavily dependent on the information conveyed by the media, and therefore it is regarded as less trustworthy.

In the interview situation, the images were first shown cut out of the context. In a similar way, the first image (Image 1) was exposed to the respondents as a close up of a little boy looking at the camera/viewer with big sad eyes. The informants were asked: *what thoughts or feelings does this image evoke?* And a follow-up question was: *Is this image truthful?* Afterwards, the same questions were repeated when the image was shown with the context of the whole news article and page or the newspaper. Then the interviewee was informed that the image was published on the front page of the Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* from 30 December 2008. The English translation of the headline is 'Gaza bombings threaten to light up the West Bank.' The photo credits are found in the corner of the photograph, which was taken by a Reuters photographer named Ibraheem Abu Mustafa. There are also two other smaller photos attached to the article. The other is a map illustration of Palestine and Israel and next to is a small photo depicting tanks.

Image 1: Front page news on war in Gaza, Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, 30.12.2008.

The second selected photograph (Image 2) is also about a war situation. In the foreground of the image a soldier is standing with his gun in the middle of a crowd of civilians squatting on the ground. At first, the informants were shown this image without the news article, and later they were shown the headline 'Panic and Human Shields in Basra', revealing that the story was about the British soldiers' participation in the Iraq war. The caption says "DOWN! A British soldier manning the Azubayr Bridge orders fleeing Basra residents to hit the dirt when the Iraqi forces opened fire." The image was published in *the Los Angeles Times* on 31 March 2003.

Image 2: The front page of the Los Angeles Times, 31.3.2003.

NATIONAL EDITION

Los Angeles Times

On The Internet: WWW.LATIMES.COM MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2003 COPYRIGHT 2003 \$L.00 Designated Areas Higher

BRIAN WALSKI/LOS ANGELES TIMES

DOWN! A British soldier manning the Azubayr Bridge orders fleeing Basra residents to hit the dirt as Iraqi forces opened fire.

Panic and Human Shields in Basra

At a bridge checkpoint, British battle hostile fire and surging refugees. In the chaos, Hussein forces hope to sneak in fighters.

BY MARK MAGNIE

front mud huts. Within seconds, paramilitaries in pickups opened fire on the British forces manning the bridge checkpoint. From another direction, mortar shells rained down on the British, whose massive Challenger tanks returned fire. Caught in the cross-fire, panicked refugees made clear some of the pitfalls U.S. forces would confront in a battle for Baghdad. "In a way, we can't really do an aerial lot," said Maj. Peter MacMullen with the First Battalion of Irish Guards, sitting on a curb as the firefight raged at the bridge on the edge of town. "The Iraqis were in groups of two or three, driving white vehi-

Allies Battle Iraqi Fighters on City Streets

British commandos report killing several officers in Basra and plan to enter downtown soon. Three Marines die in a helicopter crash.

BY DAVID ZUCCHINO AND GREGORY MOHAN Times Staff Writers

WITH U.S. FORCES IN IRAQ — U.S. and British troops flushed out paramilitary fighters street by street in three cities of central and southern Iraq on Sunday as warplanes hammered the Republican Guard surrounding Baghdad and American soldiers inched to within sight of Karbala, a gateway to the capital.

An American military helicopter crashed in the south, killing three Marines and injuring another, the Pentagon said. A military spokesman said the UH-1 Iroquois helicopter, known as a Huey, went down for undetermined reasons just after sunset near a military base and was not under hostile fire.

Elsewhere on the 11th day of the war, allied forces foiled an apparent suicide bombing attempt near Najaf, about 50 miles south of Baghdad, and mounted

TOM ARMY/ARMY GEN. TOMMY FRANKS DENIES THAT POLITICAL PRESSURE PLAYED A ROLE IN THE TIMING OF THE INVASION.

After discussing the image in its context, the informants were told the story behind the photograph. When the news was published, *the Los Angeles Times* was not aware that the image had been manipulated by photographer Brian Walski. Later in the media interviews, the photographer explained that he was suffering from exhaustion working in the war zone and was not happy

with the photos he had taken. Therefore, he decided to make a collage of two photos from the same situation. He cut the soldier from one photo and pasted it in the other, in order to create a visual dynamics between the soldier and the father carrying a child in his arms (see Image 2). The manipulation was soon discovered after the publication of the newspaper issue and it caused a big public debate. The photographer was expelled. All of the respondents in our study were told that the image had been manipulated and they were shown the two original photographs which were used for the collage. Below we shall analyse the dynamics of the frames of trust when the informants talked about these two news images.

