Detection of Alterations in Multi-Generated Photocopied Documents: Implications for Fraud Investigation

Isah Kaura Shehu*, Dr. (Prof.)Parveen Kumar Janjua**

*Student Department of Forensic Science, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur (C.G) India.

**Professor & HOD- Forensic Science, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur (C.G) India

Abstract

This research study the challenges posed by multi-generated photocopied documents and its relevant to fraud investigation. As a result of widely usage of photocopied documents in legal, financial, and administrative functions, fraudsters exploit the degradation that occurs when a document is multi-generated to erase evidence of tempering. With the forensic observation and analysis of 30 varied samples of documents like payment receipt, admission letter, contract agreement, and other official documents, this research finds common alterations such as addition, erasure, substitution, cut and join, and interlineation as the most common alterations committed on various documents. it also finds that with each generation of photocopying, documents loss their visual clarity, fine details, and security features, and thus become more difficult to detect alterations. The study also highlights issues such as loss of forensic details in the document, inability to differentiate natural degradation from fraudulent alteration, and limited ability to use traditional techniques for document examination. The research found that handwritten degrade more quickly than machine-printed documents. The research also proposed best practice for examining multi-generated photocopied documents including obtaining original copy whenever possible, requesting for verification from the document source, and use of digital tools to enhance document lighting. The study concludes by advocating for institutional changes and integrating technological research for further verification to ensure reliable document authentication in the face of evolving fraud tactics.

Keywords: Analysis, Document Alteration, Detection, Multi-generated Photocopy, Fraud Investigation.

Introduction

Document fraud remains a persistent challenge in forensic science, with fraudsters continuously refining their tactics to exploit vulnerabilities, particularly in photocopied documents. The process of multi-generational photocopying often obscures signs of forgery, making it increasingly difficult for forensic document examiners to detect alterations. Jones (2024) classifies document fraud into several types-counterfeiting, signature forgery, and content manipulation, all of which become more difficult to detect after repeated photocopying. Fraudsters may deliberately add, erase, or overwrite content before duplication documents to obscure alteration evidence.

Despite technological advancements, many sectors, including legal, financial, and governmental institutions continue to rely heavily on photocopies for recordkeeping and decision-making. This

reliance often grants photocopied documents a level of authenticity that may not be deserved, especially when used in court proceedings or contract validations. As noted by Saroa and Saini (2013), the lack of original documents limits the scope of forensic techniques that can be applied, potentially enabling fraudulent acts to go undetected. Consequently, understanding how successive generations of copying compromise document features is essential to ensuring the integrity of document-based evidence.

As such, forensic professionals must develop improved procedures, strategies, and guidelines that account for both the original alteration methods and the deterioration caused by repeated photocopying. This study aims to analyzed how multi-generational photocopying affects the integrity and forensic examination of altered documents. it identifies the challenges faced by document examiners in detecting alterations across various document types and proposes best practices for improving detection and authentication techniques in fraud investigations. The findings of this research are intended to strengthen document verification processes, support forensic examiners, and guide legal and administrative institutions in minimizing document fraud.

Moreover, the diversity of document types involves in fraud such as identification papers, legal contracts, land records, and financial statements introduces further complexity in the examination process. As Bansal, Prasad, and Mishra (2023) suggest, the visibility of certain alterations can either diminish or intensify depending on the media and number of copies produced. This study, therefore, emphasizes the importance of a document-type-sensitive approach in forensic analysis and aims to contribute practical recommendations for improving the credibility of document examination outcomes in fraud investigations.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the different types of alterations commonly found on photocopied documents.
2. To analyze the impact of multi-generational photocopying on the integrity and examination of document alterations in fraud investigations.
3. To identify the specific challenges forensic document examiners' encounter when detecting alterations in multi-generated photocopies across different documents types.
4. To propose best practices for forensic document examination involving multi-generation photocopy fraud detection.

Literature Review

Several studies have explored the impact of photocopying on document integrity and the detectability of alterations. Jones (2024) nots that fraudsters frequently manipulate documents prior to duplication by erasing, overwriting, or inserting text. Multi-generational photocopying then helps obscure these signs of tampering, which may deceive untrained eyes and standard verification methods. This necessitates an approach that examines both the alteration methods and how degradation due to photocopying further conceals them. Schreyer, Schulze, Stahl, and

Effelsberg (2009) emphasize the importance of intelligent printing recognition systems in detecting forgery and manipulation, particularly in documents that have undergone multiple reproductions. Their work demonstrates that imaging-based analysis can detect subtle inconsistencies in print quality, toner adhesion, and halftone patterns. These microscopic features often differ in authentic and altered photocopies, providing forensic clues despite overall document degradation.

According to Bansal, Prasad, and Mishra (2023), certain types of alterations such as mechanical erasures and ink additions show variable visibility depending on the number of photocopy generations. Their study found that while some features fade into the background, others become more pronounced due to contrast changes and background noise accumulation. They advocate for a document-types-sensitive approach that accounts for these changes in visibility across different media such as official letters, ID documents, or cheques. The distortion of digitally fabricated signatures through repeated photocopying is highlighted by Bhargav, Singh, and Mishra (2017). They argue that forensic analysis of signature authenticity becomes ineffective when key indicators such as pen pressure, ink distribution, and stroke continuity are no longer discernible. This issue is compounded by the rise of high-quality digital editing tools, which enable precise but undetectable alterations unless advanced spectral analysis is employed.

Saroa and Saini (2013) focused on physical examination techniques and the behavior of ink, toner, and paper under repeated photocopying. Their research underscore that forensic light sources, side lighting and microscopic analysis remain valuable in identifying forged areas, even in multi-generated documents by revealing telltale signs like fiber disturbances and inconsistent background textures. Mishra, Sharma, Singh, and Jasuja (2019) conducted an analytical review of identification features in photocopied documents, such as print misalignment, edge defects, and distortion patterns, which can differentiate genuine from manipulated copies. They found that although the contrast and sharpness of these indicators decrease with each generation, comparative analysis against known standards often reveals inconsistencies. Their findings align with the position of Saroa and Saini (2016), who stress the utility of using known genuine specimens for the detection of ink variations, inconsistent spacing, and unnatural formatting factors that may not be evident in standalone analysis.

Mishra and Kesharwani (2018) provide a detailed case study demonstrating the difficulty of alteration detection in documents that undergone extensive photocopying. They employed both visual and instrumental methods to uncover overwritten text and erased content, showing how multiple generations of photocopying serve to mask or blend forgery elements into the background. Furthermore, Gupta (2018) identifies the practical challenges faced by forensic examiners, such as the loss of clarity and presence of toner scatter in highly photocopied documents. These issues demand a multi-pronged examination strategy that includes magnification, obliques lighting, and spectral filters.

