

# Creative Media Use Increases Online Sharing of Your Ad (but Seems Less Effective for Your Brand)

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## 1 Introduction

When you order a drink at your local juice bar, you notice that the flexing part of the straw has a picture of a woman who is holding her hands up. As you flex the straw, the woman bends backwards. This is a clever ad for a yoga center that also presents the link to its website. To what extent do consumers talk about such creative advertising? And what do they say about it? Do they mention the brand name, or focus only on the clever execution? Research has shown that creative media advertising, of which the drinking straw is an example, may have a positive effect on consumers' attitudes and brand recall (Dahlén et al. 2009). But do creative media also lead to an increase in word of mouth? And to what extent is this word of mouth linked to the brand itself?

Given the increasing importance of consumer and marketing initiatives on social media, we investigate how valuable the strategy of creative media advertising is for (electronic) word of mouth (= WOM). When consumers like an advertisement they may share it online, or speak positively about it, and are thereby offering a brand earned – hence free and additional – media space (Muntinga et al. 2011; van der Lans et al. 2010). Moreover, earned media space can greatly boost sales and trigger even more buzz (Stephen and Galak 2012). Importantly we also examine the consequences of online sharing for the brand. Is any-brand related content spoken about among consumers?

In general, positive communication effects of creative media use have been documented (e.g., Dahlén et al. 2009), but these have seldom been replicated by other researchers and there has been limited attention to the question of what the driving factors of these effects are. Hence, we focus on replicating prior findings and will be looking at the processes that underlie the effects. More specifically, we investigate whether creative media use is effective because of its novelty (i.e., spillover of the positive feeling of surprise) and/or because of the positive thoughts that arise when consumers solve the implicit link between the message and the medium? The answers will help marketers to use creative media in the right context.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Creative media advertisements can be considered a special case of *guerilla marketing* or *ambient marketing* (Hutter and Hoffmann 2011). Advertisers regularly implement promotional material into media that are not seen as traditional carriers of advertisements, such as waste bins, elevators and eggshells. What distinguishes creative media from guerilla marketing however is that the creative medium is chosen specifically to communicate the message itself. A creative medium is a non-traditional, novel medium that implicitly communicates the message (Dahlén 2005). A pillow, with associations such as sleep and relax and comfort, becomes a creative medium when it promotes a product or service that stresses similar features. Think for example of an insurance company that wants to convey helping you to relax and sleep well, because they take away your worries. The associations with the medium may then spillover to the brand (Dahlén et al. 2009).

Overall, Dahlén and colleagues have reported positive affective responses of creative media use in advertising. In comparison with a traditional medium, a creative medium increases ad attitude (Dahlén 2005; Dahlén and Edenius 2007; Dahlén et al. 2009) and brand attitude (Dahlén 2005; Dahlén et al. 2009). Also, more cognitive positive effects have been demonstrated. A creative medium captures attention better (Dahlén et al. 2009) increases the strength of brand associations over time and makes it more likely that people recall the brand (Dahlén et al. 2009). But why do these positive effects occur? And how do they trigger (electronic) word of mouth about the ad and the brand? We propose that creative media advertisements are surprising and that two mechanisms of surprise play a role in predicting positive affective outcomes for online sharing: transfer of positive feelings and increased positive elaboration.

Surprise is the emotion with which we react to unexpected things, such as an advertisement in a creative medium. From an evolutionary perspective, surprise readies the body and mind to explore and learn about the unknown. It comprises physiological reactions, behavioral responses and a subjective feeling (Meyer et al. 1991). There is a debate about the valence of the feeling of surprise (Noordewier and Breugelmans 2013) being neutral, positive or negative. We follow a recent review about the impact of surprise in advertising and assume that surprise is a neutral emotion that colors or amplifies ongoing evaluations (Hutter and Hoffmann 2014). The more positive (vs. negative) an unexpected ad is experienced, the more positive (vs. negative) ad attitudes become (Ang and Low 2000). It has been argued and demonstrated that subtle novelty is pleasantly arousing and instigates curiosity and exploration (Berlyne 1950; Eelen and Verlegh 2013). Therefore, we believe that the feeling of surprise in the context of creative media is positive. The process of *affective priming* (Murphy and Zajonc 1993) indicates that those feelings can spill over to the advertised brand

