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**Fit to last? The Immediate and Delayed Impact of Advertiser Funded Program Liking  
on Consumers' Brand Attitudes**

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# **Fit to last? The Immediate and Delayed Impact of Advertiser Funded Program Liking on Consumers' Brand Attitudes**

## **Abstract**

The present research investigates how viewers' liking of an advertiser funded television program (AFP) influences viewers' brand attitude toward the sponsor of the program and its main competitor through a field study at two points in time ( $N_{\text{wave1}} = 529$  and  $N_{\text{wave2}} = 256$ ). Two important factors are considered: (1) perceived brand-program fit and (2) time (the immediate and delayed effects, measured respectively one week and one month after the program finale). Program liking positively impacts brand attitude for the sponsor, and this effect becomes weaker over time. Perceived brand-program fit enhances the positive effect of program liking on brand attitude, especially in the longer term. In the longer term, program liking of an AFP may also positively impact viewers' attitude toward a competing brand.

## **1. Introduction**

This research presents a field study on the short-and long-term effects of a real-life advertiser funded television program (AFP) on brand attitude. It specifically explores the effects of program liking and perceived brand-program fit on brand attitudes toward the sponsor brand and its main competitor. The advent of Digital Video Recording (DVR) systems (TiVo) has introduced a new era in television history, and is challenging the traditional commercial television business model. DVR technology allows viewers to record their programs, and fast-forward the commercials. In addition, online content providers of pay-per-view streaming services such as iTunes and Netflix now allow viewers to watch their favorite content wherever and whenever they want, completely ad-free. As ad breaks are vastly under pressure for becoming ineffective (Bellman et al. 2010), marketers are looking for new ways to promote their brands. In light of this evolution, advertising formats that

merge commercial content with media content (e.g., brand placement, advertiser funded programming) are becoming increasingly important (PQMedia 2012; Verhellen et al. 2013). The practice of integrating brands and products into television programs is as old as commercial television itself (Newell et al. 2006), and intricate ways of weaving brands into entertainment content are on the rise. The outcome is a concept the advertising industry has coined *branded entertainment*, or more recently, content marketing, a true convergence of advertising and entertainment in which the brand is part of the content's DNA (Hudson & Hudson 2006; Rose 2013). Industry reports and forecasts clearly reflect this trend. The global expenditure on branded entertainment amounted up to \$54.58 billion in 2009, and is forecasted to grow by 9.2% in 2014 (PQMedia 2010). In terms of brand integration, perhaps the most advanced branded entertainment format is the Advertiser Funded Program (AFP), a television program that is completely funded by, and built around a specific brand. As opposed to brand placement, in an AFP, the brand is part of the program's essence and permeates many aspects of the program content.

The academic literature on the topic has been struggling to keep up. Even though an increasing number of papers on brand placement have been published in the last few years (e.g., Dens et al. 2012; Russell & Stern 2006; Van Reijmersdal et al. 2010; Wilson & Till 2011), a major theoretical gap remains in the understanding of brand placement and branded entertainment effects, and how and why they work. To explain attitudinal effects of brand placement, researchers rely on the affect-transfer principle (e.g., Van Reijmersdal et al. 2010). Starting from the premise that brand placement forges a link between the brand and the content (the movie or television show which it is placed in), it is assumed that positive affect induced by the content is transferred to the brand. However, as noted by Wiles and Danielova (2009), the specific nature of this link, and whether it is important, for example, that the brand fits within the content, is yet to be unveiled. This leaves both researchers and advertising

practitioners wondering whether integrating their brands in a well-liked program is enough, or whether their brand also needs to fit the respective program. In the present study, we test how the perceived brand-program fit moderates the effect of program liking on brand attitude.

While many studies have indicated that brand placement can induce positive effects on viewers' attitude toward the placed brand (Van Reijmersdal et al. 2007; Van Reijmersdal et al. 2010), the potential effect of brand placement and more advanced forms of branded entertainment on competing brands has been neglected. The ultimate purpose of any commercial campaign is to induce favorable responses to the brand with the target audience, preferably at the expense of competitors. In traditional advertising, however, research shows that the advertising efforts of one brand may also benefit competing brands with a similar brand positioning (e.g., Kent & Allen 1994; Loken et al. 1986; Pieters & Bijmolt 1997). Whether this will also be true within the context of branded entertainment, or whether integrating a brand into a program is able to create unique, idiosyncratic associations between the sponsor brand and the program is yet to be investigated. For advertising practitioners, it offers insights in the capacities of an AFP to distinguish their brands from their competitors. For these reasons, the present research does not only look at the effects of an AFP on viewers' brand attitudes toward the sponsor brand, but also toward the sponsor's main competitor, i.e., a competing brand with a similar positioning.

While the practice of branded entertainment is evolving toward new, more complex forms of brand integration, most extant academic research has exclusively focused on brand placement (also referred to as product placement), which is one of the simplest forms (e.g., Kamleitner & Jyote 2013; Russell & Stern 2006). The present study, for instance, investigates a televised fashion designer contest in which several candidates compete to win the opportunity to design their own collection for a known fashion retailer. In addition to including many brand placements, the show is set in the retailer's design workshop, and the

whole program revolves around designing for the retailer. As academic research on more advanced forms of branded entertainment is lacking, the question of how an AFP influences viewers' brand attitudes is raised.

