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"This program contains product placement": Effects of sponsorship disclosure on television viewers' responses

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CHAPTER 2

THE ROLE OF DISCLOSURE AWARENESS

ABSTRACT

Due to concerns about the possible deceptiveness of sponsored content in television programs, the EU decided to make sponsorship disclosure obligatory. The goal of sponsorship disclosure is to raise awareness of sponsored content so that viewers can guard themselves against persuasion. This study explores how sponsorship disclosure influences the use of persuasion knowledge, and to what extent recall of a disclosure influences its effect. An experiment ($N = 208$) shows that a disclosure leads to greater recognition of sponsored content as advertising (i.e., activation of conceptual persuasion knowledge), which consequently makes the viewer evaluate the sponsored content more critically (i.e., higher attitudinal persuasion knowledge). This effect is only manifest for viewers who recalled the disclosure. Theoretically, this shows the importance of sponsorship disclosure and the recall of disclosure for effects on consumers' use of persuasion knowledge. As regulations are still in development in several countries, the findings are important for the implementation of sponsorship disclosure.

INTRODUCTION

Brand, products, and persuasive messages are increasingly integrated in editorial television content (Cain, 2011; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens & Smit, 2007). This so-called sponsored content can be implemented in various ways, such as brand placement, in which a brand or product is placed in a program, or brand integration, in which a brand plays a key role in the story line and production of the program (Hudson & Hudson, 2006). The implementation of sponsored content is growing fast, and especially brand integration is seen as “the future of advertising” (Hudson & Hudson, 2006; Smit, Van Reijmersdal, & Neijens, 2009).

Because sponsored content is intertwined with noncommercial television content, it is often difficult for viewers to distinguish the commercial from the editorial content. A possible consequence is that viewers process the persuasive message less critically as they would have if they had known it was commercial (Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1998). A survey amongst Dutch television viewers showed that viewers indeed share this fear, since 69% of the viewers thought it was possible that they were unconsciously influenced by sponsored content (Neijens & Smit, 2002). Therefore, sponsored content is often considered as deceptive (Cain, 2011; Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1998), and has been a cause of serious concern for policymakers and consumer organizations. As a result, the EU has decided that television viewers need to be informed about sponsored content by means of sponsorship disclosures (Audiovisual Media Services Directive, 2010).

Until now, only two studies have investigated the effects of sponsorship disclosure. Campbell, Mohr, and Verlegh (2007) found that a sponsorship disclosure influences brand attitude, depending on the moment the disclosure is displayed in the program. A sponsorship disclosure at the beginning of a program, and during the sponsored content, resulted in more positive brand attitudes, whereas a disclosure at the end of the program led to more negative brand attitudes. Moreover, they showed that a disclosure decreased the top of mind awareness of the brand, regardless of its timing. Dekker and Van Reijmersdal (2010) compared two sponsorship disclosures, one revealing the sponsor, and one also mentioning the persuasive intent of the sponsored content. They found no effect of both types of sponsorship disclosures on brand attitude and the acceptance of product claims.

Interestingly, these prior studies only focused on how sponsorship disclosures influence the effects of the sponsored content. However, the main purpose of disclosures is to avoid deception by activating persuasion knowledge (Cain, 2011). Persuasion knowledge is defined as people’s general understanding of persuasion, and knowledge of how to cope with persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). To date, no research has yet focused on the effects of sponsorship disclosure on viewers’ use of persuasion knowledge. Yet, to understand whether sponsorship disclosures achieve their goal, it is important to know whether disclosures in television programs can activate viewers’ persuasion knowledge. Therefore, this study aims to examine to what extent sponsorship disclosures can make television viewers recognize sponsored program content as advertising, and to what extent



disclosures stimulate a more critical attitude toward the sponsored content.

Furthermore, various studies on different types of disclosures and warnings, such as health warnings and texts showing extra information during a TV commercial (i.e., “batteries not included”), demonstrated that disclosures often go unnoticed (e.g., Morgan & Stoltman, 2002; Popper & Murray, 1989; Stewart & Martin, 1994). Likewise, in the study by Campbell et al. (2007), a quarter of the respondents did not recall seeing a sponsorship disclosure. Therefore, the present study also investigates whether sponsorship disclosures are recalled, and to what extent this influences its effect on the use of persuasion knowledge.

