

‘This Video is Sponsored By’: The Effect of Disclosure Timing and Modality on Persuasion  
Knowledge and Brand Attitude in Sponsored YouTube Videos

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# SPONSORSHIP DISCLOSURES IN YOUTUBE VIDEOS

## Abstract

Integrated marketing is blooming with embedded advertising dominating one of the world's biggest user generated platforms, YouTube. The increase in commercial content in YouTube vloggers' editorial videos led to public policy concerns and the necessity to regulate sponsorship disclosures. The current research investigates how the now mandatory sponsorship disclosures in YouTube videos affect viewers persuasion knowledge and brand attitude. Established on contradictory and limited literature, the present research employed a factorial 3 (disclosure timing: pre-content, concurrent content, post-content) x 3 (disclosure modality: audio, visual, audiovisual) between-subjects design. The outcome of the online experiment filled out by 320 participants is that attitudinal persuasion knowledge is negatively related to brand attitude. Furthermore, disclosures which appear concurrently with sponsored content are the most effective in activating conceptual persuasion knowledge. Whereas attitudinal persuasion knowledge and brand attitude are not affected by disclosure timing. Contrary to expectations, audio disclosures are more effective in utilizing conceptual persuasion knowledge, while audiovisual disclosures result in more critical thoughts (attitudinal persuasion knowledge) and more negative brand attitude. Despite speculations, disclosure modality does not moderate disclosure timing effects neither on persuasion knowledge nor on brand attitude. Overall, the study demonstrates that timing of a disclosure in YouTube videos do not diminish the effectiveness of sponsored content, and marketers do not have to look for unethical ways to cover their persuasive intent. However, they should take the presentation of the disclosure into account.

*Keywords:* sponsorship disclosures, persuasion knowledge, brand attitude, YouTube

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## 1. Introduction

Roman Atwood, YouTube's second top-paid content creator, banked approximately \$1.5 million in 2016, for commercial and brand deals (Berg, 2016). YouTube content creators ("YouTubers") who rose to fame with their ever-expanding follower base have become online superstars, who are the basis and core power of integrated marketing (Litsa, 2016; Wu, 2016). Integrated marketing, which is best described as the form of marketing that aims to maximize communications impact through the seamless integration of commercial content into editorial content, has shifted throughout the past years with brands realizing the power of the new generation of influencers (Litsa, 2016; Yeshin, 2012).

Integrated marketing on YouTube can be far more effective than traditional marketing, argues Wu (2016). Many users have become repulse and irritated by advertisements and are looking for ways to eliminate unwanted messages especially before and throughout YouTube videos. As a result, embedding content within videos has become crucial in reaching customers (Rago, 2016). The effectiveness of YouTube marketing can also be the result of a new breed of consumers, or simply viewers, whose majority are millennials. These millennials tend to trust the opinions of their peers over the brands', and the established trust and credibility YouTubers have in the sight of their viewers have significant influence on their followers' purchasing decisions (Rago, 2016).

Sometimes a paid advertisement may seem obvious, but YouTubers have gone to great lengths to maintain a genuine appearance in videos (Smith, 2014). Consequently, viewers may be unaware of the presence of an advertisement, and it might be ambiguous whether they have been presented with YouTubers' individual opinion, or whether they are looking at commercial content controlled by an endorsing company (Bond, 2016). Normally, when people see content

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which is obvious in its persuasive intent, their natural defense mechanism gets activated and their persuasion knowledge critically assesses the message. People's persuasion knowledge can be attributed to their learned experiences on assessing persuasive messages, however, without knowing that marketers try to influence them, consumers cannot protect themselves against covert persuasion (Friestad & Wright, 1994). For this reason, consumer protection agencies (e.g.: FTC) and governments worldwide have released updated guidelines for sponsorship disclosures especially aimed at YouTube content creators. The update suggests that all endorsements, sponsorships and other payments from online endorsers must be disclosed by YouTubers (Schwab, 2013; Wu, 2016). The aim of sponsorship disclosures is to inform consumers about commercial content integrated into editorial content, which helps eliminating situations where the audience is being persuaded without their awareness (Cain, 2011). Although guidelines regulate YouTubers to disclose sponsorships in their videos, the way in which they ought to do so is not specified.

In her recent study, Wu (2016) argues that disclosures used by content creators on YouTube are inconsistent. Ergo, there is an urgent need for transparency, and a uniform standard way of disclosing in-video marketing could be an answer to avoid misleading viewers. She argues that proper disclosure will foster viewers' trust and will not undermine the effectiveness of marketing (Wu, 2016). The disclosure inconsistencies which can be encountered in YouTube videos are mainly due to the variation in disclosure timing and disclosure modality (i.e.: the diverse use of textual and auditory cues). In their recent literature review, Boerman and Van Reijmersdal (2016) explore current scholarly articles related to sponsorship disclosure. So far, studies on disclosure timing has been very inconclusive. On the one hand, research suggests that disclosure prior to or concurrent with a sponsored content results in more negative brand attitude

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as opposed to disclosure after a sponsored content (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal and Neijens, 2014). On the other hand, this effect has been argued to be more prominent when disclosure was shown after the sponsorship (Campell, Mohr and Verlegh, 2013). Additionally, only two studies have dealt with the role of modality in sponsorship disclosures, and it is still unclear whether it plays an influential role in terms of persuasion knowledge and brand attitude (Boerman & Van Reijmersdal, 2016).

Considering the aforementioned, the present research will focus on the effects of disclosure timing and modality on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude in sponsored YouTube content. By exploring these effects on a digital platform that has only become a marketing tool recently, the study aims to give new perspective on sponsorship disclosure effects and improve current literature with new insightful discoveries, relevant both to researchers and marketers.

### **2. Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.1. YouTube marketing and vloggers**

Industry changes led to escalating embedded advertising with the use of sponsored content integrated in television shows (Cain, 2011). In recent years, shifting from TV to online platforms, marketers have discovered the potential of user-generated content (UGC) and have been looking for ways to integrate it into their campaigns (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013). UGC is not only cheaper but also considered as more credible by consumers as opposed to regular commercial advertising (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). The reason for this, is that UGC advertising seems to be more involving as people can easily identify with the source (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013). In recent years, businesses began to see opportunities in the world's biggest user-generated video sharing platform, YouTube (Wu, 2016). YouTube gives place to millions

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of content creators to share videos with the public. The site is used by many corporations and brands, however, the most popularity has been reached by so-called YouTubers/vloggers (video bloggers) who, by creating entertaining content on the site, have established an expanding follower base with millions of people watching their every move. They are the new generation of online influencers who have become the perfect tool for marketers (Litsa, 2016; Wu, 2016). Marketers interest in vloggers created a win-win situation for both parties. From a brand's perspective, endorsing a vlogger can be more cost-effective as opposed to collaborating with pricey celebrities, and it can reach millions of people with the added bonus of more credibility (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013). From YouTubers' perspective, they can monetize their success on the website by integrating sponsored content in their videos (Wu, 2016).

Embedding commercial content in YouTube videos has been proved to be far more effective than traditional marketing (Wu, 2016). Similarly to disliking regular advertisements on television, studies have shown that online advertisements, especially ones before and throughout YouTube videos, evoke increased resistance among viewers and negatively affect advertising value (Cain, 2011; Dehghani, Nicki, Tramezzini & Sala, 2016). For this reason, marketers seek to reach the mass public through content embedded in YouTube videos where the advertisement is masked as a non-commercial editorial message created by an online influencer.

### **2.2. Sponsored content**

In general, sponsored content entails integrating a branded message about a product or service into traditional non-commercial editorial content (Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2007). When sponsored content is presented in a non-commercial environment such as a television show, consumers are unconsciously more focused on the entertainment and their

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subconscious defense against persuasive intent is down (Cain, 2011). As consumers are more accepting of messages which come from non-commercial sources, covert marketing benefits marketers by playing on consumers inability to resist (Darke & Ritchie, 2007).

The same effect can be attributed to sponsored content in YouTube videos. The concept of sponsored content in YouTube videos can be distinguished in three different ways: (1) free product sampling, where, with the hopes of a product review or general exposure on someone's channel, companies send free products to YouTubers without any real agreement between the company and the YouTuber, (2) affiliated links, where purchases made through a link or coupon code provided by the YouTuber help him or her earn a commission on the sale, and (3) explicit sponsorship where the sponsoring company pays the YouTuber a flat fee, or a specified amount per number of views on a video specifically created to market a brand or product (Wu, 2016). Especially in the latter scenario, the source of the sponsored content is obscured. By hiding persuasive intent, marketers benefit from viewers inability to process branded messages as commercial content (Darke & Ritchie, 2007).

### **2.3. Sponsorship disclosure**

The increase in covert marketing content has not only raised public policy concerns in terms of television shows, but also in terms of sponsored YouTube videos (Campbell et al., 2013; Wu, 2016). For this reason, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), has released an updated guideline for disclosure in advertising especially aimed at American YouTube content creators. The update suggests that endorsements, sponsorships, and other payments from online endorsers must be disclosed by YouTubers (Schwab, 2013). While the FTC regulates content creators in the United

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States, European governments have followed suit and now all online influencers are obliged to disclose sponsorships (Wu, 2016).