Existing research on brand placement and integration is often based on a single forced exposure in a laboratory setting (e.g., Roehm et al. 2004), thus limiting the ecological validity of the research results. As expressed in the field studies of Russell and Stern (2006), Wilson and Till (2011) and Dens et al. (2012), more naturalistic research designs are needed in order to understand the true effects of branded entertainment as it operates in real life. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, all extant research on branded entertainment formats exclusively focuses on short-term effects (e.g., Kamleitner & Jyote 2013; Russell & Stern 2006; Van Reijmersdal 2009; Wilson & Till 2011), thus ignoring the long-standing call for more academic research on the long-term impact of marketing communication (Vakratsas & Ambler 1999; Wiles & Danielova 2009). The few studies that do shed light on this matter in traditional advertising, clearly illustrate that the short-term effects of advertising are different from the long-term effects (Dahlén et al. 2009; Shapiro & Krishnan 2001; Sheinin et al. 2011). The present research answers the call for more ecologically valid research by studying both short-term and long-term brand attitude effects in a field study.

## **2. How liking of an AFP impacts viewers' attitudes toward the sponsor brand**

As proposed by Russell (1998), integrating brands in media content induces a transformational process in which content-related feelings and thoughts spill over to placed brands. The transfer of context-induced affect to attitudes toward advertised brands is a well-established theoretical principle in advertising literature (Cauberghe et al. 2011; De Pelsmacker et al. 2002; Moorman et al. 2002, 2006). Ultimately, the mechanism of affect transfer is nested in the workings of the human associative memory (Bower 1981). According to Associative Network Theory, human memory is a network of individual, interconnected

nodes that activate each other in relevant contexts. Brand knowledge can be conceptualized as a series of nodes in memory, to which various associations are linked, forming the brand's associative network (Dens & De Pelsmacker 2010). Nodes in a brand's associative network can represent a brand name (e.g., Coca-Cola), a product category (soft drink), attributes (tasty) (Krishnan 1996) or the context in which a certain stimulus (e.g., a brand) is encountered (television program) (Gawronski & Bodenhausen 2006). A spreading activation process from node to node determines the extent of brand information retrieval in memory (Keller 1993).

Entertainment programs generally evoke positive affect and positive thoughts (Ferraro & Avery 2000). In the context of brand placement, Van Reijmersdal et al. (2010) showed that viewers' attitude toward the program positively impacts their attitude toward brands that are placed in the respective program. In line with Associative Network Theory, this is because brand placement creates links between the associative networks of the brand and the program, enabling the transfer of affect from the program to the brand. An Advertiser Funded Program can be considered as a more sophisticated form of brand placement, in which the sponsor brand is the focal point of the program, and the brand and the program are intrinsically tied. Therefore, similar to earlier findings in advertising and brand placement, we expect program-induced affect to spill over to viewers' attitudes toward the sponsor brand.

We expect that time will impact to what extent an AFP's program-induced affect carries over to the attitude toward the sponsor. Academic research on the role of associative networks in the formation of attitudes has emphasized the volatile nature of human memory, and the tendency to forget learned associations when these are no longer activated or when they are replaced by new information (for further discussion, see Anderson & Bower 1973). This assertion is evidenced by the experiments of Burke and Srull (1988), who demonstrate that memory for the target brand decreases with time and exposure to advertising for other brands

in the same product category. In the context of AFPs, viewers may (partly) forget the induced associations and links between the program and the sponsor brand. Program-induced liking may then play a less prominent role in determining viewers' attitudes toward the sponsor brand as time passes by. Stated differently, the impact of program liking on brand attitude is expected to decrease over time. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

***H1a: Program liking has a positive effect on viewers' attitude toward the sponsor brand.***

***H1b: The positive effect of program liking on viewers' attitude toward the sponsor brand is stronger in the short term than in the longer term.***

### **3. The moderating impact of brand-program fit**

Not only does Associative Network Theory predict that program-induced affect spills over to an AFP's sponsor brand, the theory also allows to predict the conditions under which this affect transfer is more likely to take place. A first condition that deserves further inquiry is the perceived fit between the program and the brand. A strong perceived fit implies that the associative networks of two attitude objects converge so that they are perceived as similar (Till & Busler 2000; Till et al. 2008). In other words, attitude objects that match well are strongly connected through shared associations (i.e., nodes in their respective associative networks) (Gawronski & Bodenhausen 2006). Hence, we propose that a high degree of perceived fit facilitates affect transfer. The logic behind this proposition is grounded in the seminal research of Bower (1981), who showed that the more associative links exist between two attitude objects, the easier it becomes to transfer moods from one attitude object to another. Consistent with this logic, empirical research on celebrity endorsement and source effects in advertising has shown that the attitudinal spillover between two objects is driven by how well they fit together in the mind of the viewer (Till & Busler 2000). Therefore, we expect that the spillover of positive program-related attitudes to the sponsor brand attitude will be stronger when there is a high perceived fit between the AFP and the sponsor brand.

Adversely, when a sponsor brand is perceived as less fitting with the program, program liking is less likely to influence brand attitude.

