DISCLOSURE PRACTICES IN SPONSORED CONTENT ON YOUTUBE

A Thesis in
Media Studies

by
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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to identify the most effective disclosure practices in sponsored content on YouTube, this thesis presents a study that looks at different disclosure practices (i.e. positioning and duration) and its potential effects on advertisement recognition and people’s purchase intention, brand attitude, brand credibility and source credibility. This thesis specifically examined these practices and effects on sponsored beauty content created by beauty gurus on YouTube. To investigate these effects, this thesis utilized parasocial interaction theory and the persuasion knowledge model. Based on previous literature, different disclosure practices have led to different levels of advertisement recognition. When an advertisement is recognized as such, it activates people’s persuasion knowledge, which in turn has been found to lead to lower levels of purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility. However, when the current participants watched a sponsored beauty video with different disclosure practices, none of the conditions led to lower level of purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility. The results did show that when there was disclosure, the presence of a strong parasocial relationship between the participant and the beauty guru in the video led to participants perceiving the beauty guru as more credible. This thesis discusses these results and attempted to understand why they occurred.
# TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... v
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... vi
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................... 4
  Native Advertising .................................................................................................... 4
  YouTube, Beauty Gurus and Parasocial Interaction ................................................. 5
  Persuasion Knowledge Model and Native Advertising ........................................... 8
  FTC and YouTube Disclosure Guidelines ............................................................ 9
  Disclosure Positioning in Sponsored Content ....................................................... 11
  Source Credibility and Purchase Intention ........................................................... 13
Chapter 3. MAIN STUDY ..................................................................................... 16
  Method .................................................................................................................... 16
    Procedure ............................................................................................................ 16
    Participants ......................................................................................................... 16
  Measures .............................................................................................................. 17
  Results .................................................................................................................... 19
    Descriptive Statistics ......................................................................................... 19
    Inferential Statistics ......................................................................................... 20
Chapter 4. DISCUSSION ....................................................................................... 25
  Limitations ............................................................................................................ 28
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 29
REFERENCES .......................................................................................................... 31
APPENDIX A MAIN STUDY SURVEY ..................................................................... 37
APPENDIX B STIMULUS ....................................................................................... 42
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Number of Participants in Condition Groups..................................................17

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Variables..................................................20
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Chapter 1.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a noticeable shift in the advertising and marketing industry, from an emphasis on traditional to digital advertising. With this shift, new forms of advertising have emerged and a very prominent one, native advertising, arrived in 2011 (Lee, Kim & Ham, 2016). In 2018, $32.9 billion will be allocated to native digital display advertisements alone, taking up 58.3 percent of US digital display spending (eMarketer, 2018). When looking at US native display advertisement spending on a whole, it is shown that almost three-quarters of it is being allocated to social advertisements (eMarketer, 2018). One of the social avenues that utilizes native advertising and has reaped the benefits of this increased spending is YouTube.

In 2017, YouTube was the third most visited website, second most popular social networking site and the top video-sharing platform worldwide (statistia.com) A Pew Research Center (2018) study showed that YouTube is used by nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults and 94 percent of those users are between the ages of 18 to 24 years old. In 2018, YouTube is predicted to generate $3.36 billion in net US video ad revenues (eMarketer, 2018). A 2016 Harris Poll and Hootsuite survey looked at social media as a whole, and found that 83 percent of American adults use social media, and out of those individuals 48 percent interacted with brands and business on at least one social media site (Evans et al., 2017). This suggests that YouTube is a social media platform that is worth taking notice of because of its deep integration into people’s daily lives and internet practices. What this shows brands and businesses is that YouTube has a large user base, and that because of this it is prime for social media advertising – specifically native advertising. On YouTube, native advertising has manifested under the label “sponsored content”.

In this context, sponsored content is user-generated content that is financially supported by a
third party (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2012). The kind of users that usually create this content are “influencers,” who are the opinion leaders of specific topics (e.g. beauty, gaming) on social media.

Native advertising, while hailed by some as the solution to the decline of traditional advertising, is not without its issues. Native advertising has been shrouded by criticisms of its deceptiveness and manipulative undertones. These criticisms most notably came to light when *Atlantic* ran a native advertisement for the Church of Scientology. The advertisement received major backlash because of its “distort[ion] [of] the editorial-advertising divide” and brought up issue with disclosure practices and news credibility (Carlson, 2015, p. 855). According to the persuasion knowledge model, in order for an individual to decide whether or not they want to be persuaded they must first have knowledge of the persuasion attempt (Friestad & Wright, 1994). However, as previously mentioned it has been found that advertisement recognition is difficult in native advertisement because of its resemblance to non-commercial content (Boerman et al., 2014). Because of this, there has been a need for discussions and research on native advertising that address disclosure practices.

Studies on native advertisement have looked at disclosure positioning in print (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016), disclosure language in print and Instagram (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016; Evans et al., 2017) and disclosure duration and disclosure timing/positioning in television (Boerman et al., 2012; Boerman et al., 2014; Campbell, Mohr. & Verlegh, 2012) in regard to how it affects advertisement recognition. There have also been studies that address how the differing disclosure practices affect other variables, such as brand-related attitudes (Boerman et al. 2012; 2014; Campbell et al. 2013; Wei et al. 2008; Wojdynski and Evans 2016), purchase intention (Tessitore and Geuens 2013), brand memory and recall (Boerman et al 2012; 2014), online sharing
intention (Lee et al. 2016), and perceptions of credibility (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). However, few investigations have been done on disclosure positioning in online videos, specifically user-generated sponsored content on YouTube. Thus, this study sets forth an objective of determining what the most effective disclosure position is for sponsored content videos on YouTube and how that affects other variables, such as brand attitudes, purchase intention and credibility. This study also tries to understand potential moderators of this relationship, such as parasocial interaction, that are distinctive to sponsored content on YouTube. It is important for there to be growth of knowledge in this area, not only because of the pervasiveness of sponsored content on YouTube, but because of a need to inform the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of effective disclosure practices concerning sponsored content.
Chapter 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Native Advertising

