The Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure in Blog Posts on Persuasion Knowledge, Brand Responses and Source Credibility Moderated by Product Involvement

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Abstract

This study examines if different types of sponsorship disclosure (namely direct, indirect and no sponsorship disclosure) affect persuasion knowledge, brand responses and source credibility in blogs. Moreover, the study examines whether product involvement moderates these relations. Up till now, research on the effects of sponsorship disclosures in blogs is limited to a direct sponsorship disclosure; the use of an indirect sponsorship disclosure was not taken into account. An online survey was performed, in which the participants were exposed to a blog post about a backpack brand. The blog post contained a direct, an indirect or no sponsorship disclosure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three sponsorship disclosure conditions and either high or low product involvement. Regarding types of sponsorship disclosure it was found that both, the direct and indirect, disclosures lowered perceived source credibility of the blogger and increased participants’ recognition of the blog post as advertising. Moreover, participants with high product involvement perceived the brand as more positive. However, based on this study it cannot be assumed that product involvement moderates the effects of sponsorship disclosure. The study provides advanced insight in the research field of sponsorship disclosure in blogs.

Keywords: sponsorship disclosure, blogs, types of sponsorship disclosure, persuasion knowledge, source credibility, brand responses, product involvement
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“Starting today, you need to stop paying for your travel” (Smith, 2015). Travel bloggers have the possibility to get sponsored by brands when blogging about travel experiences. Sponsored content can be defined as an intentional inclusion of persuasive brand messages in non-commercial content (van Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2007). For example, travel blogger Expert Vagabond uses sponsored content in a blog post by promoting a GoPro camera when presenting his “Ultimate Travel Gear Guide”, because he got the camera for free from the company (Expert Vagabond, 2016). Since he got the camera for free, he was expected to promote the product on his blog. Marketers like to use sponsored content in blogs, because bloggers are able to reach out to millions of consumers as a result of a rapidly increasing online audience (cf. Verband Privater Rundfunk und Telemedien e.V, 2014). Moreover, sponsored content is effortless for marketers, since bloggers promote their product in return for a monetary or materialistic compensation. Therefore, sponsored content in blog posts has become popular in recent years. However, the consumer may not be aware of the fact that for example Expert Vagabond promotes the GoPro in his blog post, because he got a materialistic compensation. Therefore, sponsored content in blogs increases the difficulty for consumers to distinguish between editorial and commercial content. Consequently, the blog content might mislead consumers’ impression and they might not be aware that the blog content is part of an advertisement campaign, which could unconsciously influence them (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal, & Neijens, 2012; Milne, Bahl, & Rohm, 2008).

In order to protect the consumers from being misled by sponsored content, some countries, such as the U.S., have established regulations that require a disclosure of sponsored
content in blogs (Petty & Andrews, 2008). Since this is also a highly discussed topic in Europe, these regulations will possibly be implemented in Europe as well. If so, bloggers have to disclose sponsored content by adding a sentence to the blog post, stating that the blog content is sponsored. Alternatively, in practice bloggers disclose sponsorship often indirectly by mentioning the receiving of a free product without explicitly disclosing the sponsor (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014). Previous studies on sponsorship disclosures in blogs predominantly focused on direct sponsorship disclosure and showed that this type of sponsorship disclosure leads a critical perception of the blog (Campbell, Mohr & Verlegh, 2012; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). The indication of an indirect sponsorship disclosure adds new value to the research field of sponsorship disclosure in blogs. Bloggers might use an indirect disclosure to degrade the effects of a direct sponsorship disclosure, since they do not specifically mention a sponsor. If an indirect disclosure does in fact lead to lower effects than a direct sponsorship disclosure is not yet proven.

Since the comparison of the effects of direct and indirect sponsorship disclosures in blog posts is still understudied, the present study investigates the effects of both sponsorship disclosures on brand responses, composed of a consumer’s purchase intention, brand preference and brand attitude in blog posts. Until now, most studies on the effects of sponsorship disclosures on brand responses focused on disclosure in television. These studies examined that sponsorship disclosure leads to less favourable brand responses (Boerman et al., 2012; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). However, the effect of an indirect sponsorship disclosure and a direct sponsorship disclosure were not compared. Therefore, the present study investigates whether an indirect sponsorship disclosure may harm the brand’s image less than a direct sponsorship disclosure.
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Recent research found that a sponsorship disclosure lowers source credibility (Cain, 2011; Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Source credibility determines whether the consumer perceives the information presented in a blog post as true and believable (Lu et al., 2014). Up to now, the effects of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility were predominantly investigated by focusing on disclosure of sponsored content in TV programs (Cain, 2011). The present study provides additional insight by investigating if sponsorship disclosure lowers source credibility as well on blogs and if an indirect sponsorship disclosure lowers source credibility less than a direct sponsorship disclosure. If both would be the case, it could be assumed that disclosures on blogs are harmful for the blogger and an indirect sponsorship disclosure might protect the blogger’s credibility more than a direct sponsorship disclosure.

When examining the effects of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility and brand responses, the present study includes product involvement to investigate if these relations are moderated by product involvement. The present study defines product involvement as the involvement and interest of a person in the topic of the blog post, which might interact with the effects of sponsorship disclosure. A theory by Sherif (1965 as cited in Petty & Cacioppo, 1981) indicates that the higher a person’s product involvement the more critical is a person. This would imply that high product involvement leads to a more critical attitude towards the blog content. The implementation of types of sponsorship disclosure might affect this relation, because the disclosure of a persuasive attempt might lead to an even higher critical attitude towards the blog content than no sponsorship disclosure. To date these relations were not analysed in the context of a blog post. However, if product involvement moderates the effects of sponsorship disclosure in blogs, the implementation of a sponsorship disclosure could lead to more consequences for
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bloggers and marketers. Therefore, the present study includes product involvement to examine if it effects the relation of sponsorship disclosure to source credibility and brand responses in blogs.

The primary goal of this research was to extend the literature on sponsorship disclosure in blogs by including an indirect sponsorship disclosure. An indirect sponsorship disclosure is often used by bloggers, but how its effects differ from a direct sponsorship disclosure is not known. Moreover, the study adds relevance by including product involvement, since it might be an important aspect when examining the effects of sponsorship disclosure in blog posts. A process that might be underlying the effects of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility and brand responses is persuasion knowledge, which implies that a person has general knowledge about persuasion attempts. The following research question was investigated:

*RQ: To what extent does the type of sponsorship disclosure in a blog post affect source credibility and brand responses? Moreover, how does the level of product involvement of the reader moderate this relationship?*
2. Theoretical Framework

Companies often like to use sponsored content as marketing tool. The first type of sponsored content was product placement in television (Petty & Andrews, 2008). Product placement in television shows or movies includes a product or brand being shown on screen, whilst the brand pays media companies for it (Balasubramanian, Karrh, & Patwardhan, 2006). An example of product placement is shown in the American television show America’s Got Talent in which the jurors are drinking from cups with the logo of Dunkin Donuts on it. The logo is shown frequently on screen. By using product placement, marketers try to avoid scepticism about advertisement by the consumers (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004). They try to persuade consumers without them actually being aware of the persuasion attempt. However, television shows and movies are no longer the only mediums used for sponsored content. Nowadays, online mediums, such as blogs, are frequently used as platforms for sponsored content. Due to the rising number of online blogs, sponsored content in blogs is getting increasingly popular.