Although these guidelines regulate YouTubers to disclose sponsorships in their videos, the way in which they ought to do so is not specific. Apart from stating that a disclosure should be “clear and obvious”, no governmental agency, including the FTC, has regulated the manner in which YouTubers ought to disclose sponsorships (Lee, 2016; Wu, 2016). Consequently, sponsorship disclosures can be seen in many forms on the platform. After observing multiple sponsored videos on YouTube, the following types of disclosures have been distinguished: (1) written disclosure in the title (e.g.: #AD), (2) written disclosure text in the description box, (3) written disclosure in the video with a small text or the usage of the word “ad”, and (4) spoken disclosure at one point in the video. Mostly, but not solely, not only one of these features is used, but rather a combination of a few with embedding visual and auditory cues at the beginning, middle or at the end of a video. The number of disclosure combinations YouTubers can create with these four types is close to infinite, even so when considering that disclosures within the video can appear at any moment. YouTubers various methods to disclose sponsorships have led to inconsistency.

This inconsistency has also been stressed by other scholars, pressing the urgency for transparency and consistency in sponsorship disclosures in YouTube videos (Wu, 2016). In a recent study, Wu (2016) suggests that all sponsored videos should include audio disclosure integrated into the video itself with an additional written disclaimer. Furthermore, the paper also emphasized that YouTube itself should adopt a uniform disclosure notation, providing a consistent format of sponsorship disclosure in the description box or in the video itself (Wu, 2016). Since then, YouTube has introduced a new written disclosure feature that enables creators

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to opt-in to a visible disclosure for viewers. YouTube's built in disclosure format appears as a text overlay for the first few seconds when a viewer watches a video (Paid product placements and endorsements, 2016). This raises the question of what type of disclosure will be more effective in informing users about commercial content in YouTube videos.

To be able to investigate how sponsorship disclosures affect viewers while watching YouTube videos, it is important to first understand what is influenced by sponsorship disclosures.

### **2.4. The effect of sponsorship disclosure on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude**

Boerman and van Reijmersdal (2016) recently published a literature review in which they analyzed and assembled a collection of all relevant publications studying the effects of sponsorship disclosures. The overview includes studies investigating sponsored content in print, on television, in movies, on the radio, and online (Boerman & Van Reijmersdal, 2016). As the aim of sponsorship disclosures is to inform consumers about commercial content integrated into editorial content, when a disclosure is effectively communicated it should activate receivers' persuasion knowledge (Boerman & Van Reijmersdal, 2016; Cain, 2011).

**2.4.1. Persuasion knowledge.** Persuasion knowledge was first conceptualized by Friedman and Wright (1994) who specified it as people's ability to activate their learned experiences with regards to persuasive intent and be able to analyze, interpret and manage their responses towards persuasive attempts. They argue that people continuously learn how to protect themselves against persuasion, and when this knowledge is utilized by the occurrence of any persuasive intent, people's attitude and behavior towards the other party, whose goal is to persuade, can change (Friedman & Wright, 1994). Friedman and Wright's (1994) persuasion

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knowledge model suggests that only when people are aware of the persuasive intent can their persuasion knowledge be utilized. Without being aware of persuasive intent, people cannot protect themselves against persuasive content. Sponsorship disclosure can bring consumers to utilize their persuasion knowledge which ultimately leads to critical processing of the sponsored content (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2014; Campbell et al., 2013).

Further investigation of persuasion knowledge by Rozendaal, Lapierre, Van Reijmersdal & Buijzen (2011) distinguished two different types of persuasion knowledge: conceptual and attitudinal. Their distinction suggests that while conceptual persuasion knowledge is simply people's comprehension about persuasion, attitudinal persuasion knowledge is people's critical attitude toward persuasion. As sponsorship disclosures can activate people's persuasion knowledge, their conceptual persuasion knowledge may affect their attitudinal persuasion knowledge. After they realize that within a non-commercial setting, the presence of a brand is advertising, they may start to think more critically about the specific brand (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2012). Previous studies have suggested that sponsorship disclosure in a television show setting activates persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2012; 2014) and that the activation of conceptual persuasion knowledge results in more critical view (attitudinal persuasion knowledge) about a brand placement (Boerman et al., 2012).

The majority of the studies investigated by Boerman and van Reijmersdal (2016) have provided evidence that disclosures help activate consumers' persuasion knowledge. In a televised context, many studies demonstrated how disclosures enhance the utilization of persuasion knowledge (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal, & Neijens, 2013; Tessitore and Geuens, 2013). This has also been confirmed with advergames, blogs, and radio shows (Campbell et al., 2013; Carr & Hayes, 2014, Van Reijmersdal, Lammers, & Buijzen, 2015; Wei, Fischer & Main, 2008).

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**2.4.2. Brand attitude.** In several studies, Boerman et al. (2012; 2013; 2014) found that sponsorship disclosures in television content increased negative brand related thoughts, more critical processing of sponsored content and resulted in more critical feelings (higher scores of attitudinal persuasions knowledge). However, other studies did not find evidence to further support these claims (Van Reijmersdal, Tutaj, & Boerman, 2013). Boerman and Van Reijmersdal (2016) claim, that not all types of sponsored content are criticized by viewers even though they have been recognized as persuasive content. Viewers may evaluate sponsored content integrated in different media (i.e.: television, movies, games, etc.) differently. With regards to brand attitude, the review found contradictory findings. Certain articles suggest no significant effect of disclosures on brand attitude (Dekker & Van Reijmersdal, 2013; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2015; Wood, Nelson, Atkinson & Lane, 2008). However, a large body of literature did find negative effects of sponsorship disclosures on brand attitude either directly, or indirectly via the activation of persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2012; 2013; 2014; Campbell et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2008).

Nowadays it is not only mandatory to disclose sponsorships in television, but also on most social media platforms such as YouTube. Hence, more studies are urged to investigate how sponsorship disclosures can affect viewers persuasion knowledge (conceptual and attitudinal) when the persuasive message is integrated within content created by an online influencer. If the activation of attitudinal persuasion knowledge results in more critical thinking of the brand, then the utilization of conceptual persuasion knowledge is the core element that initiates a domino effect. By activating attitudinal persuasion knowledge, critical processing could lead to more skeptical thoughts, which can affect brand attitude. As such, the present research hypothesizes that:

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*H1: Persuasion knowledge is negatively related to brand attitude that is, increased persuasion knowledge induces negative brand attitude.*

### **2.5. Effects of disclosure timing on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude**

One influential factor that has been shown to be affecting how sponsorship disclosure impacts viewers' persuasion knowledge and brand attitude is disclosure timing (Boerman et al., 2014; 2015; Campbell et al., 2013). Interestingly, Boerman and Van Reijmersdal (2016) found contradictory studies regarding the effects of disclosure timing.

Boerman et al. (2014) investigated sponsorship disclosures prior to, concurrent with and after a sponsored content appeared in a television show. They found, that disclosure prior to or concurrent with branded content results in people processing the content more critically, as opposed to disclosure after the sponsored content, because they provide sufficient time for viewers to guard themselves against persuasive intent. When disclosure shown after the sponsorship, viewers do not recognize it as advertising, and therefore do not change the way in which they process the sponsorship. As persuasion knowledge is least activated when it is shown after the sponsored content, disclosure prior to or concurrent with the sponsored content leads to less favorable brand attitudes. Conversely, when disclosure is shown after the sponsored content, viewers' evaluation of the brand does not change when compared to no disclosure (Boerman et al., 2014). Additionally, compared to disclosure concurrent or after sponsored content, only disclosure prior to sponsored content is more effective in utilizing persuasion knowledge and affecting brand attitude (Boerman et al., 2014).

Contrastingly, another study by Campbell et al. (2013) shares contradictory findings. Their research suggests that opposed to disclosure prior to a sponsored content, disclosure after a

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persuasion attempt motivates consumers more to correct all their brand judgments. This demonstrated that disclosure after sponsored content activated persuasion knowledge to a greater extent than pre-disclosure. Their research uses television shows as well as an online blog platform to test the effect of disclosure timing on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude and using both mediums, brand attitude becomes more negative when a disclosure is shown after a product placement. They justify this by concluding, that disclosure after the persuasive intent could make viewers feel as if they have been “fooled” by hidden brand messages (Campbell et al., 2013). As opposed, when a disclosure is shown prior to a sponsored content, viewers may be distracted by the program and forget to resist persuasion by the time they see the sponsored content (Campbell et al., 2013).

