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# “Branded, biased and it wants to sell a product”: typical ad representations influence the effect of ad recognition: a mixed-method research

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## ABSTRACT

In the present two-study mixed-method research, we aimed to explore how different ad representation dimensions influence the recognition of new advertising formats. Furthermore, we also investigated the effect of ad recognition on ad and brand liking. In line with the past applications of schema theory to advertising (Evans and Park 2015), as well as categorization theories, we found in both studies that ad representation dimensions influence ad recognition of new advertising formats, especially when the relevant feature is present in the ad. Ad representation dimensions such as *branded*, *biased* or *selling* facilitated ad recognition, while *informative* had a negative effect on ad recognition. The sponsored journal article represented an exception as both *branded* and *biased* representations hindered ad recognition. Furthermore, the effect of ad recognition on ad and brand liking varied across the tested messages. Theoretical and practical implications have been formulated. Future research might consider to further explore the effect of ad schemas on advertising and brand attitudes.

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persuasion knowledge;  
schema

## Introduction

As a response to increased advertising avoidance and skepticism (Cho and Cheon 2004; Fransen et al. 2015; Obermiller, Spangenberg, and MacLachlan 2005), advertisers developed new advertising formats such as sponsored content where commercial messages are embedded into a non-commercial content (Boerman, van Reijmersdal, and Neijens 2012; Dahlen and Rosengren 2016; Rozendaal et al. 2011). When encountering sponsored content, consumers might be confused whether they are watching an ad or not. Authorities such as the Federal Trade Commission in the United States are guided by the principle that consumers must be informed when they are watching a commercial message<sup>1</sup>; therefore, they oblige the content owner to use advertising disclosures. However, these authorities cannot control all related cases due to the

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extremely high number of concerned content. Furthermore, consumers might ignore or avoid processing ad disclosures (Boerman and van Reijmersdal 2016; Tessitore and Geuens 2013), ad recognition of these new ad formats stays low (Amazeen and Muddiman 2018; Amazeen and Wojdynski 2018). Given these circumstances, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of how advertising recognition of new ad formats naturally occurs.

People use their relevant past experiences to understand a new phenomenon, but it is less clear how this statement translates to ad recognition of new advertising formats. For instance, if consumers believe that ads try to play the emotional card so that we buy their products, will this belief help them to recognize a sponsored article about an innovative beauty treatment as an ad? Or what would consumers who are used to identifying ads as 30-s spots on TV think about a movie such as the Lego Movie that is built entirely around a brand? This article aims to explore how advertising recognition is embedded in past advertising-related experiences.

Despite the interest in advertising recognition of new advertising formats, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical study has focused on how previous advertising-related consumer experience influence the ad recognition process yet. The question arises: how do consumers' representations of typical ads—as internal templates on what an ad is supposed to be—help their ad recognition? To answer this question, we used the theoretical framework of Evans and Park (2015) which integrates Schema Theory into the Persuasion Knowledge Model and categorization theories to investigate how typical representation of ads contributes to the ad recognition of new advertising formats.

## Literature review

In the context of native advertisements and sponsored content, advertising recognition refers to identifying a message as an advertisement. It includes both realizing the commercial source and the persuasive intent of the commercial message. Confusion may arise because the term “recognition” is also used in advertising memory research. It refers to the identification of an ad stimulus by the participant as having been seen or heard previously, and it serves as a memory measure for the ad (Singh, Rothschild, and Churchill 1988). In the present manuscript, all further references to recognition will refer to correct classification of a message as advertising.

Advertising recognition is part of the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) that provides a theoretical framework about how consumers interpret and cope with persuasion attempts in their everyday life (Friestad and Wright 1994). According to the PKM, advertising recognition activates persuasion knowledge that consumers would use to cope with the persuasion attempt. If the consumer is not aware of the persuasive intent, their thinking and behaviour are likely to differ from the reaction they would have given if they had recognized the persuasive intent. When persuasion knowledge is activated, consumers become more defensive and critical regarding the persuasive message. However, the PKM does not provide any detailed explanation about the process of advertising recognition when it occurs naturally.

Categorization research is interested in consumers' decisions whether an object can be considered as part of a category (Fiske et al. 1987; Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Loken, Barsalou, and Joiner 2008). Similarity-based categorization theories such as the prototype and exemplar models posit that in the case of an ill-defined concept such as advertising, people use the centre of the concept to decide whether a new upcoming item is part of the category or not (Loken 2006; Loken et al. 2008; Reisberg 2016). This predefined centre can be an abstract prototype or typical exemplars of the category as well. Consequently, the representation of the typical example of advertising influences the advertising recognition of new advertising formats.

While similarity-based categories focus on the number and the degree of similarities, according to the theory-based or rule-based categorization theories, people use features or rules that are central to the category to decide category membership of a new object (Rouder and Ratcliff 2006). For instance, ads usually try to sell a product (rule), so when an influencer pushes a product on Instagram and encourages people to try it out, some may conclude that it is an ad, not a genuine recommendation from the influencer despite the low level of resemblance to a typical ad. Thus, these rules may play an essential role in the ad recognition of new ad formats where the appearance of the ad is similar to the surrounding, non-commercial context.