2.1. Sponsored Content in Blog Posts

In 2016, Tumblr.com, a micro blogging and social networking site, has been estimated to have more than 305.9 million blog accounts (statista.com, 2016). This number does not include additional blogs created on WordPress or other website creators. The numbers show that blogs are an important content medium, written and read by a high number of internet users. A statistic by McGrail (2013) reveals five different types of bloggers: the part-time professional, the hobbyist, the full-time professional, the corporate and the entrepreneur. While the entrepreneur and the corporate types write blogs for the company they work for, the full-time professional, the part-time professional and the hobbyist start their blog out of own interest and write with a
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personal intention. Bloggers inform other people about their life and new trends, however, for a large number (which consists mostly of the part-time and the full-time professionals) the published content is a source of income.

An income might be earned by displaying advertisements in form of, for example banners, or blog posts containing sponsored content and affiliated marketing links (McGrail, 2013). Sponsored content entails a consumer-generated blog post, which is sponsored by a brand in form of free products or financial benefits (Mutum & Wang, 2010). For example, travel blogger Expert Vagabond writes his Ultimate Travel Gear Guide, whilst receiving free try-out products from a travel gear company for reviewing their specific product in a blog post. Regarding the form of compensation, Lu et al. (2014) distinguish between two different types: direct-monetary and indirect-monetary. Direct-monetary refers to a benefit that consists of cash compensation whereas indirect–monetary implies a non-financial benefit for the blogger, such as product coupons, discounts or free samples (Lu et al., 2014). In comparison, affiliated links are implemented in blog posts and direct the consumer to the shop of the mentioned product’s company. Bloggers benefit when the reader makes a purchase at the shop (Culbertson, 2014).

Recent research ascertained that consumers perceive blogs as conversational and trusted resources of product information, which have more influence than social sites with product information of companies (Huang, Chou, & Lin, 2010). Bloggers are often perceived as opinion leaders, their readers are more attracted by their opinion on products in comparison to content from companies (Wu & Lee, 2012). Therefore, sponsored content in blogs can be important and a huge help in making purchase decisions for the reader.
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2.2. Types of Sponsorship Disclosure in Blogs

While sponsored content is beneficial for marketers, consumers might be misled by sponsored content, because they may not be aware of the fact that they are exposed to advertising (Boerman et al., 2012; Milne et al., 2008). Till now, Europe did not implement regulations in order to protect consumers from sponsored content in blog posts. However, current European regulations determine that in broadcasted formats product placement and sponsorship have to be disclosed for at least three seconds (Ofcom, 2011 as cited in Boerman et al., 2012). In television and movies it is required to disclose the sponsorship by showing warning messages or the disclosure symbol PP on screen when a sponsored brand is seen (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal, & Neijens, 2014; Tessitore, & Geuens 2013). Moreover, in the U.S. a disclosure of sponsored content in blogs is either shown before, in or after the written content by mentioning that the blog content is sponsored (Petty & Andrews, 2008).

The present study defines different kinds of sponsorship disclosure as following: When bloggers get paid for what they write about a specific brand, they have to disclose the sponsor by mentioning that the blog post is sponsored. This is labelled as direct sponsorship disclosure. However, if bloggers receive a product for free, without any extra financial compensation, they do not necessarily have to disclose the sponsor. The bloggers either mention that they got the product for free or do not say anything at all. The mentioning of receiving a free product is specified as indirect sponsorship disclosure, because the blogger does not specifically mention a sponsor. Therefore, it depends on the reader’s evaluation if the content was sponsored, since not everyone links a free product to sponsorship.

Until now, a few studies focused on the implementation of a direct sponsorship disclosure in blog posts (Hwang & Jeong., 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). These studies mainly
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showed that the implementation of a sponsorship disclosure led to more negative opinions of the blog than no disclosure. Hwang and Jeong (2016) added a second disclosure condition to their study, namely the *honest opinions* disclosure, which indicates that the blogger mentions the sponsor but assures that he or she is writing his or her own opinion. The use of the honest opinions condition led to a more positive opinion than the direct sponsorship disclosure. However, until now it was not investigated whether an indirect sponsorship disclosure has different effects on consumer’s opinion about the blog than a direct sponsorship disclosure. The indirect sponsorship disclosure does not specifically mention the sponsor and therefore, it cannot be automatically assumed that the reader is aware of the persuasion attempt. If consumers are not aware of the sponsorship, it might be that they are not protected in this condition. Since this type of disclosure is often used by bloggers, direct and indirect sponsorship disclosure should be compared in order to examine whether the reader perceives the content differently in an obvious and a hidden persuasion attempt. If this is the case, it could be recommended for the blogger to use a sponsorship disclosure, which does lead to more positive effects in the future.

Besides the direct and the indirect sponsorship disclosure, a *no disclosure condition* is included in the present study. This condition is added to compare the effects of disclosure conditions to a blog post without any sponsorship disclosure. Without the no sponsorship disclosure condition it would not be possible to determine whether sponsorship disclosure has any effect on the reader’s opinion of the content compared to a blog post without disclosure. By adding the no disclosure condition it is possible to determine whether disclosures in blog posts serve the purpose of their insertion (ensuring to protect consumers from a persuasion attempt). A factor that might be affected by different types of sponsorship disclosure is a person’s persuasion knowledge.
2.3. Disclosure Effects on Persuasion Knowledge

Recent literature claims that persuasion knowledge is an important mediator when considering the effects of sponsorship disclosure (Boerman et al., 2012). Persuasion knowledge implies that individuals have a general knowledge about persuasion and they use this in order to analyse and evaluate persuasion attempts. Two different types of persuasion knowledge are mentioned in literature: *conceptual* persuasion knowledge and *attitudinal* persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2012). Conceptual persuasion knowledge implies that consumers recognize advertising and its persuasion attempt (Rozendaal, Lapierre, Van Reijmersdal, & Buijzen, 2011). Attitudinal persuasion knowledge involves critical feelings about honesty, trustworthiness and credibility towards the source or the sponsored brand (Boerman et al., 2012).

Recent research determined that persons, who are exposed to a sponsorship disclosure activate their persuasion knowledge and perceive the content as less favourable than a blog post without a sponsorship disclosure (Boerman et al., 2012; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). Moreover, previous research has shown that sponsorship disclosures in blog posts affected both types of persuasion knowledge. In a study by Boerman et al. (2012) people’s distrust towards sponsored content (attitudinal persuasion knowledge) and critical evaluation (conceptual persuasion knowledge) increased with sponsorship disclosure.

