

NOSTALGIA AND AUTHENTICITY OF FAUX VINTAGE PHOTO IN INSTAGRAM THROUGH DIGITAL FILTERS

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Abstract

Visually photos with vintage filters in Instagram are similar with vintage photos originally from 1960-1980s that resonate nostalgia and authenticity within the emotional, symbolic, and historical values, but in spite of the similarity do these faux vintage photos resonates the same nostalgia and authenticity of the original vintage? How the revolution of technology in photography contributes in the change of the values of nostalgia and authenticity? To provide answers to these questions, a quantitative research has been done by questionnaire about perception using faux vintage photos as stimulus given to 46 Instagram users divided into 2 groups of 23 serious amateurs and of 23 amateurs, then the result is qualitatively analyzed with theories of socio-culture history of photography, post photography in digital culture, and postmodern aesthetics. Subsequently, it is inferred that faux vintage photos are able to resonate nostalgia and authenticity but in a different manner, as those so called essential values has degraded into mere essence of nostalgia and authenticity flavor distilled by vintage filters. The purpose is to explain how these-generated through digital technology-photos are supposed to be appreciated as *new* artifacts within the context of postmodern aesthetics in digital culture. The understanding of essential values of photo of which technology contributed to, underlying people to create innovative photo apps that embrace essential values supporting creative industries in Indonesia.

Keywords: values, nostalgia, authenticity, faux vintage photo and digital culture.

1. Introduction

In the period of analog photography, photographs became a proof that recorded of what had happened in the past, that is as Galanopoulos says a photograph is a literal representation of what was stand before the lens (Galanopoulos, 2011:7-16), by taking photos people captured moments of their life and freeze them inside the photographs they have taken before, therefore when they saw these authentic photos, they felt nostalgic feeling of moments of the past, which is why old photos or vintage photos commonly identified with nostalgia and authenticity. On the other hand with the invasion of digital technology in photography, there is a tendency that the two traditional values are no longer essential to a photograph, by asking to 10 Instagram users about what were the reason for them applying vintage filters to their photos as the majority of the answers were more into aesthetic matters, that the filters as facilitator of their artistic expression to make mundane photos more artistic and stand out. The ease of photography technology causes the production and consumption of faux vintage photos to become simultaneous and rapid, shaping the attitude of its performers that losing their ability to sense what is essential from a photo. Furthermore the revolution of photography technology changed the relation of human with their camera as a medium to produce a photograph of which the relation is represented, and of human as a viewer giving their perception and interpretation to the photograph, within the whole process of values and meanings. From this statement raise the questions that if nostalgia and authenticity of emotional, symbolic and historical

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values are embedded in vintage photos, do the-generated through smartphone digital camera-faux vintage photos that visually resembling 1960-1980s vintage photos are also able to resonate the same nostalgia and authenticity? How digital revolution in photography and human interaction to that technology cause the essential values of nostalgia and authenticity to change? Therefore, in order to provide answer to these questions, a quantitative research is done to solicit perceptions about faux vintage photos from the perspective of Instagram users of 23 serious amateurs and of 23 amateurs by questionnaire, the results is qualitatively analyzed with theories with the understanding of socio-culture history of photography, post photography in digital culture, and postmodern aesthetics, to gain the knowledge that place photography with technology prosthetic in the state of new art to be appreciated in the context of particular aesthetic canon of digital culture. On the other hand, the understanding of essential values of photos influenced by technology might be used as strong foundation of people in Indonesia to create innovative photo apps to support creative industries in Indonesia.

2. Materials

The theories in this research based on function, values, and meanings within photography practice in Yianis Galanopoulos thesis where technology takes part in the relationship of Instagram users with their smartphone cameras and faux vintage photos as its representation: users that apply vintage filters to their photos (function) and users as viewers give their perception and interpretation or meanings to the photos within the process of value. The value is refers to Prasad Boradkar theory, values and meanings process that involve memories where technology as the integral part is analyzed by José van Dijck's theory, the influence of technology then explained by Risto Sarvas, David M. Frohlich and William J. Mitchell as the path of technology in photography from analog to digital that cause its practice, experience and culture to change and finally photographs as the medium for people to express their artistic sense in the context of aesthetic postmodern in digital culture apart from their nature as the representation of reality based on Susan Sontag and Walter Benjamin thoughts in Liz Wells theory.