Considering, that current literature shows contradictory findings, and given the lack of research on sponsorship disclosures in YouTube video content, the present research tests the following conflicting hypotheses:

*H2a: Sponsorship disclosure presented prior to or concurrent with sponsored content in a YouTube video increases persuasion knowledge compared to disclosure after the sponsored content.*

*H2b: Sponsorship disclosure presented prior to or concurrent with sponsored content in a YouTube video leads to less positive brand attitude compared to disclosure after the sponsored content.*

*H3a: Sponsorship disclosure presented after the sponsored content in a YouTube video increases persuasion knowledge compared to disclosure prior to or concurrent with sponsored content.*

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*H3b: Sponsorship disclosure presented after the sponsored content in a YouTube video leads to less positive brand attitude compared to disclosure prior to or concurrent with sponsored content.*

### **2.6. Effects of disclosure modality on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude**

In their literature review, Boerman and Van Reijmersdal (2016) indicated that previous studies could not find significant differences in how disclosure modality would affect viewers. Two studies which have investigated disclosure modality explored the effect of modality in advergames and video news releases. In terms of advergames, results show, that the effect of audiovisual disclosure on utilizing persuasion knowledge was equal to visual disclosures, which were more effective than no disclosure (Evans & Hoy, 2016). However, they did not test whether there is any difference between visual and audiovisual disclosures and whether audio disclosures would have any effect. The other study on video news releases tested modality of a disclosure only for perceived credibility, here no difference was found between visual, audio and audiovisual disclosures (Tuggle, 1998). Even though, these two studies could not prove that modality is an influential factor, they do not cover all grounds of sponsorship disclosures (e.g.: modality effects on several online media such as YouTube or single audio disclosures compared to visual or audiovisual disclosures). Despite of these studies, Boerman and Van Reijmersdal (2016) urge researchers to further scrutinize whether disclosure modality plays a role when combined with other disclosure characteristics, such as timing or content. While investigating various aspects of YouTube's persuasive powers, Verhellen, Dens and De Pelsmacker (2013) suggested, that brand placement in user generated content (e.g.: YouTube vlog) has a different effect on consumers as opposed to traditional media. This effect overrules previous knowledge

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on persuasion knowledge, and it should be interpreted differently, and when applied to digital media its mechanics should be reconsidered in function of the medium at hand (Verhellen et al., 2013). In a YouTube vlog, the vlogger speaks directly to the camera creating a one-way asymmetrical conversation, this involves viewers more with the content as opposed to regular television shows. As such, there is reason to believe that the modality of a disclosure would be influential when applied to YouTube videos.

Studies applying dual coding theory to brand awareness suggested, that when both nonverbal and verbal subsystems are activated, the information is stored in the memory more stable (Jensen, Walsh, Cobbs & Turner, 2015). When audiovisual information is presented, knowledge acquisition is higher as opposed to only visual or pictorial information. Audiovisual presentations significantly reduce people's cognitive load and improves their ability to process information as opposed to visual-only presentation (Brunken, Steinbacher, Plass, and Leutner, 2002). This suggests, that as audiovisual presentations can help people in processing information, the same way audiovisual disclosures could induce people's ability to utilize persuasion knowledge easier as opposed to only visual disclosure. Therefore, the current research hypothesizes that:

*H4: Audiovisual disclosure in a YouTube video leads to increased persuasion knowledge and brand attitude as opposed to visual-only or audio-only disclosures.*

Although, Boerman and van Reijmersdal (2016) urged scholars to study disclosure modality in combination with another factor such as timing, to the researcher's best knowledge, no study has ever investigated the relationship between these two factors. For this reason, the study posits the following research question:

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*RQ1: Does disclosure modality moderate the effect of disclosure timing on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude, and if so, how?*

### 2.7. Implications and conceptual model

Considering, that current literature shows contradictory findings and given the lack of research on sponsorship disclosures in YouTube video content, the previously mentioned hypotheses and research question will lead the present study. This investigation contributes to already existing literature by broadening the scope of sponsorship disclosure effects on an undiscovered user generated media platform, YouTube. Moreover, the present study could lead to significant insights in persuasion knowledge and brand attitude research. Additionally, it can serve as a guide to marketers on how to work together with YouTubers and maximize corporate gains without manipulating viewers. The conceptual model of the study can be seen in Figure 1.

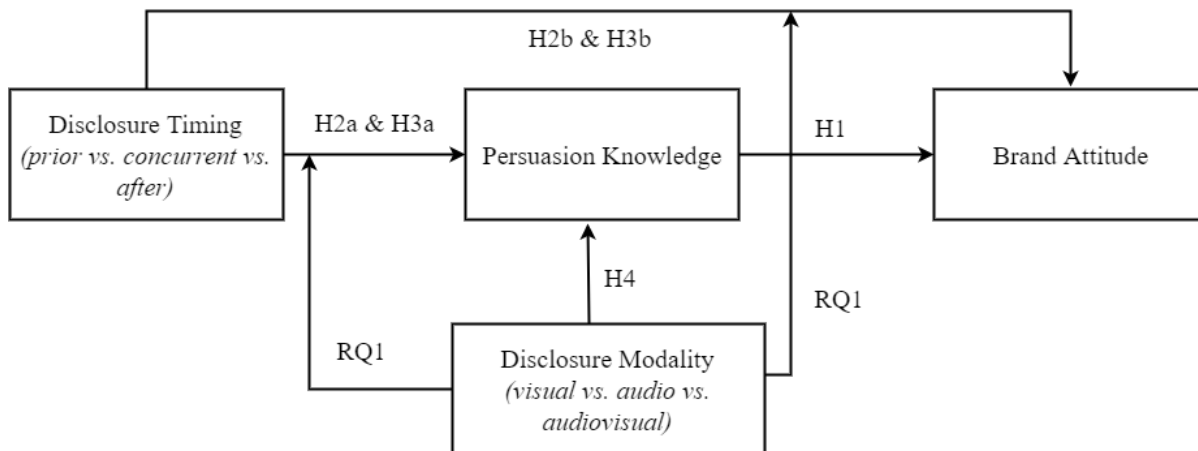


Figure 1. Conceptual model

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Participants

A total of 342 participants were recruited partially using social media platforms ( $N = 198$ ) where people could have the chance to participate in a poll to win a €15 gift voucher, and by paying for participants on Mechanical Turk ( $N = 144$ ), an online crowdsourcing marketplace. Participants sampled from social media were on average 26.87 years old ( $SD = 12.53$ ) and the others from Mechanical Turk were on average 34.25 years old ( $SD = 11.03$ ). In both groups, female participants were in majority with people from social media dividing into 67% female and 33% male, and the paid for participants splitting to 54% female and 46% male.

To only work with data collected from viewers who paid attention to the presented stimulus, three control questions tested their recall. Participants ( $N = 19$ ) who were unable to answer two out of the three questions correctly were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, an extra control question measured participants' recall of a sponsorship disclosure. Participants who did not recognize the sponsorship even though it was present in the video were not excluded from further analysis, because memory of the warning condition is not a precondition for its efficiency, as warning messages may occur on an implicit level (Stewart and Martin, 1994). Three participants in the disclosure absent control condition did report seeing a disclosure, these participants were excluded from further analysis, this yielded a total usable sample of 320 respondents whose division in the experimental conditions can be seen in table 1. Additionally, a detailed table showing participants recall in every condition can be found in Appendix I.

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Table 1

*Participants division into conditions*

	<b>Number of participants within condition</b>
Control (no disclosure)	28
Pre- audio disclosure	33
Pre- visual disclosure	35
Pre -audiovisual disclosure	32
Concurrent audio disclosure	32
Concurrent visual disclosure	27
Concurrent audiovisual disclosure	33
Post- audio disclosure	33
Post- visual disclosure	35
Post- audiovisual disclosure	32

### **3.2. Design**

To investigate how sponsorship disclosures in YouTube videos affect persuasion knowledge and brand attitude, an experiment was conducted. The experiment employed a factorial 3 (timing: pre-disclosure vs. concurrent disclosure vs. post-disclosure) x 3 (modality: audio vs. visual vs. audiovisual) between-subjects design with a no disclosure control condition. Participants were asked to fill out an online questionnaire where they were instructed to watch a four minute YouTube video and answer some questions about its content.

### **3.3. Material**

One four minute YouTube video was shot (control) and manipulated with respect to the two independent variables (disclosure timing and modality). To choose a product or service which would both appeal to men and women, a sponsored cooking video was shot, in which an

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unprofessional YouTuber recruited by the researcher shows step by step instructions to create a Caribbean vegetable soup. The fictional sponsor of the video was Fair Trade Original, who is the producer of a top-quality coconut milk that was essential for the recipe. Throughout the video, all other ingredients apart from the coconut milk were stripped from their original packaging. Hence, only the coconut milk had the appearance of a branded product. All videos were identical in script, they only differed in the presentation of the disclosure. The variation in manipulations also produced a 10-15 second variation in duration. The control condition, which served as the basis for all other conditions, contained no disclosure. Links to the YouTube videos can be found in Appendix II.

**3.3.1. Manipulation of disclosure timing.** Disclosure timing was manipulated by inserting disclosures into three different segments of the video. In the first manipulation, the disclosure was shown at the beginning of the video after the introduction of the YouTuber, here the disclosure appeared prior to the sponsored content. In the next manipulation, the disclosure was shown concurrently with the sponsored content. The third and last manipulation showed the disclosure at the end of the video, that is after the sponsored content, but prior to the YouTubers closing statement towards the views.

