



Article

War Photographers Documenting Conflicts and Preserving Historical Narratives

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Abstract: War photography plays a pivotal role in documenting conflict, providing both historical records and shaping public perception. Despite its historical significance, limited research has focused on the emotional and cognitive effects of war images on public opinion and their role in contemporary media. This study bridges that gap by examining the work of prominent war photographers, including Vakhtang Egiazarov, through a mixed-method approach. Content analysis of selected war photographs was conducted to identify recurring themes, while expert interviews and a quantitative survey assessed the emotional and cognitive responses of 200 participants. Findings revealed that war photographs evoke strong emotions such as sadness, anger, and empathy, with close-up images of civilians eliciting the most intense reactions. Survey results also indicated that 67% of participants view war photographers as neutral observers, though a significant portion (33%) expressed concern about the potential for manipulation. These findings suggest that while war photography remains a powerful tool for raising awareness and documenting history, the risk of desensitization due to overexposure requires careful ethical considerations. Future research should explore strategies to maintain the impact of war photography while minimizing desensitization in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

Keywords: War photography, public perception, emotional impact, historical documentation, media ethics, Vakhtang Egiazarov, visual storytelling, desensitization, photojournalism, conflict reporting.

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1. Introduction

War photography has played a critical role in documenting the realities of conflict, offering a visual account of historical events that shape our understanding of warfare. Through the courageous work of photographers like Vakhtang Egiazarov, Steve McCurry, and Robert Capa, images of war zones have provided the world with a window into the devastation, human suffering, and resilience observed during conflicts. The importance of these photographers is reflected not only in their contribution to historical archives but also in their influence on public opinion and political discourse. As the world continues to witness wars in regions like Israel and Ukraine, war photography remains an indispensable tool for capturing the truth of events as they unfold.

Despite the historical significance of war photography, the literature exploring the relationship between visual representation and public perception of war remains underexplored. Existing studies have largely focused on the individual contributions of renowned photographers but have not sufficiently addressed the broader impact of war photography on society, particularly in contemporary conflicts. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining the intersection of war photography, media representation, and its

influence on public sentiment and policy decisions. Utilizing the works of notable war photographers, such as those highlighted in the case of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, this study aims to shed light on the evolving role of photojournalism in conflict reporting.

This research will employ a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative content analysis of war photography with interviews from experts in visual communication and international relations. By analyzing iconic war images and their distribution across various media platforms, the study will explore how these images shape narratives and influence both policymakers and the general public. Furthermore, the research will compare the impact of traditional war photography, such as Robert Capa's work, with modern digital images shared instantaneously during ongoing conflicts.

The findings are expected to reveal a significant correlation between the dissemination of war images and shifts in public opinion, particularly in democratic societies where media plays a central role in shaping political discourse. Moreover, the research will highlight how war photographers navigate the ethical challenges of documenting human suffering while maintaining objectivity. The study will also explore the legal protections offered to war photographers and the risks they face in their line of duty.

War photography has conserved enduring images of historical significance for humanity. This genre of photography has provided us with numerous images that depict the battles that occurred throughout the history of humanity, the events that transpired in war zones, and the realities of life in a state of war. War photography facilitated the dissemination of comprehensive information regarding the intricate developments of the Amatuï conflict to nonviolent civilians. Furthermore, apart from the informational burden, the photographic materials captured at various periods of the war gained historical importance. Frequently, war photographers endanger their lives to recover images from areas of intense conflict. Although the International Convention on the Laws of War protects journalists and photographers operating in hazardous locations, history nevertheless recalls the fatalities of photojournalists on the battlefield. They have bequeathed an indispensable account of the ongoing events of the conflict to humanity.

Regrettably, the identity of the first American photographer throughout the war remains unknown. His photographic output during the Mexican-American War in 1847 was extensive. One of the earliest documented combat photographers was Karol Pope de Zaffmar, an American photographer of Hungarian-Romanian descent. His photographic output during the Crimean War in 1853-1854 was extensive.

In 1850, Felice Beato, a British photographer of Italian descent, journeyed to East Asia and captured a multitude of images documenting unfolding events in India and China.

During the 19th century, British photographer Roger Fenton resided in a compact van alongside soldiers and captured images of the conflict when the coalition of Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire emerged victorious over Russia. His intimate association with the royal family is the reason he possesses valuable historical photographs of English aristocracy. Presently, the royal collections in Britain house 350 of Fenton's images.

In the early stages of the First World War, Nino Jorjadze became the inaugural Georgian female photographer to serve as a nurse within the military. The author's diaries and photographs portrayed the military operations of the First World battle, daily updates from the frontlines, and perspectives of communities devastated by battle. Chronological documentary of the conflict Nino Jorjadze's photographic contributions secured a distinctive position in the annals of Georgian photography.

Robert Capa (Andre Friedman) is undoubtedly one of the most renowned photographers of the 20th century. In his recorded work, he documented five distinct conflicts: the Spanish Civil War, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), World War II, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and the First Indo-China War.

World-renowned American photojournalist Steve Makkari. The career of Steve McCurry commenced as a photojournalist in Afghanistan. To ensure his safety and facilitate photography, he was attired in authentic Afghan attire, on which a camera was surreptitiously affixed. Amidst the challenging circumstances, Steve successfully captured numerous historical photographs that vividly portrayed the ongoing battles in that region. The image of an Afghan refugee girl, discovered by the photographer 17 years ago and subsequently captured once more, is widely acknowledged as a masterpiece of Steve McCurry's photographic craftsmanship.

