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Qualitative Study

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## **Photoshopping in Advertisements and its effect on Body Image**

### **1.0 Introduction**

A cornucopia of studies have been made on the effects of advertising and body image and all conclude to different variations of that these unrealistic images effect the self-esteem of the consumer in a harmful way that is not encouraging for future generations.

“[R]esearchers have come to contradictory conclusions. In fact, results of studies by Crouch and Degelman (1998) and Myers and Biocca (1992) have indicated that rather than causing an increase in body dissatisfaction, media promote positive body attitudes in young women. Other researchers claim that no relationship exists” (2004 Holmstrom).

With the variation of conclusions from other studies, more research can be done to find out how the advertisements are affecting people’s perception of themselves. The cause of the mixed results could have been due to a variety of reasoning, such as which ads they were using in the research. The researchers grouped psychological theories with how humans naturally compare themselves to others with the study of humans perception of advertisements and the connection they make with themselves.

The purpose of the study is to evaluate and see if consumers really enjoy seeing perfect images selling products or if this step is only creating low self-esteem teenagers that need to learn to accept who they are through the struggle of societies screaming ads. Aerie has done a refreshing step and have eliminated Photoshopping their models and are calling it the “Aerie Real Campaign” as they proudly show off the curves, lines, and tattoos of the models. Will this

be encouraging to consumers to purchase Aerie products or are the Victoria Secret models seducing consumers that their bras and panties will make them have this “ideal body” that is different to every consumers mind.

Those who will benefit from this study are both consumers and advertisers. Figuring out whether real life untouched models is good enough for consumers will not only help the self-esteem of consumers, but will also give advertisers a better idea of what consumers want to see and can make their job less demanding as they no longer need to hide an unwanted freckle.

## **2.0 Body of Paper**

We interviewed students 15 at Southern New Hampshire University, both male and female, age ranging from 18 through 22, and hometowns varied throughout the United States. All of our participants were college students, some with part time jobs, and all participants were Caucasian. Each interview was taken separately on campus in different offices, dorm rooms, and the dining hall. During the interview all candidates were very cooperative and very enthused in the content. Some students even stayed post interview to discuss further about the topic.

## **3.0 Content Analysis**

We began our content analysis by going through each question and underling key words that the respondents had answered. We combined similar answers and in the end developed a list that related to each question. We then grouped some questions together that had similar responses and put one word that could describe the whole list.

We believe that some of the questions could not be combined because of the importance it has to the interview. We asked participants what they believed the perfect body image for both a man and woman. Most of the participants responded that the woman should be petite, fit, and small, with a clear complexion while other participants said to embrace the curves and to feel

good in their skin. The perfect body of the man was mostly described as tall, muscular, and good looking. The other question that remains to be ungrouped asked the participants to analyze, in depth, the message that we want to believe and the one the advertisements are telling us. They concluded that the message contradicts the personal belief in being ourselves.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

### **4.1 Perfect Image**

The people that were surveyed for the Body Image and its relationship with Advertising and Photoshop demonstrated that they believe that there is this unobtainable perfect body that cannot be obtained without the use of computer technology. The participants expressed that they believed advertisers were airbrushing the models skin and smoothing out the wrinkles and stretch marks. With the use of Photoshop, models have their necks elongated, waists shrink, a new nose put on, legs stretched for length, and are at least touched up twenty times. Our participants also expressed where the line should be with the use of advertising and suggested only to improve the lighting, scenery, and some blemish removal for those random bad days. It was made clear that the body remained untouched.

This article was a great example of how social media and body image is constantly being effected whether it be through the use of Photoshop, social media or other mediums. The article explained how social media is altering the viewer's image and idea of the perfect person. The perfect body in the eyes of the viewer is a small and petite body type with alterations to perfect the image and body as a whole. Body image is a huge problem not only with young and adolescent women, but also with males who try to get "big" and overuse or use the enhancing substances to make them look bigger and stronger. The article mentioned, "the media model demonstrated that regardless of the media type, experimental exposure to the boy perfect led to

significantly higher body and appearance dissatisfaction” (2011 Bell and Dittmar). This article was a great implication of the dangers that Photoshop and social media pose as well as the negative consequences of society’s “perfect image.” Education and awareness of this topic will allow consumers to be healthier, make better choices and not alter themselves in order to fit the standards.