CONCEPTUAL AND ATTITUDINAL PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE

People develop knowledge about persuasion and persuasion tactics throughout their lives, and use this knowledge to respond to persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) describes the development and usage of persuasion knowledge, and stresses that people only use their persuasion knowledge when they are aware of a persuasion attempt. This means that viewers only retrieve and apply their persuasion knowledge to cope with a persuasive message, when they are aware of its persuasive intent (d’Astous & Chartier, 2000; Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1998).

In the development of persuasion knowledge, the first step is being able to distinguish commercials from programs, which is followed by more extensive knowledge about the source, persuasive intent, and tactics (John, 1999). In other words, the first step of persuasion knowledge is the recognition of the persuasive intent of a message. This recognition of the persuasive intent is part of conceptual persuasion knowledge, which is the cognitive dimension of persuasion knowledge. The cognitive dimension of persuasion knowledge includes the recognition of a message as advertising, the recognition of the source of the message, and the understanding of the persuasive intent and tactics of the advertiser (Rozendaal, Lapierre, Van Reijmersdal & Buijzen, 2011). By obligating broadcasters to disclose sponsored content, policymakers try to make viewers aware of the sponsored content, so they can distinguish between editorial and commercial content. Given this goal of sponsorship disclosure, and because it is the first step of persuasion knowledge, this study focuses with regard to conceptual persuasion knowledge on the recognition of sponsored television content as advertising.

Conceptual persuasion knowledge is usually only activated and applied when viewers attentively process the message (Campbell, 1995; Buijzen, Van Reijmersdal & Owen, 2010; Rozendaal et al., 2011). Since a disclosure emphasizes the sponsored content, this will probably makes viewers process the sponsored content more carefully, which increases the chance they recognize it as advertising. In this way, the disclosure may activate viewers’ conceptual advertising. Therefore, we pose the following hypothesis:

H1: A sponsorship disclosure has a positive effect on viewers’ use of conceptual persuasion knowledge.

Next to the cognitive aspect of persuasion knowledge, Rozendaal et al. (2011) argue that research on persuasion knowledge and advertising literacy theories should also take into account the affective aspect of persuasion knowledge. When attitudinal persuasion knowledge is activated, critical attitudes such as skepticism and disliking are applied to a specific persuasive message (Rozendaal et al., 2011). For instance, viewers can evaluate the sponsored content in terms of honesty, trustworthiness, and credibility.

A sponsorship disclosure may directly lead to more critical attitudes toward the sponsored content. As a sponsorship disclosure mentions words like advertising or product placement, these words may work as heuristics or cues that activate schemata in the brain that are related to advertising. Although consumers may like specific advertisements (Smit & Neijens, 2000), the majority of the consumers is skeptical toward advertising (Calfee & Ringold, 1994; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000). Hence, the schemata in the brain about advertising will generally be negative. Prior research showed that consumers' critical attitudes toward advertising in general can lead to negative evaluations of a specific advertisement (Lutz, 1985; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Moreover, forewarnings of (noncommercial) persuasive message demonstrated to lead to less favorable attitudes toward the message (Jacks & Devine, 2000; Wood & Quinn, 2003), and the sender (Allyn & Festinger, 1961; Campbell & Kirmani, 2000).

Hence, a sponsorship disclosure may work as a cue that activates the concept of advertising and the related (negative) associations. Consequently, these associations with advertising can be applied to the sponsored content. This would mean that, besides its direct effect on conceptual (cognitive) persuasion knowledge, a sponsorship disclosure may also have a direct effect on attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: A sponsorship disclosure directly increases viewers' attitudinal persuasion knowledge.

It is also possible that the effect of a sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge is mediated by the activation of conceptual persuasion knowledge. The recognition of advertising is considered to be the first step of persuasion knowledge, which can lead to more elaborate ideas and beliefs about the persuasion attempt (John, 1999). Hence, the recognition of sponsored content as advertising may activate other dimensions of persuasion knowledge, such as attitudinal persuasion knowledge. When viewers recognize the television content as advertising, they realize the television program is not neutral and is trying to persuade them. This can stimulate viewers to actively resist this persuasion attempt. This effect can be explained by the reactance theory (Brehm, 1996), which poses that people want to maintain their freedom and do not want to be manipulated. Hence, people will try to resist persuasion attempts when they recognize them as such (Sagarin, Cialdini, Rice & Serna, 2002; Wei, Fischer & Main, 2008).