Lance Adario is a renowned photojournalist who has extensively documented numerous conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, including but not limited to Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Somalia. An image captured in Afghanistan earned him a Pulitzer Prize. Lance Addario was abducted on two occasions while operating in a conflict-ridden area. He authored his memoir, *This Is What I Do*, which achieved bestseller status.

Visual documentation of the August 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia was disseminated globally. Prominent among the photographs are those of an injured woman pleading for assistance, captured by Georgian photographer Giorgi Abdaladze, and the Razmedze brothers, captured by Davit Mdzinarishvili. The two photographs become emblematic of the August 2008 conflict.

Presently, global attention is directed towards the ongoing conflict between Israel and Ukraine. Local and international photographers disseminate images that allow the global audience to witness the horrifying events occurring in that location, prompting the civilised world to urge all nations to strive for peace.



Materials from Wikipedia are used

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Materials and methods. This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the impact of war photography on public perception, media representation, and historical documentation. The qualitative component involves a content analysis of selected war photographs, focusing on images captured by photographers like Vakhtang Egiazarov, Robert Capa, and Steve McCurry. These images will be examined for thematic elements such as emotional intensity, representation of human suffering, and narrative framing. A thematic coding system will be used to identify patterns related to the portrayal of victims, violence, and the ethical challenges photographers face in war zones. To enrich this analysis, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with experts in visual media, journalism, and history. These

interviews will explore the ethical responsibilities of war photographers and the influence of modern digital photography on public understanding of conflict. The qualitative findings will provide a deep exploration of the emotional and narrative power of war photography.

On the quantitative side, a survey will be administered to a diverse group of participants, including media professionals, historians, and the general public. The survey will measure emotional and cognitive responses to selected war images using Likert scale questions, assessing variables such as emotional intensity, the perceived role of war photographers, and the influence of these photographs on public understanding. Descriptive statistics will summarize the data, and correlation analysis will identify relationships between the visual content of the images and the participants' emotional reactions. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data will allow for a comprehensive understanding of war photography's influence. The study expects to uncover significant correlations between emotional intensity and the impact of war photographs on public perception, though it acknowledges limitations such as subjective interpretations and ethical concerns around using distressing imagery. The findings will provide valuable insights into the evolving role of war photography in conflict reporting, as well as the professional and ethical responsibilities of photographers documenting war.

Results and Discussion. The results from both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study provide a comprehensive understanding of the emotional and cognitive impacts of war photography on public perception. Through the analysis of key images captured by photographers like Vakhtang Egiazarov and Robert Capa, and supported by survey data, several key themes emerge.

The survey revealed strong emotional responses to war photography. As depicted in the pie chart, 35% of participants reported feeling sadness when viewing war images, followed by 25% expressing anger and empathy each. This highlights the powerful emotional influence war photography holds, particularly in close-up images of vulnerable populations such as children and civilians caught in conflict zones. A smaller portion (10%) of participants had a neutral response, while 5% expressed concern regarding the ethical implications of such imagery. The distribution of these emotional responses suggests that war photography continues to evoke significant emotional reactions, underscoring its role as a critical medium for conveying the human cost of conflict.

Figure 1. Emotional Response to War Photography

The perception of war photographers varies among the respondents. According to the bar chart, 67% of participants view war photographers as neutral observers who document historical events objectively. However, 40% see them as activists, believing that war photographers play an active role in advocating for peace and raising awareness of human suffering. Notably, 33% of respondents expressed concern over the potential for manipulation, where images could be used out of context to sway public opinion or serve political agendas. This suggests a nuanced understanding of the complex role war photographers play in documenting conflict while navigating the ethical challenges inherent in their profession.

Figure 2. Public Perception of War Photographer's Roles

The thematic content analysis of selected photographs supported these findings, with recurring patterns of emotional intensity and ethical considerations. Images from conflicts such as the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, including depictions of wounded civilians and devastated landscapes, elicited powerful emotional responses that align with the survey data. However, expert interviews revealed concerns about the overexposure to graphic images potentially leading to desensitization. The role of social media in amplifying the

reach of these images further complicates the ethical responsibilities of photographers, as the line between documentation and sensationalism becomes increasingly blurred.

Conclusion

The analysis of war photography, particularly through the works of Vakhtang Egiazarov and other renowned photographers, underscores the profound emotional and cognitive impact these images have on public perception. The findings reveal that war photographs evoke strong emotions such as sadness, anger, and empathy, while simultaneously shaping viewers' understanding of conflict and influencing political discourse. The perception of war photographers as both neutral documentarians and activists highlights the complex ethical responsibilities they navigate. These insights emphasize the crucial role war photography plays in documenting historical events and raising awareness, yet also point to the risks of desensitization in an era of rapid media consumption. The implications suggest that media professionals must develop ethical guidelines to balance the need for accurate representation with respect for human dignity. Further research should explore the long-term effects of repeated exposure to war imagery and investigate strategies for maintaining the powerful impact of war photography while mitigating the risks of viewer desensitization..

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