

Why Shouldn't The Mail Steal Your Photos?

lse.blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2009/12/11/why-shouldnt-the-mail-steal-your-photos/

2009-12-11

[Twitter people](#) love to hate the Daily Mail, so it's no surprise to see them leading the [latest charge](#) against Dacre's outfit.

This time the newspaper's website stands accused of using people's photos – largely from Flickr – to illustrate a nice online [lifestyle piece about 'moneyfacing'](#). This is a charming optical illusion craze whereby you crease up half a banknote in front of your face to create an amusing composite image of you as the Duke Of Wellington or Her Majesty The Queen.

Thanks to the Internet this has gone global with people around the world apparently wasting valuable work-time to indulge in a harmless and mildly artistic jape. But the Mail obviously reproduced the photos without asking permission. 'Adebond' from Liverpool is not happy and says so in a comment on the [Mail's website](#):

You would think that a newspaper, & I use that term in the loosest sense of the word, would have a better comprehension regarding copyright infringement of digital media. Using someone's images from another online source, where some rights have been reserved, is generally not the done thing. Oh look, what's that over to the right. It's only an ad supported website, so I'm assuming some revenue is being made from other peoples intellectual property?

Well done to the Mail to start with, for publishing the complaints but they raise some interesting questions.

At what point does material in the public domain become copyright? the people who published these images didn't do so for financial gain. There is a genuine, if very slight, news story here which feels worthy of reporting. If I link to those photos am I also infringing people's copyright? Might it be possible that they will actually enjoy seeing their work on the Mail's website where it will be connected to millions of other people?

If they had wanted privacy then they should have changed their security settings. If they wanted payment then a little note or code would have made that clear. Some of them did [see the comment on this post below].

Generally, the principle online has always been that sharing is good. So what if the Mail made money out of it? Isn't the point of open source and creative commons that we all benefit from the Internet's link economy?

It seems that photographers are particularly cross about this idea of weakened copyright because their trade is being especially hard hit by the ubiquity of imagery online and the ease of creation by 'amateurs'. This is partly about the Internet and partly about the availability of stunning quality digital equipment at prices anyone can afford – let along the pretty decent quality of modern mobile phone cameras. But there is no way back to the protected photojournalism elite. And the rest of us will never enjoy the same level of intellectual property rights on pictures again. This may be a good thing.

We still have to work out the rules and etiquette for online sharing/stealing. It is both polite and productive to at least credit people and link to them. But in this case has anyone really lost out?

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science