#### **4.2 Unrealistic Image**

Participants were asked whether they believe that Photoshop is often used to alter the body of models. Most agreed with the statement and said that Photoshop is used to create false images of people, to make them look of a certain stature, and show what is popular. The manipulation of images is used to boost the ego for those who use it personally, and perfect these models that are already beautiful.

Unrealistic images and expectations are what are being perceived by consumers as they are bombarded with advertisements with the Photoshopped models. They are being told that in order to be considered beautiful, you must be tiny and there is a certain stigma for the ideal girl even though the consumer understands that Photoshop is being done to the images. “Festinger (1954) argues that people evaluate themselves through comparison with others and are more likely to compare themselves to those who are similar to them and who are attractive” (2004 Holmstrom). With this knowledge of people’s unconscious habit of comparing themselves, it is only natural to believe that consumers are doing the same to the models in advertisements. “The average model portrayed in the media is approximately 5'11" and 120 pounds. By contrast, the average American woman is 5'4" and 140 pounds” (2004 Holmstrom). Although consumers are able to diet to lose weight, it is found that consumers are not taking the healthy steps to do this.

Photoshop is creating this unrealistic image that is not obtainable even to the model in the advertisement. They are perfecting perfection.

### **4.3 False Advertising**

The use of Photoshop is ultimately like false advertising to consumers to make them believe that this is how people are supposed to look like. Split views said that some consumers wanted to purchase the products that the models are advertising because it will make them look like the model. Others knew they could not live up to the morphed image so they don't even try to bother.

False advertising refers to the way that marketers make their models look. They have such a Photoshopped and enhanced body that it is completely unobtainable for normal people to have. "Alteration of photos like this should be considered a form of false advertising and be prohibited by the FTC," People have goals to look like what they see in advertisements and it cannot be done, people can't have the body of people who are Photoshopped. This then leads diseases such as eating disorders, depression, and low self-esteem, which can lead to people seriously harming themselves. It comes down to the fact that people are not satisfied with body and will try to do anything to obtain what people see in the media. Dr. Terry Dubrow says "I find this scary as my own skinny little 7-year-old daughter asked me the other day if I thought she was fat." His child is seven years old, she should not be thinking about what her size is, she is not even fully grown.

### **4.4 Emotional Effects**

Participants were asked about how they are affected by advertisement's emotionally and what was being done to compensate for their emotions. Most participants said that although they are affected, they do not take any actions to compensate for this distress. Others said that they

would work out more often, try dieting pills, eat, and binge. Men also fall victim to the emotional turmoil of advertisements because just as much as women see Victoria Secret models, men see Abercrombie models. It puts stereotypes onto the genders and the genders are viewed as sex objects rather than people.

Both questions three and eight were directed towards the emotional effects that come from Photoshopped advertisements. The emotional effects coming from advertisements are based off of the reactions of participants and actions they take as a result of what they see as the perfect body image. Participants of the survey stated effects as things such as advertisements lower self-esteem, set a high expectation for the opposite sex, cause people to binge, and many more. In an article written by Tara MacInnis from the Weekend Post, "Seventeen talks about embracing your body shape and imperfections, but they are always contradicting that." Sixteen year old Erica Whitehead did research about the magazine and all of its Photoshopping, and realized the many ways Seventeen contradicts what they are selling to their young audience. Another young teen, Fourteen year old Julia Bluhm, states "I've been fighting to stop magazines, toy companies and other big businesses from creating photo spreads and ads that hurt girls and break our self-esteem. I want to see regular girls who look like me in a magazine that's supposed to be for me."

## References

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