or product. Research has indeed shown that a creative medium induces a feeling of surprise that positively influences the evaluation of the brand (Dahlén 2005; Hutter and Hoffmann 2014), but this has not been validated in the context of online sharing. There is evidence that surprise is one of the driving forces of diffusion in (electronic) word-of-mouth (WOM). The presence of surprise increases people's will to share news items (Berger and Milkman 2012), product and service experiences (Derbaix and Vanhamme 2003), and advertising content with others (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & van Wijk, 2007). We expect that the positive feeling of surprise mediates the impact of creative media use on the likelihood of sharing an advertisement online and speaking positively about it.

H1: Creative media use leads to (a) a higher willingness to share an ad online, and (b) a more positive valence of word of mouth than traditional media use, mediated by an increase in surprise.

However, surprise in creative media may not only give rise to positive feelings that spillover to online sharing, it may also trigger increased elaboration. The creative medium calls for exploration of its meaning. Being confronted with the medium, consumers may wonder why the medium was chosen to promote the product or service. This is exactly one of the behavioral components of surprise, namely that ongoing processes are interrupted to increase attention towards the unexpected event in order to *solve schema incongruity* (Schützwohl 1998). Resolving the mystery and "getting it" (i.e., the link between the message and the chosen medium) might lead to positive affect. This was found in research about humor in advertising (Strick et al. 2013). Hence we predict that creative media use will lead to more positive thoughts and subsequently to a higher likelihood of sharing the advertisement online and speaking positively about it than traditional medium use.

H2: Creative media use leads to (a) a higher willingness to share an ad online, and (b) a more positive valence of word of mouth than traditional media use, mediated by an increase in positive thoughts

Besides these effects on feelings and attitudes, there might also be more "cognitive" responses to creative media. It has been shown that surprise increases attention (Meyer et al. 1991) and that creative media capture attention better than traditional media (Dahlén et al. 2009). Hence, it could be speculated that creative media use attracts more attention towards the brand and increases the chance of sharing brand-related information with other consumers. But capturing attention in itself may not be sufficient for all ad elements to be

elaborated upon. It is possible that “solving the puzzle” that is posed by the ad absorbs most of consumers’ cognitive resources and hinders attending brand-related information (Strick et al. 2010). In other words, presenting consumers with a puzzle might not help when you want them to think about your brand and its attributes. It might even distract them. In that case consumers may even be less likely to speak about the brand when they share the ad. Because of these opposing ideas, it is a research question how creative media use affects the ad content that is shared online. The proposed mechanisms of effectiveness are depicted visually in Figure 1.

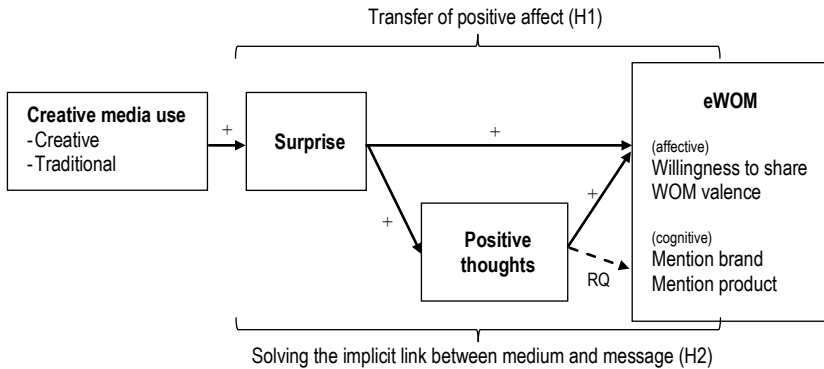


Figure 1: Conceptual model

To examine the proposed mechanisms, we conducted an experiment in which participants were confronted with either a creative or a traditional print advertisement. We explored how likely it was that the advertisement was shared, and we examined what was said about the advertisement. Additionally, ad attitude, brand attitude and recall measures were included to see if prior findings on creative media effectiveness could be replicated.