This means that the awareness that program content is actually advertising can result in negative evaluations of the persuasive message, such as a feeling of distrust or irritation.



Hence, although there is reason to believe the sponsorship disclosure can directly lead to a more critical evaluation of the sponsored content (i.e., higher scores of attitudinal persuasion knowledge; H2), this effect may also be mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge. Therefore, we propose the following research question:

RQ1: Is the effect of a sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge?

The above hypotheses assume that viewers actually notice the sponsorship disclosure. As mentioned before, studies show that disclosures on television, including sponsorship disclosures, often go unnoticed (e.g., Campbell et al., 2007; Morgan & Stoltman, 2002, Stewart & Martin, 1994). When a disclosure is not remembered, this does not necessarily mean that the disclosure has no effect (Stewart & Martin, 1994). However, the memory of a message does indicate that the message has been processed (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984). Hence, when a sponsored disclosure is remembered, it is more likely to be processed and to have an effect on viewers' use of persuasion knowledge. Therefore, we propose a second research question:

RQ2: To what extent does the recall of the sponsorship disclosure influence the effect of the disclosure on the use of persuasion knowledge?

METHOD

Stimulus materials

To test our hypotheses and research question, we conducted an experiment in which participants were asked to watch an adapted episode of *MTV Was Here*. This television program is aired weekly and consists of various items about lifestyle, fashion, music, and gadgets. The episode used in this experiment included three items stemming from three original episodes, and lasted in total about 14 minutes. The first item in the episode was an item about a dance improvisation festival, and the third was an interview with DJ Tiësto. The second item included the sponsored content and was about a new brand of sneakers called Alive Shoes. This brand connects sport shoes to social networking sites. In the item, the presenter visits the Alive Shoes shop, talks to the creator of the concept, and receives a pair of shoes which she links to her Facebook profile. This item lasted four minutes and 20 seconds, in which the shoes were visible for one and a half minutes (in the background but also very prominently).

The sponsorship disclosure was shown during the program (at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the program) for 3 or 6 seconds, and said: "This program contains advertising by Alive Shoes." Because this study only focuses on the extent to which a sponsorship disclosure can influence viewers' use of persuasion knowledge, the timing or duration of the disclosure are not taken into account. The disclosure was displayed in the

left upper corner and covered about 2.5% of the screen (which is comparable to the size of standard subtitles) and was clearly readable.

Respondents and procedure

In total, 208 students participated in the experiment. Their average age was 22.22 ($SD = 3.36$) and 77% was female. The participants were recruited through flyers and posters throughout the university building. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the disclosure conditions ($n = 178$), or to the program with no sponsorship disclosure ($n = 30$).

Participants were asked to take a seat behind a computer in an individual cubicle. The instructions claimed the study was about watching television online. After watching the program, participants were directed to an online questionnaire. This questionnaire started with questions about participants' familiarity with the program, followed by their persuasion knowledge (conceptual and attitudinal), and ended with the recall of the sponsorship disclosure, product interest, and demographic variables. The experiment took about half an hour and participants received €8 for their participation.

Measures

Persuasion knowledge

To measure conceptual persuasion knowledge, participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) to what extent the item about Alive Shoes was advertising ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.41$).

Attitudinal persuasion knowledge was measured by asking participants to what extent they thought the item about Alive Shoes in MTV Was Here was honest, trustworthy, convincing, biased, and not credible (Ohanian, 1990). Factor analysis revealed that the five items load on one factor and form a reliable scale (Eigenvalue = 2.66; explained variance 53.15%; Cronbach's alpha = .77). The items were (re)coded so that a higher score of attitudinal persuasion knowledge corresponds to a more critical evaluation of the sponsored content. The mean score of the five items is used as a measurement of attitudinal persuasion knowledge ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.98$).