However, it has not yet been investigated whether direct and indirect sponsorship disclosures have different effects on persuasion knowledge. In comparison to a direct sponsorship disclosure, one could assume that an indirect sponsorship disclosure does not activate persuasion knowledge, because the sponsored content is not perceived as a persuasion attempt. Therefore, the present study includes persuasion knowledge, as seen in the conceptual model in Figure 1, to determine whether there are different effects on persuasion knowledge in
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both types of sponsorship disclosure. The following hypothesis and research question are composed:

**H1:** Participants have higher persuasion knowledge in the direct sponsorship disclosure condition than in the no sponsorship disclosure condition.

**RQ1:** To what extent does indirect sponsorship disclosure activate persuasion knowledge in comparison to direct sponsorship disclosure and no sponsorship disclosure?

### 2.4. Brand Responses

Another factor that might be affected by sponsorship disclosure is the consumer’s opinion of the sponsored brand, which is captured in the term brand responses. Previous research found that disclosures lead to less favourable perception of the brand (Boerman et al., 2012). However, the effect of an indirect sponsorship disclosure in blogs was not taken into account. Brand responses are considered an important variable in the present study, because they measure how consumer’s behaviour towards the brand changes when seeing a sponsorship disclosure. In the present study brand responses were measured with three different indicators: brand preference, brand attitude and purchase intention.

In the present study brand preference measures if readers of the blog choose the featured brand over other similar brands. Brand attitude measures how readers think about the brand: If they like the brand or not. Purchase intention was defined as the conscious plan or intention of the consumer to make an effort to purchase a product (Spears & Singh, 2004). Recent studies discussed that similar results can be expected for these three different measures (Janssen, Fransen, Wulff & van Reijmersdal, 2016).
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Boerman et al. (2012) measured the effects of sponsorship disclosure on brand responses, focusing on brand attitude on television. The results showed that when participants saw the sponsorship disclosure, they had a more negative brand attitude than when not seeing a sponsorship disclosure. However, the general results on the effects of sponsorship disclosure on brands responses are diverse, other studies found no significant effect of sponsorship disclosure on brand responses (Dekker & Van Reijmersdal, 2013; Wood, Nelson, Atkinson & Lane, 2008). Therefore, the present study aims to provide additional insight by focusing on the medium blog and including an indirect sponsorship disclosure.

Additional insight is given by including the effects of an indirect sponsorship disclosure on brand responses. Since an indirect disclosure condition is less explicit in mentioning sponsorship, it might be that the consumer has more positive brand responses than in the direct sponsorship disclosure. However, the indirect sponsorship disclosure might still influence the brand perception more negative than no disclosure, because it is mentioned that the blogger got a product for free. If this condition differs significantly from direct disclosure condition on brand responses, it could suggest that an indirect sponsorship is more beneficial for marketers than a direct sponsorship. However, this is only speculation and therefore, the following hypothesis and research question are proposed:

**H2**: Direct sponsorship disclosure leads to more negative brand responses than no sponsorship disclosure.

**RQ2**: To what extent does indirect sponsorship disclosure lead to more negative brand responses in comparison to direct sponsorship disclosure and no sponsorship disclosure?
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Apart from the effects of sponsorship disclosure, recent studies have investigated the effects of persuasion knowledge on brand responses and show that a person’s persuasion knowledge leads to a more negative brand attitude (Boerman et al., 2012; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). By revealing a persuasion attempt, persuasion knowledge leads to scepticism and resistance (Jacks & Devine, 2000; Lee, 2010). It is proposed that not only brand attitude, but as well brand preference and purchase intention will be perceived more negative the higher a person’s persuasion knowledge (Wei, Fischer, & Main, 2008). The accompanying following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The higher a person’s persuasion knowledge, the lower are a person’s brand responses.

2.5. Source Credibility

Besides brand responses, previous research found that source credibility decreased when implementing a sponsorship disclosure (Lu et al., 2014). The present study includes source credibility to determine to what extent the different sponsorship disclosure conditions affect the credibility of the blogger. As stated by Lu et al. (2014), source credibility involves whether a person perceives the information given by the blogger as unbiased, believable, true or factual (Hass, 1981). By taking source credibility into consideration, it can be analysed if the use of a sponsorship disclosure harms the image of a blogger.

Hwang and Jeong (2016) investigated if different types of sponsorship disclosure differentiate in their effects on source credibility in blog posts. They made a distinction between no disclosure, a simple disclosure, which states that the blog post is sponsored, and an honest opinions disclosure, which indicates that the blogger mentions the sponsor but asserts that he is writing his own opinion in the blog. These results are relevant for the present study, because the
simple disclosure can be compared to the direct sponsorship disclosure used in the present study and therefore, provides the basis of the present study. However, the present study uses an indirect sponsorship disclosure instead of an honest opinions disclosure. Source credibility is defined by Hwang and Jeong (2016) as the characteristics of the source or blogger, determined by expertise and trustworthiness. The results of their study show that participant’s perception of source credibility was lowest in the simple disclosure, which supports the presumption that a sponsorship disclosure results in lower source credibility in comparison to no sponsorship disclosure. The honest opinions disclosure did in turn result in higher source credibility. In how far an indirect sponsorship disclosure differs from a direct sponsorship disclosure in its effects on source credibility is going to be investigated in the present study.

In contrast to Hwang and Jeong's (2016) study, the present study implements a disclosure condition in which it is not clearly mentioned that the content of the blog post is sponsored (indirect sponsorship disclosure). By including this condition, the present study questions whether an indirect sponsorship disclosure leads to higher source credibility than a direct sponsorship disclosure. Since it is not given that participants in the indirect sponsorship disclosure are as aware of the sponsored content as in the direct sponsorship disclosure condition, it might be that the indirect condition does not lower source credibility to the same extent as direct disclosure. The following hypothesis and research question are proposed:

**H4:** Direct sponsorship disclosure leads to lower source credibility than no sponsorship disclosure.

**RQ3:** To what extent does indirect sponsorship disclosure lead to less source credibility in comparison to direct sponsorship disclosure and no sponsorship disclosure?
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Apart from sponsorship disclosure, a person’s persuasion knowledge might affect source credibility. Up to now, previous literature did not take this relation into account. However, the effect is considered in the present study to see if the level of a person’s persuasion knowledge may influence his or her perception of source credibility. As stated earlier, persuasion knowledge implies a general knowledge about persuasion, which is used to analyse and evaluate persuasion attempts (Boerman et al., 2012). Therefore, it could be assumed that the higher a person’s persuasion knowledge, the lower is the perception of the source, caused by the critical evaluation of the content. The following hypothesis is proposed:

\( H5: \) The higher a participant’s persuasion knowledge the lower is the participant’s source credibility.