Across literature the label “native advertising” has been used interchangeably with other labels such as “covert marketing” and “sponsored content.” It is important to parse out the distinctions between these labels in order to achieve greater understanding of the labels and how they relate to one another. Traditional advertising has been used by advertising agencies for a long time, and because of this, consumers have become familiar with its persuasive tactics. Arguably, because these traditional advertisements have become easily recognizable to consumers they have also become easily ignored. To combat this issue, the marketing industry developed covert marketing, a communication method that made it harder for consumers to identify persuasive marketing attempts (Campbell et al., 2012). They did this by embedding persuasive messages into outlets that were not typically consider advertising environments (Wei, Fisher & Main, 2008). A popular practice of covert marketing is product placement, which involves a paid visual and/or verbal inclusion of brands in mass media programming (Tessitore & Geuens, 2013). For example, American Idol, a singing competition television series, was sponsored by Coca-Cola for ten seasons (The Coca-Cola Company, 2012). The company used product placements tactics throughout the seasons, with the most notable display being the Coca-Cola cups on the judges’ table. According to the Nielsen Company (2008), the company had 4,349 product placement occurrences in season six alone. A consumer’s unfamiliarity with these practices allowed marketers to bypass consumer resistance and garner more acceptance of their persuasive messages (Darke & Ritchie, 2007). Covert marketing serves as the umbrella term for native advertising and sponsored content.
Native advertisements, a form of covert marketing, first manifested as an advertising technique for online print media. The narrow definition of native advertising applies more to online print media and encompasses “any paid advertising that takes the specific form and appearance of editorial content from the publisher itself” (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016, p. 157). The broad definition of native advertisement expands beyond online print media to include social media. Native advertising on social media includes “branded content that is integrated in or similar to the format or design of the platform, including the social engagement features of the platform” (as cited in Lee, Kim & Ham, 2016). This is inclusive of but not limited to search ads, promoted tweets on Twitter, and suggested posts on Facebook (Lee, Kim & Ham, 2016).

The difference between native advertisements and sponsored content is that native advertisements rely on non-third-party content that is created by the same publisher, while sponsored content is paid for by a third-party and can be consumed alongside the publisher’s own content (Wojdynski, 2016). The core commonality between these three labels is an emphasis on “seamless integration of paid content with other non-paid content” (Wojdynski, 2016, p. 6). This study will be examining sponsored content, the definition of which is content that is paid for and possibly created by a third-party that is integrated in or similar to non-paid content. Another similarity between the three labels is how their creation has caused issues of advertisement recognition. The obscuration of the persuasive message and the blurring between editorial and paid content has made it difficult for consumers to identify these messages as advertisements and subsequently process the persuasive attempts (Lieb, 2013; Wojdynski, 2016; Wojdynski, Evans & Hoy, 2018).

**Youtube, Beauty Gurus and Parasocial Interaction**

Before discussing the issue of recognizing sponsored content, it is important to establish
the context of the sponsored content that will be investigated in this study. Cunningham and Craig (2017) have distinguished YouTube, a social media platform, more narrowly as social media entertainment (SME). SME is an “emerging proto-industry” that allows amateur creators to professionalize their content, thus differing from more traditional internet media entertainment, such as internet-distributed television (e.g. Netflix), which starts out as professional content (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). What YouTube does that is innovative is operate successfully within a commercialized space that, through a focus on audience interactivity, also manages to tap into feelings of authenticity and community. (Cunningham & Craig, 2017).

According to Cunningham and Craig (2017), there are three characteristics that help foster authenticity and community, thus leading to success on SME spaces like YouTube. First, unlike traditional screen entertainment, SME spaces have response and feedback features that help creators provide real-time involvement and transparency with fans, or in YouTube terms “subscribers,” thus resulting in the creation of parasocial relationships and community (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Second, there is sense of peer-to-peer equality because of the narrow gap between a creator and a subscriber (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Finally, the establishment of community and confidence in the authenticity of user-generate content on YouTube always precedes the more evident commercialized aspects/productions (e.g. sponsored content) (Cunningham & Craig, 2017).

These three characteristics have, not only lent themselves to the success of YouTube, but also the success of YouTube content creators. These creators are shuffled into various categories, and one particularly successful category, that some YouTube content creators belong to, is the ‘beauty gurus” category. The term “guru”, in the context of YouTube content creators, refers to
the ability to produce guides/how-tos or teach skills on a topic of choice (Biel & Gatia-Perez, 2009). Therefore, beauty gurus are YouTube content creators who specialize in sharing with and educating viewers on things related to beauty and sometimes fashion (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2017). These videos can range from make-up tutorials to fashion hauls and often also have a reviewing element to them. In 2016, more than 5.3 million beauty videos were published on YouTube, generating more than 55 billion views (Statista, 2018). Its sizable presence on the YouTube platform and its increasing employment of sponsored content has proven it to be an interesting area of investigation.

Sponsored content, in the context of YouTube, are videos created by amateur content creators that are financially supported by a third party (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2012). For beauty gurus, this might mean posting a video dedicated to promoting a product from a brand that is financially supporting the video. On this platform, sponsored content can be both personalized and informative, which sets it apart from other types of advertising. The personalized feel of these advertisements is usually a byproduct of consumers experiencing parasocial interactions with the content creators (i.e., beauty guru). Rubin and McHugh (1987) define parasocial interaction as a one-sided relationship that consumers establish with a media character through experiences of things such as affinity, attitudinal similarities, attraction and shared experiences. Consumers are also attentive to advertisements that are personalized because of the value they place on the information that is exchanged between consumers and advertisers in these advertised messages (Liu, Li, Mizerski & Soh, 2012). A consumer feels informed by an ad on product alternatives, by an influencer or guru who they have experienced a parasocial interaction with, causing them to then be more satisfied with their subsequent decision of purchase. While there are clearly some benefits to sponsored content, there is still an issue of advertisement
recognition because of its integrative nature.

