

The unintended consequences of disclosure: Explicit sponsor identification and the cognitive processing of smoking cessation ads¹

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The unintended consequences of disclosure: Explicit sponsor identification and the cognitive processing of smoking cessation ads

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Abstract

The study examines the complexity of sponsorship disclosure and the nature of ad content in impacting ad effectiveness in the context of smoking cessation ad campaigns using a fully-crossed 3 (sponsor identification) X 2 (ad content) factorial experiment (N=296). Hypotheses were tested through a series of linear regressions, Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA), and paired comparisons. Results indicate that the content of public health ads is more effective than the content of tobacco company ads. Perceptions of sponsor credibility play an important role in perceptions of ad effectiveness, with identification of a tobacco company as the sponsor of an ad severely undermining perceived credibility. The study found evidence that the reduction in credibility resulting from tobacco company sponsorship identification can be partially overcome by highly effective ad content, and that without sponsor identification tobacco company ads are significantly more likely to change attitudes and behavior in the desired direction. Implications of study results for public policy are explored.