Conclusively, these studies reveal that while multi-generated photocopies can obscure forensic markers, a combination of physical, chemical, and comparative methods remains effective in many cases. However, each document type and alteration methods present unique challenges that must be carefully considered. This review affirms the need for continued research training to counteract the effects of multi-generational degradation in fraudulent documents.

Research Design

Observational and microscopic forensic analysis on altered multi-generated photocopied documents was adopted by this study. The observational method focused on identifying areas of altered multi-generated photocopied documents using control samples (multi-generated photocopied documents), on which various changes and degradation were observed after each subsequent photocopy. While the microscopic method figures out unique minute changes done on the documents. These methods were utilized to enable the achievement of the research objectives of understanding the challenges faced by document fraud examiners in cases involving multi-generated photocopy.

Sampling Selection and Document Preparation

For this study, 30 samples of real and simulated documents, comprising examination mark sheets, handwritten documents, visa stay permit document for international students, payment receipts, final will document, contractual document agreement, tax clearance certificate, and university admission letters were collected. After collecting the samples, UG Students of Forensic Science at Kalinga University, Naya Raipur were given the samples to make different alterations on them. After the alterations were made, the altered samples were later multi-generated up to five (5) times. The students utilized various tools to make the alteration. Analysis as well as examination were conducted to detect various alterations on the documents as well as signature distortion at the different stages of the photocopy.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data were processed and analyzed based on various forensic features like loss of visual clarity and details, obliteration of security features, concealment of tempering evidence, font and spacing irregularities, as well as misleading visual cues. The data collected were presented using observation table and then analyzed for easy understanding and comprehension.

Result Analysis and Discussion

The analysis and discussion of the result was detailed provided. Each document which was altered and later multi-generated was analyzed individually and the changes in the document as well as alterations were all discussed.

Result Analysis

The result was analyzed based on the objectives of the study using some parameters which were detected on the various samples of documents collected after been altered. Those parameters are

loss of visual clarity and details, obliteration of security features, concealment of tempering evidence, font and spacing irregularities, as well as misleading visual cues.

Different types of alterations commonly found on multi-generated photocopied documents.

1. **Addition:** Based on the 30 samples collected, altered, and examined by this study, sixteen (16) additions were detected at various parts of the altered document. This makes addition to be the most common type of alteration found on photocopied documents. But when the documents were multi-generated, detecting such additions becomes very difficult and even impossible at times without the use of detecting instruments.

2. **Substitution:** This is the second most detected alterations found on the different samples collected. Twelve (12) parts of the various documents were detected to have been substituted by others similar but fraudulent figures or letters on the documents. in case when the documents were multi-generated, detecting the substitution create a serious challenge.

3. **Erasure:** The third most commonly found alterations on photocopied document as reveal by this study is erasure. Based on the data analyzed by this study, seven (7) erasures were located on different parts of the documents analyzed. However, when the altered documents were multi-generated, the erasures were hardly detected, as degradation of ink and loss of sharpness and brightness affect the visibility of the altered parts.

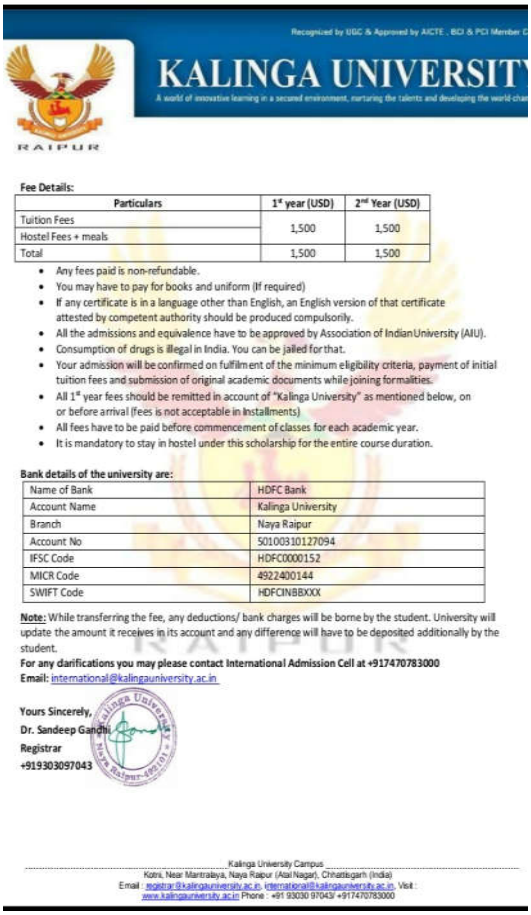
4. **Overwritten:** Another major alteration found on photocopied documents by this study is overwritten, which was detected at five different parts of the analyzed documents. The overwritten was visible at the original and initial photocopy of the documents, but when multi-generated, the alteration become less and even invisible.

5. **Cut and Join:** This forms part of the least detected alterations found on photocopied documents. Based on this study, only two (2) of this type of alteration was detected. Furthermore, even after multiple generation of the documents, this alteration is still detectible, though with very less precision due to noise introduction and loss of sharpness and brightness.

6. **Interlineation:** This is another less detected alteration found on photocopied document according to this study. Only two (2) of it was found on the samples distributed and altered for this study. When multi-generated, it also become less detectible due to loss of sharpness and ink degradation.

Impact of multi-generational photocopying on the integrity and examination of document alterations in fraud investigations.

1. **Loss of Visual Clarity and Details:** This is the major impact of multi-generation of a photocopied document, but it differs according to the type of the document, that is; machine-printed documents, and handwritten documents. Machine-printed documents are visually clear and present all necessary details required for forensic examination such as in (fig. 1). All the machine-printed documents collected, altered and analyzed by this study shows loss of visual clarity and fine details which are very critical for detecting alterations. According to the finding of this study, when an altered document is multi-generated, the alterations were visible on the first (fig. 2) and second generations in a machine-printed documents. By the third generation (fig. 3), most of the machine-printed documents begin to loss visual clarity and fine details, which also marks the beginning of introducing noise and blurriness. Furthermore, when the machine-printed documents were generated for fourth and fifth copy (fig. 4), the sharpness and brightness responsible for visual clarity were loss, and alterations on the documents becomes less or undetectable. Furthermore, various alterations signals such as tremor - which were not part of the first and second generations of the machine-printed documents were also introduced; which add some significant challenges to the fraud investigator. However, one thing worthy to notice is that all the above changes are for alterations perpetuated on machine-printed documents, which are even more easily detectible than handwritten documents. In handwritten documents, the visual clarity of the documents began to loss at the second generation. Alterations are more easily covered and hidden when the documents are handwritten. Even the first copy of a handwritten documents concealed alterations. Another challenge faced by fraud investigator when analyzing multi-generated handwritten documents is that, the contents of the handwritten documents become so degrade that some letters exhibit feature of erasure, which are not truly part of the original documents. This situation creates very serious challenges for a fraud investigator.