2.1 Values, meanings and culture

Values and meanings entwine one and another said Galanopoulos, in function level, users interact with their Instagram produce faux vintage photos, these photos are also act as the medium of artistic expression by the users. Users as viewers decode meaning by interpreting the message embedded inside the photos through their perception when experiencing photography practice (Galanopoulos, 2011:17), and by the same time they feel value based on the whole process of it, said Boradkar (Boradkar, 2010:45). Perception in this case is shaped by personal and collective experience framing by rules and conventions in digital culture.

2.2 Values of vintage photo and faux vintage photo

In this inquiry to answer the research questions, researcher needs to acknowledge classification of values that build upon the understanding of photo as the literal representation of reality, and photography practice in the early time refers to nostalgia and authenticity of vintage photo, also the understanding of post photography in the digital era, as well as observation to 10 Instagram users showing that the focus is more into aesthetic matters rather than nostalgia and authenticity. All these elements is coherent with Boradkar's value theory which classify the values discussed in this research to emotional, symbolic, historical and aesthetic values. These values are question variables in questionnaire, as a quantitative method to solicit data. On the other hand faux vintage photo refers to vintage photo popular in 1960-1980s. The particular vintage look was generated by camera and film technology at that time, Lomo or toy camera like Holga and Diana F+ as well as Polaroid SX70 or Holgaroid instant cameras. There were assorted films for each of these cameras, color and

black and white films, the combination of them produced unique-idiosyncratic photos, yet they had a particular feature that still be recognized as vintage, such as aquatic or yellowish color, black and white, vignette, blur, washed out color, grain, frame etc. Below are the example of black and white vintage photo (right) and the grainy faux one (left) with digital modification in higher level of contrast, additional vignette and the color also has been changed to brownish black and white which brings out the vintage features that familiar to the viewer's eye all harmonized to visualize the experience of old time feeling.



Figure 1 (left-right) the faux vintage photo of modern buildings and the genuine old photo of Preanger Hotel around 1950s. Source: (left) <http://instagram.com/langsky256> (right) Lasmono

In this research values of faux vintage photo are described and analyzed based on user's perspective involving their experience to interpret the faux vintage photos. as Boradkar said (Boradkar, 2010:45) value is a fluid aggregate relation consists of information or whatever interacting one and another through socially, politically and economically constructed production, distribution and consumption process. Value can be an objective or subjective matter. Naturally as an object, a photo has its own value, but its objective turns subjective when value is added by personal or collective under the conventions. For example a Historical value of a photo comes not only from the object of the photo, nor its visual: its color, its blur, or its frame but from how each elements entwines to present historical experience all at once to its viewers, and by the same time they give meaning to this process.

2.3 Nostalgia and authenticity

Vintage photos have the quality of authenticity because of their literal representation to the reality as for Sontag they served as evidence of what had happened before the lens (Sontag, 2005:3). Furthermore Benjamin stated that authenticity could not be copied nor manipulated, since it possessed historical testimony and had the authority to claim itself as the truth vaporized the aura of authenticity. Therefore when someone saw these photos, they felt the nostalgic feeling or brought back to the time past mentally, for instance an experience being in some place in 1960s with family and friends, or an experience taking photos with Polaroids, anxiously waiting the picture slowly appeared on the paper, because after object is captured by the camera, it become a part of the past reflected on to the photo as a reference of experience of photographer and object, as well as viewers to their object in the spatio-temporal relationship that triggers nostalgia or homesick remembering the time past. In addition to this light leaks or chemical leaks, color distortions, washed out color and other vintage features generates by analogue camera and its film, render its photo as a unique artifact to become an authentic. By the observation to 10 Instagram users and study of the theories above that related to the impact of the technology in value and culture, where personal experience

shaping the memory collectively that eventually describe the topology of digital culture, can be used to reveal the answers of the research questions, configures the assumptions for this research:

1. Faux vintage photos cannot resonate nostalgia and authenticity generated from the emotional, symbolic, and historical values like the vintage does, because they tend to be perceived to have an aesthetic value instead.
2. Perception towards faux vintage photos influenced by technology change the essential values of nostalgia and authenticity.

