

Beauty Unaltered: Courtesy of CVS

CASE 13

In 2018, CVS Pharmacy launched a new initiative called CVS Beauty Mark. The company declared that by the end of 2020 the brand will no longer use pictures of faces that have been digitally altered to make them look blemish-free.

The company began making these changes on posters displayed near its beauty product shelves. Instead of the beautiful faces, which are usually airbrushed to make them look blemish-free, they used the photos of faces that had not been airbrushed. Then it extended this new rule everywhere—in its marketing materials, on its website, and on its social media pages.

CVS does not make these brands, it must be noted; it merely sells those brands. Yet, the retailer was so committed to this new philosophy of authenticity that it in fact got some major brands such as CoverGirl and Revlon to go along. The photos—left unbrushed—now had a tag phrase: *#Beauty Unaltered*. It used this hashtag everywhere—from store shelves to social media. And it invited consumers to post their own photos, unaltered, with the hashtag.

The company's resolve for authenticity was so infectious that national beauty brands that sell through the retailer adopted the practice not only for materials they supplied to CVS for display, but they also began to use the same unaltered photos in their own independent brand advertising materials.

COVERGIRL Ayesha Curry, the celebrity behind COVERGIRL Outlast Lipstick, appears digitally unaltered in a campaign for the brand. Kerry Washington, brand ambassador for Neutrogena and Ashley Graham, brand ambassador for Revlon similarly appear in digitally unaltered images. On Kerry Washington's new photo, the Beauty Mark (a visual icon) and the textual brand mark, *Beauty Unaltered*, even appear as tattoos on her shoulder. Other brands have joined the bandwagon: Olay, Almay, Aveeno, Rimmel, L'Oreal, Maybelline, Unilever, Burt's Bees and Physician's Formula, among others.^a

In a consumer advertising campaign, some ads showed the ambassadors' faces in side-by-side unaltered and altered versions. In other ads, it showed the models in everyday life (as opposed to studio shots), naming the campaign "Beauty in Real Life," these words overlaid on the images of the models.

Prior to this initiative, CVS had conducted a survey of consumers. This research had found that its customers of beauty products were turned off by unrealistically beautiful faces.

^{a, b, c} <https://cvshealth.com/news-and-insights/press-releases/cvs-pharmacy-unveils-new-beauty-aisles-reflecting-significant>. CVS Health Press release Jan 24, 2019; <https://cvshealth.com/news-and-insights/press-releases/cvs-pharmacy-launches-first-campaign-featuring-unaltered-beauty>, Press release April 9, 2018.

Note: The image of split-half face shown here is for illustration only and does not resemble the CVS campaign or its products.



Kevin Hourican, CVS President described this initiative thus:^b

"As a purpose-led health care company as well as the second largest beauty retailer in the country, we want the millions of customers that visit CVS Pharmacy locations each day to see a more authentic and diverse representation of beauty."

Norman de Greve, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of CVS Health said:^c

"There's been a shift in what consumers want to see when it comes to beauty. They are asking for more transparency and authenticity, and that's what 'Beauty in Real Life' is all about. ...We wanted to introduce a campaign that uses beauty to make women feel good about themselves by empowering them to feel comfortable and confident in their own skin."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Q1. As a consumer yourself, would you rather see model faces with blemishes or with airbrushed perfect beauty? Why?
- Q2. Historically, "perfect beauty" faces were used because it was believed that consumers saw them as ideals to aspire to. Is that kind of aspirational motive not relevant anymore?
- Q3. How does the concept of "brand image-self-concept/self-image congruence" apply here?
- Q4. Interview a sample of consumers on (a) their self-concepts, (b) their goals in using makeup; and (c) their reaction to the CVS Beauty Unaltered campaign.