2.6. Product Involvement

In order to investigate the effects of different types of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility and brand responses, product involvement is a relevant addition to the conceptual model of this study. The present study defines product involvement as to what extent the consumer is involved in the topic of the blog post (high vs. low). The moderating role of product involvement on the effects of different types of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility and brand responses is still understudied. Previous research has established that a person’s involvement level is a relevant indicator of a person’s perception of a persuasion attempt (Huang, Chou, & Lin, 2009). In other words, the higher a person’s product involvement level, the more is he or she aware of the persuasion attempt when being confronted with advertising. Since sponsorship disclosures expose the persuasive attempt, it could be expected that a person with high product involvement perceives the blog content more negative in a disclosure
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condition compared to a condition without a sponsorship disclosure. Although the role of product involvement seems relevant, because it might intensify the effects of a sponsorship disclosure, it was not studied in this context before.

A person evaluates the content of blog posts by comparing it to personal attitudes and experiences (Sherif, 1965 as cited in Petty et al., 1983). Especially when the topic of the blog is of high personal relevance, it is mostly analysed by carefully examining the purpose of the issue (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). The social judgement theory by Sherif (1965 as cited in Petty et al., 1983) indicates a latitude of rejection, which implies that the individual denial for a persuasion attempt grows with a person’s personal involvement. For the present study this could imply that high product involvement leads to lower source credibility and brand responses than low product involvement. In cases of high product involvement, the direct sponsorship disclosure might lead to lower source credibility and brand responses than an indirect sponsorship disclosure, because a person is more aware of the persuasion attempt and therefore, has higher latitude of rejection. Low product involvement probably leads to more negative perception in the direct sponsorship disclosure condition than in the indirect and no sponsorship disclosure condition. However, the consumer’s perception is less negative than in high product involvement, because a person is less aware of the persuasion attempt. Considering these speculations, the following research questions are proposed:

**RQ4**: How does product involvement influence the effects of different types of sponsorship disclosure on persuasion knowledge?

**RQ5**: How does product involvement influence the effects of different types of sponsorship disclosure on brand responses?
RQ6: How does product involvement influence the effects of different types of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility?

Figure 1 Conceptual Model
3. Method

3.1. Design and Participants

In order to test the stated hypotheses and answer the research questions, a 3 (sponsorship disclosure type: direct disclosure vs. indirect disclosure vs. no disclosure) x 2 (level of product involvement: low vs. high) between subjects design was used. The dependent variables were source credibility and brand responses. Persuasion knowledge was added as mediator in the conceptual model.

By the use of convenience and snowball (network) sampling, a group of young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 was recruited to participate in the online study. Since travel blogs were used as stimulus material in the study, the age group was limited to this age range, because this age group is most likely to read travel blogs and is able to travel a lot (Mohn, 2013). The final sample consisted of 197 participants ($M_{age} = 24.06, SD = 2.88; 53.8\%$ females). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions, namely high involvement – direct sponsorship disclosure ($N = 31$), high involvement – indirect sponsorship disclosure ($N = 27$), high involvement - no sponsorship disclosure ($N = 29$), low involvement – direct sponsorship disclosure ($N = 30$), low involvement – indirect sponsorship disclosure ($N = 43$) and low involvement - no sponsorship disclosure ($N = 37$). All European nationalities were able to participate in this study. The only restriction was that the level of English proficiency of the participants had to be adequate in order to understand the blog post and answer the questions. To accommodate this, the English proficiency of the participants was measured prior to the start of the experiment by asking questions about the background of their English knowledge. All participants had an adequate level of English proficiency.
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3.2. Procedure

The experiment started by asking for participants’ English proficiency and demographical questions. After these questions, participants read an introduction before reading the actual blog post. The introduction either included a short imaginary story about upcoming holiday plans or simply asked the participants to read the upcoming blog post. The two different introductions split the participants in high and low product involvement. Once the participants read the introduction they continued by reading a blog post about the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 backpack with either a direct sponsorship disclosure, indirect sponsorship disclosure or no sponsorship disclosure. After reading the blog post, the participants could directly proceed to the questionnaire. The questionnaire started with questions about the dependent variables brand responses (brand preference, brand attitude and purchase intention) and source credibility. Following, participants were asked about their knowledge about persuasion (i.e., conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge). The questionnaire ended with control questions about participants’ travel behaviour and interest in travel gear. All questions can be found in Appendix B. The experiment lasted about 10 to 15 minutes and took place in an online environment. After the experiment participants were thanked and had the possibility to contact the experimenter in order to get debriefed and ask questions.

3.3. Experimental Materials and Manipulation

Product involvement was manipulated at the beginning of the study. The participants were divided into two groups; half of the participants got an instruction indicating that they had to imagine they are going on an Asia backpack travel soon and still need a suitable backpack. In order to get valuable tips, they are now looking at recommendations on travel blogs. The
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participants with this instruction were considered to have a high product involvement level. The other half of the participants got no specific instruction, they were told to read the following blog post and answer the upcoming questions. These participants were considered to have a low level of product involvement. The product involvement levels are based on a previous research using a similar manipulation (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). The full introductions of the present study can be found in Appendix A.

The type of blog used for this study was a travel blog. This blog was chosen because it is of same interest for men and women. Therefore, both genders could be included in this study. Especially backpack travelling has become very popular in the last years and consumers are generally interested in getting tips and tricks for their next vacation (Mohn, 2013). The blog content was an article about a travel backpack including sponsored content in form of a recommendation for the new Eagle Creek Deviate 60 backpack. Since Eagle Creek is not the most familiar backpack brand, it was chosen in order to preclude that participants favour the backpack caused by their degree of brand awareness. The sponsorship disclosure was manipulated by telling either that the blog post is sponsored by implementing the statement “This blog post is sponsored by Eagle Creek.” at the end of the text (direct disclosure); that the blogger got the backpack featured in the post for free with the statement “Eagle Creek was so kind and send me an Eagle Creek Deviate 60 backpack for free” in the text (indirect disclosure) or no disclosure was mentioned at all. The full blog posts can be found in Appendix B.

3.4. Measures

The measurements included measures of English proficiency, persuasion knowledge, source credibility and brand responses. Brand responses was compounded by measuring brand
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preference, brand attitude and purchase intention. A total overview of all items can be found in Appendix C.

*English Proficiency.* Participants’ English proficiency was measured by asking a multiple choice question (‘How would you rate your English language proficiency?’) with six answer options (e.g., ‘Advanced (high school and experiences abroad’).

*Source Credibility.* On the basis of Harmon and Coney’s (1982) credibility scales, source credibility was measured. Therefore, source credibility was measured with six bipolar items (e.g., ‘I think the person who wrote the blog post is dishonest/ honest.’) on a 7-point semantic differential scale. The scale had a good reliability (Cronbach’s α = .890).

*Brand Responses.* Purchase Intention was measured with two items (e.g., ‘The next time I need a new backpack, I may choose an Eagle Creek backpack.’) on a 7-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither agree or disagree, 5 somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree). The scale had a good reliability (Cronbach’s α = .893). Brand attitude was measured by asking the participant ‘How would you rate the backpack?’ with five bipolar items on a 7-point semantic differential scale. The scale had as well a good reliability (Cronbach’s α = .951). Moreover, brand preference was measured with a multiple choice question by asking ‘Which backpack would you prefer if you were asked to select one of these backpacks now?’ and showing the participants one picture of the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 and two pictures of backpacks from different brands.