KALINGA UNIVERSITY

RAIPUR

Fee Details:

Particulars	1st year (USD)	2nd Year (USD)
Tuition Fees	1,500	1,500
Hostel Fees + meals		
Total	1,500	1,500

- Any fees paid is non-refundable.
- You may have to pay for books and uniform (If required)
- If any certificate is in a language other than English, an English version of that certificate attested by competent authority should be produced compulsorily.
- All the admissions and equivalence have to be approved by Association of Indian University (AIU).
- Consumption of drugs is illegal in India. You can be jailed for that.
- Your admission will be confirmed on fulfilment of the minimum eligibility criteria, payment of initial tuition fees and submission of original academic documents while joining formalities.
- All 1st year fees should be remitted in account of "Kalinga University" as mentioned below, on or before arrival (fees is not acceptable in installments)
- All fees have to be paid before commencement of classes for each academic year.
- It is mandatory to stay in hostel under this scholarship for the entire course duration.

Bank details of the university are:

Name of Bank	HDFC Bank
Account Name	Kalinga University
Branch	Naya Raipur
Account No	50100310127094
IFSC Code	HDFC0000152
MICR Code	4922400144
SWIFT Code	HDFCINBBXXX

Note: While transferring the fee, any deductions/ bank charges will be borne by the student. University will update the amount it receives in its account and any difference will have to be deposited additionally by the student.

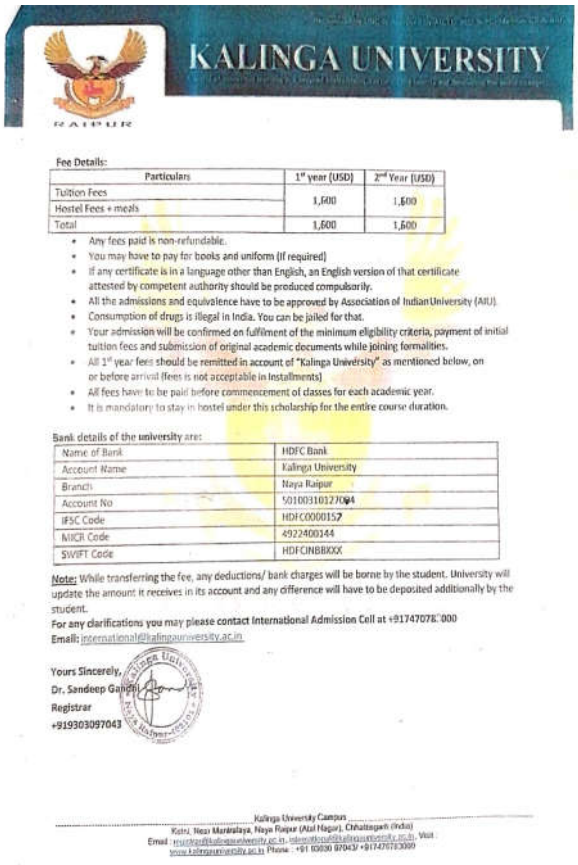
For any clarifications you may please contact International Admission Cell at +917470783000

Email: international@kalingauniversity.ac.in

Yours Sincerely,
Dr. Sandeep Gandhi
Registrar
+919303097043

Kalinga University Campus
Kotni, Near Mantralaya, Naya Raipur (Atal Nagar), Chhattisgarh (India)
Email : registrar@kalingauniversity.ac.in, international@kalingauniversity.ac.in, Visit : www.kalingauniversity.ac.in Phone : +91 93030 97043/ +917470783000

Fig 1.



KALINGA UNIVERSITY

RAIPUR

Fee Details:

Particulars	1st year (USD)	2nd Year (USD)
Tuition Fees	1,600	1,600
Hostel Fees + meals		
Total	1,600	1,600

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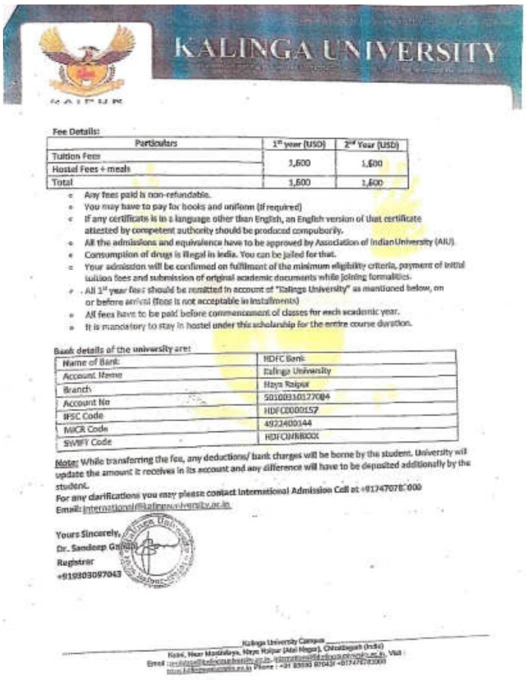
Fig 2.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- It is mandatory to stay in hostel under this scholarship for the entire course duration.

Bank details of the university are:

Name of Bank	HDFC Bank
Account Name	Kalinga University
Branch	Naya Raipur
Account No	50100310127084
IFSC Code	HDFC0000157
MICR Code	492240014
SWIFT Code	HDFCINBBXXX

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Dr. Sandeep Gandhi
Registrar
+919303097043

Kalinga University Campus
Kotni, Near Mantralaya, Naya Raipur (Atal Nagar), Chhattisgarh (India)

Fig 3.


KALINGA UNIVERSITY

Fee Details:

Particulars	1st year (USD)	2nd Year (USD)
Tuition Fees	1,600	1,600
Hostel Fees + meals		
Total	1,600	1,600

- Any fees paid is non-refundable.
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Fig 4.