Tacit Trust

Luhmann defines confidence as an unreflective and passive outlook. This is a starting point for how we relate to situations, issues and other people. We cannot live without forming expectations of contingent events and tend to ignore the possibility of disappointment (Luhmann, 1988: 97). Related to the idea of confidence, we define the frame of tacit trust as the dominant way in which the Finnish interviewees responded to news images. Tacit trust was activated when the interviewees discussed the images: they described what they saw in the photo, they analysed the characters' poses, the colours or shades in the picture, they made guesses as to what had happened in the situation of the photograph, and talked about the background of the news story. But they did not talk about their trust in the news image. Hence, in most cases, they did not question the veracity of the photograph and they did not talk about their trust in the image before the interviewer asked them about it. (Sometimes they brought up the question of trust because it had been raised during the previous photo example.)

In the frame of tacit trust, our interviewees very often talked about the incidents depicted in the photograph as if the image itself were an open window to the external reality. The informants described the elements and contexts of the image. For example, when looking at the photo of the little boy at the funeral in Gaza (Image 1) the informants talked about the emotions aroused by the pleading eyes of the little boy, the grief and confusion. They tried to guess why the boy is sad and what has happened. This is illustrated in the following quote in which Katja, a 38-year-old high school teacher, responded to the interviewers' question about the spontaneous thoughts and feelings aroused by the photograph:

Fear. Of course it evokes [fear] because I'm a mother, so this arouses a strong emotional reaction. Fear I would want to help this little child. Why is he there behind? This must be from some refugee camp (Katja, 38, high school teacher).

The frame of tacit trust was not as dominant when the interviewees were exposed to the image of the British soldier among the Iraqi civilians (Image 2). However, there were some who, in the frame of tacit trust, described the denotation of the image. They talked about the soldier with a gun and his hand pointing at the man carrying a child, with people sitting on the sand around them. The respondents also discussed the relationship between these characters and interpreted the meanings of their postures. They also talked about feelings such as fear, distress and the horrors of war, and they talked about the possible situation of a soldier meeting civilians in a war zone. These events seem distant to the Finnish interviewees living in a peaceful, democratic and affluent society. An excerpt from Aapo's interview illustrates the frame of tacit trust, yet, there is a tone of cynicism in his voice:

Again there are conflicts and confusion in the world when people are forced into peace. Oh, poor them, all of them – it's not easy being human. The other one is doing his job there and tries to secure democracy and peace in the world with his gun, and then the civilians have to obey this peace. And they're not doing that well either. They might be hungry and cold during the night in the desert (Aapo, 41, osteopath).

The absence of the issue of trust in the interview can be interpreted as a frame of tacit trust. Of course, one could argue, silence does not guarantee trust. People can feel distrust without expressing it verbally. Therefore, our analysis can only include what people *say* about their trust in news images and how they say it. But it is also important to consider what they choose not to mention: what remains outside of the chosen frame. Briefly, we define the dimension of tacit trust as an *absence of doubt* and an *absence of verbal recognition* of the veracity of the news photograph or its context.

Measured Trust

Evidently, in order to analyse the cultural frames of trust there must be some talk about the issue. Therefore, the interviewer often had to ask questions to evoke discussion. Hence, our study simulated the process whereby tacit and

more or less self-evident confidence was gradually transformed into measured trust and expressed accordingly.

For Luhmann (1988: 97), trust requires a situation of risk: “You may or may not buy a used car which turns out to be a ‘lemon’”. In contrast to tacit confidence, he uses the word trust to refer to a reflective and active stance. We call it measured trust when a person makes calculations or evaluations regarding whether or not to trust something or someone. The possibility for disappointment is understood and expressed in one way or another. In this case, the situation of risk means that if the viewer decides to trust the news image, s/he articulates the possibility of the risk of being deluded. For instance, there is a possibility that the image has been made to look authentic, but it turns out to be digitally altered. The viewer’s trust in the news medium and in the functioning of society is at stake. What if the newspapers distort the news events – how can we find out what is ‘really’ happening out there? Yet in choosing the frame of measured trust, we decide to take a risk. We trust in what we see and hear and act accordingly.

While in the frame of tacit trust the relationship of trust was not expressed, in the frame of measured trust the informants talked about their trust in news images. They expressed their feelings and said that they believed in the veracity of the image. They also often evaluated the images objectively and expressed a relationship of trust simultaneously. The majority of the respondents said that they trusted most news images and it did not make a difference if they were made by professional or amateur photographers, or published in print or on-line.

