# NARRATIVES THAT LAST: EXPLORING LONG-TERM RETENTION OF ELEMENTS IN STORYTELLING ADVERTISING

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS / GLOSSARY

**AI** - Artificial Intelligence

**Ad** - Advertisement

**STM** - Short-Term Memory

**LTM** - Long-Term Memory

**ELM** - Elaboration Likelihood Model

**E-ELM** - Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Context

In 2024, narrative advertising continues to be a critical strategy for brands aiming to stand out in a crowded marketplace. As consumers are inundated with information from multiple channels, the power of storytelling has become essential in cutting through the noise. Studies have shown that narratives are far more memorable than isolated facts or figures, with people being 22 times more likely to remember a story-based statistic than one presented as raw data (The Brand Shop, 2024). This enhanced memorability is crucial in a time where consumer attention spans are shrinking, and the ability to recall brand messages is directly linked to the effectiveness of advertising campaigns.

The digital landscape, particularly platforms like Instagram and TikTok, has become fertile ground for narrative advertising. With over 500 million daily users on Instagram Stories alone, brands have unprecedented opportunities to craft and share their stories in engaging formats that resonate with consumers (The Brand Shop, 2024). These platforms allow for the creation of dynamic, ongoing narratives that not only capture attention but also foster long-term engagement and loyalty.

The contemporary business environment is shaped by rapid advancements in technology, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), which is revolutionizing content creation and personalization. In 2024, 85% of marketers reported that AI has significantly changed how they create content, enabling more personalized and impactful storytelling (HubSpot, 2024). Despite these technological advancements, the need for authentic and human-centered narratives remains paramount. Consumers are increasingly seeking out brands whose stories align with their personal values, with 71% of millennials preferring to buy from companies that reflect their beliefs and ethics (The Brand Shop, 2024).

Moreover, the current geopolitical and economic uncertainties have heightened the demand for narratives that convey trust, transparency, and ethical considerations. As consumers navigate these turbulent times, they are drawn to brands that not only entertain but also provide a sense of reassurance and shared values through their storytelling (MGID, 2024). This shift underscores the critical role of narrative advertising in building and maintaining consumer trust in an era where such trust is increasingly fragile.

Several key trends define the narrative advertising landscape in 2024, each with significant implications for how brands tell their stories. AI continues to be a major force, not only in creating more content but also in enabling more nuanced and personalized narratives. However, as AI-generated content becomes more prevalent, there is a growing emphasis on maintaining the authenticity and emotional resonance of these narratives. Consumers are quick to discern and reject content that feels overly automated or inauthentic, making it essential for brands to strike a balance between technological efficiency and genuine human storytelling (HubSpot, 2024) (MGID, 2024).

Another significant trend is the strategic use of nostalgia and pop culture references in advertising narratives. These elements tap into collective memories and cultural touchpoints, making the stories more relatable and emotionally engaging. By linking their narratives to familiar experiences, brands can enhance the memorability of their messages, which is particularly relevant given that the ability to remember these narratives is crucial for long-term brand recall and loyalty (MGID, 2024).

In conclusion, narrative advertising is more relevant and necessary than ever in 2024. The combination of digital transformation, AI advancements, and shifting consumer expectations has made storytelling a powerful tool for brands to differentiate themselves and build lasting connections with their audiences. By focusing on authentic, value-driven narratives that are both memorable and relatable, companies can effectively navigate the complexities of the modern marketing landscape.

## 1.2. Research Motivations

In today's competitive marketplace, where consumers are bombarded with countless ads daily, the need for advertisements that resonate and are remembered is more critical than ever. As highlighted in the literature, narrative advertising has become a key strategy in breaking through the clutter and creating memorable advertisements (The Brand Shop, 2024).

Managers need more insights into which specific elements of narrative advertising are most effective in enhancing brand and ad recall. Research shows that characters and well-structured plots in storytelling advertising generate consumer engagement and recall (McGann & Schwartz, 1988; Escalas, 2004). However, not all narrative components contribute equally to recall. Understanding the nuances of the diversity of elements that compose these advertisements can help advertisers allocate their creative resources more effectively, ensuring that their campaigns leave a lasting impact on the audience.

Moreover, the rise of AI-driven content creation and the increasing demand for authentic, value-driven narratives mean that managers must adapt their strategies to ensure that their advertisements are both technologically advanced and emotionally resonant (HubSpot, 2024). By examining how different elements contribute to long-term memory retention, this research provides valuable insights for managers looking to optimize their advertising strategies for maximum recall and engagement.