**Persuasion Knowledge Model and Native Advertising**

The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) posits that a consumer is only able to cope with advertisements and their persuasive messages if there is first recognition (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). The thesis will define “advertisement recognition” as an audience member’s ability to identify the content and/or persuasive message as an advertisement. A way to activate advertisement recognition in native advertisements is by including disclosure practices. Disclosures convey whether the publication of the message has been paid for or whether it has been produced by a third party (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). The inclusion of them causes consumers to take part in an “if-then” procedure, where only if they are aware of a persuasion attempt, only then can they navigate themselves to an effective response (Friestad & Wright, 1994). While one would hope that advertisement recognition elicits positive conditions, some research has shown that it can actually produce protective mechanisms, such as increased skepticism, resistance, counter-arguing and critical processing, all of which could then negatively affect brand attitudes and behavioral intent (Nelson, Wood & Paek, 2009).

Unlike persuasion knowledge, where a consumer’s knowledge is neutral and based on self-confidence, advertisement skepticism centers around a consumer’s negative feelings towards an advertisement (e.g. when a consumer feels disbelief toward the claims made in an advertisement) (Ham et al., 2015; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Lee, Kim and Ham (2016) found that higher native advertisement skepticism was negatively associated with attitudinal and behavioral responses. They also found that if a consumer exhibited negative attitudes toward a native advertisement they would then be less likely to share it (Lee, Kim and Ham, 2016).

Evans, Phua, and Jun (2017) addressed another coping mechanism, resistance strategies,
that could be prompted by advertisement recognition. Resistance strategies fall under the ideas of reactance theory. Reactance theory examines how an individual reacts when their freedom, to engage in a specific behavior, is threatened (Brehm, 1989). According to this theory, consumers want to maintain their freedom of choice, so when they encounter sponsored content that explicitly discloses its persuasive intention they will attempt to resist the message (Evans, Phua, & Jun, 2017; Reijmersdal et al., 2016). Resistance strategies can be both cognitive and affective.

When consumers engage in cognitive resistance they resist persuasive messages by employing negative cognitions (i.e. counter-arguing) (Reijmersdal et al., 2016). A consumer can also resist persuasive messages by experiencing negative affective reactions (e.g. anger, irritation), therefore utilizing an affective resistance strategy (Reijmersdal et al., 2016). These resistance strategies then result in a decrease in persuasive outcomes, increase in negative brand attitudes, and lower behavioral intentions (i.e., sharing or purchasing) (Evans, Phua, & Jun, 2017). However, this is only what is thought to occur. Reijmersdal et al.’s (2016) investigation into these strategies actually found that, while disclosure did activate persuasion knowledge and then resistance strategies (specifically counter-arguing), it was not followed by negative brand attitudes and lower purchase intention. Research on disclosure activated persuasion knowledge and the subsequent consequential outcomes have been mixed. Some studies have found that effective advertising disclosure can have a positive effect on advertisement recognition and consumer responses (Nelson & Ham, 2012). The discrepancy between negative and positive outcomes of disclosure and advertisement recognition seem to depend on how effectively disclosure practices are executed.

**FTC and Youtube Disclosure Guidelines**

What does the FTC have to say about disclosure practices in native advertisements? To
clearly identity communication as advertising, the FTC has required for there to be disclosure. Disclosure practices have become mandated in an effort to help consumers recognize obscure advertisements, such as sponsored content, which would then trigger their persuasion knowledge (Reijmersdal et al., 2016). However, in order for disclosure to effectively activate knowledge on persuasion motives and tactics, two sequential processes must occur (Wojdynski, 2016). First, the consumer has to actually notice the disclosure (attention) (Wojdynski, 2016). Second, the disclosure has to be delivered in a way that permits consumers to understand that the content is paid for (comprehension) (Wojdynski, 2016). Evidently, the specifics of disclosure practices are important and yet little is enforced by the FTC in terms of disclosure language, positioning/timing and duration. Instead, the FTC has created the Clear and Conspicuous Standard (CCS), which serves as a guideline for advertising disclosures.

When looking at disclosure position/timing (beginning or end) in sponsored videos, the CCS suggests that it is most effective when placed near the claim or other relevant information (Federal Trade Commission, 2013). The FTC’s endorsement guidelines advise that disclosure should be at the beginning of the video because placing it at the end might cause it to be missed (Federal Trade Commission, 2017). Disclosure throughout the video is also highly encouraged, but not necessary (Federal Trade Commission, 2017). In these guidelines, when the FTC was explicitly asked whether they monitored bloggers (sponsored content creators) the answer was “generally not” (Federal Trade Commission, 2017).

YouTube does not seem to do a better job of enforcing disclosure practices on its platform. The platform’s “visible disclosure for viewers: feature”, where the words “include paid promotion” appear for the first few seconds of the video, is an opt-in feature and not required (YouTube Help, nd). YouTube does require creators to check as “video contain paid promotion”
box under “content declaration” when uploading a sponsored video, but the purpose of this is so YouTube can customize other advertisements shown in the video to avoid conflict and not to inform the audience (YouTube Help, nd). The platform also states that the responsibility to disclose paid promotions in content fall solely on the creator and/or the brand that is behind the content (YouTube Help, nd). What is most troubling is that inclusion of disclosure practices in sponsored content, whether it be addressed by the FTC or YouTube, seem to be left entirely up to creators of sponsored content and/or the parties that paid for it and the monitoring of this content is lacking.

Disclosure Positioning in Sponsored Content

Recently, there has been a slow increase in the number of studies dedicated to investigating disclosure practices in native advertisements and the conditions under which it is most effective. However, few researchers have looked at disclosure positioning in sponsored video content. Researchers started by looking at disclosure positioning in native advertisements in online print media. Wojdynski and Evans (2016) conducted a study that examined disclosure positioning (top, middle, bottom) and language (“advertising, “sponsored content”, “brand-voice”, “presented by [sponsor]”). They found that disclosure placed on the top of the page was less effective at stimulation of advertisement recognition, when compared to disclosures placed in the middle and bottom of the page (Wojdynski and Evans, 2016). Overall, they concluded that disclosure placed in the middle of the page garnered the greatest visual attention and had higher likelihood of fixation (Wojdynski and Evans, 2016). This fixation was then positively related to advertisement recognition and negatively affected perceptions of news credibility (Wojdynski and Evans, 2016).