### 3 Method

#### 3.1 Design and Sample

The study was designed as a completely randomized online experiment with one factor (creative media use: creative versus traditional print advertisement). Participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (Micu et al. 2011), an online platform that provides manpower for human intelligence tasks.

Participants were required to be US residents and earned 0.40 USD by participating in the study which took on average 15 minutes to complete. In total 303 MTurk workers participated in this study. Participants who did not follow instructions ( $n = 7$ ), who scored low on English language proficiency ( $n = 2$ ), who indicated they had seen the ad before ( $n = 3$ ), or who had an outlying ad viewing time ( $n = 5$ ), were excluded from further analyses (see Measures). The final sample hence consisted of 287 participants (188 women, 99 men) between 18 and 76 years of age ( $M_{Age} = 38.42$ ,  $SD_{Age} = 14.25$ ). Observations were still equally balanced across the ad type conditions ( $n_{\text{traditional}} = 140$ ,  $n_{\text{creative}} = 147$ ,  $\chi^2 = 0.17$ ,  $p > .67$ ). For less than 1% the highest education degree was primary education, for 11% secondary education, for 33% post-secondary education, for 41% a bachelor degree, for 11% a master degree, for 3% a doctoral degree.

### 3.2 Stimulus Development

To ensure a naturalistic context, we adapted a picture of an existing creative advertisement and translated it into an equivalent traditional ad (see Figure 2). Although exposure to a picture of an advertisement is a different experience than being confronted with an ad in the actual medium, this technique has successfully been used in prior research about creative media (Dahlén 2005; Dahlén and Edenius 2007). Moreover, pictures are often shared online through social media. As a consequence people are confronted more often with a copy of the creative medium than with the medium itself. Therefore exposure to a picture creates a realistic setting for studying online sharing of ads.



Figure 2: Stimuli used in the pretest and study. Left: advertisement in a creative medium with added mock-up website. Right: print advertisement created in line with the ad on the straw

The chosen creative advertisement was a picture that showed a hand holding a drinking straw on which a woman in gym clothing was printed together with the company name “Y+ yoga center”. The straw promoted a yoga center in China and was therefore expected to be unknown to U.S. residents. The female figure was placed on the spot where the straw could be flexed, such that the user could make the woman bend into an actual yoga pose. A short mock-up website address “www.yplus.com” on the straw was added to increase the actionability of the advertisement. The website would allow consumers to look up further information about the yoga center. Next to the creative ad, a traditional print advertising with the same message was created.

In a pretest, 20 participants ( $M_{Age} = 26.50$ ,  $SD_{Age} = 7.06$ , age range 21-52, 12 women) rated both the traditional and creative advertisement. Perceived creativity was measured with the novelty and originality dimension of the creative product semantic scale (CPSS) (White et al. 2002). The scale consisted of five bipolar 7-point scales anchored with opposing adjectives (*over used – fresh*, *predictable – novel*, *usual – unusual*, *unique – ordinary*, *original – conventional*),  $\alpha = .88$ ,  $M = 5.18$ ,  $SD = .77$ . A paired sample t-test showed that the average perceived creativity of the ad on the drinking straw ( $M = 6.21$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) was higher than the perceived creativity of the ad in the traditional medium ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ),  $t(19) = 8.00$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Participants also compared the ads directly (on bipolar 7-point scales, one sample t-tests indicate whether each result was different from the midpoint). They evaluated the ads as resembling (versus *unresembling*,  $M = 5.15$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ,  $t(19) = 3.22$ ,  $p = .005$ ) and conveying similar textual information (versus *different*,  $M = 6.55$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ,  $t(19) = 16.62$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). The visuals were not considered highly similar, but not different either ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ,  $t(19) = 1.10$ ,  $p = .287$ ). The developed creative ad and its traditional counterpart were found appropriate to be used for the main study.