2. **Obliteration of Security Features:** This is an important feature that helps in the identification of original document. Security features such as watermark, microtext, special inks, holograms, barcode and so on, are some of the security features found on official and undistorted document (fig. 5). These features are very essential in differentiating original document with an altered one. In multi-generational photocopy, these security features become degrade or even get lost in some documents when multi-generated. Based on the finding of this study, security features are distorted when a document is generated for the first copy. The fig. 6 which is a first copy shows loss of watermark which is one of the key security of the document; although some minutes security features are still present. However, by the third generation (fig. 7), most security features lost their uniqueness, marking them to be questioned based on their originality or become completely invisible. This create a serious challenge for fraud investigators in determining the genuineity of the documents. Furthermore, when a document is generated for the fifth copy (fig. 8), the entire security features on the documents get degraded and unavailable, coupled with severe visual damage that their genuineity cannot be guarantee. When a fraud investigator is presented with fourth or fifth generation photocopied document for examination, forming an opinion become very much challenging and can result to legal scuttle.

Fig 5.

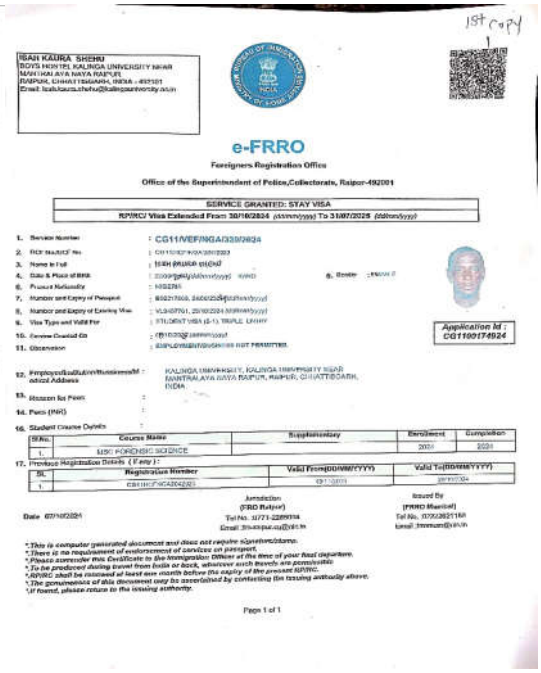


Fig 6.

Fig 7.

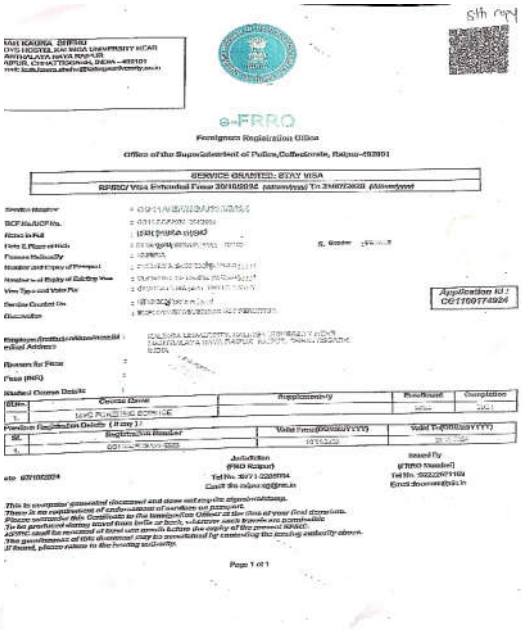
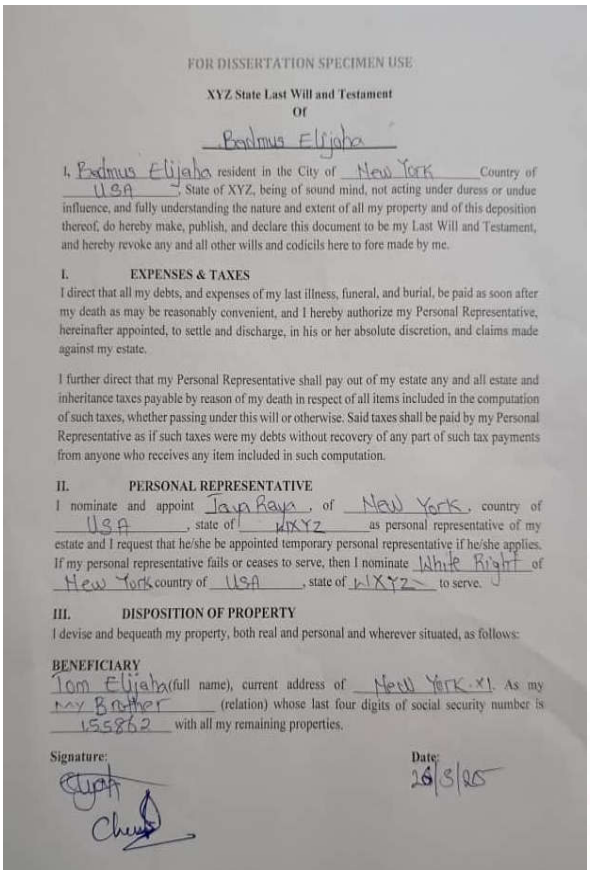


Fig 8.

3. **Concealment of Tempering Evidence:** Another finding made by this study is that multi-generational photocopied documents conceal evidence of tempering. Based on the sample below (fig. 9), the name of the beneficiary is John Elijah. The name was later altered and change to Linda Ray (fig. 10). However, due to the fact that the document was photocopied, the alteration was conceal become undetectable with naked eyes. This concealment further become problematic as a result of loss in visual clarity and degradations faced by the documents (fig. 11 & 12). Evidence of insertion, erasure, and overwritten on some documents become so unnoticeable that if extra care is not taking might go undetected. This concealment is more prominent when the documents are generated above two copies. In the first generation, the evidence of may be seen and detected. But when further generations are made, concealment of such alteration become more prominent. Thus, only the first copy should be considered for examination if available. However, when all efforts are put to acquire the first copy proved abortive, then 2nd copy maybe consider. Concealing evidence of tempering is very serious impact on examination of document to fraud investigator as it may completely mislead the final result.



FOR DISSERTATION SPECIMEN USE

XYZ State Last Will and Testament
Of
Bodmus Elijaha

I, Bodmus Elijaha resident in the City of New York Country of USA, State of XYZ, being of sound mind, not acting under duress or undue influence, and fully understanding the nature and extent of all my property and of this deposition thereof, do hereby make, publish, and declare this document to be my Last Will and Testament, and hereby revoke any and all other wills and codicils here to fore made by me.

I. EXPENSES & TAXES

I direct that all my debts, and expenses of my last illness, funeral, and burial, be paid as soon after my death as may be reasonably convenient, and I hereby authorize my Personal Representative, hereinafter appointed, to settle and discharge, in his or her absolute discretion, and claims made against my estate.

