



Computer-generated images used on the H&M website.

Buying hope, selling lies

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Retail clothing chain H&M is the most recent company under fire for misleading consumers with Photoshopped images in an attempt to sell their products.

H&M admitted to putting the heads of real models on computer generated bodies to sell their bikinis and lingerie on their website. With the help of a computer program, they took pictures of their clothes on a mannequin and then created a human appearance.

The Swedish clothing brand is not the first to be caught tampering with pictures. CoverGirl cosmetics has also recently had a Taylor Swift mascara advertisement banned for excessive Photoshopping, another example of many.

Unfortunately, in Canada, what the laws on altering images in advertisements are concerned with is changing the product itself. Take a Neutrogena face wash advertisement for example. There is no law against altering the models' hair, eye colour, or skin tone. The law targets altering the product in the ad itself — in this case, the face wash.

For the most part, we know that images of models found in advertisements are heavily edited and

airbrushed. Some of the changes include deleting birthmarks, whitening teeth, and erasing any "imperfections." But when you look at the images on the H&M website, the computer-generated bodies are all exactly the same, except for skin colour. All varieties of body shapes have been removed, and consequently H&M has promoted an unrealistic image of the perfect body.

Twenty-five year-old Pauline Ranjbar started modeling six years ago. In 2008 she represented Canada at the Miss Global International Beauty Pageant in China, and in Germany for the Miss World Cup in 2011. She has also landed modeling contracts for retail brands like Bench Clothing.

"I do expect my photos to be Photoshopped and modified when working with major companies or big contracts," says Ranjbar.

However, she says H&M is taking things way too far by using computer generated bodies. "It is upsetting that even the use of real people that are extremely Photoshopped, are still not good enough," says Ranjbar.

"H&M is creating an ideal that does not exist. It is false representation and many are fooled by these images."

Her degree in Women Studies from Concordia University has an influence on the type of contracts Ranjbar is willing to take. "A project like H&M would turn me off instantly knowing that they are going to the ultimate extreme to promote an unrealistic image," she says. "I would not encourage such a project because it is fake."

But can this marketing scheme be justifiable as a simple attempt to sell clothes?

The sad truth is that this marketing scheme actually does help sell products. "They wouldn't do it, if it didn't work," says Concordia University Marketing professor Harold Simpkins. "In certain product categories advertisements are altered 100 percent of the time."

This is the case in both fashion and cosmetics. Unlike the old days, Simpkins says, "Because

[Photoshopping] is so easy and cheap to do, it's being done more than ever."

When it comes to advertisements, he says "you don't want to leave the impression that you're misleading people... [but] part of advertisement is exaggeration... The business community accepts this."

And in a way, by continually buying in to the beauty ideal, so do consumers. The image that these brands are trying to project is one of extremely beautiful women and men.

"The image that they project is an image that most people want," Simpkins claims.

In the late 1930s, cosmetics company Revlon was launched by Charles Revson with an investment of less than \$100. But by the mid-1940s, Revlon had become the industry leader. When Revson was asked what the key to his success was he replied with the famous line: "My competitors sell cosmetics. I sell hope."

Today, this is exactly what ads and commercials are doing. Simpkins agrees. "What we are buying is hope."

When buying a product, we hope that it will make us prettier, we hope that it will make us fit in, and we hope that it will help us be accepted by our peers.

Still, as we're buying hope, H&M is selling us a lie. As hard as it is to replicate the beauty of Victoria Secret models, it is literally impossible to reproduce the perfection of a virtual body, leaving consumers in fitting rooms everywhere faced with the crushing question; why doesn't this look good on me?

While consumers rush to the store to buy the latest miracle in a jar, beauty is continually placed at an unattainable standard.

And as this beauty ideal stands, consumers will be hoping for a very long time.