### 3.3 Procedure

Participants were requested to imagine being in a juice bar and ordering a drink. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the medium type conditions. In the traditional ad condition, participants imagined flipping through a magazine while enjoying their drink and noticing a print ad in it. In the creative ad condition, participants imagined enjoying their drink and noticing an ad on their drinking straw. As in real life, participants could determine the length of exposure to the ad on their own, by clicking through to the next section at their own pace. After exposure, ad-related measures followed (willingness to share, writing a message about the ad, attitude towards the ad, surprise, attitude towards the brand, valence of WOM, manipulation check, ad thoughts, recall of ad elements). Finally, participants responded to control questions (ad familiarity,

interest in yoga, manipulation check) and provided demographic information. Participants were debriefed and reminded of contact details of the researchers.

### 3.4 Measures

#### 3.4.1 Length of Ad Exposure

We measured length of exposure in seconds from the start of exposure until participants clicked on the “next” button. Values were then log transformed (i.e., natural logarithm) to obtain a normal distribution. Outlying ad viewing times were excluded per condition ( $n = 3$  for traditional ad,  $n = 2$  for creative ad) according to the interquartile distance criterion of Tukey (1977) to ensure that all observations represented natural viewing times. On average, participants took 17.29 seconds to look at the advertisement (min = 3.53, max = 81.45; in ln seconds:  $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ).

#### 3.4.2 Willingness to Share

Participants indicated their willingness to share the advertisement online for two types of messages, public and private sharing, on a 7-point Likert scale with the endpoints *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7) (based on Huang, Lin and Lin 2009). The two statements were “I would pass along/ share the just seen ad online to a bigger audience, e.g. as a Facebook status”, and “I would pass along/ share the just seen ad online in a private message” ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.85$ ). These items could be taken together,  $r = .67$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ . Overall, half of all participants wanted to share the message (31% both publicly and privately, 10% only privately, 9% only publicly), and half did not want to share the message publicly or privately.

#### 3.4.3 Word of Mouth Content

Participants were requested to imagine they would forward the ad on their favorite social network site and to make up a short accompanying message. Through an automated text analysis that accounted for incorrect spelling, each message was afterwards coded for mentioning the topic yoga (41%), and mentioning the brand (3%).

#### 3.4.4 Word of Mouth Valence

At the end of the survey participants were confronted with the message they had written and were requested to rate its valence (Cacioppo et al. 1997) on a 7-

point scale from *very negative* (1) to *very positive* (7). Overall, the messages had a positive tone ( $M = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ).

#### 3.4.5 Attitude towards the Ad

Attitude towards the ad was assessed using three bipolar 7-point scales, anchored (a) *bad – good*, (b) *unpleasant – pleasant*, and (c) *unfavorable – favorable* (Dahlén, 2005; Dahlén, 2009),  $\alpha = .95$ ,  $M = 5.45$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ .

#### 3.4.6 Attitude towards the Brand

As suggested by Dahlén (2005), attitude towards the brand was measured by three 7-point bipolar scales, anchored (a) *bad – good*, (b) *unsatisfactory – satisfactory*, and (c) *negative – positive*,  $\alpha = .95$ ,  $M = 5.47$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ .

#### 3.4.7 Surprise

The 7-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree – strongly agree*) contained five items to assess how surprising the ad was, and seven filler items (adapted from Holbrook and Batra 1987). The five items were (a) surprising, (b) astonishing, (c) exciting, (d) expected, and (e) mundane. The latter two were coded reversely. The scale was considered reliable,  $\alpha = .78$ ,  $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.27$  (mean-centered for analyses).

#### 3.4.8 Number of Positive Thoughts

In one essay box participants were requested to list the thoughts they had while viewing the ad (Cacioppo et al. 1997). None of the listed thoughts seemed unrelated to the study. Responses were coded blind of hypotheses for number of thoughts ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = .92$ ), number of positive thoughts ( $M = .92$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) and number of negative thoughts ( $M = .46$ ,  $SD = .72$ ). Each measure was mean-centered for analyses. Literature suggests that different psychological processes may underlie generating positive and negative thoughts and combining both into one score reduces the chance of detecting those different processes (Cacioppo et al. 1997). However, we found almost inverse results with both measures: overall, an increase in number of positive thoughts co-occurred with a decrease in number of negative thoughts, which led to the same outcomes. The total number of thoughts did not account for the results.

