

The evolution of photography

[Design](#), [Photography](#)



Ever since the invention of the earliest camera, technology has rapidly advanced the field of photography, bringing change and improvement to almost every aspect of the art. However, despite all the technological improvements, pocket sized cameras, night vision modes, face and smile recognition facilities that the new age digital cameras have to offer, one sees that almost any camera store worth its salt still stocks single lens reflex cameras (SLRs).

Despite the fact that many dismiss these devices as archaic and obsolete, quite a few professional photographers still opt for and recommend SLRs to others over point and shoot cameras. A novice buyer has no idea whether to opt for a digital point and shoot or a film SLR or DSLR and is unable to decide which one would best serve his or her purpose within their budget. To shed some light on this topic, the pros and cons of a 35 mm SLR over other film formats and image capturing systems have been detailed in this article.

What is an SLR

An SLR or Single Lens Reflex camera is one that has a ‘ reflex mirror’ which allows the user to directly view the image being shot through the lens of the camera (Rowse2007). In simpler words, unlike other cameras which have a viewing system different from the lens of the camera, the SLR has only one viewing system and allows the user to see exactly what is being photographed through the viewfinder.

SLR or Point and Shoot

While deciding which camera one needs to buy, one needs to balance utility with price to choose a camera perfectly suited to their needs. Both SLRs and

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point and shoots have their own strengths and weaknesses with respect to each other. For example, SLRs have much faster shutter speeds than point and shoot cameras. This can duly be adjusted for the film being used and the abundance of light, giving the photographer multiple options for using high speed films (greater ISO) without risking grainy output in the photographs. Also, there is an almost negligible time lag between when the shutter is pressed and the film is exposed, giving the photographer a better opportunity of capturing the perfect moment even with a moving subject. Such is not the case with point and shoot cameras. Both digital and film P&S cameras have a time lag between when the shutter button is clicked and the sensor or film is exposed.

This renders them more or less useless for anything but still photography and memories with orchestrated poses. An SLR allows the user to control almost every aspect of photography. He can adjust the light entering through the aperture, the speed of the film, the duration for which the shutter exposes the film, the focus of the image and even the kind of lens being used. Even the best of the point and shoot cameras can't hold a candle to these features. The fact that the SLR allows for interchangeable lenses means that the photographer is ready for almost any kind of shot whether a close up, extreme close up, long or a wide shot. The lack of this feature sorely limits prospects with point and shoots. The quality of optics (lenses) in even the worst SLRs tops that in the best point and shoots cameras. The compatibility of these lenses with other camera bodies means that the investment in the lenses is not wasted if the camera body malfunctions. To

upgrade, the photographer only needs to change the camera body, which itself is extremely durable compared to a point and shoot.

However, an SLR also has certain limitations. One extremely limiting factor is the price of an SLR camera which is many times that of a point and shoot camera. Another prohibiting factor is the size and weight of SLR cameras. The weight of an SLR camera along with its lens kit filters, flash apparatus and tripod can make it pretty inconvenient to carry around and also, an SLR requires considerable setup time for the perfect shot to be taken. A point and shoot can be fit into the user's pocket, whipped out when needed and is ready to capture images. Another issue with SLRs is maintenance.

Considering that the SLR is highly dependent on its optics for performance, any smudges, fungus, dust or damage to the lens could prove quite expensive to rectify. Lenses have to be stored in moisture proof containers during humid seasons and are extremely expensive to clean or replace. Point and shoot cameras are operable by most laymen, while SLRs are quite complex and require the user to know how to use the various features for them to be of any use. The lack of a live view in SLRs such as available in LCD point and shoot cameras make shots from difficult angles harder for the user. Many point and shoot cameras today possess LCD monitors that can be flipped outwards, making even the most difficult angles easy to shoot from.

Film or Digital

When one finally decides on the type of camera to buy, the image capturing format is still an issue to decide on. While quality of image capture in digital is categorized according to the megapixels per square inch of the sensor,

film quality depends on the size. The prevailing formats of film today are 35mm, medium and large format. Despite rapid advancement in technology relevant to photography, the resolution offered by a 35mm film is still vastly superior to that of any digital camera. Practically, it would take a 25 Megapixel sensor to rival the quality of photographs that can be obtained from a 35 mm film (Ken Rockwell 2006). In terms of quality (of film formats available today), the large format film is unparalleled (Guide to Film Photography 2010). The most popular size of large film today is 4? 5 inches; however, there are sizes of up to 20? 24 inch available in this format.

With large film format, results are sharper, have a better tonality and are grain free (Luong 2011). Even 4? 5 films have 13 times the resolution offered by 35 mm film. The drawbacks of the format are that the cameras required to use this film are bulky and extremely manual. Certain things that are taken for granted with even 35mm cameras such as avoiding fogged film and preventing double and non-exposures have to be manually done in these cameras. The equipment for such cameras is also quite bulky, making it inconvenient to carry and set up. Everything from setting up, photocomposition, focus and exposure take a long time in such cameras. While medium film format (6? 6 or 6? 7 inches) is more convenient than large and offers better quality than 35mm film, it is also quite inconvenient as the film is more expensive to buy and process. Each roll can only fit 10 frames; the depth of field of such cameras is lesser than that in 35mm from certain angles and also, there are a limited number of the types of film available.

Coming back to the debate of film versus digital, it is obvious that digital photography has a lot of ground to cover before it can match the quality of film. However, that being said, digital cameras have the advantage that the user can immediately preview the image after it is shot, thus there is no wastage of film in digital photography. The user only sees what went wrong with a shot after processing if they used film. There is only a one time expenditure on the digital camera, no expenditure on film, scanning or processing. However, once a photograph is taken at a set resolution in a digital camera, it can never be improved or blown up beyond that. A film camera is a cheaper investment than a digital camera and provides unparalleled resolution, warmth, texture and depth (Williams 2004).

While there are many pros and cons to each image capturing system and format, the only way for a photographer to get the most out of any camera is to match the camera to their needs. Only then will they be able to produce the best pictures at the highest value for their money.

References

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