3. Methods



Figure 2. (left-right) questionnaire stimulus: photo of a mountain without filters, modification 1 with Willow, modification 2 with XproII and modification 3 with Earlybird

Quantitatively set of data has been solicited by questionnaire likert scale over 46 respondents of 23 serious amateurs and of 23 amateurs with stimulus above, a photo of mountain has been chosen due to the filter as the focus in this research instead of the object as the main study, and prior to this from survey over 20 Instagram users, a photo of mountain was considered to be the most valuable when compared to other landscape object photos such as beach, sky, urban, forest, and sunset, on the other hand mountains are always neutral and objective, since they can be perceived and interpreted universally.

The questionnaire data result is analyzed with T test two independent samples to acknowledge significance of differences between serious amateur and amateur groups perceptions and one sample T test to discover significance of difference in value between modification 1, 2 and 3. The results from both T test are superimposed in scatter line graphic in order to describe the tendency of values of the 3 modifications as the background to explain the first assumption. Subsequently, to answer the second assumption a theoretical analysis based on the premise of function, values, and meanings in photography practice that embraces technology is done and enriched with the explanation to the scoring answers of the likert scale questionnaire within an interview that completes the theoretical analysis of the data result. Finally the answers of the assumptions above bring out the conclusions of this research.

4. results

4.1 T test analysis

The two independent samples analysis showing results of significance value of $0.253 > 0.05$ where H_0 is accepted, according to this there is no significance of difference between the perception about values of faux vintage photo between the serious amateur and amateur groups. This also means that both groups have the same tendency of perception. On the other hand one sample T test exemplifies the conformable results with the previous T test, as t of modification 1, 2 and 3 ($t_1=15.684$,

$t_2=22.995$, $t_3=40.327$) are all greater than 0.05 therefore between these 3 modifications the significance of difference is also absent that showing consistency in the two t test analysis.

4.2 Superimposed values of faux vintage photo with scatter line graphic

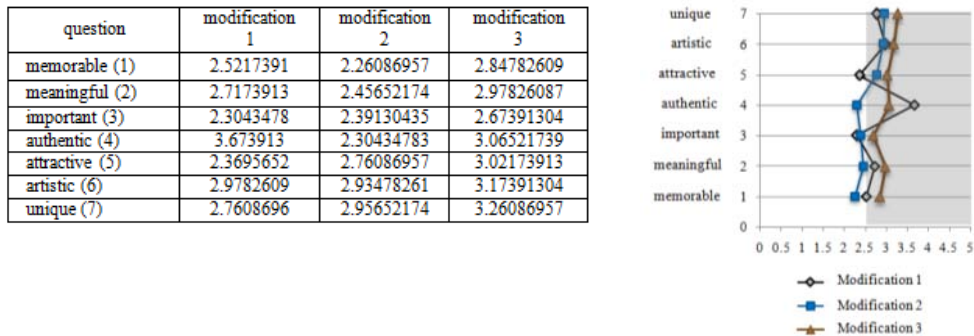


Figure 3. superimposed scatter line graphic of faux vintage values

Above 2.5 the mean value is considered to be high, and conversely below 2.5 is low. Photo modification 2 with Xpro II filter was not perceived to have emotional, symbolic and historical value by the respondents but aesthetic value instead indicated by mean value of artistic and unique items that hit a higher point than any other value items both by 2.9 Based on the answers of qualitative question for the most respondents, modification such as aquatic colors and bold black frame on the photo, cannot spark any nostalgia memories of the past, much less to make it seems authentic, since it does not look like an old photo at all. On the one hand a different perception is showed on modification 1 and 3, modification 1 with Willow filters changing colors to black and white and the additional of a white frame was perceived to have a high historical value by the respondents indicated by mean value of 3.6 in authentic item. Black and white was considered by the most respondents as the main factor to make a photo visually antique and looks authentic that triggers nostalgia, on the other hand modification 3 with Earlybird filter was perceived to have emotional, symbolic, and historical value, with the highest mean value of historical item at 3.06 That brownish or sepia color and a white frame on the photo triggers the nostalgia and authenticity the same with modification 1, moreover it also perceived to possess aesthetic value with high mean value at 3 for attractive: 3.1 for artistic and 3.2 for unique item.