#### 3.4.9 Recall

In an open question, participants were requested to write down all elements of the ad they remembered. We coded all answers for recall of the element “website” (0 not mentioned, 1 mentioned) and its specific URL (0 incorrect, 1



correct), and recall of the element “brand” and its specific name. Those were the only persuasive elements present in the advertisements. Recall of these elements facilitates action in favor of the brand (e.g., online search for further information). Few participants recalled the specific URL (12, 4%) or brand name correctly (10%). The presence of a website address was mentioned by 31% of all participants, and the presence of a brand name was mentioned by 41% of all participants.

### 3.4.10 Demographics and Control Questions

Additionally, several demographics were assessed. Next to gender, age, interest in yoga, nationality and highest level of education completed, proficiency in English was assessed. We excluded participants from analyses with a beginner’s level of English ( $n = 2$ ), because their understanding of the questions may have been poor and could bias the findings. At the end of the study, participants indicated how interested they were in yoga (on a 7-point Likert scale from *not interested at all* until *very interested*,  $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ), how common they considered the ad (on a 7-point Likert scale from *very common* to *very uncommon*,  $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ ) and whether they had seen the ad before (on a five-point scale ranging from *definitely yes* to *definitely not*,  $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ). Participants who were exposed to the creative ad considered the ad more uncommon ( $M = 6.25$ ) than those who were exposed to the traditional ad ( $M = 2.80$ ),  $F(1, 285) = 416.87$ ,  $p < .0001$ . In line with the conducted pretest, this finding indicates that the manipulation was successful. Three participants indicated they had seen the ad before and were excluded from analyses.

## 4 Results

To investigate the overall effectiveness of creative advertising, we first looked at the overall effect of creative medium use (= CM use) on ad and brand responses, without taking into account the underlying processes of surprise and elaboration. Subsequently, we investigated the mediation pattern for each dependent variable by means of the process macro of Hayes (2013). The findings reported below focus on the impact of CM use on eWOM, and on whether the effects are driven by the feeling of surprise and/or by positive thoughts (see Table 1). All further details (e.g. parameter estimates) can be found in Table 2.

### 4.1 Surprise

As expected, it was found that the creative ad scored higher on surprise than the traditional ad,  $a_1 = 1.44$ ,  $t(286) = 11.70$ ,  $p < .0001$  (see Table 1).

#### 4.2 Positive Thoughts

The overall influence of CM use on the number of positive thoughts was positive, with the creative medium condition generating on average .54 more positive thoughts than the traditional ad condition,  $t(286) = 5.66$ ,  $p < .0001$ . When surprise was added to the regression as a predictor (see Table 1), the impact of creative media use on elaboration decreased,  $t(286) = 1.92$ ,  $p = .06$ . With increasing surprise, the number of positive thoughts increased as well,  $d_{21} = .23$ ,  $t(286) = 5.15$ ,  $p < .0001$ . As expected, the finding indicates that the surprising character of the medium calls for exploration of its meaning.

Table 1: The impact of creative media use on surprise and positive thoughts

Antecedent	Surprise ( $R^2 = .32$ )			Positive thoughts ( $R^2 = .18$ )				
	Coeff.	SE	$p$	Coeff.	SE	$p$		
Creative media use (X)	$a_1$	1.44	.12	<.0001	$a_2$	.21	.11	.06
Surprise ( $M_1$ )					$d_{21}$	.23	.04	<.0001
Constant	$i_1$	-.02	.06	.78	$i_2$	-.002	.05	.95

#### 4.3 Willingness to Share

We found that the creative ad was more likely to be shared ( $M = 3.87$ ) than the traditional one ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $F(1, 285) = 48.41$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .15$ ). Next, we investigated whether that effect was driven by surprise and positive thoughts. In support of hypothesis 1, an indirect positive effect of creative media use on willingness to share the ad through surprise was found. All other variables held constant, the creative ad scored higher on surprise than the traditional ad, and more surprising ads were more likely to be shared. In support of hypothesis 2, an indirect positive effect of creative media use through surprise and positive thoughts was also found. The creative ad increased surprise which in turn increased the number of positive thoughts and subsequently participants' willingness to share the ad. Moreover, there remained a positive effect of creative media use through positive thoughts directly which calls for other explanations than the influence of surprise. Finally, there was a direct positive effect of creative media use left that could not be ascribed to the underlying processes of surprise and elaboration.