In the interviews, the first image was considered to be trustworthy. The informants’ argument was the *authenticity of the emotions*. They described how the image portrays the strong emotional state of the little child and pleads with the viewer. The arousal of affects was seen as proof of the veracity of the photograph, as illustrated in the following quote:

Well this certainly gives a first impression. This is a good photograph – looks very authentic and the picture has captured the distress of a small human being. Sad eyes. As it is shown here, this is very close to the idea that a good news photo is worth more than thousand words (Aleksi, 35, actor).

Hence, the strong emotional subject matter of the image produces its reality-effect and sense of authenticity. As Ien Ang has shown in her famous study (Ang, 1991) of the soap opera *Dallas*, the emotional ties to characters and scenes leads the viewer to interpret the narration as (emotionally) truthful

in spite of its fictional quality. If this holds true in the field of soap operas, it is even more plausible in the field of photojournalism.

Aleksi also used a common saying which contains the idea that the photograph conveys meaning by using a non-verbal visual register which goes beyond the representative possibilities of verbal language. This thinking also comprises the idea of a photograph 'capturing' part of reality and, hence, becoming an indexical and metonymical trace of the very same reality.

Measured trust was not a dominant frame when the interviewees analysed the manipulated image of the British soldier in Iraq. But it was found in a few comments during the interviews. For example, Mikael measured his trust in the image and came to the conclusion that if the image had been fake the newspaper would have said it:

Well this newspaper should be [trustworthy], but I'm not sure about this. It doesn't say in the caption that this image was manipulated (Mikael, 15, schoolchild).

Antero and Maija said that the faces of the people in the image seemed trustworthy. The emotional stress of the civilians seemed real to them. Again, the emotional appeal of the image was considered as a cue for authenticity. People are not expected to pretend that a situation of distress and fear is real. In all, the frame of measured trust was much less pertinent with the second image than it was with the first image.

Contextual trust

Trust is a relationship and a complicated process which is constantly renegotiated and contested. This is indicated well in the frame of contextual trust where the interviewees evaluated and compared the various elements of the image, the paper, media and society as a whole. A relationship of trust with respect to a news image is also constructed through the intertextual context. This is illustrated in the interviews when the informants compared a news image to another, or to an advertisement, art image or film. News images are also compared among different papers and different media. In general, trust arises from the authority of the news media. When the informants talked about the trustworthiness of the various media, they evaluated the national newspaper as the most trustworthy and the tabloids as least trustworthy.

The emotions evoked by the first image were also discussed in the frame of contextual trust. For example, this is illustrated by Mari's comment about im-

ages evoking emotions in general: “When you put a child with his big sad eyes in a newspaper, compassion is aroused immediately, whatever the cause might be” (Mari, 38, manager in a telecommunications company).

Strong emotional ties with the scene of the image may also raise questions concerning the use and the context of the image and their effect on its truthfulness. This challenges the previous interpretations about emotional realism as a component of the effect of the news image in terms of truthfulness. It seems that emotional content may *simultaneously* give rise to trust in the photographic representation itself and cast doubts about the use of the same representation. This tension is an example of the basic distinction in the photographic image itself. The photographic image is – at the same time – both nature and culture. It is an untouchable indexical sign but also an object that can be used in many different contexts and practices. Already Lewis Hine – a famous American photographer – recognised this by saying: “Photographs do not lie, but liars can photograph”. Some of our informants recognised this double logic of the photographic image and the importance of emotions in the different political uses of images.

When the image was shown without the context, some of the interviewees said that the image of the child with sad eyes reminded them more of campaign pictures of UNICEF or other charitable organisations collecting money for their programmes in developing countries:

When I first saw this I thought it was an advertisement image from some kind of a humanitarian organisation or such. I did not think it was a news image at all, because this child is so much in the fore somehow (Tanja, 38, special education teacher).

Taneli compared the image to other news and images of conflicts and catastrophes:

As regards whether this image is true or not, it is evident that in a place where someone attacks you there’s a lot of human suffering and there must be faces like that and much worse. On the other hand, I don’t see why this would not be true where the tanks are, because I do believe that the Israelis have plenty of tanks (Taneli, 40, entrepreneur).

The informants talked about their trust using their contextual knowledge acquired from other news and images they had seen in other papers, on the internet or on television. The similar message from several sources brings credibility to the issue. Teresa said that it was similar to what she had seen in the

television news. Keijo, another interviewee, talked in a similar way about his trust within a contextual frame, comparing different genres portraying the sorrow of a child:

In some ways, of course, this is meant to shake people, as it creates a strong appeal when you show a child with this kind of sorrow. It is the same on television – sometimes your eyes fill up with tears suddenly when you see something like this (Keijo, 62, teacher in an adult education institution).