Schema Theory is similar to categorization theories focusing on the internal structures of concepts. A schema is a resumed, generalized experience that we use to interpret new events. Evans and Park (2015) integrated Schema Theory—based on Rumelhart's work (1984)—into the Persuasion Knowledge Model. According to the authors, a schema is a qualitative mental representation that contains the typical values of the variables that characterize the object or the situation and the interrelationships between them. For example, ads can be characterized by featuring brands prominently. When exposed to a new object, first, we try to locate the variable constraints and their interplay that helps us to link them to variables in the appropriate schema. The process of advertising recognition can be concept (schema)-driven or data-driven or both and it includes several comparisons of relevant variables and their values between the object and promising schemas. Consumers will choose the schema whose variable-value configuration best fits the new object. Furthermore, consumers regularly update their advertising schema as they are learning about new advertising formats.

On the basis of the above theoretical framework, we aimed to explore what variables and values of the advertising schema are relevant to the advertising recognition of new ad formats. How do ad representation dimensions affect advertising recognition of different new ad formats? (**RQ1**). Given the fact, that advertising schema contains the typical values of the characterizing variables, we operationalized the concept by asking about the features of a typical ad. We used a qualitative method to detect updates in the advertising schema.

Additionally, we were interested in how ad recognition that occurs naturally can affect ad attitudes (c.f. ad liking). Most studies included advertising disclosures to facilitate ad recognition and the activation of persuasion knowledge (Boerman and van Reijmersdal 2016). Previous studies usually found a negative effect of ad recognition on the evaluation of the content or the message across various media (Amazeen and

Muddiman 2018; Amazeen and Wojdynski 2019; Wei et al. 2008) while others reported no significant effect (Evans and Hoy 2016; Wood et al. 2008).

Regarding brand attitudes across various media, again, several studies reported negative effect of disclosures/ad recognition (van Reijmersdal 2016; Wei et al. 2008; Wojdynski 2016), that can be moderated by variables such as perceived appropriateness and brand familiarity (Wei et al. 2008) or disclosure type and movie involvement (van Reijmersdal 2016).

Thus, our second research question was the following: how does advertising recognition affect ad liking? (**RQ2**). Ad liking is commonly-used to assess the evaluation of specific ads. Ad likability measures the same construct as attitudes toward the ad (Brown and Stayman 1992). Furthermore, it is one of the best indicators to predict real-world sales results (Bergkvist and Rossiter 2008; Haley and Baldinger 1991).

## Study 1

### *Materials and methods*

#### *Participants*

Overall, 253 respondents recruited from two major Hungarian universities participated in the study. However, after the quantitative analysis, 14 of them were eliminated, because their answers were not interpretable in the context of the study. Therefore, all analyses were carried out on the reduced sample of 239 respondents ( $Min_{age} = 18$ ,  $Max_{age} = 48$ ,  $M_{age} = 25.87$ ,  $SD_{age} = 6.34$ , 60.7% female). As expected, everyone graduated from high school, though 59.4% did not have their bachelor's degree yet. Most of the respondents (84.1%) were not an expert in advertising or marketing.

#### *Stimulus materials*

Previous studies about advertising recognition usually tested one or two advertising formats at the time such as sponsored web content and banner advertising (Tutaj and van Reijmersdal 2012), sponsored radio content (Wei et al. 2008) or native advertisement (Wojdynski and Evans 2016). Unlike these studies, we selected and tested together several examples of different advertising formats and one control message to explore the effect of ad representation dimensions on ad recognition. The stimulus material included real (rather than fictitious) examples to increase the external validity of the results. The pool of presented messages was drawn from several sources including news portals and social media sites.

Overall, twelve different messages were presented to participants either in a video format or as a screenshot: (1, 2) two sponsored news article (one about handbags another about upgrading to Windows 10), (3, 4) two social media posts (Facebook and Instagram), (5) an unboxing video from YouTube, (6) an electronic direct mail (EDM), (7) a video presenting a cause-related marketing activity, (8) a product recommendation, (9) a Google search result, (10) a product placement, (11) an atypical ad, and (12) a control item. The message set was divided into two subsets: a screenshot subset containing seven messages and a video subset containing four messages. Each participant saw six messages in total: the control message, three examples of the screenshot subset and two examples of the video subset. The choice of the messages within the

subset was randomized and counterbalanced. Block order (control, screenshot and video subsets) was randomized too. Consequently, the sample size varies across items.

### **Procedure**

Students were recruited during class to participate in an online, 20-min-long (not an ad-related) media study. After consenting to participate, they saw the six randomly selected messages one by one. They were requested to spend at least 20 s (or the length of the video) with each message. Each message was followed by questions about ad recognition and ad liking. The study ended with the qualitative part including open-ended questions about typical advertising and the demographic questions. Participation was voluntary; respondents received extra credit. Ethical permission was given by the Institutional Review Board of the Ohio State University.