**3.3.2. Manipulation of disclosure modality.** Both audio and visual disclosures used the following text to disclose the sponsorship: *'The video is sponsored by and made in collaboration with Fair Trade Original'*. First, an extra clip for the audio disclosure was shot, where the YouTuber herself presented the disclosure. After, the amount of time needed to disclose the sponsorship auditorily was measured and the same length was used for the textual disclosure. This resulted in a six second disclosure in all conditions, which according to Boerman et al. (2012) is long enough to activate persuasion knowledge. The visual disclosure was designed in

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such a way that it would resemble YouTube's built in disclosure feature (Paid product placements and endorsements, 2016). In the audiovisual conditions, the combination of the shot disclosure clip and the text overlay was used.

Since, in the visual only conditions the YouTuber's disclosure clip is missing, the disclosing text had to be placed to a different clip. In the pre-disclosure condition the text appeared two seconds after the video had started, in the concurrent condition it had appeared at the same time as the sponsored product in the cooking video, and at the post-disclosure condition it had appeared two seconds after the vlogger has started her closing statement. Example of a visual disclosure can be found in Appendix III.

### 3.4. Measures

**3.4.1. Persuasion knowledge.** As two categories of persuasion knowledge have been identified by Rozendaal et al. (2011), namely conceptual persuasion knowledge and attitudinal persuasion knowledge, two different scales were used from the study of Han, Nelson & Das (2015).

Conceptual persuasion knowledge was measured with an eight-item 6-point Likert type scale, from which two items were fillers and were not used in the analysis. Participants had to indicate the level agreement to questions such as '*The vlog contained advertising*', '*The brand Fair Trade Original is shown in the vlog to sell the brand*', '*The brand Fair Trade Original is shown in the vlog to influence consumers*', and more (see Appendix II for complete list). The reliability of the scale was good ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Apart from the two filler items, all the items were combined to one mean conceptual persuasion knowledge score for all participants.

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Attitudinal persuasion knowledge was measured with a nine-item 7-point Likert type scale. Participants were asked to indicate how they feel about Fair Trade Original as the sponsoring brand appearing in the video upon seeing the following labels: *enjoyable, convincing, annoying, fun, dishonest, acceptable, manipulative, deceitful* and *distracting*. All positive labels were reverse coded and the reliability of this scale was also good ( $\alpha = .80$ ). These items were combined through estimating the means score. A higher mean score of attitudinal persuasion knowledge represents more criticism and negativity towards the brand.

**3.4.2. Brand attitude.** To measure the persuasive effect of the sponsored content, participants' attitude toward the sponsoring brand was measured. Similarly to Boerman et al. (2014), attitude was measured using a six<sup>1</sup> item 7-point differential scale developed by Bruner (2009). The scale included the following items: *bad – good, unpleasant – pleasant, unfavorable – favorable, negative – positive, dislike – like, and poor quality – high quality*. The reliability of the scale was exceptional ( $\alpha = .96$ ). The scores were summed up to represent a mean score of brand attitude for each participant.

**3.4.3. Control questions.** To eliminate any possible differences between participants that could have an influence on either persuasion knowledge or brand attitude, a number of control variables were measured. With respects to the video, participants' familiarity with the YouTuber in the video was assessed (0 = no, 1= yes, 2 = I am not sure). With regards to the brand, participants were asked, whether they are familiar with the brand (0 = no, 1= yes, 2 = I am not sure), whether they have previously purchased something from the brand (0 = no, 1= yes, 2 = I am not sure), and whether they have used the specific product presented in the video before (0 =

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<sup>1</sup> The scale also included an additional item measuring purchase intention, however, this was excluded from all analyses and was not used in the combined mean score for brand attitude.

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no, 1= yes, 2 = I am not sure). The extent to which participants are interested in the topic of the video, the following statements were asked ‘I am interested in cooking’ and ‘I am interested in cooking videos’ ( $1 = \text{strongly disagree}$ ,  $7 = \text{strongly agree}$ ).

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Control variables

To control for possible bias, the impact of various control variables on the three main dependent variables, conceptual persuasion knowledge, attitudinal persuasion knowledge and brand attitude were measured. Gender and education did not affect neither of the dependent variables.

One-way ANOVA analysis showed, that nationality is not in relation with conceptual persuasion knowledge  $F(42, 319) = 1.07$ ,  $p = .358$ , however, it does significantly relate to attitudinal persuasion knowledge  $F(42,319) = 1.59$ ,  $p = .016$ , and brand attitude  $F(42,319) = 1.55$ ,  $p = .022$ . This suggests, that certain nations might be more sensitive and critical in assessing sponsored content. Correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationship of the three main dependent variables with age, and the control variables ‘interest in cooking’ and ‘interest in cooking videos’. Table 2 displays the correlation coefficients of this analysis.

The negative direction for both conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge in terms of age suggests, that increase in age results decrease in viewers persuasion knowledge. Older people might not be as critical towards the message as younger generations. Next to this, negative relationship between both interest variables and attitudinal persuasion knowledge indicate that lower interest in cooking or cooking videos results in more critical processing. Positive correlation in terms of brand attitude shows, that as interest increases so does participants evaluation of the brand.

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Table 2

*Correlation coefficients*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Conceptual persuasion knowledge</b>	<b>Attitudinal persuasion knowledge</b>	<b>Brand attitude</b>
Age	<b>-.174**</b> [-.297, .052]	<b>-.163**</b>	.054 [-.089, .186]
Interest in cooking	-.006 [-.126, .120]	<b>-.118*</b>	<b>.190**</b> [.073, .306]
Interest in cooking videos	-.044 [-.156, .080]	<b>-.189**</b>	<b>.219**</b> [.101, .341]

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Since, some significant relationships were found between the dependent variables and the control variables, in further analyses these influential variables were used as covariates. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In addition, four other control variables' possible influential effect on the main dependent variables was also tested. Namely, familiarity with the YouTuber, familiarity with the brand, previous purchase of the brand and previous purchase of the coconut milk were investigated. Multiple two-way ANOVA analyses were run using persuasion knowledge (conceptual and attitudinal) and brand attitude as dependent variables, the above mentioned four and disclosure timing and disclosure modality as independent variables.

In terms of disclosure timing, some significant main effects were found on conceptual persuasion knowledge and brand familiarity ( $F(1,292) = 4.46, p = .036$ ) and previous purchase of the specific product used in the video ( $F(1,292) = 5.24, p = .023$ ). Further significant main effect was found on attitudinal persuasion knowledge and brand familiarity ( $F(1,292) = 5.38, p = .021$ ) and previous purchase of the brand ( $F(1,292) = 6.78, p = .010$ ). Despite, no significant interaction has been found in neither of the combinations. Therefore, no additional corrections have been made to the main analyses.

In terms of disclosure modality, significant main effect was found on conceptual persuasion knowledge and brand familiarity ( $F(1,292) = 5.88, p = .019$ ), previous purchase of the brand ( $F(1,292) = 5.51, p = .020$ ) and previous purchase of the coconut milk ( $F(1,292) = 6.21, p = .013$ ). Next to this, significant main effect was found on attitudinal persuasion knowledge and previous purchase of the brand ( $F(1,292) = 6.55, p = .011$ ). Significant interaction has been found between both disclosure modality, brand familiarity and attitudinal persuasion knowledge ( $F(2,292) = 3.21, p = .042$ ) and brand attitude ( $F(2,292) = 4.39, p = .013$ ).

### **4.2. The relationship between persuasion knowledge and brand attitude**

To assess the relationship between persuasion knowledge and brand attitude, a regression analysis was conducted using conceptual persuasion knowledge and attitudinal persuasion knowledge as predictors and brand attitude as the outcome variable.

Using the enter method it was found that conceptual and attitudinal persuasion knowledge explain a significant amount of variance in people's reported brand attitude ( $F(2, 317) = 48.73, p < .001, R^2 = .24$ ). The analysis showed that both conceptual persuasion knowledge ( $b = .17 [.067, .278], \beta = .16, t(318) = 3.23, p = .001$ ) and attitudinal persuasion knowledge  $b = -.64 [-.769, -.510], \beta = -.49, t(318) = -9.74, p < .001$ ) significantly predict brand attitude. These relationships suggest, that (1) increase in conceptual persuasion knowledge results in increased brand attitude, and (2) the more attitudinal persuasion knowledge a person acquires, the lower their evaluation of the brand will be. This partly supports Hypothesis 1, supporting, that increased attitudinal persuasion knowledge induces negative brand attitude.

The research has met the following assumptions. The largest Cook's distance was 0.13 and there was no case with a leverage that was larger than three times the average leverage. Additionally, none of the Mahalobis distance scores exceeded 15. only 2.8% of the standardized residuals fell outside of the range of -2 and 2, and only 0.6% fell outside of -3 and 3.