I further direct that my Personal Representative shall pay out of my estate any and all estate and inheritance taxes payable by reason of my death in respect of all items included in the computation of such taxes, whether passing under this will or otherwise. Said taxes shall be paid by my Personal Representative as if such taxes were my debts without recovery of any part of such tax payments from anyone who receives any item included in such computation.

II. PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE

I nominate and appoint Jay Ray, of New York, country of USA, state of XYZ as personal representative of my estate and I request that he/she be appointed temporary personal representative if he/she applies. If my personal representative fails or ceases to serve, then I nominate White Right of New York country of USA, state of XYZ to serve.

III. DISPOSITION OF PROPERTY

I devise and bequeath my property, both real and personal and wherever situated, as follows:

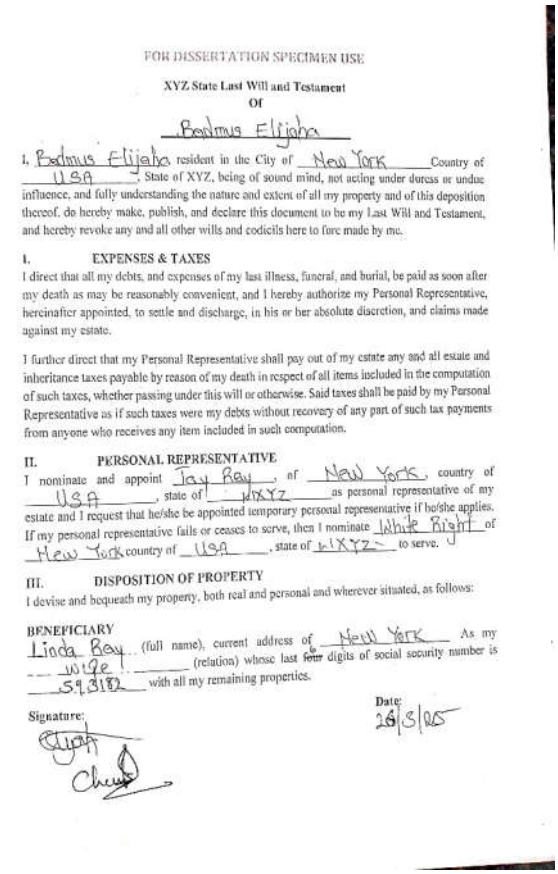
BENEFICIARY

Tom Elijaha (full name), current address of New York .x1. As my my Brother (relation) whose last four digits of social security number is 155862 with all my remaining properties.

Signature:

Date: 26/3/25

Fig 9.



FOR DISSERTATION SPECIMEN USE

XYZ State Last Will and Testament
Of
Bodmus Elijaha

I, Bodmus Elijaha resident in the City of New York Country of USA, State of XYZ, being of sound mind, not acting under duress or undue influence, and fully understanding the nature and extent of all my property and of this deposition thereof, do hereby make, publish, and declare this document to be my Last Will and Testament, and hereby revoke any and all other wills and codicils here to fore made by me.

I. EXPENSES & TAXES

I direct that all my debts, and expenses of my last illness, funeral, and burial, be paid as soon after my death as may be reasonably convenient, and I hereby authorize my Personal Representative, hereinafter appointed, to settle and discharge, in his or her absolute discretion, and claims made against my estate.

I further direct that my Personal Representative shall pay out of my estate any and all estate and inheritance taxes payable by reason of my death in respect of all items included in the computation of such taxes, whether passing under this will or otherwise. Said taxes shall be paid by my Personal Representative as if such taxes were my debts without recovery of any part of such tax payments from anyone who receives any item included in such computation.

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III. DISPOSITION OF PROPERTY

I devise and bequeath my property, both real and personal and wherever situated, as follows:

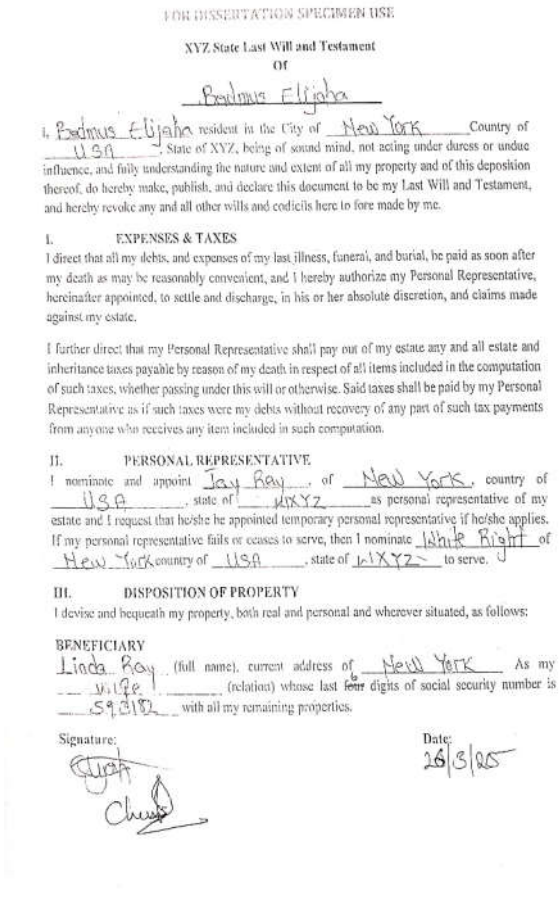
BENEFICIARY

Linda Ray (full name), current address of New York As my wife (relation) whose last four digits of social security number is 59382 with all my remaining properties.

Signature:

Date: 26/3/25

Fig 10.



FOR DISSERTATION SPECIMEN USE

XYZ State Last Will and Testament
Of
Bodmus Elijaha

I, Bodmus Elijaha resident in the City of New York Country of USA, State of XYZ, being of sound mind, not acting under duress or undue influence, and fully understanding the nature and extent of all my property and of this deposition thereof, do hereby make, publish, and declare this document to be my Last Will and Testament, and hereby revoke any and all other wills and codicils here to fore made by me.

I. EXPENSES & TAXES

I direct that all my debts, and expenses of my last illness, funeral, and burial, be paid as soon after my death as may be reasonably convenient, and I hereby authorize my Personal Representative, hereinafter appointed, to settle and discharge, in his or her absolute discretion, and claims made against my estate.