*Persuasion Knowledge.* Furthermore, participant’s conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge were measured. Conceptual persuasion knowledge was measured with seven items (e.g., ‘The blog post contains advertising.’) on a 7-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 =
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strongly agree). The scale had a satisfying reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .721$). Two items, namely ‘to inform the consumer’ and ‘to entertain the consumer’, got recoded. Attitudinal persuasion knowledge was measured with five items (e.g., ‘I think the blog post about the Eagle Creek backpack is honest.’) on a 7-point likert scale ($1 =$ strongly disagree, $7 =$ strongly agree). The scale had as well a satisfying reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .762$). Four items, namely ‘honest’, ‘trustworthy’, ‘convincing’ and ‘credible’, got recoded in order to be able to compare the scale with the scale of conceptual persuasion knowledge.

Control Variables. In order to measure a participant’s personal product involvement level, named Control_Involvement, nine bipolar items (e.g., ‘I perceive the topic of backpack travelling as important/ unimportant.’) on a 7-point semantic differential scale were asked. The scale had a good reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .937$). Moreover, if participants have ever been on a backpack holiday was asked with a multiple choice question ‘Have you ever been on a backpacking holiday?’ with three answer options (‘No, never ’, ‘Yes, once’ and ‘Yes, a couple of times circa’). If participants own a backpack (min. 60 litre) was asked with the multiple choice question ‘Do you own a travel backpack (min. 60 litre)?’ with four answer options (e.g., ‘No, but I would like to have one’).

3.5. Analysis Methods

The interaction between sponsorship disclosure and product involvement on persuasion knowledge, source credibility and brand responses was analysed by conducting factorial Analyses of Variance (ANOVA). In order to investigate the relation between persuasion knowledge, source credibility and brand responses regression analyses were conducted. Moreover, a logistic regression was performed to investigate the effects of sponsorship
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disclosure and product involvement on brand preference. Furthermore, by using a correlation analysis it was analysed whether the control variables, Control_Involvement and Own Backpack correlated with the dependent variables.
4. Results

The results section reports the outcomes of several analyses to test the stated hypotheses and to try to answer the accompanying research questions. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for all conditions of the independent variables, sponsorship disclosure and product involvement.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sponsorship Disclosure</th>
<th></th>
<th>Product Involvement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M  SD</td>
<td>M  SD</td>
<td>M  SD</td>
<td>M  SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Persuasion Knowledge</td>
<td>4.97 .80</td>
<td>5.10 .67</td>
<td>4.65 .82</td>
<td>4.93 .86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal Persuasion Knowledge</td>
<td>5.01 .59</td>
<td>4.96 .50</td>
<td>4.99 .48</td>
<td>4.99 .55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase Intention</td>
<td>4.73 .99</td>
<td>4.57 .99</td>
<td>4.57 1.23</td>
<td>4.87 .90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Attitude</td>
<td>4.96 1.31</td>
<td>4.88 1.34</td>
<td>4.88 1.35</td>
<td>4.93 1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Credibility</td>
<td>4.64 1.16</td>
<td>4.53 1.03</td>
<td>5.09 .96</td>
<td>4.84 1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1. Persuasion Knowledge

To test the H1, RQ1 and RQ4 a factorial ANOVA with product involvement and sponsorship disclosure as independent variables and conceptual persuasion knowledge as dependent variable was performed. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, because Levene’s test was not significant ($F(5, 191) = 1.92, p = .092$). The ANOVA showed a significant main effect of type of sponsorship disclosure on conceptual persuasion knowledge, $F(2, 191) = 6.33, p = .002, \eta^2 = .062$. A post hoc Tukey test showed that the no sponsorship disclosure condition differed significantly from the indirect sponsorship disclosure condition ($p = .002$) and the direct sponsorship disclosure condition ($p = .051$); the indirect sponsorship disclosure condition was
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not significantly different from the direct sponsorship disclosure condition \((p = .599)\). This indicated that participants in the direct \((M = 4.97, SD = .79)\) and indirect sponsorship disclosure condition \((M = 5.10, SD = .67)\) had more conceptual persuasion knowledge than participants in the no sponsorship disclosure condition \((M = 4.65, SD = .82)\). This can be seen in Figure 2. There was no main effect of product involvement, \(F(1, 191) = .158, p = .691, \eta^2 = .001\). Additionally, there was no significant interaction effect between type of sponsorship disclosure and product involvement, \(F(2, 191) = .158, p = .845, \eta^2 = .002\).

Moreover, to test the effect of product involvement and sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge, another factorial ANOVA was performed. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, because Levene’s test was not significant \((F(5, 191) = 1.11, p = .356)\). The ANOVA showed no significant main effect of type of sponsorship disclosure on attitudinal persuasion knowledge, \(F(2, 191) = .107, p = .898, \eta^2 = .001\). There was no main effect of product involvement, \(F(1, 191) = .033, p = .856, \eta^2 = .000\). Compared to conceptual persuasion knowledge, there was as well no significant interaction effect between type of sponsorship disclosure and product involvement on attitudinal persuasion knowledge, \(F(2, 191) = .527, p = .592, \eta^2 = .005\).
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Figure 2 Conceptual Persuasion Knowledge as function of Type of Sponsorship Disclosure

4.2. Correlations

In order to see if one of the control variables correlates with the dependent variables, Pearson’s correlation ($r$) was performed. As shown in Table 2, Control_Involvement did positively correlate with source credibility. Therefore, Control_Involvement was included as a covariate in the factorial ANOVA of source credibility.

Table 2

Pearson’s correlation coefficients ($r$) between control variables and dependent measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Variable</th>
<th>Brand Attitude</th>
<th>Purchase Intention</th>
<th>Source Credibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$r$</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>$r$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control_Involvement</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Backpack</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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4.3. Brand Responses

To test H2 and H3 and answer the research questions RQ2 and RQ5, several analyses were performed. The effects of sponsorship disclosure, product involvement and persuasion knowledge were tested on purchase intention, brand preference and brand attitude.

4.3.1. Purchase Intention.

To test H2 and answer RQ2 and RQ5 a factorial ANOVA was performed with product involvement and sponsorship disclosure as independent variables and purchase intention as dependent variable. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, because the Levene’s test was not significant ($F(5, 191) = 1.59, p = .164$). The ANOVA showed no significant main effect of type of sponsorship disclosure on purchase intention, $F(2, 191) = 0.26, p = .775, \eta^2 = .003$. However, there was a main effect of product involvement on purchase intention, $F(1, 191) = 8.01, p = .005, \eta^2 = .040$. This indicated that participants in the low involvement condition wanted to buy the mentioned product less often ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.16$) than participants in the high involvement condition ($M = 4.87, SD = 0.90$). There was no significant interaction effect between type of sponsorship disclosure and product involvement, $F(2, 191) = 1.25, p = .290, \eta^2 = .013$.