Recall of sponsorship disclosure

Recall of the sponsorship disclosure was measured by asking participants whether they could recall seeing a disclosure for advertising in the episode of MTV Was Here (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). Of all 178 participants that were exposed to a sponsorship disclosure, 52% indicated not to recall any sponsorship disclosure.

Control variables

A number of control variables were measured to make sure that the effects of the sponsorship disclosure were not caused by other differences between the experimental groups. First, participants were asked whether they knew the program MTV Was Here before participating in the experiment (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), and how often they watched the



program (1 = *never*, 2 = [*less than*] *once a month*, 3 = *twice or three times a month*, 4 = *weekly*, 5 = *daily*). Most participants (67%) did not know the program and 76% never watched the program. Furthermore, participants were asked whether they were familiar with the brand before their participation in the experiment (98% said no), and whether they owned Alive Shoes (100% said no). Based on a scale by Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit (2007), we measured product interest by asking participants to what extent (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) they agreed with the items: “I like buying shoes,” “I like to watch programs about shoes on television,” and “I am interested in shoes” (Eigenvalue = 2.33, explained variance = 77.92%, Cronbach’s alpha = .86, $M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.52$). Finally, we asked participants about their sex and age.

Analysis

To be able to answer our research question, we compare three groups in the analyses:

- (1) the group that was not exposed to a sponsorship disclosure (the control group, $n = 30$),
- (2) the group that was exposed to a sponsorship disclosure but did not recall seeing it ($n = 93$),
- (3) the group that was exposed to a sponsorship disclosure and recalled seeing it ($n = 85$).

RESULTS

Randomization

The three groups did not differ with respect to participants’ sex, $\chi^2(2) = 2.71$, $p = .258$, age, $F(2, 205) = 1.72$, $p = .181$, and product interest, $F(2, 205) = 1.39$, $p = .251$. The groups did differ in participants’ familiarity with the program, $\chi^2(2) = 8.57$, $p = .014$, and marginally significant in their program viewing frequency, $\chi^2(4) = 8.36$, $p = .079$. To make sure that program familiarity and program viewing frequency do not confound the effects, we included these variables as covariates in the analyses.

Effects on persuasion knowledge

To test H1 and H2, we conducted a MANCOVA with the three groups (no disclosure, disclosure not recalled, disclosure recalled) as independent variable, conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge as dependent variables, and program familiarity and program viewing frequency as covariates. The multivariate analysis revealed a significant effect of the three groups, Pillai’s Trace = .08, $F(4, 206) = 4.23$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Separate ANCOVA’s (see Table 1) showed significant main effects of the three groups on conceptual persuasion knowledge, $F(2, 203) = 26.81$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$, and attitudinal persuasion knowledge, $F(2, 203) = 5.63$, $p = .050$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Pairwise comparisons (LSD, controlling for the covariates) demonstrated that viewers who did recall the sponsorship disclosure scored significantly higher on conceptual persuasion knowledge compared to the control group ($p = .012$), and the viewers who did not recall the disclosure ($p = .001$). There was no significant difference in conceptual persuasion knowledge between the control group and the group that did not recall the sponsorship disclosure ($p = .986$).

Attitudinal persuasion knowledge was significantly higher for the group that did recall seeing the disclosure compared to the group that did not recall it ($p = .015$). There was no significant difference between the group with no disclosure compared to both disclosure groups (disclosure not recalled $p = .570$, disclosure recalled $p = .235$)

Table 1 *Effect of sponsorship disclosure on conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge*

	No disclosure	Disclosure not recalled	Disclosure recalled
Conceptual persuasion knowledge	5.07 (1.66) ^a	5.03 (1.36) ^a	5.81 (1.26) ^b
Attitudinal persuasion knowledge	3.58 (1.21) ^{ab}	3.53 (0.81) ^a	3.83 (1.05) ^b

Note Mean scores with standard deviations between parentheses; Effects controlled for program familiarity and program viewing frequency.

^{a b} Means with a different superscript in the same row differ significantly at $p < .05$.