Importantly, we posit that viewers' levels of perceived brand-program fit will moderate the deteriorating effect of affect transfer over time. As stated above, a high degree of perceived fit strengthens the connection between the brand and the program, making the effect of program liking on brand attitude more resistant to temporal deterioration. The brand and the program are both part of an associative memory structure that is forged by their perceived fit. Similar to the associative structure of a highly familiar brand, such a structure is robust against temporal deterioration (Campbell & Keller 2003; Keller 1987). In contrast, under conditions of low perceived brand-program fit, the brand is only weakly associated with the program to begin with. These weak associations are much more likely to erode over time (Finn & Roediger 2013). In that case, in the long run, the positive effect of program liking on the sponsor brand will be weaker than in the case of a high initial perceived fit. In line with this logic, we posit that:

***H2a: Both in the short term and the longer term, the positive effect of program liking on viewers' attitude toward the sponsor brand is reinforced by viewers' perceived fit between the program and the sponsor brand.***

***H2b: As compared to the short term, higher levels of perceived fit are required in the longer term to result in a positive effect of program liking on viewers' attitude toward the sponsor brand.***

#### **4. The impact of an AFP on viewers' attitude toward a competing brand**

Finally, marketers may be interested to know the impact of an AFP on competing brands. Past research on the effects of advertising for one brand on viewers' memory for a competing brand with a similar positioning has shown that as both brands share certain characteristics (i.e., branding elements, positioning, etc.), it becomes hard for viewers to keep them apart

(Loken et al. 1986). Brand confusion easily occurs for competing brands that make similar claims (Keller 1987; Kent & Allen 1994; Kent & Kellaris 2001). When exposed to advertising for competing brands, viewers have difficulties recalling advertised information that is idiosyncratic to each brand. Such findings are again in line with the perspective of Associative Network Theory (Gawronski & Bodenhausen 2007). All brands will share certain associations with their competitors, even if only product category-related associations. The more associations a brand and its competitor share, the more likely it is that adding new associations to one brand would also affect the other. When an AFP attempts to influence brand attitude by adding or reinforcing certain program-related associations, the overlap between the associative networks of two competing brands could not only lead to an improvement of viewers' attitudes toward the sponsor brand, but also toward competing brands with similar associations. This would imply that program liking would also spill over to viewers' attitudes toward competing brands that are similar to the program's sponsor. In the present study, the sponsor brand and its main competitor are both positioned as affordable fashion retailers targeted toward families.

Kent and Kellaris (2001) note that the effect of advertising on a competing brand is weaker when the advertised brand is highly familiar to viewers. The more familiar viewers are with a brand, the richer the associate network of that brand is in viewers' memory, making it less likely that the idiosyncratic knowledge about the brand spills over to another, competing, brand. As both the sponsor brand and its competitor in this study are well-established brands which are highly familiar to consumers, there is no reason to expect positive effects of the AFP on the attitude toward the competitor immediately after the program.

In the long run, however, we argued that associative networks are affected by temporal deterioration, and that learned links in the brand's associative network may be forgotten. Indeed, in one of the only studies that deals with this phenomenon, Sujan and Bettman (1989)

show that a brand's positioning, or the specific brand associations that exist in the consumer's mind, fades over time. Therefore as times goes by, the likelihood of confusing the sponsor brand with a highly similar competitor may increase. More precisely, we expect that it becomes more likely that, in the long term, the positive affect associated with the program does not only benefit the target brand, but also a similar competing brand. Even though both brands will still be familiar to consumers, the strength of the associative network between the AFP and the sponsor brand is diminished over time. Brand familiarity accumulates through many experiences and exposures with the brand, and results in a temporally stable associative network for both brands (Campbell & Keller 2003). The associations added to the brand's associative network by the AFP result from only one particular experience, i.e., the program. Over time, the clear link between the program and the sponsor brand will fade. The associations between the sponsor brand and its competitor, however, will remain more stable, to the extent that viewers may indeed confound the two. Therefore, we expect that in the longer term, there will be an effect of program liking on the attitude toward a competing brand:

***H3: As opposed to the short term, program liking has a stronger effect on viewers' attitude toward a competing brand in the longer term.***

Building on the reasoning for H1b and H3, we also expect that the temporal effect of time on the relationship between program liking and attitude toward a competing brand is moderated by perceived brand-program fit. As theorized above, perceived brand-program fit will strengthen program-related links in the brand's associative network, making them more resistant to the influence of time and decreasing the likelihood of brand confusion (Keller 1987). In contrast, under conditions of low perceived brand-program fit, the course of time may weaken or erase idiosyncratic associations between the program and the sponsor brand. The weaker the links between the brand and the associations that were added by the program,

the more likely it becomes that these associations are misattributed to a similar competing brand. As such, the positive longer term effect of program liking on viewers' attitudes toward the sponsor's main competitor is expected to be stronger when the perceived fit between the program and the sponsor brand is low.

***H4: A higher perceived fit between the program and the sponsor brand weakens the positive long term effect of program liking on viewers' attitude toward a competing brand.***

## **5. Method**

### *5.1. Research setting*

The study was conducted in Belgium, a small open economy, centrally located within Western Europe, whose viewer market in many ways represents an average European Union profile (De Pelsmacker & Janssens 2007; Verhellen et al. 2014). Popular television (sitcoms, reality shows, game show formulas, etc.), movies (all major blockbusters) and music (charts and video clips) are dominated by American productions (e.g., De Bens & de Smaele 2001). On average, Belgian television viewers are exposed to a brand placement every 12 minutes (Wouters & De Pelsmacker 2011). The average amount of placements in domestic television programs does not differ significantly from that in U.S. programs (Wouters & De Pelsmacker 2011).

