

Behavioural science

with Dr Maïke Hübner and Professor Julia Thalmann

Talking points

Comprehension

1. What are the similarities and differences between native ads and organic content?
2. Why is it important that sponsored content is labelled as such?
3. Why is it challenging for advertising companies to attract viewers' attention on social media?

Application

4. How could you design a similar experiment to investigate how political messages influence social media users?
5. How could advertisers use Maïke and Julia's findings to make sponsored content clearer and more transparent?

Analysis

6. Why do you think Maïke and Julia created a mock Instagram feed for their experiment, rather than using a real one?
7. Why do you think most countries regulate what commercial advertisers can and cannot do? What do you think an environment with zero advertisement regulation might look like?

Evaluation

8. Has Maïke and Julia's article influenced your own perspective on engaging with social media and adverts? If so, how? If not, why not?
9. Some countries are debating a social media ban for people under 16 years old. How could the information in Maïke and Julia's article be used to support or oppose a ban?

Activities

Design and deliver an engaging educational presentation to help develop learners' consumer literacy – in other words, to help them learn how to identify when they are being advertised to.

Begin by laying out why it is important to be able to identify adverts. Then, give them tools (with examples) to identify native ads, such as:

- Disclosure labels, e.g., 'Ad', 'Sponsored', 'Paid partnership'
- Call-to-action buttons, e.g., 'Shop now!'
- Influencer affiliate links and discount codes
- Algorithmic targeting cues, e.g., 'Why am I seeing this?'
- Psychological persuasion, e.g., fake urgency

Think about incorporating the following discussion prompts in your presentation to get your audience talking:

- Why do advertising companies make ads look like regular posts?
- Who benefits when viewers cannot tell the difference?
- What is the difference between an ad and a recommendation from a friend if your friend is paid to give the recommendation?

It is also important to remember that on social media platforms, it is not only adverts that are trying to influence our behaviour. How could your audience identify other content that aims to shape their views and opinions?

Additional activity:

If you have access to a social media account, try following your own advice from your presentation. Scroll through your feed at your normal rate and see how many native ads you can spot. How easy was it to identify them? What clues alerted you to the fact that they were sponsored content? How easy was it to know when a post was trying to influence you?

More resources

- Maïke and Julia's lab YouTube page contains short explanatory videos about eye-tracking: [youtube.com/@UniLabHRW](https://www.youtube.com/@UniLabHRW)
- Maïke and Julia regularly share insights into their studies and results on their lab LinkedIn page: [linkedin.com/company/uni-lab-community](https://www.linkedin.com/company/uni-lab-community)