In the case of the second image, the informants used the contextual frame when interpreting the image and when looking for cues of trustworthiness. The viewers interpreted the image in the context of their previous knowledge and experiences. For example, the comments referred to the fact that these kinds of incident, as depicted in the photograph, happen all the time in a war zone.

Humanities undergraduate student Timi described that he believed in the veracity of the photograph because he had seen similar war scenes in films. He also said that he had first-hand information from his brother who had worked in the peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan. Timi continued to talk about the political and social context after seeing the whole news page including the texts:

In this context it seems like a trustworthy picture, as I've seen war movies and my brother was in Afghanistan for a long time last year in the peace keeping forces. From what I have heard, I can imagine that this is pretty much how it is there. This is more than what they say in the Finnish media [...] (Timi, 22, student).

It is interesting that Timi presented an intertextual comparison of the image to war movies. He did not distinguish between fiction and documentary, but it is usually a common assumption that war movies are amplified in some ways. Many of the other interviewees' comments in the frame of contextual trust overlap with the frame of doubt, as they suspected the propagandist purpose of the photograph or image manipulation.

Doubt and distrust

The very last dimension of trust is the frame of doubt. Doubt is still included in the dimensions of trust since the speaker expresses an uncertainty of trust. However, there is a very fine line between doubt and distrust. The frame of doubt features in our study when the interviewees made observations about the images when they saw something uncanny or controversial. Two main objects

of doubt can be identified. Firstly, the informants talked about their doubt with respect to the content of the image, the choice of the images and their purposefulness. Secondly, they expressed doubts when analysing the image's technical execution and whether it might have been digitally altered after it was taken. However, the comment expressing doubt might contain both of these elements and several arguments related to each image arise in the frame of doubt.

Elicited by the first image, in the frame of contextual trust the interviewees said that the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper is reliable when considering the veracity of a photograph. However, in many cases the comments turned into doubt as the informants questioned the purpose of showing the particular image. They were well aware – which shows their visual literacy – that news images are selected in order to lead to a certain interpretation. The interpretation of the image also has an effect on the interpretation of the whole issue at stake in the article. The informants raised ethical questions about the purpose of selecting the particular photograph. As illustrated in the contextual frame, they argued that the image resembled an advertising image from a humanitarian organisation, as illustrated in Teresa's quote:

Well, this arouses such feelings that it breaks my heart when I see this child's eyes. I don't know what's going on with him but he's got very sad eyes. So this could be used for money collection purposes because it appeals directly to the emotions (Teresa, 53, yoga instructor).

The image is said to be suspicious because of its emotional appeal. This is quite contradictory to what was said in the frame of measured trust, as the emotional interpretation of the image was said to be proof of its authenticity. In the frame of doubt, some interviewees suspected that it was possible that the editors had taken the image from the archives when they were looking for an image of a scared child. This was considered as a "cheap trick to appeal to the viewers" and the edition was blamed for "child abuse through a news photo" (Niina, 38, manager).

Criticism of the photograph as a vehicle of political propaganda arose in some interviews. It was said that this is not pure news mediation, but that the editorial is aiming at influencing readers' opinions about the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians through the selected image. When the interviewer asked about the meaning of the image with respect to the article as a whole, Teresa replied:

I think they are trying to persuade people to take the side of the Palestinians. The Israeli attack was of course monstrous, but their war is not so unequivocal (Teresa, 53, yoga instructor).

Johannes also commented on the political aim to affect the reader: “The Palestinians are good and Israel is bad – this is what they’re after. And with this sad looking boy they are trying to convince the reader” (Johannes, 45, maths teacher).

The interviewees very seldom doubted that the image had been altered. Instead, they expressed doubts about the origin of the photograph. They said that the image of the boy may have been taken from another situation and added to this context and this particular news item. Seija said: “The boy could be from a refugee camp or just as well from the amusement park, scared to go on the roller coaster”. There is no proof that it was taken at the funeral as it says in the caption. Since the photo was cropped as a close-up, the background gives very few clues, as Taneli continued:

This image could be taken from anywhere; we cannot be sure whether this boy has really been to a funeral. Of course I would like to believe it because *Helsingin Sanomat* says so. But I can’t say whether it is trustworthy (Taneli, 40, entrepreneur).