### **Qualitative ad representation measures**

Three open-ended questions assessed typical ad representation. First, we asked participants to describe a typical ad: *“Please think about all the advertising that you have seen recently. Based on your experience, how would you describe a typical advertisement?”*. Then, we asked about the common features of typical ads: *“In your opinion, what are the common features of these advertisements?”*. Finally, we asked about the distinctive features of typical ads compared to other forms of communication: *“According to you, what are the features that distinguish advertising from other types of communication such as news stories, Facebook posts, emails from your friends or entertaining videos?”*.

Both similarities and differences were asked regarding the typical ad, considering that when comparing two objects, people evaluate both the similarities and the differences regarding selected features (Tversky 1977). Additionally, we also ensured that participants would list all relevant features that define a typical advertisement.

### **Quantitative measures**

*Ad recognition* was assessed using one item from a study concerning sponsorship disclosure effects (Boerman et al. 2012): *“To what extent do you think that what you have seen is an advertisement?”*. Answers were given on a slider scale ranging from zero (*“not at all an ad”*) to one hundred (*“definitely an ad”*).

*Ad liking* was assessed using one item: *“How much do you like what you have seen?”*. Answers were given on a slider scale ranging from zero (*“don’t like at all”*) to one hundred (*“like it very much”*). Both measures were adopted from English to Hungarian by using the protocol of Beaton et al. (2000).

### **Demographics**

Questions were asked about the consumers’ *education, expertise in advertising and marketing*, their *age* (open-ended question) and *gender* (*“male”, “female”*). *Level of education* was assessed on a six-point scale ranging from no high school degree to doctorate. *Advertising/marketing expertise* was also assessed on a six-point scale ranging from relevant work experience to no formal knowledge or work experience at all.

### **Analytic strategy: coding of the qualitative responses (study 1)**

The aim of the qualitative analysis was to explore respondents' ad representation. We chose to conduct an inductive (conventional) content analysis when coding categories arise from the data (Elo and Kyngäs 2008; Hsieh and Shannon 2005). First, two researchers read the answers several times to identify the main themes that were adopted to construct the coding categories. Findings were discussed, coding categories were specified and defined to create the coding scheme that contained fifteen coding categories. Next, two trained independent raters coded the answers based on the coding scheme. Raters only coded the presence (1) or absence (0), not the frequency of a category. Words that could not be categorized in the coding categories were not used in this study. Interrater reliability (Cohen's kappa ( $\kappa$ )) was substantial ( $\kappa > .61$ ) (McHugh 2012) for 10 variables, for eight variables, it was even excellent ( $\kappa > .75$ ) (Fleiss, Bruce, and Myunghee 2003). Disagreements were discussed between raters until consensus was reached. For the remaining five variables (*attractive/interesting, descriptive, branded, biased* and *persuasive/impactful*), interrater reliability was between .495 and .608. First, raters discussed the possible causes of disagreement and the definition of the concerned categories was clarified. Then, a third rater was trained and coded all answers using a reduced coding scheme of these five variables. Final coding was based on the discussion and consensus among the three raters.

## **Results**

### **Coding results**

The coding scheme contained overall fifteen categories that are described below. Most often, participants responded to the questions using general terms without mentioning any particular brands or advertisements.

1. **Branded** (53.1% mentioned): this category refers to the presence of a brand, brand elements such as a logo, a company or the presence of a specific product in the advertisement such as "(the ad) *promotes a brand*".
2. **Persuasive/impactful** (46.4% mentioned): answers from this category state that the purpose of ads is to affect, influence or persuade the viewer such as "(the ad) *affects emotions*" or "(the ad) *affects consumer decision*".
3. **Direct** (46% mentioned): this category includes statements that describe ads as "*short*", "*simple*" and "*straightforward*".
4. **Selling** (44.8% mentioned): this category includes statements about the selling and profit-oriented purpose of advertising like "(the ad's) *purpose is selling*" or "*buy for that price*".
5. **Entertaining/emotional** (43.9% mentioned): this category describes ads as entertaining or as having the intention to entertain. Additionally, ads might depict or try to arouse emotions as well: "*an ad can be humorous that makes us smile or laugh*" or "*Beautiful people, positive emotions, nice or popular music*".
6. **Awareness-raising/memorable** (43.1% mentioned): this category contains statements about ads trying to capture the viewer's attention, raise awareness or



trying to be memorable to increase recall. For example, “*awareness-raising*” or “(an ad) *gets you interested*”.