#### 4.4 Word of Mouth Valence

The findings for valence were similar to those of willingness to share. Participants wrote a more positive message about the creative ad ( $M = 5.68$ ) than

about the traditional ad ( $M = 5.04$ ,  $F(1, 284) = 13.22$ ,  $p = .0001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ ). Hypothesis 1 was confirmed by the indirect positive effect of creative media use through surprise, and hypothesis 2 was confirmed by the indirect positive effect through surprise and positive thoughts. Again, the remaining positive indirect effect through thoughts indicates that the number of positive thoughts was not only triggered by surprise. For word of mouth valence, there was no direct effect of creative media use left.

#### 4.5 *Mentioning the Brand in WOM*

Overall, the chance of mentioning the brand name explicitly in the message,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.62$ ,  $p = .43$  was not affected by the medium used. The creative advertisement did not increase sharing brand-related information in WOM. The findings even point in the direction of an inverse effect: there was an indirect negative effect of creative media use through surprise and thoughts. This indicates that higher surprise and more positive thoughts reduced the chance of speaking about the brand in the shared message.

#### 4.6 *Mentioning the Product in WOM*

Participants who saw the creative ad had a lower chance of speaking about yoga ( $M = 27\%$ ) than those who saw the traditional ad ( $M = 56\%$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 26.91$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). This overall negative effect of creative media on mentioning yoga in the shared message could not be ascribed to surprise and/or positive thoughts, because none of the indirect effects were significant. The direct remaining effect of creative media use was still negative.

#### 4.7 *Ad Attitude, Brand Attitude, and Product Interest*

In general, the pattern of findings for these affective measures reflects that of the affective eWOM measures. Overall, the creative ad was liked more ( $M = 5.63$ ) than the traditional one ( $M = 5.26$ ,  $F(1, 285) = 4.31$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ ). Moreover, the creative ad led to a slightly higher interest in yoga ( $M = 4.11$ ) than the traditional ad ( $M = 3.66$ ),  $F(1, 285) = 3.40$ ,  $p = .07$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Brand attitude on the other hand was unaffected by creative media use,  $F(1, 285) < 1$ ,  $\eta^2 = .003$ . For all three measures a positive indirect effect of CM use through surprise was found (in line with hypothesis 1). For ad attitude and brand attitude, a positive indirect of CM use through surprise and positive thoughts was also found (in line with hypothesis 2) but the remaining direct effects of CM use were negative. There were no indirect effects of CM use through positive thoughts directly.

#### 4.8 *Recall of the Brand Name and the Website*

As for the cognitive eWOM measures, the recall measures did not show beneficial effects of CM use. Exposure to the creative ad led to a lower chance of recalling the brand name ( $M = 7\%$ ) than exposure to the traditional ad ( $M = 14\%$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.13$ ,  $p < .04$ ). This effect was not mediated by surprise, neither by surprise and positive thoughts, nor by positive thoughts directly. The direct impact of CM use on recall of the brand name remained marginally significantly negative. Recall of the website URL was unaffected by CM use,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.14$ ,  $p < .28$ . There were no indirect effects.