The program under study is 'De Designers', the local version of 'Project Runway'. 'De Designers' is a 10-episode advertiser funded fashion designer competition broadcast on the largest Belgian commercial television station. Each episode lasted 50 minutes. The program was sponsored by a well-known Belgian fashion retailer. The winner of the competition got to design his/her own clothes collection, which would be sold in the retailer's stores. As such, the brand was an omnipresent and essential part of the competition and the program. The brand was also given a lot of visibility throughout the program. Each episode contained several brand placements in the form of verbal mentions, brand logos in the designers'

workshop, etc. At regular times during the competition, the participants visited the retailer’s designers or the retailer’s stores. The sponsor brand was also shown and mentioned in the program’s end credits by means of a sponsorship disclaimer.

### 5.2. Procedure and sample

The study represents a two-wave posttest-only field study. Short-term and longer-term program effects were measured through an online questionnaire one week (N = 529) and one month (N = 256) after the program finale was broadcast, respectively. Both samples were collected by a Belgian market research agency to be representative of the program’s viewer profile (mostly young women). Only viewers who had viewed at least 10 minutes of the program were considered. Both samples were unique; meaning that wave 2 did not contain respondents from wave 1 and vice versa. Tables 1 and 2 provide a socio-demographic description of the two samples.

*Table 1: Sample characteristics (wave 1)*

Age category	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
-20 yrs.	11 (14.5%)	118 (16.4%)	129 (24.4%)
21 – 30 yrs.	34 (44.7%)	185 (41.0%)	219 (41.5%)
31 – 40 yrs.	12 (15.8%)	78 (17.2%)	90 (16.9%)
41 – 50 yrs.	13 (17.1%)	54 (11.9%)	67 (12.6%)
51 – 60 yrs.	4 (5.3%)	14 (3.1%)	18 (3.4%)
+ 60 yrs.	2 (2.6%)	4 (.9%)	6 (1.1%)
<b>Total</b>	76	453	529 (100%)

*Table 2: Sample characteristics (wave 2)*

Gender	
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Age category	Male	Female	Total
-20 yrs.	1 (2.3%)	23 (10.8%)	24 (9.3%)
21 – 30 yrs.	15 (34.1%)	66 (31.0%)	81 (31.5%)
31 – 40 yrs.	10 (22.7%)	55 (26.3%)	65 (25.7%)
41 – 50 yrs.	10 (22.7%)	48 (22.5%)	58 (22.6%)
51 – 60 yrs.	6 (13.6%)	19 (8.9%)	25 (9.7%)
+ 60 yrs.	2 (4.5%)	1 (.5%)	3 (1.2%)
<b>Total</b>	44	212	256 (100%)

### 5.3. Measures

First, respondents were asked to indicate their age category and gender, which served as quota in order to match the program’s viewer profile. Next, in order to build in a control for exposure frequency, the online questionnaire measured ‘viewing frequency’ (how many episodes of the program respondents had seen, between 1 and 10;  $M = 5.86$   $SD = 3.96$ ). Second, respondents’ liking of the program was measured on a 6-item, 5-point Likert scale based on Cowley and Barron (2008) from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (i.e., ‘I really enjoyed watching De Designers’, ‘I looked forward to seeing the next episode of De Designers’, ‘Watching De Designers is more pleasant than watching other shows’, ‘If they would make another season of De Designers, I would definitely watch it’, ‘De Designers is a good program’ and ‘De Designers was vivacious to me’;  $\alpha_{\text{wave1}} = .912$ ,  $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .98$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{wave2}} = .922$ ,  $M = 3.058$ ,  $SD = .93$ ). Third, involvement with the product category (i.e., fashion) was measured by means of a 4-item 5-point semantic differential scale based on Zaichkowsky (1985) (i.e., ‘Unimportant/Important’, ‘Meaningless/Meaningful’, ‘Does not matter to me/Matters to me’ and ‘Insignificant/Significant’;  $\alpha_{\text{wave1}} = .811$ ,  $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = .73$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{wave2}} = .818$ ,  $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = .87$ ). This variable was included as a covariate in subsequent analyses to account for biasing effects of a special interest in fashion. Afterwards, respondents had to indicate their attitude toward the sponsor brand on a 6-item, 5-point semantic differential scale based on Sengupta and Johar (2002) (i.e., ‘Bad/Good’, ‘Unfavorable/Favorable’, ‘Unpleasant/Pleasant’, ‘Unfriendly/Friendly’, ‘Negative/Positive’

and ‘Don’t like it/Like it’;  $\alpha_{\text{wave1}} = .968, M = 3.54, SD = .861$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{wave2}} = .964, M = 3.58, SD = .79$ ). The same scale was used to measure viewers’ attitude toward the sponsor’s main competitor ( $\alpha_{\text{wave1}} = .978, M = 3.23, SD = .97, \alpha_{\text{wave2}} = .977, M = 3.53, SD = .95$ ). Finally, respondents indicated their perceived fit between the sponsor brand and the program on a 4-item, 5-point Likert scale (i.e., ‘[Sponsor brand] matches De Designers’, ‘[Sponsor brand] and De Designers are logically connected’, ‘[Sponsor brand] and De Designers have a similar image’ and ‘There is a clear link between [Sponsor brand] and De Designers’;  $\alpha_{\text{wave1}} = .944, M = 2.94, SD = 1.11$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{wave2}} = .941, M = 3.03, SD = .97$ ).

