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A Study into Sponsorship Disclosure on Video Sharing Platforms: Evidence from Bilibili

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1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the new era of Web 2.0, social media is developing rapidly and is witnessing the emergence of various types of user-generated content (UGC). UGC refers to a new type of web usage where users can display or provide their personalized created content to other users through online platforms. Leveraging UGC, traditional video websites are evolving into fashionable video sharing platforms allowing for intensive interpersonal interactions.

Previous research on the impact of sponsorship disclosure has obtained conflicting results. Some scholars argued that sponsorship disclosure may lead to advertising recognition, thus negatively affect consumers' attitudes towards the brand and their purchase intention^[1]. But some studies pointed out that social media influencers would be seen as sincere, open-minded and favorable if the sponsorship was disclosed^[2]. Moreover, there is a lack of research examining sponsorship disclosure in the context of video sharing platforms, which deserves further attention. Thus, this paper tries to answer the research question: 1) On video-sharing platforms, how does sponsorship disclosure affect consumers' purchase intention? 2) Does the impact of sponsorship disclosure on consumers' purchase intention change with the type? 3) Whether and how does the degree of interactivity between social media influencers and consumers affect the impact of sponsorship disclosure?

2. THEORY AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The paper examines the relationship between general and specific sponsorship disclosure and consumer purchase intentions mediated by influencer trust. Interactivity with influencers acts as moderator between sponsorship disclosure and influencer trust (Figure 1).

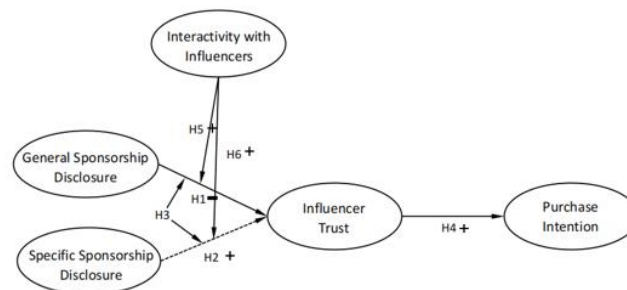


Figure 1. Research framework

A 3 (type of disclosure: control with no disclosure, general disclosure and specific disclosure) × 2 (Interactivity with influencers: high vs. low) between-group experiment design was used. Participants who have experience in using video sharing platforms were invited to join the online experiment. The participants were asked to watch a video with product information and indicate their attitudes through answering a questionnaire. During the experiment, the participants were randomly assigned into six scenarios, which vary both in the types of product information, types of disclosed sponsorship information contained in the video, and levels of interactivity with social media influencer. In total, we have 328 valid answers.

3. RESULTS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The regression results in Table 5 suggest that general sponsorship disclosure has a significant negative impact on influencer trust, thus H1 is supported. However, the results of specific sponsorship disclosure on influencer trust are not significant ($p > 0.05$), thus H2 is not supported. Comparing the effect size of general and specific sponsorship disclosure, H3 is not supported since the estimates of general sponsorship disclosure are overwhelmingly larger than specific sponsorship disclosure. H4 is supported that influencer trust is positively related with purchase intention. As to the moderation effect, only the interaction term of interactivity with general sponsorship disclosure is significant thus only H5 is supported.

Table 1. Regression results

Variables	Dependent variable			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Constant)	4.334***	4.739***	2.148***	2.283***
Experience	0.036	0.017	-0.031	-0.020
Gender	-0.120	-0.121	-0.099	-0.106
Age	0.141	0.062	0.053	0.059
Education	0.190**	0.200**	0.117**	0.103*
Occupation	-0.036	-0.019	-0.003	-0.011
General sponsorship disclosure		-0.876***	-0.585***	-0.656***
Specific sponsorship disclosure		0.148	-0.006	-0.007
Interactivity with influencer			0.559***	0.536***
General sponsorship disclosure *interactivity with influencer				-0.247**
Specific sponsorship disclosure *interactivity with influencer				-0.073
Influencer trust				0.897***
Adjusted R Square	0.023	0.270	0.613	0.622
R Square Change	0.038	0.248	0.337	0.011
F value	2.532*	18.296***	65.805***	54.763***

Note: (a) dependent variable is influencer trust; (b) * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper can advance the theoretical understanding of sponsorship disclosure and provide a better understanding of various types of sponsorship disclosure in influencer marketing. As a distinguished feature of video sharing platforms, the impact of influencer-consumer interactivity is examined as well. The findings can also offer managerial implications for marketers to develop better influencer marketing strategies through appropriate sponsorship disclosure.

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