

Not all Edits are Equal: How Body and Facial Manipulation Disclosure Shape Consumer Responses

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Abstract

Prior research on digital manipulation in advertisements has produced mixed results with some studies showing that disclosing retouched ads leads to more favorable evaluations, while others report that retouch-free disclosure generate better responses. We propose that these inconsistencies may stem from a key yet overlooked distinction: whether the advertisement features a full body image or a facial image. Across two studies, we find that body image ads generate more favorable product and self-evaluations for disclosed retouched ads, whereas facial image ads generate more favorable evaluations for disclosed un-retouched ads. More importantly, we also demonstrate that disclosure operates through a dual-process mechanism. Communication honesty and credibility explain the effect of disclosure on product evaluations, whereas perceived attainability explains the effects of disclosure on self-evaluations. These findings clarify prior inconsistencies in the literature and provide a more nuanced understanding of digital manipulation disclosure outcomes.

Track: Consumer Behaviour