7. **Attractive/interesting** (42.3% mentioned): in this category, ads are described as particularly attractive or interesting like “*sumptuous*”, “*creative*”, “*spectacular*” or “*novel*”.
8. **Visual/aural** (41% mentioned): this category regroups answers about the visual appearance and the sound of the ad such as “*colorful*”, “*musical*”, “*loud*” or “*boisterous*”.
9. **Biased** (37.2% mentioned): this category includes statements about biases in advertising, mostly because the information is one-sided, and they only talk about the good features of the product, or they exaggerate the benefits: “*perfect smile, happiness*” or “*they present the product by emphasizing its benefits*”.
10. **Informative** (33.5% mentioned): this category describes ads as information providers about the product. For example, “(the ad) *lists the characteristics of the product*” or “*the product is often present, they also talk about it.*”
11. **Manipulative** (30.1% mentioned): the category regroups answers about how ads change their message to adapt it to their purpose and manipulate the viewers: “*manipulative elements and creative plot, they try to transmit the message to the subconscious*” or “*emotionally manipulative*”.
12. **Unwanted** (23.4% mentioned): these answers describe the ad as “*unwanted*”, “*intrusive*”, “*aggressive*” or “(the ad) *cannot be avoided*”.
13. **Cliché** (23.4% mentioned): this category contains answers that label ads “*cliché*”, “*boring*”, “*stereotyped*” or “*often repeated*”, “*abundant*”.
14. **Descriptive** (17.2% mentioned): this category contains statements about the advertising format, the typical presentation of an advertisement or places where advertising can be seen like “(an ad is) *generally a half-minute short film that they air on TV channel or it pops up on the Internet*” or “*typical ad: billboard, advert, video on the Internet or on TV, on the radio*”.
15. **Annoying** (12.1% mentioned): answers where ads are depicted as annoying, tiresome.

### *The effect of ad representation dimensions on ad recognition*

To examine the effect of the ad representation dimensions on ad recognition in general, we created a general linear model (GLM) including all the ad representation dimensions (predictor variables) and the ad recognition score (outcome variable), controlling for the tested items. We excluded the control message from the analysis. Results indicated that overall, five variables out of the fifteen influenced ad recognition in general significantly.

Three dimensions facilitated ad recognition in general: *branded*, *entertaining/emotional* and *direct*. Those who mentioned that ads were branded, in general gave higher recognition scores to the tested items, compared to those who did not ( $F(1, 1169) = 6.65, p = .01, \eta^2 = .006, B = 4.54$ ). Similarly, those who answered that ads try to arouse emotions or they aim to entertain gave higher ad recognition scores ( $F(1, 1169) = 6.06, p = .014, \eta^2 = .005, B = 4.34$ ). Finally, participants who mentioned that



ads are direct, short and simple also gave higher ad recognition scores ( $F(1, 1169) = 4.12, p = .043, \eta^2 = .004, B = 3.39$ ).

The remaining variables, *informative* and *attractive/interesting*, hindered ad recognition in general. Respondents who mentioned that ads provided product information, gave lower ad recognition scores in general compared to those who did not ( $F(1, 1169) = 8.04, p = .005, \eta^2 = .007, B = -5.06$ ). Likewise, those who mentioned that ads were attractive or interesting, gave lower ad recognition scores in general to the tested items ( $F(1, 1169) = 5.29, p = .022, \eta^2 = .005, B = -3.89$ ). The remaining 10 variables did not influence ad recognition in general significantly ( $F(1, 1169) < 2.43$ ).

### ***The effect of advertising recognition on ad liking***

We were also interested in how ad recognition affected ad liking. Therefore, we built a GLM, including ad recognition as the predictor variable and ad liking as the outcome variable, controlled for the tested items, age, gender, education, and ad expertise. Results indicated no general effect of ad recognition on ad liking ( $F(1, 1179) = 1.151, p = .284, \eta^2 = .001$ ): ad recognition did not affect ad liking on a general level.

## ***Discussion***

In the first study, based on the open-ended answers, we identified overall fifteen ad representation dimensions. Regarding the relationship between these dimensions and ad recognition, we found that *branded*, *entertaining/emotional* and *direct* facilitated ad recognition in general. On the other hand, *informative* and *attractive/interesting* hindered ad recognition in general. Moreover, we found no general effect of ad recognition on ad liking.

## ***Study 2***

In the second study, we aimed to confirm the relevant ad representation dimensions and their effect on ad recognition in a different cultural environment, on a more diverse sample. Previous studies indicated that ad format played an essential role in ad recognition (Boerman and van Reijmersdal 2016) and in ad evaluation as well (Burns and Lutz 2006; Jin and Lutz 2013). Therefore, in Study 2, we also analyzed data at a message-level. In addition, we expanded the analysis to the effect of advertising recognition on brand liking as well.

## ***Materials and methods***

### ***Study design***

The same mixed-method design was implemented as in Study 1. Study 2 differed from Study 1 in the selection and presentation of the messages. Overall, 14 different messages were presented in two different data collection waves using a repeated-measure design in a randomized order to minimize order and carry-over effects (Charness, Gneezy, and Kuhn 2012).