Again there is a mixture of contextual trust and doubt in Taneli’s quote above. He said he would like to believe in the newspaper medium, but there are dubious elements in the picture.

In addition, the photograph of the British soldier in *the Los Angeles Times* received comments on the purposefulness of the photograph. A minority of the informants said that they believed the photograph was true; however they talked doubtfully about the political aim of using this photograph. Yet, a more dominant object of doubt regarding this photograph is whether or not it was altered. In many cases, the doubts were raised already when the photo was shown cut out of context. Many of the interviewees noticed the photo being a little out of focus, the flatness of the colours, the surface of the image, the lack of shadows, and so on. Paula said that “this is the first one which makes me ask what is really going on here”. She explained that there seemed to be too many elements in the photograph and that it was likely that the figures had been cut and pasted from another context. Kaisa also expressed her doubt:

Well, this is the first picture that I would suspect to be manipulated. My first impression is that not everything is matching [...] I feel like Photo Shop has been used here (Kaisa, 53, craft teacher).

The informants talked about the image from the point of view of photo shooting and image processing with an analytical tone. The informants mentioned that the image seems so unreal that “it looks almost like a painting”. It was said to seem like a constructed performance, and therefore it is not even appealing to emotions. Again, the emotions evoked by the image were referred to as a cue for veracity. The frame of doubt concerning the image manipulation was also consistent when the image was shown in its context.

When the interviewees were told in the end that the image had been manipulated, many of them responded with disapproval: “I feel like I have been cheated”, says Seija. Niina also had a very strong judgement regarding the image manipulation:

Okay, they have the guts to fuck the audience in this kind of paper. Maybe it was the photographer, but it is the paper’s responsibility. And on the other hand, I should have known better. Actually this makes me think about all the war situations which are so constructed by the media. This does not surprise me anymore (Niina, 38, manager).

This speaker is saying that the whole of war communication is a dubious issue. After this, she continued to deconstruct the visual elements of the photograph. She said that possibly with this image they had wished to give an impression of the British soldiers in Iraq as benefactors, which would give a political justification for the interference of the foreign armed forces with the situation in Iraq. Niina concluded that the selection, cropping and processing of the image can direct the meaning given to the viewers. In the end she stated: “The photographers should shoot the kind of photo which does not need to be manipulated – even when a certain effect is sought” (Niina, 38, manager).

The word ‘propaganda’ also appeared in the discussions when talking about the manipulated photograph of the soldier, as it did regarding the Gaza war image. Many of the interviewees expressed that elements of propaganda can be identified in all news about conflicts and politics. This means graphic images with emotional appeal. However the word ‘propaganda’ was not given only negative connotations, but Timi’s comment implies that this is taken for granted: “The news is supposed to take a stance in some issues”. The propaganda talk also had some humoristic elements, as Tapio explained that the image could be from the Soviet epoch of the newspaper *Pravda*. He also saw some biblical connotations in the posture of the soldier: “Don’t be afraid, I will bring you a great light – today a child was born to you” (Tapio, 64, retired German teacher). This also shows the construction of doubt in context with the interpreter’s previous

knowledge and experiences. This emphasises the importance of knowledge of different media and genres regarding the viewer's visual literacy.

In the discussion about the manipulated image of the soldier, the informants said that the revelation of this case causes distrust in news images and media in general. "After this one you start suspecting every single image", said Mari. Tanja expressed her distrust:

My trust has eroded so much that I do not know if I want to buy that paper at all. And it would not have crossed my mind that a paper like *the Los Angeles Times* would do image manipulation (Tanja, 38 special education teacher).

On the other hand, many of the interviewees said that trust may be preserved despite a few occasional cases. A single case does not ruin the trustworthiness of the entire medium. Like many others, Tanja said that if the paper takes responsibility over the issue and bears the consequences, one single case of image manipulation may be forgiven and forgotten.

Conclusions

People usually tend to choose a trusting approach, since it is the grounds for the basic security for all human beings. It would be very difficult to distrust everything in everyday life; distrust makes us feel unhappy and unsafe. A trusting outlook is a presupposition as long as suspicious cues are not perceived in the surroundings. The fact that it is taken for granted also makes it very difficult to study trust. It seems to be easier to explore why and how distrust develops than how trust is constructed in a positive sense.

Our study shows that trust is not only a question of trust versus distrust. Trust is a multidimensional process, ever evolving in each situation of social interaction. We have used as our starting point the distinction between confidence and trust by Niklas Luhmann (1988) and developed four frames of trust with respect to two foreign news images from newspapers. But the frames are not fixed; they change and take new forms in different situations and contexts. The dimensions of trust are also often overlapping. We have separated them for the sake of analytical clarity.