From an academic perspective, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning the long-term retention and recall of specific narrative components in advertisements. While considerable research has focused on the immediate or short-term impact of narrative advertising (Escalas, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000), less attention has been paid to how these elements—such as characters, plot, settings, brand messages and brand elements—are retained from advertisements over extended periods of time. Understanding these processes is interesting for developing knowledge around memory and advertising effectiveness.

Most existing studies tend to treat advertisements as holistic units, without dissecting the individual contributions of its components. This approach overlooks the potential differential impact these elements might have on memory retention. For instance, characters might create stronger emotional connections than plot points, or familiar settings might enhance the relatability of an ad, influencing how well the advertisement is remembered (Green & Brock, 2000; Escalas, 2004; Gillespie & Joireman, 2016). More focused studies on each element are needed to tailor advertising creation and improve ad memorability.

Additionally, the intersection of narrative theories and advertising presents a rich area for exploration. Applying concepts from narratology and cognitive psychology to the field of advertising can provide deeper insights into how stories are developed, processed, stored, and recalled by consumers (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010; van Laer et al., 2014). By addressing these gaps, this research contributes to both the theoretical understanding of narrative processing and the practical application of these theories in advertising.

### 1.2.1. Research Problem

Despite the growing use of narrative advertising in modern marketing, there remains a significant gap in understanding which specific elements of these narratives are most effectively retained by consumers over time. While narrative ads aim to create lasting impressions, not all components—such as characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integration—are remembered equally. The challenge lies in identifying which elements contribute most to long-term recall, thereby optimizing the design of narrative advertisements to enhance their effectiveness. This research problem is particularly relevant in the context of an increasingly competitive advertising landscape, where brands need to ensure that their messages not only capture attention but also remain memorable over extended periods. With that in mind, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- Which elements of narrative advertisements are most effectively retained by consumers over time?
- How does the recall of specific elements (characters, plot, settings, messages, brand elements) of narrative advertisements decay over time?

## 1.3. Contributions

This research offers valuable insights for advertisers and marketers aiming to enhance the effectiveness of their narrative campaigns by understanding how different narrative elements contribute to long-term recall. One of the primary contributions is the identification of specific narrative components that have the greatest impact on memory retention over extended periods. By understanding which elements are most likely to be remembered, advertisers can strategically design their campaigns to focus on these components, thereby maximizing the longevity of their ads.

For instance, if characters or specific plot points are shown to be more resilient in memory, advertisers can ensure these elements are prominently featured in their narratives. This approach not only aids in immediate consumer recall but also reinforces it over time, leading to more sustained consumer engagement and loyalty.

From an academic perspective, this thesis makes significant contributions to the understanding of narrative advertising by focusing on the long-term retention of specific elements that compose narrative ads. Unlike many studies that treat advertisements as holistic entities, this research dissects the components and explores their unique contributions to memory retention. This granular analysis fills a critical gap in the literature, offering a deeper understanding of the separate components that underlie the recall of narrative advertisements.

The use of a qualitative longitudinal methodology also represents a noteworthy contribution to the field. This approach allows for a detailed examination of how recall evolves over time, providing richer insights than cross-sectional studies. The integration of thematic analysis with quantitative analysis of qualitative data further enhances the robustness of the findings, offering a comprehensive view of the factors that influence the long-term effectiveness of narrative advertising.

Additionally, by examining the decay of recall for different narrative elements, this research provides a foundation for future studies to explore how narratives can be optimized for better long-term retention. The research will confirm that not all elements are retained equally, highlighting the need for more focused research on the characteristics that make certain elements more memorable than others.

The contributions of this thesis are addressing both the practical needs of marketers and the theoretical gaps in the literature. For practitioners, the insights on long-term recall and the strategic use of narrative elements offer clear guidelines for enhancing the impact of their advertising campaigns. Academically, the study explores how specific narrative components last in memory while covering a time range never explored in this context before, providing new knowledge that can inform future research and develop the field of narrative advertising.

## 1.4. Approach

The literature review forms the theoretical backbone of this research. It begins by tracing the evolution of advertising, highlighting the shift from traditional methods to more dynamic, narrative-driven approaches. This section then delves into the concept of narrative advertising, examining what are its components and how they are used to create engaging and memorable advertisements. By reviewing key theories from narratology and marketing, this chapter identifies the current understanding of these components and their relation with recall. The literature review also introduces the theoretical framework that guides this study, including relevant models of memory retention and advertising effectiveness.