## **6. Results**

### *6.1. Analyses*

To test our hypotheses, we estimated two OLS regression models using ‘Model 3’ of Hayes’ (2008) PROCESS macro for SPSS, one with the attitude toward the sponsor brand as the dependent variable, and one with the attitude toward the sponsor’s main competitor. The independent variable was program liking. Perceived brand-program fit and wave (0 = ‘wave 1’ and 1 = ‘wave 2’) were modeled as moderators. Exploratory analyses revealed a moderate, yet significant correlation ( $r = .221, p < .001$ ) between program liking and perceived brand-program fit. This indicates that respondents who liked the advertiser funded program better, were also more likely to see a closer fit between the program and the sponsor. As noted by Hayes (2008), a correlation between the independent variable (program liking) and a moderator (perceived brand-program fit) may result in estimation problems. In order to remedy potential confounding effects caused by this correlation, we ran a linear regression model with perceived brand-program fit as the dependent variable and program liking as the independent variable, and saved the standardized residuals into a new variable (“Residual fit”), which was used in our final model instead of the measured perceived brand-program fit. The residual fit variable contains the variance within perceived brand-program fit that is not

explained by program liking, and is no longer correlated with program liking ( $r = .002, p = .960$ ). Program liking and the residual fit variable were both mean-centered (see discussion in Hayes 2008). Gender, age category, viewing frequency (mean-centered) and product category involvement (mean-centered) were entered as control variables. Gender was included as a dummy variable (0 = 'male' and 1 = 'female'). Age category was indicator coded into 5 dummy variables, according to the procedure prescribed by Aguinis (2003), using the youngest age group as a reference category.

The results of the analyses are summarized in Table 3 (sponsor brand) and Table 4 (competing brand). Both models explain a significant amount of variance in the dependent variable (Sponsor brand:  $R^2 = .340, F(15, 773) = 26.584, p < .001$ ; Competing brand:  $R^2 = .361, F(15, 774) = 7.720, p < .001$ ). Variance Inflation Factor scores demonstrate good discriminant validity (range: 1.040 – 1.918 across both models) between the independent variables. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, gender ( $p < .074$ ) and age ( $p < .05$ ) were significant covariates. Viewing frequency did not impact viewers' brand attitude for either the sponsor brand ( $b = -.018, p = .188$ ) or its main competitor ( $b = -.005, p = .798$ ). Product category (fashion) involvement did not significantly influence viewers' brand attitude toward the sponsor brand ( $b = .053, p = .105$ ), but had a significant effect on the attitude toward the competitor ( $b = -.118, p = .008$ ).

## 6.2. *Effects on the attitude toward the sponsor brand (H1a – H2b)*

We first report the results of the hypotheses tests for viewers' attitude toward the AFP's sponsor brand. The results show that program liking has a significant positive effect on viewers' brand attitude toward the sponsor brand ( $b = .248, p < .001$ ), confirming H1a. H1b posits that the effect of program liking on brand attitude would be larger in the short-term than in the long-term. As shown in Table 3, the program liking x wave interaction is negative

and significant ( $b = -.133, p = .024$ ) and indicates that the effect of program liking on brand attitude is significantly smaller in wave 2 than in wave 1, which supports H1b.