Boerman et al.’s (2014) study, which looked at disclosure positioning in sponsored
content in a television show, found that disclosures displayed prior to or concurrent with the sponsored content enhanced advertisement recognition. This recognition then led to critical processing of the sponsored content, which subsequently caused consumers to have negative attitudes toward the brand sponsoring the content (Boerman et al., 2014). They explained that this may be because disclosure prior to or concurrent with the sponsored content forewarns the consumer of the presence of a noncommercial persuasive message (Boerman et al., 2014; Campbell et al., 2012). This forewarning provides sufficient time for consumers to activate persuasive knowledge, hence prompting them to protect themselves against persuasive tactics and process the content critically (Boerman et al., 2014).

Another study by Boerman et al. (2012) examined the effects of disclosure duration in a television program. Disclosure duration was manipulated to be either 3 or 6 seconds in length, and they found that while there was no difference in conceptual persuasion knowledge, there was a significant difference in attitudinal persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2012). A disclosure duration of 6 seconds resulted in higher rates of attitudinal persuasion knowledge; participants experienced more critical attitudes towards sponsored content because of the high levels of attention and content processing (Boerman et al., 2012). Higher rates of attitudinal persuasion knowledge then led to a resistance to the persuasion attempts and more negative brand attitudes (Boerman et al., 2012). These results add to the support for forewarning literature, which states that the revelation of persuasive intent results in skepticism (as cited in Boerman et al., 2012).

Wojdynski and Evans’s (2016) study simply found a significant relationship between disclosure positioning and news credibility. Boerman et al.’s (2014) study only looked at disclosure positioning and how it affected advertisement recognition and brand attitude. Boerman et al.’s (2012) other study just explored disclosure duration and how it affected the
activation of attitudinal persuasion knowledge and brand attitudes. It still remains unclear how disclosure positioning and disclosure duration affects wider concerns such as source credibility and purchase intention, specifically in sponsored video content.

**Source Credibility and Purchase Intention**

The source is an important component of persuasive communication in advertising. Many scholars have proposed that how a consumer behaves in relation to persuasion is often linked to perceptions of source credibility. Source credibility infers that a message sender’s positive characteristics influences a receiver’s acceptance of that same message (Ohanian, 1990; Pornpitakpan, 2003). The sender can be a real person, a brand or even a corporation (Wang & Yang, 2010). An evaluation of source credibility arises when a consumer wants to judge something based on factors, such as authenticity and trustworthiness (Moore & Rodgers, 2005). Source credibility has been said to have various dimensions, though the most commonly identified dimensions are trustworthiness and expertise (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Erdem & Swait, 2004). Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which a receiver perceives the message to be valid (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Expertise refers to the extent to which the receiver perceives the source to be skillful or capable of making correct assertions (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Wang & Yang, 2010). It is important to take into account a consumer’s perception of source credibility because of its positive relationship with persuasiveness, which can subsequently influence the perception of a brand as a whole and ergo purchase intention.

Under source credibility is a more specifically studied branch called brand credibility. Brand credibility rests on a consumer’s perception of a brand’s ability and willingness to continuously deliver what has been promised and is often based on the brand’s past marketing activities (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Erdem, Swait & Louviere, 2002). “Brand credibility represents
the summary of brand-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand communication over time because consumers can have a relationship with the brand, and the brand communicates with the consumer” (as cited in Gilaninia et al., 2012). According to a study conducted by Wang and Yang (2010), brand credibility positively impacts a consumer’s brand purchase intention. This shows that trust and belief in a brand’s expertise are important components in the purchasing process.

Similar patterns have been found when looking at perceptions of celebrities or real people endorsers’ level of credibility. Ohanian (1991) found that celebrity endorser was perceived as high in expertise lead to higher levels of purchase intention. In Braunsberger’s (1996) study they found that when a source was perceived as high in expertise it led to positive attitudes towards the endorser and the advertisement.

Another study’s results showed that a majority of their participants revealed that they had purchased an item because they saw that a celebrity they trusted has endorsed it on Instagram (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). These studies all show a link between source credibility and purchase intention, though it remains unclear as to how this is affected by disclosure positioning in the advertisements. When we look at beauty gurus as endorsers and the source, Ferchaud et al. (2013) has suggested that the act of disclosing sponsorship itself in conjunction with the existing parasocial relationship, enhances a content creator’s authenticity and therefore credibility because it reduces perceptions of opportunistic behavior.

It would thus be of interest to learn how disclosure positioning in sponsored beauty videos affects advertisement recognition, how that in-turn changes purchase intentions, brand attitudes and source credibility and whether that is moderated by the presence of parasocial interaction.
H1: Disclosure positioning at the beginning of the sponsored video will result in higher advertisement recognition than disclosure positioning at the end of the video.

H2: Disclosure positioning at the beginning of the sponsored video will result in a) lower purchase intention, b) lower brand attitude and c) lower brand credibility than disclosure positioning at the end of the video.

H3: Disclosure positioning that is concurrent with the sponsored product will result in higher advertisement recognition than disclosure positioning at the end of the video.

H4: Disclosure positioning that is concurrent with the sponsored product will result in a) lower purchase intention, b) lower brand attitude and c) lower brand credibility than disclosure positioning at the end of the video.

H5: Presence of parasocial interactions will moderate the relationship between disclosure positioning and beauty guru credibility.

RQ1: Is there a difference between disclosure positioning at the beginning of the sponsored video and disclosure positioning that is concurrent in a sponsored video for advertisement recognition, purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility?

H6: Disclosure duration that is 6 seconds long in a sponsored video will result in higher advertisement recognition than a disclosure duration of 3 seconds.

H7: Disclosure duration that is 6 seconds long in a sponsored video will result in a) lower purchase intention, b) lower brand attitude and c) lower brand credibility than a disclosure duration of 3 seconds.

RQ2: Is there an interaction effect between disclosure duration and disclosure positioning in the sponsored video regarding purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility?
Chapter 3.