Moreover, in a next step a regression analysis was performed to examine if higher persuasion knowledge leads to less purchase intention. Conceptual persuasion knowledge had a marginally significant effect on purchase intention, $b = -.189, t = -1.87, p = .063$. Conceptual persuasion explained a low, but significant proportion of variance in purchase intention, $R^2 = .018$. This indicated that the predictor explained 1.8% of the variance. Participant’s purchase intention was lower the higher their conceptual persuasion knowledge was. Moreover, attitudinal
persuasion knowledge was found as a significant predictor of purchase intention, \( b = .541, t(195) = 3.79, p < .001 \), and explained 6.9% its variance.

4.3.2. Brand Preference.

Since the variable Brand Preference is nominal scaled, a logistic regression analysis was conducted to investigate if brand preference can be predicted by product involvement and type of sponsorship disclosure. A test of the full model against a constant only model was statistically not significant, this indicates that the predictors did not differ between the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 and other backpack brands \( (\chi^2 = 4.884, p = .430 \text{ with } df = 5) \). The Wald criterion demonstrated that neither product involvement, \( Wald (1) = 1.48, p = .224 \), nor type of sponsorship disclosure, \( Wald (2) = 1.04, p = .595 \), and the interaction, \( Wald (2) = 1.92, p = .383 \), made a significant contribution to the prediction of brand preferences.

4.3.3. Brand Attitude.

To test if direct sponsorship disclosure leads to more negative brand responses than indirect sponsorship disclosure and no sponsorship disclosure, a factorial ANOVA was performed. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, because the Levene’s test was not significant \( (F(5, 191) = .11, p = .989) \). The ANOVA showed no significant main effect of type of sponsorship disclosure on brand attitude, \( F(2, 191) = 0.07, p = .936, \eta^2 = .001 \). There was no main effect of product involvement on brand attitude, \( F(1, 191) = 0.03, p = .863, \eta^2 < .001 \). Moreover, there was no significant interaction between the type of sponsorship disclosure and product involvement, \( F(2, 191) = .52, p = .598, \eta^2 = .005 \).

Moreover, in the next step it was evaluated if higher persuasion knowledge leads to less positive brand responses than lower persuasion knowledge by performing a linear regression
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with conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge as predictors for brand attitude. A marginally significant effect was found for conceptual persuasion knowledge, $b = -.223, t(195) = -1.85, p = .066$, with an $R^2$ of .017. This indicated that the predictor explained 1.7% of the variance. Participant’s brand attitude was lower the higher their persuasion knowledge was. Moreover, attitudinal persuasion knowledge explained a significant proportion of variance in brand attitude, $b = .902, t(195) = 5.28, p < .001$, with an $R^2$ of .125.

4.4. Source Credibility

To test the H4, RQ2 and RQ5 a factorial ANCOVA with product involvement and sponsorship disclosure as independent variables, source credibility as dependent variable and Control_Involvement as covariate was performed. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, because the Levene’s test was not significant ($F(5, 191) = 0.84, p = .523$). The ANOVA showed a significant main effect of type of sponsorship disclosure on source credibility, $F(2, 190) = 5.30, p = .006, \eta^2 = .053$. A post hoc Tukey test showed that the no sponsorship disclosure condition differed significantly from the indirect sponsorship disclosure condition ($p = .006$) and the direct sponsorship disclosure condition ($p = .043$); the indirect sponsorship disclosure condition was not significantly different from the direct sponsorship disclosure condition ($p = .818$). This indicates that participants in the direct ($M = 4.64, SD = 1.16$) and indirect sponsorship disclosure condition ($M = 4.53, SD = 1.03$) perceived source credibility less positive than in the no sponsorship disclosure condition ($M = 5.09, SD = 0.96$) and therefore, confirming hypothesis 4. There was no main effect of product involvement on source credibility, $F(1, 190) = .65, p = .420, \eta^2 = .003$ and no significant interaction effect between type of sponsorship disclosure and product involvement as well, $F(2, 190) = .91, p =$
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.403, $\eta^2 = .010$. Moreover, Control_Involvement had marginally significant main effect on source credibility $F(1, 190) = 3.39, p = .067, \eta^2 = .018$.

Moreover, linear regressions were calculated to examine if higher participant’s persuasion knowledge lowers participant’s source credibility (H5). Result revealed a significant effect of conceptual persuasion knowledge on source credibility, $b = -.659, t(195) = -7.64, p < .001$, explaining 23% of the variance of source credibility. Moreover, attitudinal persuasion knowledge significantly predicted source credibility, $b = .853, t(195) = 6.35, p < .001$, explaining 17.1% of the variance of source credibility.
5. Discussion

The general aim of this study was to examine the effects of different types of sponsorship disclosure in blogs. Therefore, effects of sponsorship disclosure on persuasion knowledge, brand responses and source credibility were assessed. Besides that, the study aimed to answer the research question if product involvement moderates the effects of sponsorship disclosure on the named variables.

The results of the ANOVA showed that type of sponsorship disclosure affected participants’ conceptual persuasion knowledge. Conceptual persuasion knowledge was higher in the direct and indirect sponsorship disclosure than in the no sponsorship disclosure. However, the direct and indirect sponsorship disclosure did not lead to significant different results. The results confirms the first hypothesis that participants have higher persuasion knowledge in the direct sponsorship disclosure condition than in the no sponsorship disclosure condition and answers RQ1. This would indicate that a sponsorship disclosure increases a person’s perception of a persuasive attempt, which is in line with recent literature (Boerman et al., 2012). Therefore, it can be concluded that consumers are more critical about a blog post when they see a sponsorship disclosure, because their awareness of the persuasion attempt increases. However, in the present study sponsorship disclosure did not affect attitudinal persuasion knowledge, which contradicts previous studies. For example, Boerman et al. (2012) found that disclosures affect conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge. It could be expected that the disclosures in the present study were not distinct enough in order to active attitudinal persuasion knowledge.

Furthermore, brand responses are not affected by sponsorship disclosure. Therefore, the disclosure of a sponsor, direct or indirect, does not necessarily harm the brand’s image and
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therefore reject H2. In contrast to Boerman et al. (2012), who found that sponsorship disclosure on television leads to less favourable brand perception, the present study cannot confirm these findings for sponsorship disclosure in blogs. Therefore, it can be assumed that disclosing a sponsor in a blog post would not certainly cause a lower reputation of the sponsored brand.