Table 2: Overview of the impact of creative media use on the different outcome variables mediated by surprise and positive thoughts

Outcome (Y)	Overall effect			Full regression model				Indirect effects		
	CM use	$c$	$R^2$	CM use (X) (direct effect) $c'$	Surprise ( $M_1$ ) $b_1$	Pos. thoughts ( $M_2$ ) $b_2$	Constant	$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$	$X \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$	$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$
<b>eWOM</b>										
- Willingness to share	1.29*** (.19)	.24	.55*** (.21)	.42*** (.09)	.26* (.11)	3.23*** (.09)	.60 (.15)	.06 (.04)	.08 (.04)	[.02, .18]
- Message valence	.64*** (.17)	.21	-.15 (.20)	.37*** (.08)	.48*** (.10)	5.37*** (.08)	.53 (.12)	.11 (.06)	.16 (.04)	[.09, .26]
- Mention brand ( $\omega$ )	-.58 (.74)	.10	.57 (.92)	-.50 (.34)	-.79 (.66)	-3.99*** (.51)	/	/	/	[-2.15, -.02]
- Mention product ( $\omega$ )	-1.28*** (.25)	.13	-1.40*** (.31)	-.01 (.13)	.23 (.17)	-.38 (.13)	/	/	/	/
<b>Evaluation</b>										
- Ad attitude	.37* (.18)	.34	-.77*** (.18)	.55*** (.07)	.63*** (.09)	5.46*** (.07)	.80 (.12)	/	/	.21 (.05)
- Brand attitude	.15 (.16)	.28	-.75*** (.17)	.41*** (.07)	.57*** (.09)	5.47*** (.07)	.60 (.11)	/	/	[.12, .31]
- Interest in product	.45† (.25)	.05	-.12 (.30)	.33*** (.12)	.19 (.16)	3.89*** (.12)	.47 (.17)	/	/	[.11, .29]
<b>Memory</b>										
- Recall brand name ( $\omega$ )	-.77† (.41)	.04	-.88† (.50)	-.03 (.19)	.29 (.25)	-2.25*** (.21)	/	/	/	/
- Recall website ( $\omega$ )	.67 (.62)	.02	.46 (.75)	.13 (.32)	.07 (.37)	-3.20*** (.31)	/	/	/	/

Creative medium (= CM) use was treated as an effect-coded discrete between subjects variable (traditional = -0.5, creative = 0.5). Unstandardized b-coefficients are presented with standard error between parentheses. The b-coefficients of  $a_1$ ,  $a_2$  and  $d_{31}$  are presented in Table 1. The indirect effects are estimated using 5000 bias corrected bootstraps [with confidence interval between square brackets]. Only significant indirect effects are reported. For the logistic regression models (L), the Nagelkerke pseudo  $R^2$  is provided. N = 287. †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

We explored the impact of creative media use on online sharing of advertisements. Earlier research has shown the potentially advantageous communication effects of creative media advertising. The use of a creative medium can reduce resistance, lead to more favorable responses, increase the amount of brand-related thoughts, and increase sales (Dahlén 2005; Dahlén and Edenius 2007; Dahlén et al. 2009; Hutter and Hoffmann 2014). In the current study, we sought to broaden the existing knowledge about creative media by examining whether the effects could be extended to (electronic) word of mouth. Many consumers share branded content with others through online social media platforms (Muntinga et al. 2011). Therefore it is important to find out whether marketers can use creative media to earn more media space and reach more consumers. Importantly we investigated the underlying mechanisms that are involved in the processing of advertisements in a creative medium, as they might boost or hamper the effectiveness of creative media.

We found evidence that a creative media advertisement was surprising and that this led to a spillover of positive feelings to WOM (i.e., higher willingness to share the advertisement online, more positive valence of WOM) and to the evaluation of the advertisement, the brand and the promoted product, in comparison with a traditional print advertisement. This is in line with the idea that surprise amplifies feelings (Hutter and Hoffmann 2014) that spillover to the evaluated advertisement and product (Murphy and Zajonc 1993). Furthermore, we also found that the unexpected, surprising creative medium generated more positive thoughts and that this in its turn led to more and more positive WOM, as well as a more positive evaluation of the ad and brand. In line with our expectations, this suggests that consumers think harder about a creative medium advertisement to find the link between the medium and the message and that they enjoy solving it. “Getting it” led to transfer of positive affect to the evaluated advertisement (Strick et al. 2013). Taken together, our findings suggest that creative media have the potential of leading to greater and more positive earned media space due to surprise and subsequent increased positive elaboration. From our findings it cannot (yet) be concluded that online sharing of the creative ad will trigger overall positive effects for the brand. First, the advertised product and the brand itself were not mentioned more often in WOM. Greater amounts of positive thoughts even seemed to hinder mentioning the brand in the message. Second, creative advertising led to lower recall of the brand name than traditional advertising. Interestingly, our findings indicate that creative media use in the context of online sharing is beneficial for the advertisement itself, but not necessarily for sharing brand-related information and (explicit) brand knowledge.

