



A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON THE USE OF PHOTO-MANIPULATION IN ADVERTISEMENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to look at different opinions about photo manipulation in advertising, and draw conclusions based on this. A variety of secondary sources have been analysed to come to the conclusion that photo manipulation can be harmful when used excessively in advertising.

INTRODUCTION

The doctoring of photographs began long before the digital age. Digital photo manipulation began only in the 1990's. In the short time from then till now, it has taken over many aspects of our lives. We see manipulated photographs every day – in newspapers, blog posts and – most importantly – advertisements. While creative retouching of photos is, in itself, a form of art, it is a different story altogether when the technique is used for advertisements. In the following study, we look at the pros and cons of using photo manipulation in advertising.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

(Coffaney, 2011) conducted a survey regarding public opinion about image manipulation in the media. The results of her survey showed that people generally noticed photoshopping in advertisements, but believed that there should be a law regulating the amount of manipulation done to an image. Acceptable changes included change in contrast, and removal of blemishes, dust and clutter. Most people believed that it was unacceptable to publish a photo if main subjects were moved or deleted, or if the meaning or context was changed.

Contrary to this, (Waller, 2015) says that many respondents made comments about advertisements 'without indicating determined deceptive behaviour'. He says that the public policy issues that are raised by the use of photo manipulation in advertising are mostly how they can have a negative effect on girls and women, relating to unattainable standards of body image set by the media.

DESIGN

All information gathered for this study is secondary. It has been obtained from various online sources – blogs, news articles and journals. The objective of this research is to do an in-depth study of the effects of photo manipulation and the impact that it has on consumers. The different points of view have been analysed, and a concluding opinion has been formed.

INFERENCE

Photo manipulation in advertising is a sensitive topic because it has been shunned by receivers of ads, but defended by ad makers and magazine editors. Gradational retouching of photographs (which involves adjusting contrast, colours, white balance, etc.) is acceptable since it is only restoring picture quality and not fundamentally altering the photograph. A line is crossed when photo manipulation starts representing an unrealistic form of beauty, and how everyday objects and people are supposed to look.

How ethical is it when the beauty industry advertises blemish-free, wrinkle-free, and even pore-free skin, thanks to the wonders of digital manipulation, or when the fast food industry retouches their sloppy burgers to an idealistic burger to make it more appetizing to its customers? As society sees these images in various media, new standards are formed not just for "beautiful," but also for "average" and "healthy".

When women compare themselves to a standard of beautiful, average and healthy that simply doesn't exist in real life, the battle for healthy body image is already lost. From lost self-esteem, to lost money and time spent fixing "flaws" and a well-documented preoccupation with losing weight (NEDA, 2010), the effects of these unreal ideals hurt everyone. Scholars have proposed that eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia are due, in part, to an extreme commitment to attaining the cultural body ideal as it is portrayed in the media.

Thus, an inference can be made that when photo manipulation starts promoting unhealthy and unrealistic ideals that negatively impact the society; the line of ethicality is crossed. The responsibility here lies with advertisers to keep a check on the use of digital retouching tools in their advertisements.



CONCLUSION

Digital photo manipulation is used to enhance skin tone, pronounce cheek bones, minimize the waist, enlarge features or airbrush freckles. A constant debate is whether or not this practice is ethical. Photo manipulation results in a mere reflection of a person. Jennifer Lawrence declared that “it doesn’t look like me [her] at all” and on more provocation she said, “of course it’s Photoshop, people don’t look like that” with respect to her new Christian Dior handbag campaign.

Advertisements are used to lure consumers and fill the gap between the demand and purchase. A McDonald’s burger looks perfect in a poster but is nothing like that in reality. Advocates of the use of photo manipulation, on the other hand, argue that altering images is a form of art much like painting or sculpture.

We believe that excessive usage of photo manipulation is unethical. An especially important reason is that young girls see perfect figures in magazines, which makes them want to attain impossible goals. It affects the minds of customers who repeatedly see manipulated images. There is a constant pressure to be ‘skinny’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘fair’. This pressure has risen only because of the existence of photo manipulation.

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