However, when considering the product involvement level of participants, brand responses are significantly affected. Product Involvement had an impact on participants’ purchase intention. Highly involved participants had more intention to buy the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 than participants with low involvement. Taking these results into account, sponsoring on topic specific blogs, such as travel blogs, can be profitable for brands. Since readers are searching for advice on blogs when making a purchase decision, a positive review most possibly leads to a purchase of the product when the reader is highly involved (Swartz, 2013). This is in contrast to Sherif’s social judgement theory (1965 as cited in Petty et al., 1983), which states that a person’s denial for a persuasion attempt grows with a person’s involvement. In case of purchase intention, high product involvement raised participants’ intention to purchase the Eagle Creek Deviate 60. However, the results were not similar for all three measures of brand responses. Brand preference and brand attitude were not affected by participants’ involvement level, which indicates that product involvement does not influence a person’s attitude towards a brand. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that high product involvement in general leads to higher brand responses.

Conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge had contradicting results on purchase intention. Higher conceptual persuasion knowledge led to less intention to purchase the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 and lower brand attitude, which confirms H3. However, the results as well show that the higher a person’s attitudinal persuasion knowledge, the higher was the participants’
brand attitude and the more intention to purchase the backpack were measured. These results differ from previous research, since Boerman et al. (2012) found that people have lower brand attitude the higher their attitudinal persuasion knowledge was and conceptual persuasion knowledge did not lower participants’ brand attitude. The results of the present study imply that participants’ attitudinal persuasion knowledge leads to a higher attitude towards the brand. Attitudinal persuasion knowledge relies on a person’s attitude and critical feelings (Boerman et al., 2012). Therefore, it could be concluded that even though a person is more aware of the persuasion attempt (high attitudinal persuasion knowledge), this does not indicate that it is enough to change the person’s attitude towards the brand.

Moreover, sponsorship disclosure affected participants’ source credibility. The analysis showed, that a sponsorship disclosure, either direct or indirect, lowered participants’ source credibility. The results confirm H4 and recent literature (Lu et al., 2014). Therefore, it can be acknowledged that the implementation of a sponsorship disclosure is not profitable for bloggers, since the disclosure leads to a more negative appreciation of the blogger.

Additionally, conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge had as well contradicting effects on source credibility. Participants’ had lower source credibility the higher their conceptual persuasion knowledge was. These results confirm H5. However, participants’ source credibility was higher the higher their attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Therefore, the results imply that even though a person is more aware of the persuasion attempt (high attitudinal persuasion knowledge), it does not necessarily change the person’s attitude towards the source.

Since there were no interactions effect between product involvement and sponsorship disclosure on persuasion knowledge, brand responses and source credibility, it cannot be
assumed that the product involvement level of a person moderates the effects of sponsorship on the named variables. Therefore, R4, R5 and R6 can be answered by denying a moderation effect of product involvement.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

By implementing an indirect sponsorship disclosure, the present study is one of the first studies to analyse this condition in blogs. Bloggers often use an indirect sponsorship disclosure to implicitly disclose a sponsor and therefore, because they expect it to lower the intensity of a sponsorship disclosure compared to a direct sponsorship disclosure. Nevertheless, the results reveal no significant difference between direct and indirect sponsorship. However, the present results are limited to students with high educational level. A follow-up study is recommended to ascertain that there is no difference between the two conditions. A larger and more diverse sample might lead to significant differences.

The present study evaluated moderator effects of product involvement, but found no significant effects. Maybe other moderators are more relevant for the relation of sponsorship disclosure, brand response and source credibility. Therefore, future studies should focus on other possible moderators that might influence a person’s perception of the blog. The present study emphasized persuasion knowledge and product involvement to be important predictors of a person’s source credibility and brand responses in blogs. However, the results of the present study do not precisely explain these predictions, since the results are predominantly contradicting previous literature. Therefore, further studies should focus on the effects of persuasion knowledge and product involvement in blogs.
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Although the study has some strength, for example the online design, some limitations have to be considered. Based on comments of participants after participating in the study, it can be expected that scores on brand responses were influenced by participants’ personal preferences. Brand attitude was measured by asking the participants to rate three different backpacks and brand preference was measured by asking the participants to choose between the three different backpacks. Especially when choosing between the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 and two unknown backpacks personal likings probably influenced their decision more than the content of the blog post. The colour and shape of the backpacks could have had an impact on participants’ decision, since some people prefer a black backpack to a coloured one. In order to exclude this factor, future research should use three backpacks of the same colour and similar shaping. Moreover, participants might have got confused when they had to rate two backpacks they did not see in the previous blog post. Since they did not know anything about these backpacks, it can be assumed that they purely rated the visual of the backpack on basis of their personal preference. Therefore, future research should include personal preference as control variable in order to figure out if it affects the results.

Furthermore, the generalizability of the present study is limited, because the use of snowball and convenience sampling restricts the sample to mostly German and Dutch participants. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize it for whole Europe. Moreover, since a travel blog was used, results of the present study are limited to this kind of topic. The generalization to other blog contents should be investigated in future studies.
5.2. Practical Implications

The results suggest that the implementation of sponsorship disclosures is not beneficial for bloggers, since sponsorship disclosures lowered source credibility. If bloggers disclose a sponsor in their blog post, their readers perceive them as less credible as without a disclosure. Moreover, the results ascertained that the higher a person’s persuasion knowledge, the more credible a person perceives the source. Therefore, bloggers should always try to be honest and credible, since these aspects control a person’s attitudinal persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2012).

When focusing on marketers, the results suggest no harm to the brand by implementing sponsorship disclosures. Sponsorship disclosure had no effect on participant’s brand responses. However, on the basis of the results, sponsoring of topic specific blogs, such as travel blogs, is recommended, because the higher a person is involved in the blog topic, the more is the person willing to purchase the featured product. Therefore, sponsored content in blogs is a beneficial marketing tool, even when the sponsor has to be disclosed.

5.3. Final Note

In conclusion, the present study contributes to current knowledge about sponsorship disclosures in blogs. The integration of an indirect sponsorship disclosure was not yet considered in the research of sponsorship disclosures in blogs. Since the indirect sponsorship disclosure does not specifically mention a sponsor, it was expected that it decrease the effects of a sponsorship disclosure. However, the indirect sponsorship disclosure did not lead to higher source credibility or higher conceptual persuasion knowledge than a direct sponsorship disclosure. Therefore, it can be concluded that the indirect sponsorship disclosure does not operate as a rewarding replacement of the direct sponsorship disclosure for the blogger.
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6. References


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Appendix A: Manipulation Product Involvement

Low Product Involvement Condition

„On the next page you will see a blog post that was recently posted on the travel blog ‘Ready, Set, Travel’. Please read this blog post and answer the accompanying questions.“

High Product Involvement Condition

“On the next page you will see a blog post that was recently posted on the travel blog ‘Ready, Set, Travel’. Please read this blog post and answer the accompanying questions. While reading this blog post, try to imagine that you are going on a backpack travel to Asia. You have already carefully planned your journey, but for a perfect start you are still missing a suitable backpack to take along. The recommendations about travel backpacks you got until now were not sufficient in order to make a decision. Therefore, you are searching for recommendations on travel blogs now.“
Appendix B: Manipulation Sponsorship Disclosure

Direct Sponsorship Disclosure Condition

Everything You Need to Know About the Perfect Backpack
12th November 16

This blog post is sponsored by Eagle Creek. A backpack can make or break a trip. Too large and heavy really slows you down and if you don’t have enough space you will have to sacrifice on things you need. I have tested way too many backpacks because I am obsessed with finding the best one. This is my favorite.