MAIN STUDY

Method

Procedure. Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. They watched a sponsored video created by a beauty guru on YouTube. The username of the YouTube beauty guru that was featured is “KathleenLights”. Her channel is incredibly popular and boasts 3.9 million followers. The video that was chosen is titled “Minimal Fresh Makeup | Foundation-less, Long Wearing | Talk Through”, has a duration of 7 minutes and 46 seconds, was published on March 2th 2017 and has accumulated 1,500,237 views thus far. The video was sponsored by the popular makeup company “NARS” and featured one sponsored product among other products.

Participants watched one of seven different video conditions. Each condition was manipulated to have a textual disclosure, “Includes paid promotion from NARS”, that had a duration of either 6 seconds or 3 seconds and a disclosure position either at the beginning, concurrent to the product use or end of the video. The textual disclosure mimics the type of textual disclosure that is available for optional use on most YouTube sponsored content. The last condition had no disclosure and served as the control. Once the participant had completed watching the video, they then proceeded to answer three quiz questions on the video stimulus’ content to ensure they watched the video in full. Participants then fill out a questionnaire that included demographic information and measures of the dependent variables.

Participants. A total number of 192 participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Originally, this study set out to collect data from 210 participants, but some were removed because of the following reasons: they did not answer the three quiz questions correctly, they were not females between the ages of 18 to 25 years old or they did not spend
longer than 7 minutes and 46 seconds (duration of stimulus) on the survey. The participants that were approved for use in this study were all compensated with $0.20. All participants were females that were either 18 years old (n = 7), 19 years old (n = 7), 20 years old (n = 9), 21 years old (n = 24), 22 years old (n = 24), 23 years old (n = 26), 24 years old (n = 35) or the most common 25 years old (n = 59). Another demographic that was measured was education level, which was broken down into: high school graduate (n = 17), some college (n = 49), 2-year degree/associate’s degree (n = 22), 4-year degree/bachelor’s degree (n = 85), professional degree (n = 16), and doctorate (n = 3). All participants were randomly assigned to one of seven condition groups (see Table 1).

### Table 1. Number of Participants in Condition Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition Group</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disclosure</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Positioning</strong></td>
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**Measures.**

*Advertisement Recognition*, or ability to discern whether the video contained advertising,
was coded from participants’ responses. Participants were asked “Was there any advertising in the video?” and those who checked “yes” were asked to provide details regarding what in the video made them think portions were advertising. Participants’ open-ended responses were coded as 1 (mentioned disclosure and chooses “yes”) or 0 (all other variations) based on the procedure used by Tutaj and van Reijmersdal (2012). Participants were also asked to indicate whether they felt the content was more “promotional” or “informational” on a five-point scale ranging from “promotional” to “informational” (see Table 2).

**Parasocial Interaction** was measured using a modified version of Auter and Palmgreen’s (2000) Audience-Persona Interaction Scale. The scale consisted of 8 items, such as “The YouTuber reminds me of myself”, and “I can identify with the YouTuber”, and all items used a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) (see Table 2).

**Beauty Guru Credibility** was measured using McCrosky’s semantic differential scale. This scale consisted of 10 items (i.e. “Intelligent” to “Unintelligent”, “Informed” to “Uninformed”). A 7-point scale was used, where 1 = a word not synonymous with credibility and 7 = a word synonymous with credibility (see Table 2).

**Purchase Intention** was measured by asking the following questions, “I would like to try the brand ‘NARS’,” “I would buy other products from the brand ‘NARS’,” “I would buy the ‘Soft Matte Complete Concealer’ if I happened to see the brand ‘NARS’,” and “I would actively seek out the ‘Soft Matte Complete Concealer’ in a store in order to purchase it.” All items used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (Baker and Churchill, 1977) (see Table 2).

**Brand Attitude** was measured using a six 7-point semantic differential scale: bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavorable/favorable, negative/positive, dislike/like, and poor quality/high
quality (Bruner, 2009) (see Table 2).

**Brand Credibility** was measured using a modified version of Erdem & Swait’s (2004) Brand Credibility Scale. Only the items used to measure the dimensions of “expertise” and “trustworthiness” was used, resulting in a scale that consisted of 5 items (i.e. “This brand has the ability to deliver what it promises”, “This brand’s product claims are believable”). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (see Table 2).

**Results**

**Descriptive Statistics**

Participants were asked to report how frequently they wore make up in a week, with 93.22% of participants reporting that they wore make-up at least once a week, and most people indicating that they wore make up every day (N = 45). Of all the participants 79.17% indicated that they had not heard of the YouTuber in the video, “Kathleenlight”, before, 95.83% said they’d never watched the video stimuli before, and 83.33% said that they had watched at least one beauty guru on YouTube before. Participants were also asked whether or not they believed the video to be advertising and 64.58% answered “yes”. Of those participants who answered “yes” only 33.06% mentioned that it was due to the presence of disclosure. Participants were then asked to rate their familiarity with the video’s sponsoring brand, “NARS”, on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = Not familiar at all, 5 = Extremely familiar) and the most common answer was “extremely familiar” with the brand (32.81%) (M = 3.33, SD = 1.49). Additionally, a total of 57.29% of participants indicated that they had not purchased a product from the video’s sponsoring brand, “NARS”, prior to viewing the video. When provided with a list of four make-up brands (“NARS”, “Wet n Wild”, “e.l.f.” and “Pixi”), 89.58% of participants said that they
had purchased a product from at least one of the brands mentioned prior to viewing the video stimuli.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parasocial Interaction</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty Guru</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intention</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Attitude</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Credibility</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Inferential Statistics**