I further direct that my Personal Representative shall pay out of my estate any and all estate and inheritance taxes payable by reason of my death in respect of all items included in the computation of such taxes, whether passing under this will or otherwise. Said taxes shall be paid by my Personal Representative as if such taxes were my debts without recovery of any part of such tax payments from anyone who receives any item included in such computation.

II. PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE

I nominate and appoint Jay Ray, of New York, country of USA, state of WXYZ as personal representative of my estate and I request that he/she be appointed temporary personal representative if he/she applies. If my personal representative fails or ceases to serve, then I nominate White Right of New York country of USA, state of WXYZ to serve.

III. DISPOSITION OF PROPERTY

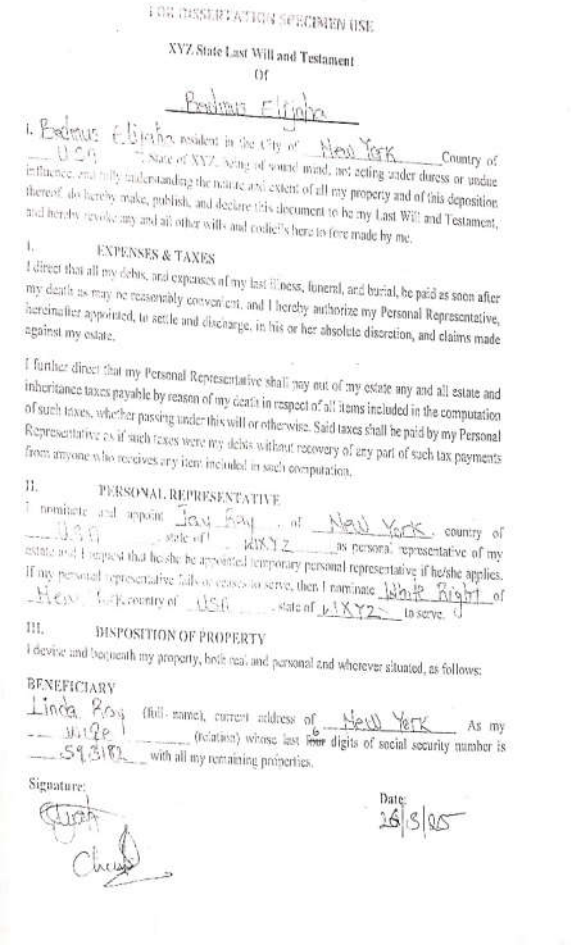
I devise and bequeath my property, both real and personal and wherever situated, as follows:

BENEFICIARY

Linda Ray (full name), current address of New York As my wife (relation) whose last four digits of social security number is 59318 with all my remaining properties.

Signature: Date: 26/3/25

Fig 11.



FOR DISSERTATION SPECIMEN USE

XYZ State Last Will and Testament
Of
Bodmus Elijaha

I, Bodmus Elijaha resident in the City of New York Country of USA, State of XYZ, being of sound mind, not acting under duress or undue influence, and fully understanding the nature and extent of all my property and of this deposition thereof, do hereby make, publish, and declare this document to be my Last Will and Testament, and hereby revoke any and all other wills and codicils here to fore made by me.

I. EXPENSES & TAXES

I direct that all my debts, and expenses of my last illness, funeral, and burial, be paid as soon after my death as may be reasonably convenient, and I hereby authorize my Personal Representative, hereinafter appointed, to settle and discharge, in his or her absolute discretion, and claims made against my estate.

I further direct that my Personal Representative shall pay out of my estate any and all estate and inheritance taxes payable by reason of my death in respect of all items included in the computation of such taxes, whether passing under this will or otherwise. Said taxes shall be paid by my Personal Representative as if such taxes were my debts without recovery of any part of such tax payments from anyone who receives any item included in such computation.

II. PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE

I nominate and appoint Jay Ray, of New York, country of USA, state of WXYZ as personal representative of my estate and I request that he/she be appointed temporary personal representative if he/she applies. If my personal representative fails or ceases to serve, then I nominate White Right of New York, country of USA, state of WXYZ to serve.

III. DISPOSITION OF PROPERTY

I devise and bequeath my property, both real and personal and wherever situated, as follows:

BENEFICIARY

Linda Ray (full name), current address of New York As my wife (relation) whose last four digits of social security number is 59318 with all my remaining properties.

Signature: Date: 26/3/25

Fig 12.

4. **Font and Spacing Irregularities Become Ambiguous:** Due to multi-generation of a document, some minor inconsistencies in letter size and spacing which are key indicators of tempering and alterations become less visible and reliable due to visual degradation caused on the document e.g fig. 15. Spacing irregularities which are visibly clear in the first copy (fig. 14), especially in computer generated documents also become degrade and sometimes even invisible. However, when the document is handwritten, even the second-generation copy conceals font and space irregularities. As a result of this, the fraud investigators may be unable to distinguish between natural deterioration and intentional manipulation.

Fig 13.

Fig 14.

Fig 15.

Fig 16.

5. **Misleading Visual Cues:** Multi-generational photocopy documents sometimes produce some misleading cues to the fraud investigators. These cues are introduced due to several factors that affects the documents originality, including but not limited to noise introduction, visual defects, degradation and so on. Some artifacts such as shadowing, noise, and tone variation which are introduced to the documents when multi-generated often produced false alteration signals like erasure, overwritten or even obliteration, which mislead the fraud investigator culminating to blunder in the examination and result to misinterpretation or investigative error. See fig. 19 & 20.

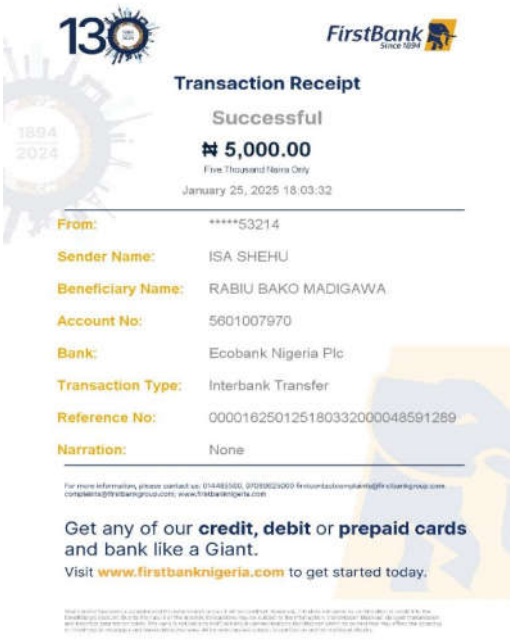


Fig 17.

Fig 18.