### **4.3. The effect of disclosure timing on persuasion knowledge**

One-way ANCOVA analyses were performed to assess the effect of disclosure timing on conceptual persuasion knowledge and attitudinal persuasion knowledge. As contradictory findings arose from the literature review, one analysis tested whether disclosure prior to or concurrent with the video results in increased persuasion knowledge as opposed to post-

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disclosure, or directly the opposite: The paradoxical hypothesis suggests, that persuasion knowledge will be stronger at the end of the video, after the sponsored content as opposed to at the pre- and concurrent disclosures.

**4.3.1. Disclosure timing and conceptual persuasion knowledge.** In advance to the actual analysis, the normality of the conceptual persuasion knowledge variable was measured. A significant skewness score ( $Z_{\text{skewness}} = -4.29$ ,  $Z_{\text{kurtosis}} = -1.38$ ) has violated the assumption of normality, therefore, bootstrapping was used while running the analysis.

In the present one-way ANCOVA analysis, disclosure timing (pre-, concurrent, post-disclosure and control) was used as the independent variable, conceptual persuasion knowledge as the dependent variable and age as a covariate. Levene's test was not significant  $F(3, 316) =$

1.81,  $p = 0.146$ , indicating

the homogeneity of the

sample. The covariate, age,

was significantly related to

conceptual persuasion

knowledge  $F(1,320) = 10.83$ ,

$p = .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ,

indicating a decrease in

scores for older participants.

Further, a significant effect of

disclosure timing was found on conceptual persuasion knowledge after controlling for age,

$F(3,320) = 5.28$ ,  $p = .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ . See Figure 2.

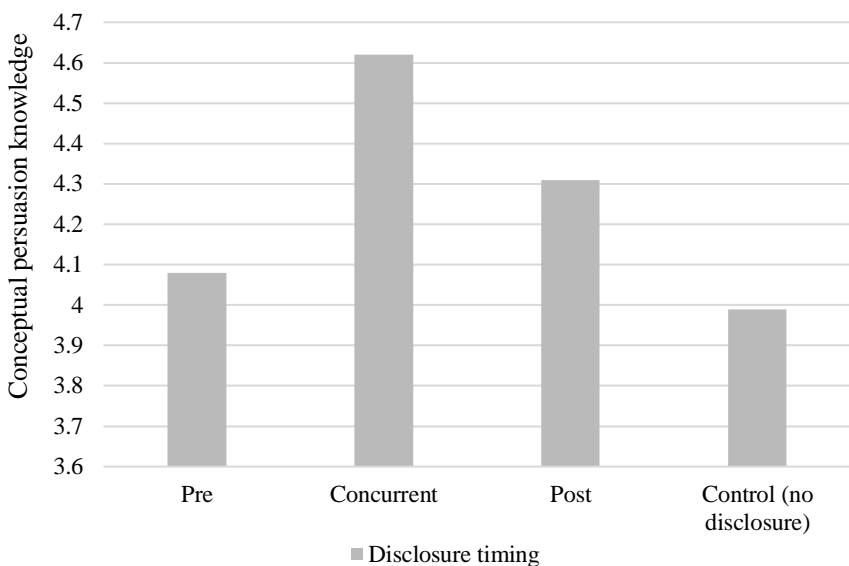


Figure 2. The effect of disclosure timing on conceptual persuasion knowledge measured on a 6-point Likert type scale

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Simple contrast showed that when compared to no disclosure ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ), disclosure concurrent with the sponsored content ( $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) resulted in significantly higher reported conceptual persuasion knowledge ( $M_{diff} = .62$ ,  $p = .033$ , 95% CI [.032, 1.21]). Furthermore, concurrent disclosure compared to disclosure prior to the content ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) also resulted in significantly higher conceptual persuasion knowledge ( $M_{diff} = .535$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [.140, .929]). Disclosure after the sponsored content ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) had no such effect. This suggest that when confronted with a sponsorship disclosure which appears concurrently with the sponsored content, people recognize persuasive attempts easier. This is in line with the findings of Boerman et al. (2014), that concurrent disclosure increases conceptual persuasion knowledge. Correspondingly, from the two contradictory hypotheses, Hypothesis 2a can be partly supported (pre-disclosure could not be supported) and Hypothesis 3a is denied.

**4.3.2. Disclosure timing and attitudinal persuasion knowledge.** In the second one-way ANCOVA analysis, attitudinal persuasion knowledge was used as the dependent variable, disclosure timing including a no disclosure control condition as the independent variable and nationality, age, interest in cooking and interest in cooking videos as covariates. Neither the assumption of normality ( $Z_{skewness} = -0.43$ ,  $Z_{kurtosis} = -0.09$ ), nor the assumption of homogeneity (Levene's  $F(3, 316) = .76$ ,  $p = .517$ ) was violated.

Covariates age ( $F(1,320) = 7.17$ ,  $p = .008$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .022$ ) and cooking video interest ( $F(1,320) = 7.49$ ,  $p = .007$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) both showed significant relationship to attitudinal persuasion knowledge (no relationship found for nationality ( $p = .296$ ) and cooking interest ( $p = .999$ )). After controlling for these, no significant effect of disclosure timing on attitudinal persuasion knowledge was found ( $F(3,320) = 1.69$ ,  $p = .170$ ). This finding suggests, that showing a disclosure of sponsorship in a YouTube video either prior to, concurrent with or after the

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sponsored content do not influence viewers attitudinal persuasion knowledge. The three timings also do not differ significantly from videos in which the disclosure was absent. Consequently, it can be derived, that disclosure timing does not influence attitudinal persuasion knowledge. As a result, Hypotheses 2a and 3a cannot be supported.

### 4.4. The effect of disclosure timing on brand attitude

The relationship between disclosure timing and brand attitude was measured with a one-way ANCOVA analysis. Here, brand attitude was used as dependent variable and disclosure timing as independent variable. As mention previously, significant relationships were found between brand attitude and nationality, brand attitude and cooking interest and brand attitude and cooking video interest. Consequently, these variables were used as covariates while running the analysis.

A significant skewness ( $Z_{\text{skewness}} = -4.45$ ,  $Z_{\text{kurtosis}} = -0.85$ ) suggested non-normal distribution in the sample, therefore, to conduct the analysis, bootstrapping was used. Levene's test showed no significance  $F(3, 316) = .224$ ,  $p = .880$ , indicating that the assumption of homogeneity was not violated.

From the three covariates, only interest in cooking videos ( $F(1,320) = 5.64$ ,  $p = .018$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .0182$ ) was significantly in relation to brand attitude. Both nationality ( $F(1,320) = .63$ ,  $p = .428$ ) and cooking interest ( $F(1,320) = 1.62$ ,  $p = .204$ ) were non-significant. The main analysis, after controlling for the previously mention variables, was not significant  $F(3,320) = .55$ ,  $p = .646$ . This suggests, that the timing of a sponsorship disclosure does not influence people's evaluation of a brand. This finding rejects Hypothesis 2b and 3b, which conflictly argued, that a (H2b) sponsorship disclosure in a YouTube video prior to or concurrent with the

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sponsored content result less positive brand attitude compared to post disclosure, and (H3b) sponsorship disclosures after the sponsored content result in more negative brand attitude than disclosure prior to or concurrent with the content.

### 4.5. Disclosure modality

No previous study could clearly confirm the relationship of disclosure modality to persuasion knowledge and brand attitude. However, there is legitimate reason to believe it has an influential effect in YouTube video. The study tests the hypothesis that richer disclosure will lead to more persuasion knowledge and negative brand attitude. To test the hypothesis that audiovisual disclosure in a YouTube video leads to increased persuasion knowledge and decreased brand attitude as opposed to visual-only or audio-only disclosures, three one-way ANCOVA analyses were conducted.

**4.5.1. Disclosure modality and conceptual persuasion knowledge.** Since, conceptual persuasion knowledge did not pass the normality test ( $Z_{\text{skewness}} = -4.29$ ,  $Z_{\text{kurtosis}} = -1.38$ ), bootstrapping was used to run the analysis. Levene's test was not significant  $F(3, 316) = 1.13$ ,  $p = 0.338$ , suggesting that the assumption of homogeneity was met. The covariate age was significantly related to conceptual persuasion knowledge  $F(1, 320) = 10.37$ ,  $p = .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .032$ . After controlling for age, a significant relationship was found between disclosure modality and conceptual persuasion knowledge  $F(3, 320) = 4.56$ ,  $p = .004$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .042$ . As visualized in Figure 3, simple comparison with bootstrapping revealed, that compared to the control condition ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .94$ ), participants' conceptual persuasion knowledge scores were significantly higher in the audio condition ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ,  $M_{\text{diff}} = -.52$ ,  $p = .012$ , 95% CI [-.88, -.09]) and audiovisual condition ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ,  $M_{\text{diff}} = -.44$ ,  $p = .037$ , 95% CI [-.82, -

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.02]). Further

significant difference

was found between

audio and visual

conditions ( $M = 4.05$ ,

$SD = 1.12$ ,  $M_{diff} = .47$ ,  $p$

$= .007$ , 95% CI [.18,

.76]), and audiovisual

and visual conditions

( $M_{diff} = .39$ ,  $p = .019$ , 95% CI

[.07, .69]). Meaning, that participants were more likely to recognize the persuasive intent when a disclosure was presented auditorily compared to visual disclosure or no disclosure. This finding somewhat contradicts Hypothesis 4, as audiovisual disclosure was thought to be more efficient in utilizing persuasion knowledge, but this could not be confirmed.