Hypothesis 1 stated that disclosure positioning at the beginning of the sponsored video would result in higher advertisement recognition than disclosure positioning at the end of the video. A 2x2 Chi-square test was conducted to look at relationship between disclosure positioning (beginning vs. end) and advertisement recognition (yes or no) (H₁). The Chi-square showed that there was no significance between disclosure positioning (beginning vs. end) and advertisement recognition (yes or no)($\chi^2 = .23$, df = 1, p = .16). Hypothesis 1 was not supported, disclosure positioning the occurred at the beginning of the sponsored video did not result in higher advertisement recognition than disclosure positioning that occurred at the end of the video.
Hypothesis 2 stated that disclosure positioning at the beginning of the sponsored video would result in lower purchase intention, lower brand attitude and lower brand credibility than disclosure positioning at the end of the video. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility in disclosure positioning at the beginning and at the end of the sponsored video (H2). There was no significant difference in the scores for purchase intention (M = 5.20, SD = 1.37), t(109) = 1.58, p = .11, brand attitude (M = 5.77, SD = 1.07), t(109) = -.24, p = .80 and brand credibility (M = 5.29, SD = .98), t(109) = -.29, p = .76. Hypothesis 2 was not supported, disclosure positioning that was the beginning of the sponsored video did not result in lower purchase intention, brand attitude or brand credibility when compared to disclosure positioning at the end of the video.

Hypothesis 3 stated that disclosure positioning that was concurrent with the sponsored product would result in higher advertisement recognition than disclosure positioning at the end of the video. A 2x2 Chi-square test was conducted to look at relationship between disclosure positioning (concurrent vs. end) and advertisement recognition (yes or no) (H3). The Chi-square showed that there was no significance between disclosure positioning (concurrent vs. end) and advertisement recognition (yes or no) ($\chi^2 = .88$, df = 1, p = .52). Hypothesis 3 was not supported, disclosure positioning that was concurrent with the sponsored product did not result in higher advertisement recognition than disclosure positioning at the end of the video.

Hypothesis 4 stated that disclosure positioning that was concurrent with the sponsored product would result in lower purchase intention, lower brand attitude and lower brand credibility than disclosure positioning at the end of the video. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility in disclosure positioning that is concurrent with the sponsored product and at the end of the sponsored video.
(H₄). There was no significant different in the scores for purchase intention (M = 5.20, SD = 1.37), t(107) = .36, p = .71, brand attitude (M = 5.77, SD = 1.07), t(107) = -.18, p = .85 and brand credibility (M = 5.29, SD = .98), t(107) = -.42, p = .67. Hypothesis 4 was not supported, disclosure positioning that was concurrent with the sponsored product did not result in lower purchase intention, brand attitude or brand credibility than disclosure positioning at the end of the video.

Hypothesis 5 stated that the presence of parasocial interactions would moderate the relationship between disclosure positioning and beauty guru credibility. The conditions were dummy coded as 0 = no disclosure and 1 = disclosure and then an ANCOVA was conducted to look at the relationship between disclosure and parasocial interaction on beauty guru credibility (H₅). The relationship between disclosure positioning and parasocial interaction on beauty guru credibility showed significance (F (1, 165) = 21.28, p = .00). Hypothesis 5 was supported, such that only when there was disclosure did the level of parasocial interaction influence the level of beauty guru credibility.

Hypothesis 6 stated that disclosure duration that was 6 seconds long in a sponsored video would result in higher advertisement recognition than a disclosure duration of 3 seconds. A 2x2 Chi-square test was conducted to look at relationship between disclosure duration (3 seconds vs. 6 seconds) and advertisement recognition (yes or no). The Chi-square showed that there was no significance between disclosure duration (3 seconds vs. 6 seconds) and advertisement recognition (yes or no) ($\chi^2 = .58$, df = 1, p = .35). Hypothesis 6 was not supported, a disclosure duration that was 6 seconds long in a sponsored video did not result in higher advertisement recognition than a disclosure duration of 3 seconds.
Hypothesis 7 stated that disclosure duration that was 6 seconds long in a sponsored video would result in lower purchase intention, lower brand attitude and lower brand credibility than a disclosure duration of 3 seconds. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility in disclosure duration that was 6 seconds long and 3 seconds long in the sponsored video. There was no significant different in the scores for purchase intention (M = 5.20, SD = 1.37), t(164) = .47, p = .26, brand attitude (M = 5.77, SD = 1.07), t(164) = .52, p = .43 and brand credibility (M = 5.29, SD = .98), t(164) = -.03, p = .55. Hypothesis 7 was not supported, a disclosure duration that was 6 seconds long in a sponsored video also did not result in lower purchase intention, brand attitude or brand credibility when compared to a disclosure duration of 3 seconds.

Lastly, Research Question 1 asked whether there was a difference between disclosure positioning at the beginning of the sponsored video and disclosure positioning that was concurrent in a sponsored video for advertisement recognition, purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility. A 2x2 Chi-square test and an independent-samples t-test was used to look at the difference between disclosure positioning at the beginning of the sponsored video and disclosure positioning that is concurrent with the sponsored product in a video for advertisement recognition, purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility (RQ1). The 2x2 Chi-square test was conducted to look at relationship between disclosure positioning (beginning vs. concurrent) and advertisement recognition (yes or no). The Chi-square showed that there was no significance between disclosure positioning (beginning vs. concurrent) and advertisement recognition (yes or no) ($\chi^2 = .29$, df = 1, p = .19). The independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility in disclosure positioning that was at the beginning of the sponsored video and disclosure positioning that was concurrent with
the sponsored product in the video. There was no significant different in the scores for purchase intention (M = 5.20, SD = 1.37), t(110) = -1.13, p = .26, brand attitude (M = 5.77, SD = 1.07), t(110) = -.08, p = .93 and brand credibility (M = 5.29, SD = .98), t(110) = -.16, p = .87. Therefore, disclosure positioning that occurred at the beginning of the sponsored video did not result in higher advertisement recognition than disclosure that happened concurrent with the sponsored product; there was also no significant changes in purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility when comparing these two conditions.

Research question 2 asked whether there was an interaction effect between disclosure duration and disclosure positioning in the sponsored video when looking at purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility. An ANCOVA was conducted to look at the interaction effect between disclosure duration and disclosure positioning on purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility (RQ2). The interaction effect between disclosure duration and disclosure positioning on purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility all showed no significance (F (2, 165) = 2.95, p = .35). There was no interaction effect between disclosure duration and disclosure positioning in the sponsored video on purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility.
Chapter 4.