### **Participants**

Overall, 210 respondents filled out the survey. Seventeen of them were eliminated during the qualitative coding because their answers could not be interpreted in the context of this research. That reduced the sample size to 193. Ten respondents' demographic data was missing ( $Min_{age} = 18$ ,  $Max_{age} = 88$ ,  $M_{age} = 37.3$   $SD_{age} = 12.9$ , 55.2% female). Only 14.7% had advertising/marketing relevant work experience, while an additional 14.8% owned a degree in advertising/marketing without any relevant work experience.

### **Stimulus materials**

Fourteen different messages were presented either in a video format or as a screenshot: (1) a product review video from YouTube, (2, 3) two cause-related marketing activities (ViaOpta and GaScale), (4) an electronic direct mail (EDM), (5) a sponsored news article, (5, 7, 8) three social media posts (a Facebook post, an Instagram post and a Twitter post), (9) a product placement, (10) an atypical, humorous ad, (11) a Google search result. (12) a social message (not an ad) and (13, 14) two control messages (a news article and an entertaining article). All materials were real examples.

### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited on the MTurk website among subscribed MTurk workers<sup>2</sup>. The study was advertised as a media study to avoid priming respondents by telling them that the study was about advertising. Data was collected using an online survey software (Qualtrics). The order of the tasks during the study was identical to the order in Study 1.

### **Qualitative ad representation measures**

The open-ended questions to assess the ad representation dimensions were adapted from Study 1 to English by using the same translation protocol.

### **Quantitative measures**

Quantitative outcome measures assessing *ad recognition* and *ad liking* were identical to the measures used in Study 1. Furthermore, we assessed *brand liking* the same way as *ad liking*.

### **Demographics**

Questions were asked about the consumers' *education*, *expertise in advertising and marketing*, their *age* (open-ended question) and *gender* ("male", "female") in the same way as for Study 1.

### **Analytic strategy: coding of the qualitative responses (study 2)**

he analytic strategy consisted of two steps: first, we identified the categories using an inductive content analysis (Elo and Kyngäs 2008; Hsieh and Shannon 2005) to be aware of potential cross-cultural differences (about cross-cultural differences in advertising research, see: Andrews, Durvasula, and Netemeyer 1994; Durvasula, Lysonksi,

and Adnrews 1993; Petrovici and Marinov 2007). Then, we synchronized the coding categories with the categories of Study 1; therefore, categories with the same meaning were labelled identically across the two studies. The first step resulted in an inductive data-driven analysis as for Study 1, the second step allowed for the test of previously identified effects.

Two trained raters coded the dataset. Interrater reliability was tested using Cohen's kappa ( $\kappa$ ). For each category, the level of interrater reliability was substantial ( $\kappa > .61$ ) (McHugh 2012), for 8 out of the 10 categories it was even excellent ( $\kappa > .75$ ) (Fleiss, Bruce, and Myunghee 2003). The lowest level of agreement was reached in the *biased* ( $\kappa = .642$ ) and *awareness-raising/memorable* ( $\kappa = .673$ ) categories. Cases of disagreement were discussed by raters until consensus was reached.

## Results

After the two steps of coding, the final coding scheme contained ten categories: *informative* (58% mentioned), *attractive/interesting* (50.3% mentioned), *entertaining/emotional* (42% mentioned), *branded* (44.6% mentioned), *persuasive/impactful* (43.3% mentioned), *selling* (42.3% mentioned), *biased* (36.3% mentioned), *descriptive* (28.5% mentioned), *awareness-raising/memorable* (24.4% mentioned), *manipulative* (15.0% mentioned). There were no supplemental categories compared to Study 1.

### *The priming effect of the tested messages on ad representation*

Concerning the possible priming effect of the tested messages, we did find a significant difference between the two data collection waves. *Attractive/interesting* ( $\phi(193) = .161, p < .026$ ) and *entertaining/emotional* ( $\phi(193) = .183, p < .011$ ) were more likely to be mentioned by the participants in the second data collection wave than in the first wave. Additionally, participants from the second wave were marginally less likely to mention *informative* ( $\phi(193) = -.12, p < .096$ ). For the rest of the dimensions, we did not find any priming effect.

### *The general effect of ad representation on ad recognition*

To examine the effect of ad representation dimensions on ad recognition, we built a general linear model (GLM) including all the ad representation dimensions as predictor variables and the ad recognition score as the outcome variable, controlling for the tested messages. We excluded the two control messages and the social message from the analysis. Results indicated that *biased* was the only dimension that had a significant effect in general on the ad recognition scores ( $F(1, 1040) = 8.43, p = .004, \eta^2 = .008, B = 5.58$ ): those who mentioned that ads were biased, gave higher ad recognition scores in general to the tested ads.

Compared to the results of Study 1, where *branded*, *entertaining/emotional* and *direct* facilitated ad recognition and *informative* and *attractive/interesting* hindered it, in Study 2 only *branded* had a marginally positive effect on ad recognition in general ( $F(1, 1040) = 3.50, p = .062, \eta^2 = .003, B = 3.44$ ). The rest of the variables did not have a significant general effect on ad recognition ( $F(1, 1040) < 3.81$ ).