If I were planning an epic travel adventure, the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 would be the best backpack for me. Unlike many of the other backpacks, this one never felt clumsy while walking around because it has a narrow profile and doesn’t restrict movement. The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 is not only a convenient travel companion, it as well includes a 15-liter detachable daypack. Utilizing the daypack in your packing strategy will give you a total 60 liters of packable space.

My favorite thing about the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 is its ability to thrive in a range of activities. I loved using it for hiking, traveling, skiing, and rock climbing. The supportive, shaped frame sheet and padded hip belt make this pack quite comfortable.

The overall design of this backpack lends itself to backcountry versatility. Many other backpacks have a traditional opening at the top of the backpack. The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 has a floating (read removable) top lid that keeps your stuff handy when on the go. This top lid has a small pocket that is a fantastic place to keep snacks, a map, and some extra camera batteries. If you’re in travel mode, it’s a great spot for toiletries, a book, and other odds and ends.

The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 wins my personal top list because it is super versatile and excels for a variety of activities. I can’t wait to use it on my next adventure!
EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURE IN BLOG POSTS

Indirect Sponsorship Disclosure Condition

Everything You Need to Know About the Perfect Backpack
12th November 16

A backpack can make or break a trip. Too large and heavy really slows you down and if you don’t have enough space you will have to sacrifice on things you need. I have tested way too many backpacks because I am obsessed with finding the best one. Eagle Creek was so kind and send me an Eagle Creek Deviate 60 backpack for free. This is my favorite.

If I were planning an epic travel adventure, the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 would be the best backpack for me. Unlike many of the other backpacks, this one never felt clumsy while walking around because it has a narrow profile and doesn’t restrict movement. The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 is not only a convenient travel companion, it as well includes a 15-liter detachable daypack. Utilizing the daypack in your packing strategy will give you a total 60 liters of packable space.

My favorite thing about the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 is its ability to thrive in a range of activities. I loved using it for hiking, traveling, skiing, and rock climbing. The supportive, shaped frame sheet and padded hip belt make this pack quite comfortable.

The overall design of this backpack lends itself to backcountry versatility. Many other backpacks have a traditional opening at the top of the backpack. The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 has a floating (read removable) top lid that keeps your stuff handy when on the go. This top lid has a small pocket that is a fantastic place to keep snacks, a map, and some extra camera batteries. If you’re in travel mode, it’s a great spot for toiletries, a book, and other odds and ends.

The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 wins my personal top list because it is super versatile and excels for a variety of activities. I can’t wait to use it on my next adventure!
EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURE IN BLOG POSTS

No Disclosure Condition

Everything You Need to Know About the Perfect Backpack
12th November 16

A backpack can make or break a trip. Too large and heavy really slows you down and if you don't have enough space you will have to sacrifice on things you need. I have tested way too many backpacks because I am obsessed with finding the best one. This is my favorite.

If I were planning an epic travel adventure, the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 would be the best backpack for me. Unlike many of the other backpacks, this one never felt clumsy while walking around because it has a narrow profile and doesn't restrict movement. The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 is not only a convenient travel companion, it as well includes a 15-liter detachable daypack. Utilizing the daypack in your packing strategy will give you a total 60 liters of packable space.

My favorite thing about the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 is its ability to thrive in a range of activities. I loved using it for hiking, traveling, skiing, and rock climbing. The supportive, shaped frame sheet and padded hip belt make this pack quite comfortable.

The overall design of this backpack lends itself to backcountry versatility. Many other backpacks have a traditional opening at the top of the backpack. The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 has a floating (read removable) top lid that keeps your stuff handy when on the go. This top lid has a small pocket that is a fantastic place to keep snacks, a map, and some extra camera batteries. If you're in travel mode, it's a great spot for toiletries, a book, and other odds and ends.

The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 wins my personal top list because it is super versatile and excels for a variety of activities. I can't wait to use it on my next adventure!
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Appendix C: Questionnaire

*English Proficiency.* How would you rate your English language proficiency?

- Elementary (never actually had a course)
- Intermediate (some years in high school)
- Advanced (high school and experiences abroad)
- Professional (work or study in English)
- Native
- Other, namely […]

**Brand Responses**

How would you rate this backpack?

- Unfavourable
- Poor quality
- Bad
- Negative
- Dislike
- Favourable
- High quality
- Good
- Positive
- Like
EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURE IN BLOG POSTS

Brand Attitude. How would you rate this backpack?

Unfavourable  Favourable
Poor quality  High quality
Bad  Good
Negative  Positive
Dislike  Like

How would you rate this backpack?

Unfavourable  Favourable
Poor quality  High quality
Bad  Good
Negative  Positive
Dislike  Like
EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURE IN BLOG POSTS

*Brand Preference.* Which backpack would you prefer if you were asked to select one of these backpacks now?

![Backpack Options](image1)

*Purchase Intention.* Please indicate your agreement with the following statements.

The next time I need a new backpack, I may choose an Eagle Creek backpack.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In the next year, if I need a backpack I may select an Eagle Creek Deviate 60.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Source Credibility*

I think the person who wrote the blog post is..

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dishonest</th>
<th>Honest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insincere</td>
<td>Sincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untrustworthy</td>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not credible</td>
<td>Credible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not an expert</td>
<td>An expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inexperienced</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURE IN BLOG POSTS

Persuasion Knowledge

*Conceptual Persuasion Knowledge.* Indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.

The blog post contains advertising.

Mentioning the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 in the blog post is advertising.

The Eagle Creek Deviate 60 is discussed in the blog post...

...to inform the consumer.

...to stimulate sales of the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 backpack.

...to entertain the consumer.

...to increase consumers' liking of the Eagle Creek Deviate 60 backpack.
EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURE IN BLOG POSTS

...to influence the consumer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Attitudinal Persuasion Knowledge.* I think the blog post about the Eagle Creek backpack is...

...honest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

...trustworthy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

...convincing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

...biased

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

...credible

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<thead>
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</table>

*Control Questions*

Do you happen to have an actual backpack holiday planned?

Yes

No
**EFFECTS OF SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURE IN BLOG POSTS**

*Control Involvement.* Indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements. I perceive the topic of backpack travelling as...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means nothing to me</td>
<td>Means a lot to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valueless</td>
<td>Valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring</td>
<td>Interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexciting</td>
<td>Exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unappealing</td>
<td>Appealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repulsive</td>
<td>Fascinating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needless</td>
<td>Needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever been on a backpacking holiday?
- No, never
- Yes, once
- Yes, a couple of times, circa [number]

Do you own a travel backpack (min. 60l)?
- Yes
- No, but I used to have one
- No, but I would like to have one
- No and I don’t need one