**4.5.2. Disclosure modality and attitudinal persuasion knowledge.** The present one-way ANCOVA analysis used attitudinal persuasion knowledge as dependent variable, modality as independent variable and age, nationality, interest in cooking and interest in cooking videos as covariates. Neither the assumption of normality ( $Z_{skewness} = -0.43$ ,  $Z_{kurtosis} = -0.09$ ), nor the assumption of homogeneity ( $F(3, 316) = .44$ ,  $p = .721$ ) were violated. Two covariates, age ( $F(1,320) = 7.34$ ,  $p = .007$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) and cooking video interest ( $F(1,320) = 9.49$ ,  $p = .002$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ) were both significantly related to attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Nationality ( $p = .148$ ) and cooking interest ( $p = .711$ ) showed no significant relationship. After

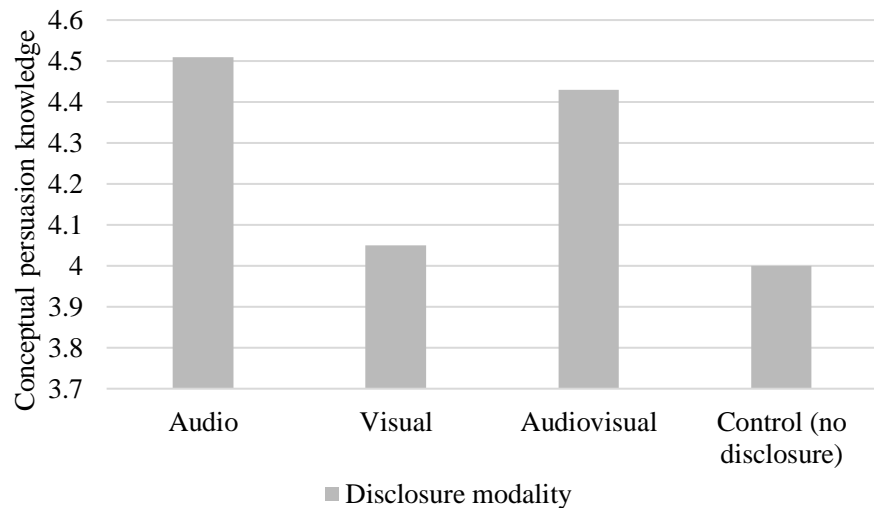


Figure 3. The effect of disclosure modality on conceptual persuasion knowledge (measured on a 6-point Likert scale)

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controlling for these variables, a significant relationship was found between disclosure modality and attitudinal

persuasion knowledge

$F(3,320) = 5.05, p =$

$.002, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .05.$

The simple contrast

analysis revealed that

people in the

audiovisual condition

( $M = 3.47, SD = .88$ )

reacted significantly more

critically to the persuasive intent opposed to people in the control condition ( $M = 2.94, SD = .88,$

$M_{diff} = .56, p = .011$ ), audio only condition ( $M = 3.17, SD = .90, M_{diff} = .35, p = .023$ ), and visual

only condition ( $M = 3.18, SD = .79, M_{diff} = .34, p = .032$ ). This is in line with expectations

derived from dual-coding theory, and suggests that utilizing both non-verbal and verbal

subsystems results in more critically processing of the brand in YouTube videos (see Figure 4)

(Jensen et al., 2015). This confirms Hypothesis 4, however, it does not justify, why the audio

only and text only conditions resulted in almost equal reported attitudinal persuasion knowledge.

**4.5.3. Disclosure modality and brand attitude.** To test whether disclosure modality has any effect on how people perceive a brand after seeing it in a sponsored YouTube video, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted, using brand attitude as the dependent variable, disclosure modality as the independent variable and nationality, interest in cooking and interest in cooking videos as covariates. The sample showed signs of non-normal distribution ( $Z_{\text{skewness}} = -4.45,$

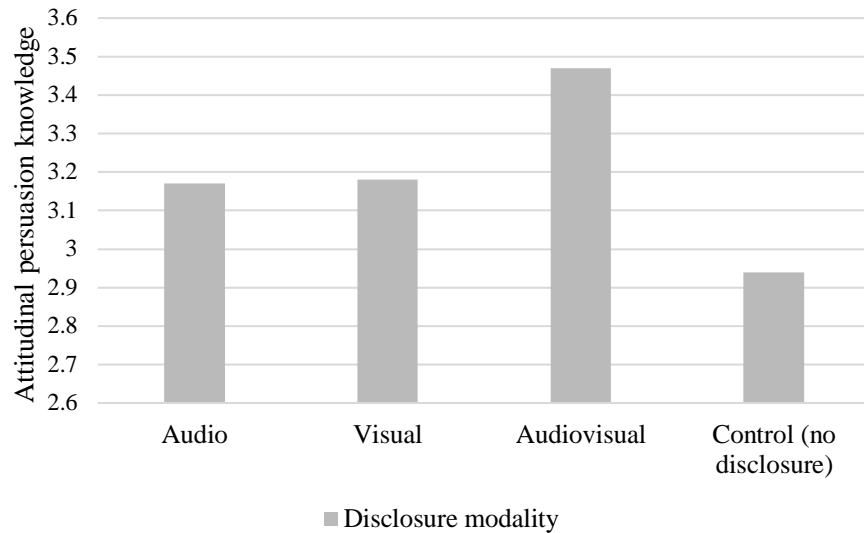


Figure 4. The effect of disclosure modality on attitudinal persuasion knowledge (measured on a 7-point Likert scale)

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$Z_{\text{kurtosis}} = -0.85$ ), therefore, bootstrapping was used to run the analysis. Levene's test supported the assumption of homogeneity ( $F(3, 316) = .10, p = .960$ ).

From the covariates, only interest in cooking videos ( $F(1,320) = 6.22, p = .013$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) was significantly related to brand attitude, nationality ( $p = .333$ ) and interest in cooking ( $p = .252$ ) were both non-significant. After controlling for these variables, the one-way ANCOVA analysis showed no significant relationship between disclosure modality and brand attitude  $F(3,320) = 1.63, p = .181$ . However, simple contrast analysis revealed a marginally significant difference between people in the audiovisual condition ( $M = 5.49, SD = 1.15$ ) and people in the control condition ( $M = 5.89, SD = 1.11, M_{\text{diff}} = -.42, p = .066, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.87, .02]$ ). The relationship between attitudinal persuasion knowledge and brand attitude has already been confirmed. This could explain the marginal significance, as audiovisual disclosure was also significantly more effective in influencing attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Auditory disclosure ( $M = 5.76, SD = 1.12$ ) and visual disclosure ( $M = 5.58, SD = 1.19$ ) showed no difference compared to the other conditions. People in the control condition evaluated the brand in the video more positively than participants in the other three experimental conditions. The marginal significance can confirm the relationship between disclosure modality and brand attitude, however, this should be interpreted with caution.

### **4.6. The moderating effect of disclosure modality**

The moderating effect of disclosure modality has never been investigated before. The present study's sole research question was set out to explore whether disclosure modality has a moderating effect on the relationship of disclosure timing and persuasion knowledge and disclosure timing and brand attitude. To assess these relationships, three moderation analyses

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were conducted by using PROCESS (Hayes, 2013). In all cases timing was used as independent variable and modality as moderator.

In the first moderation analysis, conceptual persuasion knowledge is used as dependent variable and age as a covariate. The overall model was significant,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(4, 315) = 3.63$ ,  $p = .0065$ . The covariate age had a significant relationship to conceptual persuasion knowledge  $b = -.02$ , 95% CI [-.03, -.01],  $t = -2.83$ ,  $p = .0050$ . No significant main effect was found between brand attitude and modality  $b = -.03$ , 95% CI [-.16, .10],  $t = -.42$ ,  $p = .6718$ , and brand attitude and timing  $b = .13$ , 95% CI [-.01, .27],  $t = 1.79$ ,  $p = .0731$ . Additionally, the interaction effect was also insignificant  $b = -.04$ , 95% CI [-.15, .07],  $t = -.70$ ,  $p = .4832$ .

The second moderation analysis used attitudinal persuasion knowledge as dependent variable and nationality, age, interest in cooking and interest in cooking videos as covariates. The overall model was once again significant  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $F(7, 312) = 5.87$ ,  $p < .001$ . Only covariates age ( $b = -.01$ , 95% CI [-.02, -.00],  $t = -2.51$ ,  $p = .0127$ ) and interest in cooking videos ( $b = -.11$ , 95% CI [-.18, -.04],  $t = -3.06$ ,  $p = .0024$ ) were significantly related to attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Nationality ( $p = .1839$ ) and interest in cooking ( $p = .8073$ ) did not relate to brand attitude. Unfortunately, there was no significant effect found of disclosure timing ( $b = -.02$ , 95% CI [-.13, .08],  $t = -.44$ ,  $p = .6604$ ), and the interaction effect also displayed non-significant results ( $b = -.02$ , 95% CI [-.11, .07],  $t = -.48$ ,  $p = .6300$ ). A significant main effect was found between attitudinal persuasion knowledge and disclosure modality ( $b = .17$ , 95% CI [.06, .28],  $t = 2.99$ ,  $p = .0030$ ). This suggest, that even though modality does not influence the relationship between disclosure timing and attitudinal persuasion knowledge, it does influence attitudinal persuasion knowledge alone. This effect has already been investigated (see section 4.5.2.) and it further confirms the influential effect of disclosure modality on persuasion knowledge.