The first image of the little boy at a funeral in Gaza, elicited mainly frames of tacit, measured and contextual trust. Yet the frame of doubt was more present here than with the other news photos in the interviews. The image was not suspected of manipulation. Instead, doubt was expressed regarding the possibility of the image being taken from another context and used for emotional

appeal in order to influence the political views of the readers. The interviewees' analysis of the image and its possible aims reveals that they are visually literate. They are aware of the media's way of possibly representing reality from a perspective which is not necessarily neutral. This could be an example of what Coleman (2012: 36) defines as the second order of trust which is at the core of the tension between contemporary news production values and news consumption frustrations.

The second image, a photograph of the British soldier with refugees in Iraq, evoked many doubts about photo manipulation. More than half of the thirty informants expressed their doubts about the veracity of the photograph already when they saw it without the context. They suspected and some were even certain that the image had been manipulated. When the full context was shown, most of them kept the same viewpoint, and a few of them said that they trusted the news image when they saw the context with the logo of the newspaper. Less than half of the thirty informants did not express any doubt about the image processing before they were told about the manipulation of the image.

The comments on the manipulated image are mixed and controversial. Some of the respondents expressed disapproval of the photo manipulation. But some just said that it does not matter so much. The informants were aware that image processing is part of photography today. They were pondering on the ethics of the photographer's actions, and some said they would accept this because the situation of the photo had not been changed.

An interesting and controversial finding of the study is that the emotions aroused by the news photographs evoked both frames of trust and doubt. In the first three frames of trust, the emotions were regarded as proof for the authenticity of the photograph. Truth based on personal experiences, feelings and subjective judgement is a trend in today's popular and political culture (van Zoonen, 2012: 57). A personal or amateurish touch in news photographs has also proven to be judged more trustworthy in our other study (Puustinen & Seppänen, 2011). In contrast, in the frame of doubt the viewers said that the same emotions of sorrow and despair evoked doubt and ethical questions. The image was seen to be aimed at manipulating the viewer's political views on the situation. Many of the interviewees said that the news article with the little boy attending a dead child's funeral in Gaza was an attempt to persuade the reader to favour Palestinians in the conflict. Emotions were also regarded as suspicious because of a possible connection to commercial persuasion. In a factual news genre, the emotional address is considered dubious. Although it has been proven that the news has become more entertaining and contains affective elements,

the informants seemed to have internalised the classical journalistic ideals, as they expressed a desire for the neutrality and objectivity of the news.

The paradoxical nature of emotional content was very clear. On the one hand, it reinforced the realistic and hence trustworthy impressions of the image. On the other hand, strong emotional content raised questions about political uses of the image. This vacillating position of the photographic image is grounded in its nature as an indexical sign. The indexicality of the photographic image means that it has been a material part ('fragment torn away', 'physical connection') of the object it represents. This semiotic quality equips the photographic image with an exceptionally strong evidentiary potential, which could be used in different social practices. In a sense, a photograph acts as circumstantial evidence (e.g. fingerprints), which is inevitably physically connected to presence at the scene of the crime. Hence, the emotions expressed in the image are – in a sense – even physically present for the viewer. The indexicality of the photographic image is an essential part of photographic common sense and a basis for the trustworthiness of photographs. However, indexicality is seldom consciously expressed as such. It is part of our tacit and non-verbal expectations concerning the nature of the photographic image. Furthermore, the indexical power of the photographic image may be misused as well.

As a result of the study, we found that the frames of tacit trust, measured trust and contextual trust are most common among the Finnish interviewees. The high scores in trust is not a surprising finding in the context of a democratic and affluent society with a relatively high level of freedom of speech. However, surveys in other European countries such as the United Kingdom show that people's trust in media has been severely eroded due to the recent media scandals (Coleman, 2012). Yet the situation is different in Eastern European countries, where the polls indicate lower trust in all social institutions including the media (e.g. Čuvalo in this issue). The Finns still have relatively high trust in governmental and economical institutions (Borg, 2007) but the British people's trust in government and media has dramatically declined. Trust is the foundation of the social relationship of being a citizen in a society. "Unless we can trust the news media to deliver common knowledge, the idea of the public – a collective entity possessing shared concerns – starts to fall apart" (Coleman 2012, 36). A certain level of trust is crucial for the functioning of the media and society as a whole.

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