One of the limitations of our study is that we made use of an online experiment that may say more about consumers' sharing intentions rather than about real sharing behavior. However we made use of implicit measures (i.e., coding of messages) to reveal how participants felt and thought about the advertisement they were exposed to, thereby reducing the chance of finding biased results. The explicit measures were used to facilitate comparison with prior research. The benefit of our approach was that we could study underlying mechanisms of creative media effectiveness with single source data in depth. However, adding field experiments or analyzing secondary data of social media platforms would definitely be a required next step to advance our understanding of electronic word of mouth for creative advertising.

Our research has major contributions for both theory and practice. First, we replicated and extended research findings about creative media independent of the original work by Dahlén and colleagues. We have replicated the overall beneficial effect of creative media use for ad attitude (Dahlén 2005; Dahlén and Edenius 2007; Dahlén et al. 2008b; Dahlén et al. 2009) and have extended it to word of mouth (some preliminar evidence for WOM intention in&nbsp;&nbsp; Dahlén et al. 2008a). We did not find an overall positive effect for brand attitude (in contrast with Dahlén 2005; but in line with Dahlén et al. 2008b; Dahlén et al. 2009). Importantly, our measures of mentioning the brand and product in WOM and recall did not show positive cognitive outcomes of creative media use in advertising. We even found some indications that creative media use can have negative consequences for explicit memory. Prior research has shown mixed results (null effect for brand identification, Dahlén et al. 2008b; positive effect for brand evocation, Dahlén et al. 2009). It should be investigated further whether finding the link between the medium and the message hinders attention for the irrelevant context, as suggested by research about humor in advertising (Strick et al. 2013). Thus, it could be investigated in depth whether a creative ad can be "too" absorbing and fun such that it blocks further exploration of the product and brand information. Our finding that consumers wrote more positive messages about the creative ad may point to this idea. Another possibility is that beneficial effects for the brand may only occur after a time delay (Dahlén et al. 2009). Furthermore, it could be studied whether implicit brand knowledge remains intact. It is possible that brand information was only processed by consumers at the unconscious level and could not be retrieved by explicit measures such as recall (Vandeberg et al. in press). Note however that conscious recall would be necessary for a consumer to undertake any further action online towards buying a product or making use of a service. Further research could make use of more implicit memory measures to find out whether creative media use is truly detrimental for the brand. Eye tracking data

may unravel implicitly how much attention consumers dedicate to the brand and product.

We also moved beyond prior findings that concentrated on effects, by focusing more on the (potential) underlying mechanisms of surprise that make creative media work. Even though this seems mainly important for theory building, it points to important boundary conditions (of when and why creative media work) that are relevant to practitioners. So far, our findings show that the positive creative media effects were triggered mainly by the novelty of the advertisements. There was an immediate transfer of positive affect through surprise. This indicates that the effects found might wear out over time, when the creative medium used is no longer considered surprising. Hence, it is clear that advertising creativity should constantly be reinvented. The surprising character of the medium also led to increased elaboration and solving the link between the message and the medium (measured by the amount of positive thoughts). Therefore, advertisers might need to be aware that mental resources should be readily available when consumers encounter the creative ad, such that they have the opportunity to understand and appreciate the cleverness of a campaign. If consumers need to decipher the message of the advertisement that is left implicit, the effects of creative advertising may only hold for target groups consisting of individuals who are motivated to think hard, or have the opportunity to do so.

Our research suggests that creative media use is a powerful instrument in the arsenal of an advertiser to surprise consumers, attract their attention, and instigate positive feelings and elaborative processing about the advertisement.

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