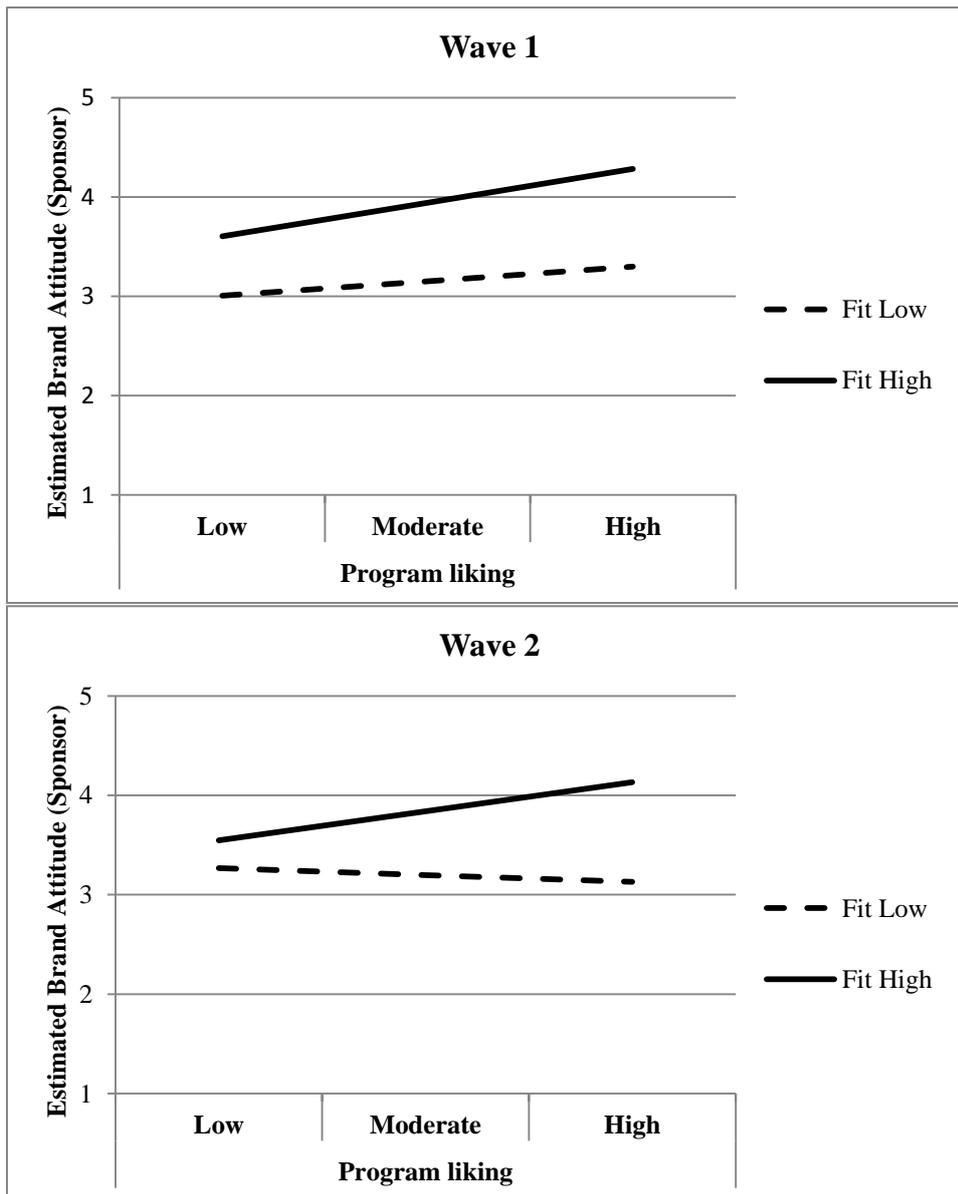
*Table 3: Results - attitude toward the sponsor brand*

	Unstandardized coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	<i>t</i>	Sig.
<b>Constant</b>	3.042	.147		
<b>Program liking</b>	.248	.040	6.151	< .001
<b>Brand-program fit</b>	.395	.032	12.447	< .001
<b>Wave</b>	-.027	.087	-.311	.756
<b>Program liking x Fit</b>	.098	.032	3.116	.002
<b>Program liking x Wave</b>	-.133	.060	-2.245	.025
<b>Fit x Wave</b>	-.075	.055	-1.372	.171
<b>Program liking x Fit x Wave</b>	.086	.055	1.567	.118
<b>Gender</b>	.202	.072	2.809	.005
<b>Age [21-30]</b>	.044	.071	.618	.537
<b>Age [31-40]</b>	.222	.083	2.673	.008
<b>Age [41-50]</b>	.320	.086	3.704	< .001
<b>Age [51-60]</b>	.307	.124	2.469	.014
<b>Age [+60]</b>	.236	.238	.741	.459
<b>Viewing frequency</b>	-.018	.014	-1.317	.188
<b>Fashion involvement</b>	.054	.033	1.621	.105

H2a predicts that, both in the short term and the longer term, the effect of program liking on sponsor brand attitude would be reinforced by the perceived brand-program fit. The two-way interaction between program liking and (the residual) perceived brand-program fit is indeed significant ( $b = .098, t = 3.116, p = .002$ ). Recall that wave 1 was coded as 0, and thus serves as the baseline. The significant interaction supports H2a in the short term. The three-way-interaction between program liking, perceived fit and wave is insignificant ( $b = .086, p = .118$ ). Considered together with the positive effect found in wave 1, the lack of three-way interaction indicates that perceived fit indeed also enhances the effect of program liking in the longer term (wave 2), similarly as in wave 1. This is also in line with H2a.

We did expect, though, in H2b, that in the longer term, higher levels of perceived fit would be required to boost the effect of program liking. We therefore further inspected the results using conditional effects analyses (Figure 1). These analyses show that, within wave 1, the positive impact of program liking on brand attitude becomes stronger with increasing perceived brand-program fit (low fit:  $b = .150$ ,  $p = .003$ ; moderate fit:  $b = .248$ ,  $p < .001$ , strong fit:  $b = .346$ ,  $p < .001$ , effects estimated at the mean value of perceived fit, and one standard deviation below and above the mean of perceived fit). In wave 2, however, program liking did not affect brand attitude when perceived brand-program fit was low,  $b = -.072$ ,  $t = -.962$ ,  $p = .337$ , or moderate,  $b = .088$ ,  $t = .1452$ ,  $p = .148$ , but only when perceived brand-program fit was high,  $b = .249$ ,  $t = 3.283$ ,  $p = .001$  (effects estimated at the mean value of perceived fit, and one standard deviation below and above the mean of perceived fit) (Figure 1). These results show that in the longer term, the effect of program liking is only significant with higher levels of perceived fit, whereas the effect was always significant in the short term. H2b is supported.