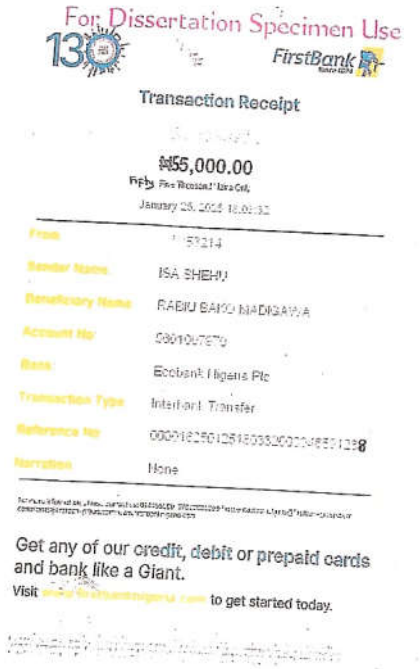


Fig 19.

Fig 20.

Challenges Forensic Document Examiners' Encounter When Detecting Alterations in Multi-Generated Photocopied Documents

1. **Loss of Fine Details Critical for Detection:** When examining any type of document suspected to be altered, one of the most important and reliable cue the examiner leverage on is the clarity and fineness of the documents. However, when a document that has been multi-generated is presented for examination, these important cues become not available. A document multi-generated up to three (3) times which was used by this study shows loss of fine details and distortion of it originality. This factor creates serious challenges for the examiner who is expected to identify, analyzed and form opinion on the document's integrity and reliability. Quality such as stroke quality, pen pressure traces, ink texture and background pattern become degrade by third generation and even severely degrade with fourth and fifth generation. It is worthy to note that handwritten documents suffered most from this effect compare to computer generated documents. for handwritten documents, even the second copy is not clearly attractive for detecting details of alterations. Therefore, this loss of fine details affects the examiner's usage of key forensic markers like pen pressure, stroke quality and so on to determine the originality of the documents.

2. **Ambiguity Between Natural Deterioration and Fraudulent Alterations:** As it was found by this study, when a document is generated to third copy, the fine quality and details of the document become affected. The degradations coupled with loss of fine details creates ambiguity in differentiating natural deterioration caused by photocopy and intentional alterations which was done for fraudulent modification. The degradation artifacts such as toner distortions and smudging sometimes mimic the signs of forgery. This situation is even more severe with a handwritten document where even the second copy shows some sign of smudginess. Ink distortion also becomes more prominent in handwritten documents which worsen the reliability and determination of the document conditions as natural deterioration or intentional manipulation. Documents examiners may risk the false positive (suspecting authentic document) or false negative (missing actual alterations), which is a serious challenge in the examination of documents.

3. **Difficulty in Establishing Chronology of Alterations:** As part of expertise of an examiner is to be able to present a complete and convincing conclusion of the result of their findings. This include a detailed explanation of how the alteration was committed, with which tools and ways the fraudsters follow to conceal the alterations. In view of this, it is essential for the examiner to explain the chronology of the alterations. Multi-generated photocopied documents create challenges for the investigator to establish this chronology. Multi-generated photocopied documents often remove temporal clues (e.g mechanical impression) which could help in understanding and determining when and how a change was made. This pose a serious challenge in forming reliable opinion by the investigator.

4. **Increase Time and Resource Demands:** The forensic analysis of multi-generated photocopied documents places a significant burden on both time and resources requirements. Unlike original documents where direct physical and chemical analysis is possible, photocopied documents conceal essential forensic features like ink type, pen pressure and so on. Therefore, investigator have to heavily relied on indirect techniques like close visual examination for handwritten documents and digital enhancement for computer generated documents to reveal some clues. Also, magnification and side-by-side copy comparison are usually necessary to detect inconsistencies. In some instances, the investigators need to be in consultation with issuing authority or focused on recovery of auxiliary evidence to validate their findings. This also lead to an increase in time and required extra resources for successful completion and forming reliable opinion.

5. **Limited Evidentiary Weight in Court:** Multi-generated photocopied documents tend to have minimal evidentiary values in court. Legal rules on documents examination generally favors original documents since they are those with primary forensic characteristics with complete security features and watermark or microprints. If the documents were multi-generated several times, some of these attributing features faded out and consequently, forensic investigators will be unable to make absolute determinations of authenticity, order of alterations, or evidence of tempering. Therefore, the court may consider opinions based on multi-generated photocopies less conclusive and require supporting evidence to substantiate allegations of alteration. The lower probative value of multi-generated photocopy can undermine the strength of a case and make it harder for investigator to prove allegation beyond reasonable doubt.

Best Practices for Forensic Document Examination Involving Multi-Generation Photocopy Fraud Detection.

1. **Always Request for the First or Best Available Copy:** When working with multi-generated photocopies, forensic document examiners always must ask for the best or most legible copy. First generation preserve more of the document's original contents, more visible, more define, and present untampered security features. These characteristics greatly improve the examiner's capacity to identify alterations such as addition, erasure, substitution, or overwritten. Third generated copy and above impose cumulative degradation through repeated photocopying, obliterating vital forensic markers. Access to first generation or best quality copy can significantly enhance the dependability of analysis and eliminate ambiguities due to blurred or distorted details. To the extent possible, examiners should also request copies taken directly from the original, rather than from subsequent photocopies, to avoid generational loss. Prioritizing the best available copy enhance the credibility of forensic conclusions and maximizes the possibility of successful detection.

2. **Use Document Enhancement Techniques:** Document enhancement methods should be used by forensic document examiners in the analysis of degraded or multi-generated photocopies. Contrast adjustment, edge detection, sharpening, grayscale manipulation, and color inversion are some of the methods that can uncover altered text, modified areas, or inconsistencies concealed by inferior reproduction quality. Enhancement can differentiate between authentic printing defects and intentional falsification, like addition, substitution, or erasure. But improvements need to be used carefully so as not to introduce artificial distortions that may mislead the interpretation. The process needs to be well-documented so that original and improved versions are kept for comparison. Enhancement methods do not recover lost physical characteristics such as ink variations or paper texture but offer useful visual clarity. If properly used, they are a valuable tool for initial alteration detection in multi-generated photocopied documents.

3. **Document all Limitations in Findings:** When reporting results involving multi-generated photocopied documents, forensic document examiners have to explicitly document all examination limitations. Photocopies do not have original ink, pen pressure, ink texture, and physical characteristics required for some types of conclusive analysis. Therefore, results based on photocopies are necessarily less definitive than original document examination. Examiners should clearly indicate that certain findings such as ink comparisons, order of entries, or identification of erasure could not be made. this ensure the examiner's professional integrity, keeps the process transparent, and controls legal teams and courts' expectations. Thorough documentation also reinforces the examiner's report by illustrating a conservative and scientifically based approach. Admitting to limitations guarantees that any forensic opinion is properly balanced and minimizes the potential for the conclusions being impeached under cross-examination in court cases.