To answer the first research question and to test for possible mediation, we used Preacher and Hayes' (2008) method of calculating mediation and indirect effects. We used the SPSS macro INDIRECT, which calculates the unstandardized coefficients for all paths in the mediation model and uses 5,000 bootstrap samples to generate the bias corrected and accelerated confidence intervals (BCACI). In addition, it estimates the total and indirect effects of the sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge via conceptual persuasion knowledge. To be able to compare the differences between the three groups, we created dummy variables for each group. All possible comparisons were made by running the mediation analyses three times in which one group functioned as independent variable, one group as covariate, and one group as reference category by excluding it from the analysis.

Just like the MANCOVA, the results of the mediation analyses (see Figure 1 and Table 2) showed that, controlling for program familiarity and program viewing frequency, a recalled sponsorship disclosure had a significant effect on conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Conceptual persuasion knowledge was higher for the group that did recall seeing the sponsorship disclosure compared to the group with no disclosure ($b_a = .73, p = .012$), and to the group that did not recall seeing the disclosure ($b_a = .74, p < .001$). There was no significant difference between the control group and the group that did not recall the disclosure ($b_a = -.00, p = .986$).

The total effect of the recall of the sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge was not significant compared to the control group ($b_c = .24, p = .235$), but was significant compared to the group that did not recall the disclosure ($b_c = .36, p = .015$). Again, there was no significant difference between the control group and the group that did not recall seeing the disclosure ($b_c = -.12, p = .570$).



The mediator conceptual persuasion knowledge appeared to be a significant predictor for attitudinal persuasion knowledge ($b_b = .13, p = .009$). The total effect of the recall of the sponsorship disclosure, compared to the group that did not recall the disclosure, on attitudinal persuasion knowledge disappears with the addition of conceptual persuasion knowledge as mediator ($b_c = .27, p = .078$). Bootstrapping confirms a significant mediation (Indirect effect = $.09, 95\% \text{ BCACI } [.02, .21]$). Compared to the control group, there is no significant direct effect of the recall of the sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge. We did, however, find a significant indirect effect via conceptual persuasion knowledge (Indirect effect = $.09, 95\% \text{ BCACI } [.01, .27]$). In other words, viewers who are exposed to a sponsorship disclosure, and recall seeing this disclosure, are better at recognizing the sponsored content as advertising, and consequently are more critical toward this sponsored content. There is no significant mediation when comparing the control group to the group that did not recall seeing the disclosure (Indirect effect = $-.00, 95\% \text{ BCACI } [-.08, .11]$).

Figure 1 Mediation model: Effect of sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge via conceptual persuasion knowledge

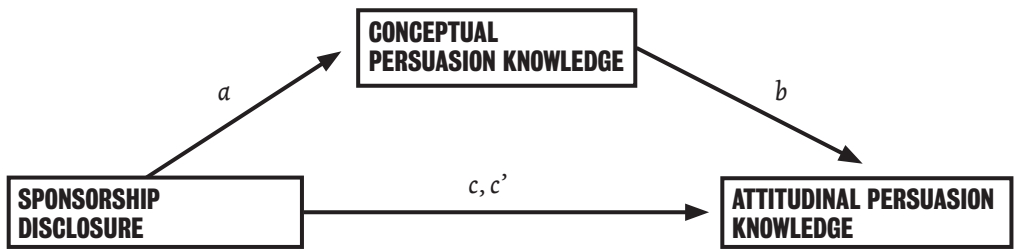


Table 2 Results of mediation model: Effect of sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge via conceptual persuasion knowledge

Condition (reference)	a	b	c (total)	c' (direct)	Indirect effect [95% BCACI]
Disclosure not recalled (No disclosure)	-.00 (.29)	.13 (.05)**	-.12 (.20)	-.12 (.20)	-.00 (.05) [-.08, .11]
Disclosure recalled (No disclosure)	.73 (.29)*	.13 (.05)**	.24 (.20)	.15 (.20)	.09 (.06) [.01, .27]
Disclosure recalled (Disclosure not recalled)	.74 (.21)***	.13 (.05)**	.36 (.15)*	.27 (.15)	.09 (.05) [.02, .21]