The condition above describes the validity of the first assumption. The assumption is not entirely correct, since nostalgia and authenticity are resonated through faux vintage photo as well, yet in the different level of value. This provides answer to the first research question, the more the old photo visually, the more it perceived to have emotional, symbolic and historical values it triggers one's memory to the nostalgia and authenticity like modification 1 and 3 with Willow and Xpro II filters, although some give their perception based on the object of the photo apart from the modification, for examples mountains that trigger memories of volcanic rupture in one's past or memories about experience when taking photo of the similar objects.

4.3 Theoretical analysis

Based on the answers of qualitative question within an interview both groups of serious amateurs and amateurs give the reasons that modification with Xpro II filter, are not able to spark any nostalgia memories of the past yet Black and white of Willow filter was considered as the main factor to make a photo visually antique and looks authentic that triggers nostalgia by the most respondents, the same with modifications of the sepia color and a white frame of Earlybird filter on the photo modification 3. It is inferred that filter modifications have big influence in respondent's

perceptions, especially perception of historical value, as 54% of them agree that modification has the ability to make photo looks authentic, this helps to adding explanation in the theoretical analysis that provides answer to the second research question based on the assumption of how technology influence the human perception cause the essential values of nostalgia and authenticity to change. Therefore the answer to this is to put photo in the position between the two era, analogue and digital with the premise of function, values and meanings in photography practice, diachronically to observe vintage photos as reference to understand faux vintage photos as product of digital technology synchronically in the explanation below.

Users do the point-shoot-share as part of their ritual of novel sharing practice in everyday life, simultaneously hold between their finger tips and the screen of their smartphones. Everything in the time and space is accommodated by screen, said Piliang, no longer one needs hours to develop the film or one needs to go to the film developing service in order to get the photo he wants, time and space in the reality has been shrunk into the virtual time and space of the screen at zero velocity. (Piliang Y. A., 2008:3). Though faux vintage photos resonate nostalgia and authenticity, the memories within are based on its visual fiction of vintage photos through the filter modifications applied to it, unlike vintage photos that echoing the time and space of the reality. Based on Galanopoulos's (Galanopoulos, 2011:11-12), in the analogue era of film photography, mechanically after an object was captured, it became part of the past that reflected the experience of its photographer or viewer with his object in the spatio-temporal relation generated a nostalgia, feeling of home sick of memories of the past, whilst through vintage filters applied on to the faux vintage photos, the similar feeling can be created anywhere anytime devoid the previous spatio-temporal relation, generate a feeling of nostalgia metaphorically not in the state of the past, but in the state of this time being, that sustainable to be in between the reality of nostalgia and its fiction representation continuously to be given meanings by people-it might be right that the photo of the mountain was taken in 1970s, but the fact tells otherwise since it is a freshly taken photo that also has been modified previously –or in other words it is interpreted through analogy or as Zakia said as equivalency between nostalgia and a fantasy (Zakia, 2002:86).

Parallel with Galanopoulos, based on van Dijck's theory from his perspective of memory discursive, nostalgia of faux vintage photo arise from memory preservation and creation when interpreting the photo of mountain with its narrative that can be easily manipulated in the digital era. Such modification on this photo by applying vintage filter in a way that is virtually synonymous to an old photo, serves as an input for the viewer to perceive it (Dijck, 2007:173). The absence of time and space in zero velocity weigh the production, distribution and consumption of faux vintage photos, they are circulated simultaneously in endless aggregate and shapes, that these photos become a mundane, subjective, and user centered such as selfies, food snap, stuff snap, perspective shots, urban shots, and holidays so ordinary and boring that they need to be modified by applying vintage filters in order to look more appealing. A different ritual in practicing photography analogue and digital generate distinct experiences that influence human perception involving their memories and meaning interpretation to the photos within the relation of function, values and meanings. The digital revolution of technology predispose human perception to the photos as representations of reality, of which their relation to their reality and their truth and authenticity are changed, as well as their essential values. However nostalgia and authenticity are still resonated yet as only a flavor essence of nostalgia and authenticity, as mere sensations.