### **The general effect of ad recognition on ad and brand liking**

Next, we examined whether ad recognition had an effect on the ad and brand liking in general. First, we built a GLM including ad recognition as the predictor variable and ad liking as the outcome variable controlling for the tested items, the demographic variables and ad expertise. In Study 1, we found no impact. However, in Study 2 we found a negative general effect of ad recognition on ad liking ( $F(1, 1137) = 4.75, p = .029, \eta^2 = .004, B = -.056$ ). When the outcome variable was changed to brand liking, results indicated no direct effect of ad recognition on brand liking ( $F(1, 1137) = 0.538, p = .464, \eta^2 = 0$ ).

### **Message-level effect of ad representation on ad recognition and the effect of ad recognition on ad and brand liking**

We constructed each of the three above-mentioned GLMs at a message-level as well. The first model examined the effect of ad representation on ad recognition while the second and third model examined the effect of ad recognition on ad and brand liking, respectively. We found that none of the ad representation dimensions affected the ad recognition of the Instagram post, the Google search and the product placement significantly.

Detailed results indicated that *informative* marginally hindered the ad recognition of the YouTube product review ( $F(1, 86) = 2.93, p = .09, \eta^2 = .033, B = 5.87$ ) while *attractive/interesting* marginally facilitated it ( $F(1, 86) = 2.88, p = .093, \eta^2 = .032, B = 10.7$ ). Additionally, ad recognition did not have a significant effect on either ad or brand liking.

*Branded, biased* and *selling* at least marginally facilitated the ad recognition of the Facebook post (*branded*:  $F(1, 86) = 5.48, p = .022, \eta^2 = .06, B = 14.3$ ; *biased*:  $F(1, 86) = 6.42, p = .013, \eta^2 = .06, B = 14.3$ ; *selling*:  $F(1, 86) = 3.77, p = .056, \eta^2 = .042, B = 12.1$ ). Moreover, ad recognition affected ad liking negatively ( $F(1, 101) = 5.67, p = .019, \eta^2 = .053, B = -0.211$ ).

*Biased* and *selling* also facilitated the ad recognition of the Twitter post (*biased*:  $F(1, 85) = 5.52, p = .021, \eta^2 = .061, B = 12.7$ ; *selling*:  $F(1, 85) = 6.55, p = .012, \eta^2 = .072, B = 14.1$ ). However, ad recognition did not have a significant effect on either ad or brand liking.

Similarly to the Facebook post, *branded, biased* and *selling* facilitated the ad recognition of the EDM (*branded*:  $F(1, 86) = 6.67, p = .012, \eta^2 = .072, B = 14.5$ ; *biased*:  $F(1, 86) = 8.02, p = .006, \eta^2 = .085, B = 17.2$ ; *selling*:  $F(1, 86) = 4.55, p = .036, \eta^2 = .05, B = 12.2$ ). Furthermore, ad recognition did not have a significant effect on either ad or brand liking.

Besides, *branded* and *biased, entertaining/emotional* also facilitated the ad recognition of the emotional cause-related marketing activity (*branded*:  $F(1, 86) = 3.28, p = .074, \eta^2 = .037, B = 8.41$ ; *biased*:  $F(1, 86) = 10.0, p = .002, \eta^2 = .104, B = 15.9$ , *entertaining*:  $F(1, 86) = 9.4, p = .003, \eta^2 = .098, B = 8.41$ ). Additionally, ad recognition impacted positively the ad liking ( $F(1, 101) = 2.95, p = .089, \eta^2 = .028, B = .184$ ).

*Selling* facilitated the ad recognition of the rational cause-related marketing activity. ( $F(1, 85) = 5.70, p = .019, \eta^2 = .063, B = 9.87$ ), while ad recognition did not have a significant effect on either ad or brand liking. *Biased* facilitated the ad recognition of

the atypical ad ( $F(1, 85) = 8.01, p = .006, \eta^2 = .086, B = 20.4$ ). However, ad recognition did not have a significant effect on either ad or brand liking.

The sponsored news article was the only ad format where both *branded* and *biased* hindered ad recognition at least marginally (*branded*:  $F(1, 86) = 3.20, p = .077, \eta^2 = .036, B = 11.5$ ; *biased*:  $F(1, 86) = 7.47, p = .008, \eta^2 = .080, B = 19.0$ ). Moreover, ad recognition increased brand liking marginally ( $F(1, 101) = 3.84, p = .053, \eta^2 = .037, B = .151$ ).

Finally, ad recognition affected negatively the brand liking of the product placement ( $F(1, 97) = 4.01, p = .048, \eta^2 = .04, B = -.192$ ), while it marginally positively affected the brand liking of the Google search result ( $F(1, 97) = 3.81, p = .054, \eta^2 = .038, B = .153$ ).