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In the third moderation analysis, brand attitude was used as dependent variable and nationality, interest in cooking and interest in cooking videos were used as covariates. The main analysis was significant  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(6, 313) = 4.17$ ,  $p = .0005$ . From the three covariates, only interest in cooking videos related significantly to brand attitude,  $b = .13$ , 95% CI [.01, .25],  $t = 2.08$ ,  $p = .0381$ . Nationality ( $p = .3340$ ) and interest in cooking ( $p = .3477$ ) were both insignificant. Unfortunately, similarly to the first two moderation analyses, no interaction effect was found  $b = -.02$ , 95% CI [-.14, .11],  $t = -.26$ ,  $p = .7919$ , and the main effect of disclosure timing was also insignificant  $b = .01$ , 95% CI [-.14, .15],  $t = .10$ ,  $p = .9192$ . The main effect of disclosure modality on brand attitude was in this case significant ( $b = -.15$ , 95% CI [-.29, -.01],  $t = -2.10$ ,  $p = .0365$ ). Even though, in section 4.5.3. only a marginal significance was found between brand attitude and modality, this finding validates modality's influential effect on brand attitude.

The three moderation analyses have evaluated, that disclosure modality does not have a moderating effect on the relationship of disclosure timing and persuasion knowledge (conceptual and attitudinal) and disclosure timing and brand attitude.

### 5. Discussion

The current study digs deeper in sponsorship disclosures in YouTube video content and investigates how disclosure timing and disclosure modality influence viewers persuasion knowledge and brand attitude. The research tests disclosure effects when they appear prior to, concurrent with and after the sponsored content, and compares visual, audio and audiovisual disclosures and measures whether these timeslots and modalities have a different effect on viewers' persuasion knowledge and brand attitude. The study contributes to marketing

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communication research in many ways. By investigating already existing phenomena on an undiscovered digital platform, YouTube, the study extends existing theories on sponsorship disclosures, persuasion knowledge and brand attitude.

### **5.1. Findings**

By examining a set of contradictory and other hypotheses the present results conclude the following. First, the results confirm that persuasion knowledge is negatively related to brand attitude (H1) However, only when compared to attitudinal persuasion knowledge. As people score higher on attitudinal persuasion knowledge (i.e.: more critical processing) their evaluation of the brand becomes more negative. When compared to conceptual persuasion knowledge brand attitude does not become more negative, on the contrary, the relationship remains positive.

Second, results only partly supported the hypothesis that sponsorship disclosure presented prior to or concurrent with sponsored content increase persuasion knowledge compared to disclosure after the sponsored content (H2a). It rejects that brand attitude becomes more negative when pre- or concurrent disclosure is presented (H2b). In a YouTube video, disclosure concurrent with the sponsored content increases viewers' conceptual persuasion knowledge. However, it does not increase attitudinal persuasion knowledge or brand attitude. Pre- and post-disclosures did not yield any significance in neither persuasion knowledge (conceptual and attitudinal) nor brand attitude. This disconfirmed that post-disclosure is more effective in utilizing persuasion knowledge (H3a) and results in less positive brand evaluation (H3b).

Third, the hypothesis that audiovisual disclosure increases persuasion knowledge and decreases brand attitude was also partly confirmed (H4). Although, viewers' attitudinal

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persuasion knowledge is higher when audiovisual disclosure is presented, their conceptual persuasion knowledge is utilized to a greater extent with only audio disclosures. Brand attitude indeed decreased when audiovisual disclosure was used compared to visual and audio disclosures.

Additionally, results showed no support for any moderating effect for disclosure modality on the relationship of disclosure timing and persuasion knowledge and disclosure timing and brand attitude (RQ1).

### **5.2. Discussion and theoretical implications**

The study broadens the scientific understanding of how the timing and modality of a sponsorship disclosure in a YouTube video effects viewers conceptual as well as attitudinal persuasion knowledge and brand attitude. In addition, as far as the researcher knows, this is the first study to explore the role of disclosure modality as a moderator combined with another influential factor, timing.

Following the contradictory findings of Boerman et al. (2014) and Campbell et al. (2014), two pairs of paradoxical hypotheses have been analyzed with regards to disclosure timing. Effects on persuasion knowledge have been tested by separating conceptual persuasion knowledge from attitudinal persuasion knowledge. Even though, they are connected (i.e. attitudinal persuasion knowledge is only utilized when conceptual persuasion knowledge is already activated), they generate different cognitive reactions (knowledge and criticism) (Rozendaal et al., 2011). When testing for conceptual persuasion knowledge, results indicate that when a disclosure is presented concurrently with the sponsored content viewers conceptual persuasion knowledge gets activated more as opposed to when the disclosure is presented prior

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to the content or not at all. When compared to disclosure after the sponsored content, though not significantly, concurrent disclosure still produced higher levels of conceptual persuasion knowledge. This finding is partly in line with the results of Boerman et al. (2014). Even though, their study finds support for concurrent disclosures, disclosure prior to sponsored content is still favored. The two fundamental studies which investigated the effect of disclosure timing on persuasion knowledge both favored time slots which were rejected by the present research (Boerman et al, 2014; Campbell et al, 2013). This difference in effects could be attributed to the difference in media used in the experiments. Verhellen et al. (2013) demonstrated, that when using a new digital medium, especially YouTube, its function and mechanics should be reconsidered when exploring how persuasion knowledge operates on the platform. Considering, that both Boerman et al. (2014) and Campbell et al. (2014) mainly used television content and blog posts as mediums, it could be presumed that when YouTube content is used, viewers may indeed react differently to the impulses presented to them. Since they are more involved, they might be more distracted at the beginning of a video so they do not recognize the disclosure or simply forget to resist by the time the persuasive content is presented to them, and might not recognize it as advertising when shown after the content.

With regards to attitudinal persuasion knowledge, neither pre-and concurrent disclosures nor post-disclosures elevated critical processing of the sponsored content, not even when compared to no disclosure. Consequently, timing of a disclosure also did not influence brand attitude in general. Since, the research supported that attitudinal persuasion knowledge is negatively related to brand attitude, no change in attitudinal persuasion knowledge evidently supports no change in brand attitude. Mixed findings in literature have proven that different disclosure timings result in elevated critical processing of sponsored content and thus, can

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negatively change viewers attitude towards a brand (Boerman et al., 2014; 2015; Campbell et al., 2014). Despite, in YouTube video content, disclosure timing does neither influence attitudinal persuasion knowledge, nor brand attitude. This further supports Wu's (2016) claim, that sponsorship disclosures in general do not undermine the effectiveness of marketing in YouTube videos.

Even though, not many studies have dealt with the effect of disclosure modality on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude, and the ones which have did not yield significant results, the present research found evidence of its influential factor. Dual-coding theory claims that people's cognitive load is reduced when presented with audiovisual messages and this improves their ability to process information (Brunken et al., 2002). When applied to YouTube sponsored videos, one would think audiovisual disclosures would surpass both visual and audio disclosures. Despite to expectations derived from dual-coding theory (Brunken et al., 2002; Jensen et al., 2015), in terms of conceptual persuasion knowledge audiovisual disclosure was not the most effective. Audiovisual disclosure was more effective than visual disclosure and no disclosure in utilizing conceptual persuasion knowledge, albeit audio disclosure was the most effective. Based on the present findings, we can only speculate why this effect emerged with sponsored YouTube content. One explanation could be, that whilst watching a YouTube vlog, viewers main focus is on the dialog that is directed to them, and for this reason, their focus does not shift to visual disclosures. This could be the reason why viewers in the visual only disclosure condition were more likely to miss or forget the disclosure. In the audio and audiovisual conditions, only 5-20% of the participants were unable to recall the disclosure. This percentage rose up to 50% or higher in the visual conditions. Presumably, while watching a YouTube vlog viewers are focusing on the dialog, as they are the part of the conversation, and their attention

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does not shift over to the visual disclosure missing the cue about persuasive content. This suggests, that viewers only recognize disclosures in YouTube content when it is presented to them by the vlogger in an auditory manner.

When testing the effect of modality on attitudinal persuasion knowledge, the findings were more in line with dual-coding theory (Brunken et al., 2002; Jensen et al., 2015). People in the audiovisual condition reported higher attitudinal persuasion knowledge as opposed to audio only and visual only conditions, which were almost identical to each other. This indicated, that as their cognitive load is minimized with the help of an audio disclosure paired with a visual disclosure, people begin to critically process the information which could result in negative attitude towards the brand. A marginally significant result further showed, that compared to no disclosure, audiovisual disclosure evokes more negative attitude towards the brand that was disclosed as sponsor. Even though, this result should be interpreted with caution, it further validates the findings in the study, that attitudinal persuasion knowledge and brand attitude are related to each other, and one induces the other.

