



### Background Information

Digitally altered images have defined the advertising industry over the past two decades (Cornelis & Peter, 2017). The increase in the use of editing to airbrush, whiten teeth, slim waists and to elongate and narrow limbs in advertising has paralleled by rises in body dissatisfaction, poor self-esteem and negative body image (Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010; Paxton et al., 2006).

In an effort to combat the negative effects of airbrushed photos, a number of countries (e.g. Australia, Israel, France, United Kingdom) considered introducing disclaimers on digitally altered images which inform consumers when a model has been digitally retouched (Selimbegovic & Chatard, 2014). However, the limited research conducted in the area of the effects of disclaimers have yielded inconclusive results and ambiguity surrounding their effectiveness in advertising remains.

The implied rationale surrounding the use of disclaimers in fashion advertisements is to inform consumers that an image has been retouched and thus, may be an unrealistic target for comparison (Bury, Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

**Unretouched:**  
Model's image has not been digitally altered

**Retouched:**  
Model's image has been digitally altered using an editing tool

### Theoretical Frameworks

#### Social Comparison Theory

- ❖ Labelling of images as digitally enhanced should reduce the negative effect of comparisons as individuals would realise that the models portrayed are an unrealistic target for comparison, thus increasing appearance satisfaction (Cornelis & Peters, 2017).
- ❖ However, there is conflicting results regarding their effectiveness.

#### Persuasion Knowledge Model

- Consumers exposed to a manipulative message, they will activate their persuasion knowledge.
- Two-sided persuasive appeals which incorporates both a positive and negative. Helps to persuade consumers to have a more favourable attitude towards a product.
- Advertisements which include a disclaimer can be viewed as a **two-sided appeal**
  - the disclaimer= positive side
  - digital alteration= negative side

#### Current Research

Examines the impacts of disclaimers in retouched and unretouched advertisements on consumers' visual attention, brand credibility, attitudes towards the product and their intention to buy the advertised product.

### Methods and Materials

#### Design

- A 2 (Disclosure vs. No disclosure) x 2 (Retouched vs. Unretouched) within-subjects experimental design
- effect of digital enhancement and disclaimers on
  - Attitudes towards the advertisement
  - Believability of the advertisement
  - Manufacturers trust
  - Buyers' intention to use the product
- Eye-tracking software used to measure the proportion of time spent looking at various parts of the advertisement was examined.
- Advertisement scepticism was also measured

#### Stimuli

4 fashion advertisements created for the purpose of this study with the fictitious brand.

#### Participants

55 female undergraduate university students, aged between 18-24 years (M=21.40, SD=1.12).

### Results

Participants did notice the disclaimers.

Participants spent significant **less time looking at the product** in the disclaimer condition. Perhaps disclaimer acts as **distractor**.

**Highest believability** in the **unretouched with a disclaimer** and **lowest believability** in the **retouched with a disclaimer**.

**Highest positive attitude** in the **unretouched with a disclaimer** and **lowest attitude** in the **retouched with a disclaimer**.

**Lowest manufacturer trust** in the **unretouched with a disclaimer** and **highest manufacturer trust** in the **retouched with a disclaimer**.

**Highest buyer intention** in the **unretouched with a disclaimer** and **lowest buyer intention** in the **retouched with a disclaimer**.

Advertisement scepticism failed to predict consumers overall view of the advertisement

Consumers trust in the manufacturer was the lowest in the advertisement which was unretouched with a disclaimer and highest manufacturer trust was reported in the retouched with a disclaimer condition.

- ❖ Consumers have an **increasing tendency to distrust advertising** (Soh, Reid & King, 2007).
- ❖ This may be explained by the fact that **trust** can be perceived **differently from attitudes** or credibility of the advertisement. Lutz (1985) suggests that advertising **credibility** is an **antecedent of attitudes towards the advertisement**. In contrast, **trust** can be considered to be within the same category as **'accuracy'** (Menon et al., 2002) or as an aspect of the integrity of the advertisement, for instance, deception or manipulation.
- ❖ Higher manufacturer trust in the retouched with a disclaimer condition may be explained by the fact that consumers view the use of this disclaimer as cue of transparency and ethical behaviour. In addition, consumers often expect advertisements to be digitally altered so such an addition presents information that is truthful and detailed (Petrescu et al., 2019).

### Implications

The current research demonstrates an array of theoretical and practical implications:

#### Challenges the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

This research suggests that persuasion knowledge is **more complex than balancing negatives with positives**. In fact, consumers judge the disclosure of retouched advertisement to be less honest in comparison to any other condition.

Consumers place **high value on authenticity** in advertising. Credibility associated with including unretouched disclaimers help to increase sales and positive attitudes.

Including a disclaimer of digital alteration= lowest believability, negative attitudes, reduced intentions to buy the product. Advertisers should be cautious revealing when advertisement have been retouched but may benefit from using **retouch-free campaigns**.

### Conclusion

Consumers do notice disclaimers.

Presence of disclaimers significantly influence consumer believability, attitudes, manufacturer trust and behaviour intentions, especially, in the presence of disclaimer indicating whether the model had been digitally enhanced.

Highlights the importance of authenticity in advertising

Unretouched campaigns fuels more positive impacts than retouched campaigns.

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### Discussion

- Disclaimers were noticed by the participants and they were found to have a **significant impact** on the way consumers responded.
- The extent to which the disclaimers influenced consumers, either positively or negatively, was related to whether the model was unretouched or retouched.

### Manufacturer Trust

❖ Results suggest that the **credibility of an advertisement directly affects consumers intention to buy and use the product being advertised** (Petrescu et al., 2019).

❖ This suggests the **positive impact of disclaimers stating there has been no digital alterations**.

❖ This may be a result of a beneficial upward comparison under **social comparison theory**, where women feel the model that has been unretouched is a closer comparison and a reflection of themselves.



### Contact Information

Anne-Marie O'Donovan  
Mary Immaculate College  
Email: 16150082@micstudent.mic.ul.ie  
www.mic.ul.ie.