## Discussion

In the second study, based on the open-ended answers, we identified overall ten ad representation dimensions, all of them (*descriptive, informative, branded, attractive/interesting, biased, manipulative, entertaining/emotional, awareness-raising/memorable, selling, persuasive/impactful*) were very similar to the categories mentioned by the Hungarian respondents in Study 1. Among these dimensions, only *biased* facilitated ad recognition in general. Moreover, *branded* had a marginally positive effect on ad recognition in general as well, partially confirming the results from Study 1. We did not find a general positive effect of *entertaining/emotional* as in Study 1. In Study 2, it only helped the ad recognition of the emotional cause-related activity. Similarly, *informative* that had a general negative effect in Study 1, only affected the ad recognition of the YouTube video in a marginally negative way. Finally, contrary to Study 1, *attractive/interesting* positively affected the ad recognition of the YouTube video.

Moreover, we found that ad recognition negatively affected ad liking in general, while we found no such general effect in Study 1. We also found that ad recognition did not affect brand liking in general. Moreover, ad recognition positively affected the liking of the emotional cause-related marketing activity.

Message-level GLM results indicated that mostly three ad recognition dimensions, *branded, biased* and *selling* facilitated the ad recognition of six tested messages: the Facebook and Twitter social media posts, the EDM, the cause-related marketing activities and the atypical ad. Moreover, ad recognition had a different impact on ad/brand liking depending on the tested message: we found a negative effect for the Facebook post, while ad recognition positively impacted the liking of the emotional cause-related marketing. We did not find any significant effect for the rest of the items.

The sponsored journal article represented the only ad format where *branded* and *biased* at least marginally hindered ad recognition. In that case, ad recognition had a marginally positive effect on brand liking.

## General discussion

Based on the theoretical framework of Evans and Park (2015) and categorization theories, the present research aimed to identify relevant ad representation dimensions and contribute to the understanding of how typical ad representation affect advertising

recognition (**RQ1**) and how ad recognition affects ad and brand liking (**RQ2**) in the case of new advertising formats in general and on a message-level as well. First, we review our results on a general level, then we continue with the message-level results.

Concerning the general effect of ad representation dimensions (**RQ1**), *branded*, *entertaining/emotional* and *direct* facilitated ad recognition in general in Study 1, while *biased* facilitated ad recognition in Study 2 and *branded* had a marginally positive effect as well, partially confirming the results of Study 1. Moreover, we found that *informative* and *attractive/interesting* hindered ad recognition in general in Study 1. However, results were not confirmed in Study 2 except for *informative* that marginally hindered the ad recognition of the YouTube video. The difference between Study 1 and Study 2 could be caused by the different set of items that we tested: we aimed to synchronize the ad formats; however, the content of the items was very diverse and differed across Study 1 and Study 2. Furthermore, results could also be the consequence of cross-cultural differences (Andrews, Durvasula, and Netemeyer 1994; Durvasula, Lysonksi, and Andrews 1993).

Regarding the effect of naturally occurring advertising recognition on ad and brand liking (**RQ2**), we found no general effect in Study 1. However, we did find a general negative effect in Study 2 that would support the Persuasion Knowledge Model's prediction that is when ad recognition activates persuasion knowledge, consumers become more defensive and give a more negative evaluation to ads (Friestad and Wright 1994). Furthermore, the negative effect of ad recognition on ad liking is also in line with previous empirical results (Amazeen and Muddiman 2018; Amazeen and Wojdyski 2019; Wei et al. 2008).

The detailed message-level analysis of Study 2 on how ad representation affected ad recognition (**RQ1**), revealed that three ad representation dimensions played a crucial role in advertising recognition: *biased*, *branded* and *selling*. The fact that the presence of the brand can facilitate ad recognition is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Amazeen and Wojdyski 2018; Wojdyski 2016). Our results complete these findings with the observation that the presence of the brand particularly facilitate the ad recognition of those consumers whose typical ad representation (ad schema) contains the *branded* feature.

*Selling* and *biased* can also facilitate ad recognition as a categorization rule when executional elements are not similar to the person's ad schema: a media message with relevant values—for example the message ultimately wants to sell something or a company seems to have a vested interest that biases the content—can be recognized as an ad when these dimensions are central features of the person's ad schema. Indeed, these ad representation dimensions had the most substantial effect when relevant values were present: the tested message either contained a visible brand element or a tangible product or service that is usually sold by a company or it presented the product in a very positive light.

Despite the facilitating effect on ad recognition, *branded* and *biased*, at least marginally hindered the ad recognition of the sponsored journal article. Indeed, it seems that the sponsored journal article activated the journal article schema, and it did not correspond to the relevant values of the participants' advertising schema: the brand

elements were not particularly visible, and the vested interest of the company to bias the content was not easily detectable either.