4. **Avoid Over Interpreting Degraded Artifacts:** Forensic document examiners should refrain from over-interpretation of artifacts due to the photocopying process itself. Degradation artifacts such as toner scatter, blurring, shadowing, and distortion are likely to easily resemble alteration signs such as erasure, overwritten, or cut and join tempering. Inferences drawn from such artifacts without careful substantiation may cause serious misinterpretations. Forensic conclusions must be based on nothing other than visible, reproducible anomalies that persist in identical form under varying enhancement attempts or comparison copies. Caution and conservative judgement are necessary, particularly when authentic physical evidence is not present. In any situation where uncertainty between natural photocopy degradation and possible alteration is present, the examiner should recognize the uncertainty instead of risking overclaiming results. Having this discipline mindset is what allows forensic opinions to be credibly objective and defensible in court even with tainted evidence.

5. **Recommend Verification Against Original Source:** Whenever possible, forensic document examiners should always recommend verification of photocopied documents against issuing authority's original records. Photocopies, especially those of multiple generations, cannot own prove authenticity. Issuing authorities typically retain original documents, electronic files, or transaction records that can be cross-checked. Independent verification can confirm critical information like document issue dates, official seals, payment receipts, or signatures. This measure is especially important when security features are no longer recognizable due to degradation. Verification prevents the acceptance for altered or tempered photocopies and strengthens the overall fraud examination. In addition, courts are more willing to give higher evidentiary weight to verification results obtained from original sources compared to forensic opinions derived from photocopies only. To recommend external verification as best forensic practice and to highlight the examiner's commitment to comprehensiveness is very vital.

6. **Photograph and Preserve all Evidence at Examination Stage:** During forensic analysis of photocopied documents, all evidence should be photographed and electronically preserved in its present condition at the time of examination. High-resolution imaging captures fine details that may further degrade with handling or elapse of time. Recording both the original photocopy and also any enhanced products create a robust examination record, enabling reproducibility of results. Preservation also protects against allegations of examiners bias or documents mishandling. If findings are challenged in court, the captured images are used as critical evidence to demonstrate the examiner's approach and findings. Complete cataloging of photographs, enhancement processes, and original file metadata strengthens the chain of custody and contributes to the integrity of the forensic report. In fraud investigations, meticulous preservation of evidence is a critical precursor to the admissibility and defensibility of forensic results.

Conclusion

This research study extensively the detection and examination of alterations in multi-generated photocopied documents, with specific focus on their relevance to fraud investigation. In today's document fraud cases, ranging from forged bank receipt and admission letters to altered tax clearances, and property agreements, photocopies are often presented instead of originals. This research finds that with each subsequent generation of photocopying, documents faces a cumulative degradation that seriously compromises their forensic integrity. Multi-generation copying was found to hide key security features like watermarks, microtext, and embossed stamps. It further distorts writing clarity, distort margins and introduced visual noise, making it to obscure evidence of tempering. Alteration methods commonly committed as found by this study include addition, erasure, overwriting, and cut and join, which all due to multi-generation increasingly faced the challenge of visual integrity. The forensic challenges identified are not only technical but also procedural. Examiners are forced to resort to using low-resolution, incomplete information due to degradation, which limit their potential to reach firm conclusions. Conventional techniques,

such as oblique lighting, ink comparison, and stroke analysis are made useless in this situation, compounding the time and resources needed for each examination. Additionally, the lower evidentiary value of photocopied documents in court can weaken the power of legal proceedings and make dependable authentication harder to attain in fraud cases.

Despite the above limitations, the study recommends a set of best practices to maximize the utility of degraded photocopies. These includes requesting for previous generation copies, using enhancement tools with caution, documenting and presenting limitations openly, and photographing as well as preserving all evidence at examination stage. By adopting these best practices, forensic document examiners can avoid the limitations of photocopied evidence without compromising analytical rigor and professional standards. Lastly, this research points out some critical gaps in fraud detection and forensic examination, considering the overdependence on photocopies of documents in administrative, legal, and fiscal structures without adequate security against authentication. Addressing these weaknesses involves integrating investigative diligence with institutional reform through secured document design, enhance chain-of-custody management, and wider acceptance of the forensic shortcomings of photocopies. This study is relevance in addition to literature as it links practical analysis with the broader problems of document integrity and legal reliability.

Scope for Future Work

While this research provided a thorough qualitative and observational investigation of alterations occurring in multi-generated photocopies, certain untapped aspects can be uncovered by future researchers. One possibility is the measurement of quantifiable basis among photocopy generations. Researchers have the option of creating controlled environments that study the degradation of visual properties such as font integrity, line sharpness, grayscale content, and signatures' readability during each subsequent generation. This would enable the creation of standardized thresholds to assist in interpreting photocopied documents in forensic contexts. Another essential area of research in the future is in the intersection of technology-based solutions. Emerging imaging tools, computer vision tools, and machine learning tools can be train to look for subtle visual cues of manipulation, such as abnormal spacing, abnormal inking, or digital insertions, that human visual system cannot see in heavily degraded copies. Developing automated models trained on collections of manipulated and genuine multi-generational documents could render detection significant quicker and more consistent. Moreover, there can be further study on forensic comparison methods across several iterations of the same document. If there are several copies; each derived from different photocopy chains or origins, algorithmic comparison may detect inconsistencies that would indicate tampering or illegal alteration. In the same manner, the forensic community could use research on how popular fraud methods develop to counter current detection techniques, particularly those used in digitally altered documents that have been photocopied to hide alterations.

At policy and legal level, comparative studies can be done to compare how photocopied documents are treated in evidentiary hearings in different jurisdictions. This would provide perspectives on how courts weigh the validity of expert findings obtained from degraded documents and how institutional policies may be developed or improved to maximize documents chain-of-custody and reduce reliance on poor-quality reproduction. Furthermore, the study opens the door to evaluate preventive mechanisms such as the application of advanced anti-tempering security features in documents, digital watermarks, QR code authentication system, or blockchain-based document authentication, which can be traceable even after multiple copies are generated. To sum it up, future studies can help improve the technical, procedural, and legal understanding of photocopied document fraud, in addition to helping develop more robust forensic and policy frameworks that adapt to the evolving nature of document manipulation.

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