DISCUSSION

The nature of sponsored content makes consumers prone to deception and manipulation. The pervasiveness of sponsored content, especially on platforms like YouTube, points to a greater need for research that tries to help consumers becomes more aware of them, thus allowing them to process the persuasive messages and make informed decisions. Disclosure practices have been employed in sponsored content in an effort to assist with the identification of persuasive attempts, however there is a gap in literature when we look at effective disclosure practices in sponsored videos. This study in particular, attempted to provide the FCC with the most effective disclosure positioning and duration, two understudied practices, for sponsored content in a video format.

When looking at disclosure positioning (beginning vs. concurrent vs. end) and disclosure duration (6 seconds long vs. 3 seconds long) and its overall effects on advertisement recognition there seems to be no significant relationship. A similar conclusion was reached by Boerman et al.’s (2012) study on disclosure duration in television programs, where there was no significant difference in advertisement recognition between a disclosure of 3 and 6 seconds. However, the findings concerning disclosure positioning stands in contrast to previous literature, which has found that disclosure positioning displayed prior to or concurrent with the sponsored content in a television show enhanced advertisement recognition when compared to disclosure positioning that occurred at the end of the show (Boerman et al., 2014). Studies on disclosure positioning in a print medium, have also found that disclosure positioning changes levels of advertisement recognition. For instance, Wojdynski and Evans (2016) discovered that disclosure placed on the top of the page was less effective at stimulation advertisement recognition, when compared to
disclosures placed in the middle and bottom of the page. The reason that similar findings concerning disclosure positioning and advertisement recognition were not present in sponsored video content are unclear. Perhaps, the dissimilarity could be attributed to data collection process. Participants were asked to pay close attention to the video stimulus and told that they would be quizzed on it afterwards. Because of this, some participants may have actively looked for elements that seemed out of place or things that popped out in the video—much like the disclosure did. Alternatively, the data shows that most participants who identified the video stimulus as advertising didn’t identify disclosure as the reason. A high percentage of participants also indicated that they had watched at least one beauty guru on YouTube before, suggesting familiarity with the content. A high level of familiarity with the content type and a lack of disclosure mention could suggest that participants thought the video stimulus was an advertisement, regardless of identifying disclosure, because of preexisting knowledge that beauty guru YouTube videos are frequently sponsored. This is an important finding in the understanding of the sponsored content recognition. The results could indicate that specific audiences are more aware of sponsored content than others. While the beauty community on YouTube seems to easily identify more covert forms of advertising, the inconsistency between the results found in this study and that of others suggests that there are a wider number of audiences who are still unaware.

The findings in this study imply that the duration and/or positioning of disclosure in a sponsored video does not lower the consumer’s intent to purchase from the sponsoring brand, or lower the consumer’s perceived brand attitude and brand credibility. This is surprising, as previous literature has found that consumers’ experience lower purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility when they recognize something as advertisement. Others have shown that
disclosure prior to or concurrent with the sponsored content acts as forewarning to a noncommercial persuasive message, which leads to critical processing. This critical processing in turn causes negative attitudes and skepticism towards the brand sponsoring the content (Boerman et al., 2014; Campbell et al., 2012; Nelson, Wood & Pack, 2009). A disclosure duration of 6 seconds has been found to result in higher levels of attention, which activates persuasion knowledge and lead to a resistance to the persuasion attempts and more negative brand attitudes (Boerman et al., 2012). However, when comparing the results of this study to those of previous studies, it must be pointed out that an important factor that they did not measure was levels of product involvement.

The findings of this study are broadly in line with research that shows that highly skeptical consumers respond well to advertisements for products for which they are highly interested in or find important (involved) (Obermiller et al., 2013). The analysis did not find that different durations and/or positions of disclosure in a sponsored video lead to lower purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility because the participants were watching an advertisement on a product they were highly involved with. It is important to note, that the present assumption relies on the fact that a majority of the participants in this study indicated that they wear make-up at least once a week, have watched beauty gurus on YouTube and have purchased a beauty product from at least one of the brands mentioned in the video stimulus. Therefore, a consumer’s level of involvement with a sponsored product should be considered in further research.

Data on the variable beauty guru credibility proved to be very interesting. The results indicated that only when there was disclosure did the level of parasocial interaction influence the level of beauty guru credibility.
This is in line with previous literature, which also found that participants who experienced strong parasocial interaction with the source (in this case the beauty guru), when exposed to disclosure in sponsored content, would then perceive the source as more credible (Ohanian, 1991; Ferchaud et al., 2013). This is an important finding because perceptions of high source credibility in conjunction with persuasive messages has been found to reduce a person’s perceptions of the content being opportunistic and enhance the likelihood of purchase intention (Ohanian, 1991; Ferchaud et al., 2013; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). From these results, it would seem that parasocial interaction is an important factor for the creators of sponsored content to consider if they wish for success. Perhaps the reason why sponsored content did not result in unfavorable results such as lower brand credibility, brand attitude, source credibility and purchase intention was because of the type of platform it was on, YouTube, and the source that delivered the sponsored message, YouTubers, thus adding to advertiser’s knowledge of how to make this newer form of advertising more successful.

**Limitations**

A limitation of the present study naturally includes an issue with the sample. A sample size of 192 participants, although not small, could have been larger. This study originally called for 210 participants, but a few were lost during data analysis. Another potential limitation is that the sample was limited to looking for females between the ages of 18 to 25 years old. The audience for beauty content on YouTube is more far-reaching that this scope. However, females were chosen because they are the primary audience of beauty content and the age range was chosen because those with disposable incomes generally fall in this range. The video stimulus used was 7 minutes and 46 seconds long. Participants were clearly asked to watch the entire video stimuli and only participants who could answer three quiz questions about the video’s
content correctly were analyzed. Unfortunately, because the survey was not done in a monitored environment and instead allowed participants to choose their environment, it is possible that participants may have only watched parts of the video and this could have affect the results. One could also argue that the length of the survey itself could be a limitation, seeing as there were many measures, but the average completion time was 13 minutes. A major source of limitation arises, when we look at how little knowledge there was on participants’ preconceived perceptions on beauty content on YouTube. This study operated under the assumption that people are not aware of sponsored content on YouTube, but it is possible that this specific audience (viewers of beauty content on YouTube) were educated on that fact. Additionally, beauty videos on YouTube rely heavily on reviewing and recommending beauty products, which can be viewed as advertising whether or not it actually is, and this could have affected the results.