This is the first study, which has taken upon Boerman and van Reijmersdal's (2016) suggestion, and investigates whether disclosure modality moderates the effect of disclosure timing on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude. Even though, the study could confirm that modality is an individual factor that influences persuasion knowledge and brand attitude, it rejects its moderating effect. Disclosure modality does neither moderate the effect of disclosure timing on persuasion knowledge, nor the effect of timing on brand attitude. Throughout the research, the effect of disclosure modality on persuasion knowledge and brand attitude in YouTube videos was more dominant than disclosure timing itself. When using this medium, timing plays a less significant role and this might be the reason why modality does not moderate

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its effect, since the effect itself is not strong enough. It is possible, that as modality is more prominent, its effect would be moderated by other factors.

### **5.3. Limitations**

As all studies, the present research also has some limitations which should be considered. First, a possible reason for people's inability to recall disclosures in the visual condition, is that even though the text presented in the video tried to resemble the disclosure feature YouTube offers in its settings, the position of the disclosed text was unfortunately misplaced. Only after the data collection did the researcher realize, that the official feature used by YouTube places the disclosure above the control panel which is part of every YouTube video. The text used in the present experiment shifted somewhat under the control panel, which could have potentially blocked the disclosure that was presented at the beginning of the video. Even though, the panel is transparent, the play buttons could cover the disclosure for a few seconds which could have tempered with viewers ability to clearly see the disclosure. This however, could mainly justify the inability for recall at the condition where the text was shown at the beginning of the video. YouTube's control panel is designed in such a way that it disappears after three to four seconds, even if the viewers cursor points at one of the play buttons. Without motion, the control panel does not appear again until the video is over, therefore, participants should have been able to see the textual disclosure in the conditions where it was shown concurrently with or after the sponsored content. Next to this, participants age should also be considered. Research suggested that most of the viewers on YouTube are millennials, however, the present study did not solely sample millennials for the experiment (Rago, 2016). As a result, the findings could demonstrate a broader population and not the age group who watches YouTube videos the most.

### **5.4. Future research**

Further research could replicate the present study by using a group of participants who are vlog watchers who spend their free time on YouTube and are more in line with the millennial group. Moreover, as previous research did not cover the grounds of single audio disclosure compared to visual or audiovisual disclosures, presumably because until now no medium allowed the genuine presentation of single auditory cues, research should investigate audio disclosures more profoundly. Especially, because this type of disclosure, even though successfully informs viewers about persuasive intent, does not induce critical processing. With YouTube presenting a one-way asymmetric dialog between viewer and vlogger, there is more room to incorporate audio disclosures, so that it also fits with the story of the video. Additional research could focus on the message itself that is presented as the sponsorship and how difference in various messages could affect persuasion knowledge and brand attitude. In addition, it is possible that the position of a visual disclosure can also influence persuasion knowledge and brand attitude. Future research could study how text size and position on the screen affects viewers' persuasion knowledge.

### **5.5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the present study confirmed the efficiency of concurrent disclosures in utilizing persuasion knowledge. Moreover, to marketers' profit, eliminated timing as influential factor that produces negative attitude towards sponsors in YouTube videos. However, it did highlight that to avoid unethical ways to cover their persuasive intent, marketers and YouTubers should focus on the presentation of the disclosure and use audio disclosures to avoid diminishing advertising effectiveness.

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## Appendix I

### Participants recall of sponsorship disclosure

Table 3

*Recall of sponsorship disclosure*

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Control (no disclosure)	3	28
Pre- audio disclosure	27	6
Pre – visual disclosure	11	21
Pre -audiovisual disclosure	24	9
Concurrent audio disclosure	30	5
Concurrent visual disclosure	13	14
Concurrent audiovisual disclosure	32	3
Post- audio disclosure	26	6
Post- visual disclosure	22	11
Post- audiovisual disclosure	28	4

### Appendix II

Online survey including scales and links to YouTube videos

Q1 Dear participant, Welcome to this survey which was created as part of my master thesis at Tilburg University. I appreciate you taking the time to contribute to my project. With your participation you can win a 15 euro gift voucher from a brand of your choosing. The current study is focusing on YouTube vlogs, therefore, you will be presented with a 4 minute video. Please watch this video carefully, as you will be asked questions about it. (If you are in a crowded room, please use headphones to be able to hear the video without interruptions.) The survey will take only 6-8 minutes of your time and your answers will be handled with care and kept anonymous. If you have any questions regarding the experiment you can send an e-mail to l.nagy@tilburguniversity.edu. Thank you for your participation and enjoy the survey, Lilien Nagy

1. CONTROL Please watch this 3-4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: <https://youtu.be/xPeiHO0d-oA>

2. AUDIO\_B Please watch this 3-4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: [https://youtu.be/MpfjX\\_v3cxk](https://youtu.be/MpfjX_v3cxk)

3. AUDIO\_MID Please watch this 4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: <https://youtu.be/aTjNxgcaewE>

4. AUDIO\_END Please watch this 4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: <https://youtu.be/SsVCQZgr3fU>

5. TEXT\_B Please watch this 4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: <https://youtu.be/tBp1fDMcUzw>

6. TEXT\_MID Please watch this 4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: [https://youtu.be/GEqz7X7mk\\_w](https://youtu.be/GEqz7X7mk_w)

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7. TEXT\_END Please watch this 4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: <https://youtu.be/h6pM8xoV7V0>

8. AUDIO + TXT B Please watch this 4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: <https://youtu.be/u4fU4OBwZeo>

9. AUDIO + TXT MID Please watch this 4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: <https://youtu.be/PtP22Po4mLs>

10. AUDIO + TXT END Please watch this 4 minute video carefully. After you have watched the video, a button with which you can move to the next page will appear.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHNucRg3uRg>

Q4 What kind of dish did the YouTuber make?

- Pasta (1)
- Soup (2)
- Salad (3)
- Cake (4)

Q3 From the following ingredients which was NOT used to make the dish?

- Coconut milk (1)
- Corn (2)
- Chicken (3)
- Carrots (4)

Q5 What is the origin of the cooked dish?

- Spanish (1)
- Italian (2)
- Mexican (3)
- Caribbean (4)

Q46 The next questions are about the brand of coconut milk that was used in the video.

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Brand Attitude How would you describe Fair Trade Original after watching the vlog?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)
Bad:Good (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unpleasant:Pleasant (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unfavorable:Favorable (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Negative:Positive (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dislike:Like (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poor quality:Quality (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Definitely do not intend to buy it:Definitely intend to buy it (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Persuasion Knowledge Please indicate whether you agree with the following statements.

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	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly agree (6)
The vlog contained advertising. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Showing the brand Fair Trade Original in the vlog is advertising. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand Fair Trade Original is shown in the vlog to inform the consumer. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand Fair Trade Original is shown in the vlog to sell the brand. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand Fair Trade Original is shown in the vlog to make the consumer like the brand. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand Fair Trade Original is shown in the vlog to entertain the consumer. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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The brand Fair Trade Original is shown in the vlog to stimulate brand sales. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand Fair Trade Original is shown in the vlog to influence the consumer. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q43 I feel that showing the brand Fair Trade Original in the vlog is:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Enjoyable (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Convincing (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Annoying (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fun (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dishonest (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acceptable (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manipulative (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deceitful (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Distracting (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Q22 Are you familiar with the person in the video?

- Yes (0)
- No (1)
- I am not sure (2)

Q23 Are you familiar with the brand Fair Trade Original?

- Yes (0)
- No (1)
- I am not sure (2)

Q24 Have you previously purchased products from Fair Trade Original?

- Yes (0)
- No (1)
- I am not sure (2)

Q44 Have you previously purchased coconut milk from Fair Trade Original that was used in the vlog?

- Yes (0)
- No (1)
- I am not sure (2)

Q25 Please indicate whether you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I am interested in cooking. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am interested in watching cooking videos. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Q45 Did the vlog contain a disclosure of sponsorship?

- No (0)
- Yes, in the vlog it was stated that the vlog was sponsored by and made in collaboration with Fair Trade Original (1)
- I am not sure (2)

Q26 You almost reached the end of the survey. Lastly, please answer a few questions about yourself.

Q27 What is your gender?

- Male (0)
- Female (1)

Q28 What is your age?

Q48 What is your nationality?

- Select

Q29 What is your highest education level? (If you are currently enrolled please choose that one.)

- Less than high school (1)
- High school graduate (2)
- HBO BSc (3)
- University BSc (4)
- University MSc (5)
- Doctorate (6)
- Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q31 Congratulations! You have reached the end of this survey. Thank you so much for taking time filling it out and contributing to my project. If you want to have the chance to win the 15 euro gift voucher please enter your e-mail below and press on the arrow to submit the survey.

**Appendix III**

Example of visual disclosure in the concurrent disclosure condition