Concerning the rest of the ad representation dimensions, we also found that when the relevant value was detectable, the related dimension facilitated ad recognition. For instance, *entertaining/emotional* positively affected the ad recognition of the cause-related marketing activity video presenting an application prepared for the visually impaired that can easily arouse the emotions of the viewer. Or *attractive/interesting* facilitated the ad recognition of the YouTube video that appealingly presented information. Similarly, *informative* hindered the ad recognition of the YouTube video that did not contain common product information such as the price or where to buy the product.

To summarize, our results suggest that the presence of the relevant value of the ad schema dimension leads to ad recognition, and the format of the advertising message itself might play a less important role as long as consumers are not familiar with it. New ad formats, especially sponsored content, are similar to the surrounding context. Thus, consumers cannot always rely on executional cues to recognize ads, and because disclosures are often overlooked, consumers will look for relevant cues in the content (Kim, Pasadeos, and Barban 2001) and relevant cues are determined by their schema.

Regarding the effect of ad recognition on liking at a message-level (RQ2), in line with Evans and Park's predictions (2015), we both found positive and negative effects on ad/brand liking, and in some cases, we found no effect at all. Our results regarding the negative or absent effects are both consistent with some previous empirical results (negative effect: Amazeen and Muddiman 2018; Amazeen and Wojdyski 2019; van Reijmersdal 2016; Wei et al. 2008, Wojdyski 2016; no effect: Evans and Hoy 2016; Wood et al. 2008). In addition to the previous literature, we provided empirical evidence that ad recognition could have a positive effect on ad liking (emotional cause-related marketing) and brand liking as well (sponsored journal article, Google search result).

### **Limitation and further research**

This article presented two exploratory studies with relatively small sample sizes. Therefore, when results were not significant, it could be either due to the small effect size that we could not detect with the current sample size or because there was no effect at all. To formulate and test hypotheses based on the current results regarding the effect of ad representation dimensions on ad recognition, a more structured data set (both in format and content) and different study design are required.

Furthermore, because the qualitative data gathering about typical ad perception succeeded the quantitative part—as categories are malleable (Loken et al. 2008; Reisberg 2016)—in the case of some dimensions, there may have been a priming effect due to the prior ad recognition and evaluation tasks. However, starting with the qualitative part could have severely biased the ad recognition results.



## Implications

### Theoretical implications

The present results demonstrate how the advertising schemata described by Evans and Park (2015) operate. Consumers use their qualitative mental representations when ad recognition naturally occurs. However, in the case of new ad formats, depending on the executional elements and the content (relevant values) and their own ad representation, they will activate different subsets of the schema. The same ad schema variable can either facilitate or hinder ad recognition.

Besides, consumers use certain schema variables (in our study: *branded, biased, selling*) more often than others to decide whether a media message is an advertisement. These variables seem to have a central role in the ad recognition of new ad formats where similarity might be misleading. Future research might consider validating our results and expand on the relevant values of the ad schema variables.

Finally, the complex relationship between ad schema variables, ad recognition and ad/brand attitudes need to be further explored together with the potential moderating variables (beliefs, attitudes) related to the concept of advertising. Future research might consider analyzing the relationship between ad schemas, ad recognition, different attitudes and intentions to create a holistic model.

### Practical implications

Advertising disclosures that match relevant variables and values of the consumers' ad schema are supposed to be more effective in activating the ad schema and therefore facilitating ad recognition and the activation of persuasion knowledge. On the basis of our results, we would endorse previous findings concerning the use of the logo in the disclosure. Furthermore, we would also specify necessary elements in the content such as "traditional" product information (price and where to buy the product).

Advertising recognition is part of advertising literacy (Rozendaal et al. 2011; Malmelin 2010). Based on our results, *branded, biased* and *selling* are the most important dimensions, together with *entertaining/emotional* and *attractive/interesting* that play a role in the ad recognition of new advertising formats. These dimensions can help consumers defend against the unwanted effects of advertising in most of the cases; however, exceptions such as sponsored journal articles must be mentioned as well.

Finally, we would advise marketers that contrary to "common sense", advertising recognition can lead to a higher appreciation of the ad in some cases. Therefore, instead of finding ways to disguise their commercial message, they should use their creative energy to create advertisements that the public appreciates.

## Conclusion

In two studies, using various new advertising formats, in two very different cultural contexts, we provided empirical evidence that ad representation dimensions affect the ad recognition of new advertising formats in various ways. Based on our results, when relevant values are present, and consumers have the related ad representation dimensions/ad schema variables, ad recognition is facilitated through

the activation of the ad schema. Besides, some ad representation variables are used more often as guiding rules during the ad recognition process. Results are in line with the predictions of the theoretical model of Evans and Park (2015) and categorization theories as well. Future research might consider exploring the effect of ad representation dimensions on ad recognition and ad and brand attitudes in a more structured way. Both policymakers and marketers can benefit from the results of this line of research.

## Notes

1. Source: FTC official web site. <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/ftc-endorsement-guides-what-people-are-asking>
2. MTurk, or Amazon Mechanical Turk, is a web-based human workforce marketplace; subscribers earned a financial reward to participate in the study.

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