**Conclusion**

On the whole, while support was not found in the relationship between different disclosure practices (i.e. positioning and duration) and advertisement recognition, purchase intention, brand attitude and brand credibility, there was evidence that showed that the presence of parasocial interaction moderated the relationship between disclosure and beauty guru credibility. This finding proves to be valuable because it points to a need to do further research on sponsored content and how its success could potentially fluctuate depending on who is delivering the persuasive message, what platform it is delivered on and how it is delivered (e.g. more informational language). The results also hint at an inconsistency in public awareness of what sponsored content is. It appears as if the beauty community on YouTube have a heightened awareness of more implicit forms of advertising, but previous literature suggests that other
audiences may still be unaware. Future research on sponsored content, disclosure and its effects should also take into account an audience’s level of product involvement, as it has shown to possibly change the way sponsored content is processed. Finally, the results of this study showed that many of the participants are still missing disclosure in sponsored content, with only a few mentioning that they saw it. Future research should look into disclosure practices, especially in video sponsored content, and how to make them effective and more prominent so that this doesn’t continue to occur.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

MAIN STUDY SURVEY

Welcome to the study of Beauty Content on YouTube.

[Consent Form]

[Demographics]

What is your sex?
1. Male
2. Female

How old are you?
1. 18
2. 19
3. 20
4. 21
5. 22
6. 23
7. 24
8. 25
9. It is not an option here

[Instructions]
You will now watch a 7 minute video. Please only watch this video in **full screen** and **do NOT skip/fast forward parts**. After you watch the video you will be given a short quiz and **compensation will only be provided to those who score 100%**. So please pay attention.

[One of seven stimuli]

[Instructions]
As previously stated, you will now be quizzed on the video you have just watched. An incorrect answer will result in you exiting the survey.

[Quiz Questions]
In the video, does the YouTuber apply eyeshadow?
1. Yes
2. No
In the video, how many lip products does the YouTuber use?
   1. 1
   2. 2
   3. 3
   4. She doesn’t apply any

In the video, does the YouTuber draw on her eyebrows?
   1. Yes
   2. No

[Instructions]
You have completed the quiz successfully! Please continue and answer a few more questions about the video.

[Advertisement Recognition]
Have you heard of or have you watched this YouTuber before?
   1. Yes
   2. No

Have you watched this video before?
   1. Yes
   2. No

Have you watched any beauty YouTuber before?
   1. Yes
   2. No

[Advertisement Recognition]
Was there any advertising in the video?
   1. Yes
   2. No

[Open Ended Question]
If you answered "Yes" in the previous question, please indicate why you think the video had advertising.

[Open Ended Question]
If you remember seeing any advertising for any specific brand(s) within the video, please list those brand(s): here:

[Advertisement Recognition]
Please indicate on the scale [on a 5 point semantic differential scale]
whether you felt the video was...
1. Informational
2. –
3. –
4. –
5. Promotional

How familiar are you with the following brands? [on a 5 point Likert scale from 1 = Not familiar at all to 5 Extremely familiar]
1. NARS
2. Wet n Wild
3. Urban Decay
4. e.l.f.
5. Pixi

Have you ever purchase a product from any of the brands below. Select all that apply.
1. NARS
2. Wet n Wild
3. e.l.f.
4. Pixi
5. None of these brands

[Parasocial Interaction]
Please state your opinions on the YouTuber in the video [on a 5 point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree].
1. The YouTuber reminds me of myself
2. I have the same qualities as the YouTuber
3. I seem to have the same beliefs or attitudes as the YouTuber
4. I can imagine myself as the YouTuber
5. I can identify with the YouTuber
6. I would like to meet the YouTuber
7. I like hearing the voice of the YouTuber
8. My friends are like the YouTuber

[Beauty Guru Credibility]
Please rate your opinions toward the YouTuber [on a 7 point semantic differential scale].
1. Intelligent – Unintelligent
2. Untrained – Trained
3. Inexpert – Expert
4. Informed – Uninformed
5. Easy to follow – Hard to follow
6. Cares about the audience – Doesn’t care about the audience
7. Incompetent – Competent
8. Bright – Stupid
9. Has audience’s interest at heart – Doesn’t have audience’s interest at heart
10. Untrustworthy – Trustworthy
11. Phoney – Genuine
12. Looks professional – Looks unprofessional

[Purchase Intention]
Please state your opinions on the products used in the video [on a 7 point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree].
1. I would like to try the brand NARS
2. I would buy other products from the brand NARS
3. I would buy the ‘Soft Matte Complete Concealer’ if I happened to see the brand NARS
4. I would actively seek out the ‘NARS Soft Matte Complete Concealer’ in a store in order to purchase it

[Brand Attitude]
Please rate your opinions toward the brand 'NARS' [on a 7 point semantic differential scale].
1. Good – Bad
2. Unpleasant – Pleasant
3. Like – Dislike
4. Negative – Positive
5. Favorable – Unfavorable
6. High Quality – Low Quality

[Brand Credibility]
Please state your opinions on the brand 'NARS' [on a 7 point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree].
1. This brand’s product claims are believable
2. This brand reminds me of someone who’s competent and knows what s/he is doing
3. The brand had the ability to deliver what it promises
4. This brand has a name I can trust
5. This brand does not pretend to be something it isn’t

[Demographics]

[Level of Education]
1. Less than high school
2. High school graduate
3. Some college
4. 2 year degree
5. 4 year degree
6. Professional degree
7. Doctorate

On average how many day(s) in a week do you wear makeup?
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
Every day
APPENDIX B

STIMULUS

Screenshot of textual disclosure.