*Figure 1: Interaction between program liking and perceived brand-program fit on the attitude toward the sponsor brand*



Note: The values represented in the graph are estimated at +/- standard deviations from the respective means.

### 6.3. Effects on the attitude toward the sponsor's main competitor (H3 – H4)

H3 posits that program liking would impact viewers' attitude toward a competing brand more strongly in the longer term. In accordance with this prediction, the observed two-way interaction effect of program liking and wave on the attitude toward the competitor brand ( $b = .144, p = .070$ ) does show that the effect of program liking on the attitude toward the competitor brand is higher in the second period, but the difference is only marginally

significant. Although the data do show a clear increasing trend in the effect of program liking on attitude toward the competitor brand, H3 is not confirmed.

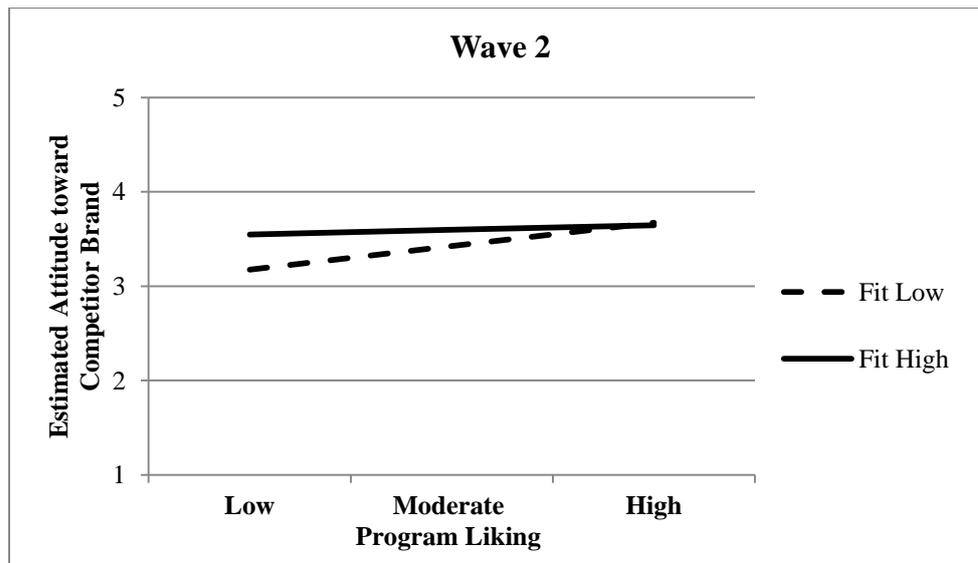
*Table 4: Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model for attitude toward the competitor brand (H5 and H6)*

	Unstandardized coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	<i>t</i>	Sig.
<b>Constant</b>	3.341	.284		
<b>Program liking</b>	.008	.054	.154	.878
<b>Brand-program fit</b>	-.009	.161	-.060	.953
<b>Wave</b>	-.233	.248	-.939	.348
<b>Program liking x Fit</b>	.081	.043	1.900	.058
<b>Program liking x Wave</b>	.144	.079	-1.814	.070
<b>Fit x Wave</b>	.437	.253	1.728	.084
<b>Program liking x Fit x Wave</b>	-.183	.074	-2.470	.014
<b>Gender</b>	.173	.097	1.790	.074
<b>Age [21-30]</b>	.010	.094	.107	.915
<b>Age [31-40]</b>	.212	.111	1.917	.056
<b>Age [41-50]</b>	.246	.115	2.129	<.034
<b>Age [51-60]</b>	.260	.164	1.583	.114
<b>Age [+60]</b>	.237	.318	.745	.456
<b>Viewing frequency</b>	-.005	.019	-.256	.798
<b>Fashion involvement</b>	-.118	.044	-2.673	.008

H4 posited that perceived fit would weaken the long term effect of program liking on viewers' attitudes toward the competitor brand. As displayed in Table 4, the three-way interaction term between program liking, brand-program fit and wave and viewers' attitude toward the competitor is negative and significant ( $b = -.183, p = .014$ ). The conditional effects demonstrate that, in wave 2, program liking exerts a significant positive impact on attitude toward a competing brand at low (one standard deviation below the mean) ( $b = .253, p = .005$ ) and moderate (mean value) ( $b = .152, p = .016$ ) levels of perceived fit between a program and

its sponsor, but not at high levels of perceived sponsor brand-program fit ( $b = .051, p = .547$ ) (Figure 2). This confirms H4.

Figure 2: Interaction between program liking and perceived brand-program fit on the attitude toward the sponsor's main competitor (wave 2)



## 7. Discussion

In accordance with prior research (e.g., Van Reijmersdal et al. 2010), we find that program liking spills over to viewers' attitudes for the integrated sponsor brand. The present research adds more depth to academic understanding of this spillover process by demonstrating that the effect of program liking is strengthened by a higher degree of perceived fit between the sponsor brand and the program. These findings support the notion that convergence between the associative networks of the integrated brand and the AFP makes it easier to make an impact on the brand through the AFP. Indeed, a higher degree of perceived fit implies a higher level of convergence and interconnectedness between the associative networks of the brand and the program, which facilitates the process of brand attitude formation through program relevant associations (Gawronski & Bodenhausen 2006; Till & Busler 2000).

