Digital Photography as a Computerization Movement

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Abstract

One of the computerization movements (CMs) that Rob Kling was beginning to study near the end of his life was digital photography. In a continuation of the work that he and I began together, I am continuing work on understanding digital photography as a communication regime undergoing social change as my doctoral dissertation research.

I propose to present an analysis of digital photography within professional organizations as a computerization movement. In organizations where traditional photography has been used as a professional tool (journalism, police forensic science, medical research, etc…), the introduction of digital cameras potentially alter the patterns of communication. For instance, they may take a number of potential players out of the production chain of a photograph. Whereas traditional "wet" photography methods require relatively expensive processing laboratories, trained personnel to run the labs, procedures for handling exposed film, and standards for presenting the printed images, some of these positions and professional norms may be altered once digital photography is adopted. An expensive lab can now be replaced by relatively inexpensive color printers (albeit currently with a reduction in quality, although this gap is narrowing), and trained laboratory technicians can be replaced by computer graphic artists. In additional, new communication paths may be required or existing paths altered to accommodate the new technology. For instance, The New York Times (Sept. 03, 2002) reports that police are replacing low-resolution Polaroid images that took weeks to reach judges with high-resolution digital images that are sent directly to prosecutors and judges, which has reportedly begun to make a noticeable difference in domestic abuse cases.