Note a, b, c and c' are unstandardized b-coefficients (with boot SE between parentheses); Effects controlled for program familiarity and program viewing frequency; BCACI = Bias corrected and accelerated confidence interval using 5,000 bootstrap samples.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Altogether, the results confirm H1: Conceptual persuasion knowledge is higher after a sponsorship disclosure, provided that is recalled. There is only a direct difference in attitudinal persuasion knowledge between the two groups that were exposed to a sponsorship disclosure. Hence, H2 is partly supported. RQ₁ can be answered affirmatively: The effect of a sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge is indeed mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge. These results give a clear answer to RQ₂: The recall of the sponsorship disclosure has an important influence on the effect of the disclosure, as the sponsorship disclosure only has an effect on persuasion knowledge when it is recalled.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study show that a sponsorship disclosure in a television program can activate viewers' conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., the recognition of program content as advertising). However, this effect is only manifest for viewers who recalled the disclosure. The effect of a recalled sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge (i.e., the critical evaluation of the sponsored content) is mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge. In other words, after seeing a sponsorship disclosure, viewers are better able to recognize the sponsored program content as advertising. Subsequently, this awareness makes viewers perceive the sponsored content as more biased, and less honest, credible, trustworthy, and convincing. When a sponsorship disclosure is not recalled, it has no effect, neither on conceptual, nor on attitudinal persuasion knowledge.

These findings demonstrate that a sponsorship disclosure has to be recalled to be able to help television viewers recognize sponsored content as advertising. This is consistent with previous findings in the literature that showed that a message needs to be processed systematically and attentively to activate conceptual persuasion knowledge (Campbell, 1995; Buijzen et al., 2010; Rozendaal et al., 2011). The results also demonstrate that viewers will only perceive the sponsored content more critically when they are aware that some parts of a program are actually advertising. This mediation model is in line with the reactance theory by Brehm (1996): Because viewers do not want to be manipulated, they are more critical as soon as they realize someone is attempting to persuade them.

A limitation of this study is that it focused on one type of sponsorship disclosure, although several forms are used in different countries. For instance, in England and Belgium a PP (product placement) logo is used, whereas in other countries textual disclosures that are similar to the one in this study are used. Because prior research on sponsorship disclosures (Dekker & Van Reijmersdal, 2010), and health and commercial disclaimers has demonstrated that the characteristics of a disclosure can influence its effects (e.g., Liebert, Sprafkin, Liebert, & Rubinstein, 1977; Mason, Scammon, & Fang, 2007), more research is needed to test the effects of different types of sponsorship disclosures.



Furthermore, although this study shows the importance of viewers' recall of a disclosure, further research is needed to show which factors make television viewers notice and process sponsorship disclosures. Moreover, future research could examine whether the processing and memory of a sponsorship disclosure change over time, when they are shown more frequently and are better known.

Notwithstanding the limitations, our results show that sponsorship disclosures can lead to the recognition of sponsored program content as advertising, and consequently to more critical evaluations of this sponsored content, provided that the disclosure is recalled. These are valuable findings given the lack of prior empirical research on the effects of sponsorship disclosures on the use of persuasion knowledge. Theoretically, the results provide new insights into how a sponsorship disclosure can activate both conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Both forms of persuasion knowledge can be activated by the sponsorship disclosure, whereby the effect on attitudinal persuasion knowledge is mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge. This emphasizes the importance of distinguishing a cognitive and affective dimension of persuasion knowledge, in theory and in further research (Rozenaal et al., 2011). Furthermore, this study is the first to show the importance of the recall of the sponsorship disclosure in this process.

As the regulations regarding sponsorship disclosure are still in development in many countries, this study also has important practical implications. To effectively implement sponsorship disclosures, it is important to know how television viewers respond to them. Prior research demonstrated that sponsorship disclosures can influence brand responses (Campbell et al., 2007). However, the main goal of sponsorship disclosures is not to influence the persuasive effect of the sponsored content, but to make viewers aware of the commercial purpose of the sponsored content, and to avoid deception. This study provides evidence that a sponsorship disclosure can be an effective way of raising viewers' awareness of advertising embedded in television programs. Moreover, the awareness of program content being advertising stimulates viewers to perceive this content more critically, so they can guard themselves against persuasion. In other words, this study is the first to demonstrate that sponsorship disclosures can achieve their goal of activating persuasion knowledge, provided that viewers recall seeing the disclosure.

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