Viewers from groups of serious amateurs and amateurs are no longer heedful in appreciating photo as a work of art conventionally, since they are surrounded by scattered countless of photos within the network they live in, and become mutants that are capable in doing multitasking juggling the massive data production, distribution and consumption, therefore photos are no longer considered as artifact and lose their strong bond to their creator. The relation between human and photos has

transformed into data producers and consumers, when these photos uploaded to the internet floating within the clouds that can be tracked down, or be seen and downloaded by anyone at anytime anywhere with Google, search column in Instagram or any search engines, that these photos become as Sterling have termed as spime (Sterling, 2005:76). The relation of function where human and his camera within his ritual practicing photography, produce photo as the representation referencing to the relation, are perceived and interpreted in the sustainable process of giving value and meaning side by side with the revolution of technology from analogue to digital photography. This explains the answer to the second question in this research.

5. Conclusions

Faux vintage photos resonate nostalgia and authenticity related to emotional, symbolic and historical values synonym to vintage photos however that essential values has been transformed into essence of vintage flavor, a digital filter that generate sensation of nostalgia and authenticity that perceived through 'aesthetic jacket' of vintage of photos in Instagram. The difference in the way of seeing of this nostalgia and authenticity by the society affected by digital revolution of technology in photography practice of novel sharing shaping personal memories and experience that become collective within the convention depicting the topology of digital culture.

The side effect of technology in the relation between users using their filter and the faux vintage photos, affect the essential values of that relation. Vintage filters as digital editing technology weave a pattern of photography practice in digital culture, since users can easily point, shoot, edit their mundane photos and share the artistic-vintage look likes-results afterwards, when the authentic vintage photos were generated by the idiosyncrasy of camera and its film, so unique that every photo had its own characteristic it is distinct from one and another. Conversely the digital filters in Instagram package uniformity on to the photos. if the same object applied with the same filter but shot by different photographer, the results would be synonymous, flat and allied. On the other hand the massive production, distribution and consumption of these photos, force the digital society to do multitasking to process the information (photos as data), each individual compete to each other to take charge of these information by becoming different from others, by making their photo the most artistic one, therefore things related to aesthetics such as good/bad, ugly/pretty have become a major issue, while the essential values such as truth/lie, authentic/modification are neglected, lies and modification have emerged into the reality for the society. The essential value of a photo represents its reality and of photo as an artifact that bonds strongly to its creator's emotions that generates a reflecting experience of the past between human and his object in photography practice as nostalgia, transformed into the essence of authenticity flavor in the vintage packaging of digital filters, arousing the sensation of nostalgia and this become what matter most for users, since the old vintage look makes their mundane photo drastically artistic, which means there is a new way of seeing and appreciating the essential value of nostalgia and authenticity by the society. The absence of the real spatio-temporal relationship when the experience of analogue photography practice was hold, generates nostalgia and authenticity metaphorically apart from the past in the state of becoming between the reality of nostalgia and its fictitious representation that continuously interpreted by users.

The relation of function, values and meanings in photography situates users with vintage filter in their Instagram (technology) and faux vintage photos as the product that represent this relationship, users as viewer perceive and interpret the photo within the whole process of value affected by memories of experiences in the past, the present, and the future. Paradoxically memories of each person, knotting together the pattern of collective memories of the society especially in Indonesia, that narrates how digital photography of novel sharing is practiced with its values and meanings

projecting the landscape of digital culture in Indonesia, yet at the same time that grand narrative is generated by every personal memory of each Instagram user.

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