Another contribution to existing academic work on the effects of branded entertainment formats is the long-term angle of the present research. Our results evidence that a high degree of perceived brand-program fit is crucial in the longer term. While a strong perceived brand-program fit reinforces the positive impact of program liking on brand attitude in the short term, it is a necessary prerequisite to warrant the impact of an AFP on viewers' attitudes toward the sponsor brand in the longer term. As our findings show, the impact of program liking on brand attitude of the sponsor brand diminishes over time. When perceived brand-program fit is low, the passing of time completely wipes out the program's effect on brand attitude. However, this was not the case when perceived brand-program fit was high. High perceived brand-program fit implies a strong degree of convergence between the associative networks of the brand and the program. In turn, this stronger linkage between the brand and the program would make the carry-over of program related associations to the brand more robust to temporal deterioration. This means that creating a high perceived fit between the brand and the program is crucial to warrant longer term effects of program liking on brand attitude. A last contribution of the present research is that it considers how investing in an AFP affects viewers' attitudes toward a sponsor's competitor in both the short and the longer term. Our results indicate that liking of an AFP does not immediately (positively or negatively) affect viewers' brand attitude toward a competing brand in the short-term, but can boost their attitude toward the competitor in the longer term. Established brands possess clear associative networks with strong links between the brand's node and certain associations, which make it easier to distinguish (an AFP of) the target brand from similar competitor brands (Keller 1987). Therefore, immediately after the program, viewers are likely to associate the AFP very strongly to the actual sponsor, and competitors are not likely to benefit from this. In the longer term, however, time may weaken the links between the sponsor brand and the program induced associations. The weaker these links become, the more likely it

becomes that these associations are misattributed to a similar competing brand. Two brands with a similar positioning by default share many associative nodes, at the very least on a category level (e.g., family brand, fair price, decent quality, etc.). When the links between the program and the sponsor brand fade, thinking back on the program can activate the competitor's node in memory. When this happens, viewers' liking of the program is (also) transferred to the competitor brand. Indeed, our results indicate that in the longer term program liking positively affected viewers' attitudes toward the main competitor of the brand that is sponsoring the AFP. However, it is important to highlight that a high perceived fit between the sponsor brand and the AFP prevents the misattribution of AFP-induced brand associations, which again underlines the importance of brand-program fit.

## **8. Managerial implications**

The present study offers several managerial implications for practitioners involved in the production or management of branded entertainment content. Although building entertaining and well-liked content around a brand is beneficial in itself, a good match between the brand and the content reinforces the attitudinal benefits the brand draws from the entertaining character of the content. Therefore, managers should pay close attention to matching their products to the right type of content before investing in a branded entertainment campaign. If the associations between the brand and program are not entirely clear to viewers, within the program or accompanying commercials efforts can be made to emphasize and improve the perceived fit.

The importance of perceived fit between the program and brand becomes particularly clear when looking at the longer-term impact of the AFP. In the longer run, the beneficial effect of program induced liking on brand attitude disappears, unless viewers perceive the brand as a very good fit with the program. Under these conditions, the program makes a long-term impact on viewers' attitudes toward the sponsor. Moreover, our findings suggest that by

increasing the fit between the brand and the AFP, advertisers may prevent similarly positioned competitors to profit from their advertising efforts. In time, viewers may forget learned idiosyncratic links between the program and the sponsor brand and misattribute positive program associations to a competing brand with a similar positioning. When there is an excellent perceived brand-program fit, however, the misattribution of program induced affect is less likely to occur and liking of the AFP does not improve viewers' brand attitudes toward competing brands. This offers advertising managers an additional incentive to invest time, effort and funds in matching their brand with appropriate content.

## **9. Limitations and suggestions for further research**

The present research has a number of limitations that can be investigated in future research.

Whereas the field study we conducted has a number of strengths, such as its high ecological validity, it also poses challenges. A field study is limited in the amount of control it has over external variables. For instance, we had no way of controlling for exposure to other brand communications for the sponsor brand or its competitors, outside of the program. Although we control for other external variables, such as viewing frequency and product category involvement, we encourage researchers pursuing similar field experiments to incorporate additional marketing communication investments into their research design.

Second, only one specific form of branded entertainment, namely brand integration through an advertiser funded fashion design contest, and only one product category (i.e., fashion) are explored. Branded entertainment and content marketing incorporate a large diversity of content types with their own idiosyncratic characteristics and contextual background, e.g., company videos, exclusive online content for customers, etc. (Rose 2013). Although we have demonstrated that time after exposure and the (absence) of fit have an important influence on whether (positive) affect spillover from the program to the sponsor

brand occurs, it would be highly interesting to find out whether the same mechanisms apply to other forms of branded entertainment.

Finally, the study uses only one outcome variable, i.e., brand attitude. Although this metric is valuable from both an academic and practical viewpoint, it is not the only outcome researchers could consider in order to gain insight into the workings of branded entertainment. To attain a more comprehensive picture of how branded entertainment influences viewers, explicit and implicit cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral outcomes should be studied. Especially given the fact that previous research on brand placement has shown that it may have a different impact on different outcome variables (Cowley & Barron 2008; Dens et al. 2012; Van Reijmersdal 2009).

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