The methodology section details the research design, which employs a qualitative longitudinal approach to conduct the study. This chapter outlines the sampling strategy, which involved purposive sampling of participants to ensure a representative demographic. The data collection process is described in detail, with participants exposed to a selected advertisement in a controlled environment, followed by in-depth interviews conducted immediately after viewing, one week later, and one month later. These interviews are designed to capture changes in recall over time, with a focus on how different narrative elements are retained or forgotten. The chapter also discusses the pilot study conducted to refine the research instruments and data collection procedures.

The results chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the interview data. This section is organized according to the different narrative elements studied and their recall at various time intervals. The results are presented using tables, trend analysis charts, and thematic analysis, providing a clear and structured account of which elements were most effectively remembered and how memory decay occurred over time. The chapter also includes a comparative analysis of the two advertisements used in the study, highlighting differences in recall of the ads.

The discussion chapter interprets the findings in the context of the existing literature and theoretical framework. This section explores the implications of the results for both theory and practice, discussing insights into the decay of elements in the long-term. This chapter integrates the study's findings with broader theoretical debates in advertising and consumer psychology, contributing to a deeper understanding of the nuances of narrative components in audience memory.

The final chapter of the thesis provides a concise summary of the research findings and their implications. It discusses the practical applications of the study, offering recommendations for advertisers on how to design more memorable narrative ads. The chapter also outlines the theoretical contributions of the research, emphasizing its role in advancing the understanding of how elements of narrative advertisements decay in memory. Finally, the conclusion identifies its limitations and opportunities for future research, particularly in improving the robustness of the research processes, such as wider data collection, different types of narrative structures or varying audience characteristics.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction to Narrative Advertising

Advertising has undergone significant transformations over the decades, evolving from traditional methods such as print and television ads to more dynamic and engaging formats. Initially, advertising focused primarily on conveying product information and persuading consumers through straightforward, often repetitive messages (Tellis, 2003). Traditional methods, including print advertisements, TV commercials, and radio spots, dominated the landscape for much of the 20th century (Kotler & Keller, 2006). However, the digital age has prompted a shift towards more interactive and story-based approaches.

As consumers became more media-savvy and selective, the limitations of traditional advertising methods became apparent. Old methods often failed to capture the sustained attention of audiences inundated with information from various media channels (Garrett, 2020). This shift in consumer behavior has opened the doors to the growth of narrative advertising—an approach that leverages storytelling to create more engaging and memorable campaigns. The need for narrative advertising is underscored by its ability to break through the clutter of conventional advertising, offering a more immersive and impactful way to connect with audiences.

Narrative advertising is a strategy that employs storytelling elements to create a compelling narrative around a brand or product, aiming to engage consumers emotionally and cognitively (Green & Brock, 2000). This form of advertising often uses characters and plots to convey a message, making the brand message more engaging and easier to remember (Escalas, 2004). By creating a

story that resonates with the consumer's experiences and emotions, narrative advertising fosters a stronger brand connection and recall (van Laer et al., 2014). This approach focuses on storytelling techniques to build an emotional connection with the audience, often resulting in increased brand loyalty and consumer engagement (Lundqvist et al., 2013).

Narrative advertisements encompasses several key components that together create a compelling and engaging story to connect with the audience. Characters serve as the human elements of the narrative, allowing audiences to connect on a personal level; these can be individuals, animals, or even anthropomorphized objects representing the brand or product (Chatman, 1978; Escalas, 2004). The plot is the sequence of events that unfold within the narrative, providing a structured storyline that captivates the audience and conveys the brand's message effectively (Chatman, 1978; Green & Brock, 2000). Setting provides the contextual backdrop, including the location, time period, and environment, which frames the story and helps create a vivid, immersive experience for the audience (Chatman, 1978). Also,, the core message is the underlying theme or moral of the story that communicates the brand's key points and values to the audience (Pulizzi, 2012). And finally, the brand itself is seamlessly integrated as part of the story, either by using its visual identity, including its products or services, or even composing the plot around actual stories about the brand (Kılıç & Yolbulan Okan, 2021; Pfannes, Meyer, & Orth, 2021; Chang, 2009). These components work synergistically to enhance brand recall and foster a deeper emotional connection with consumers.

The relevance of narrative advertising is particularly pronounced in the context of digital and social media platforms, where consumers are bombarded with ads and are more likely to engage with content that tells a story (Pera & Viglia, 2016). Understanding narrative advertising is relevant for marketers aiming to create more engaging and memorable campaigns.

### 2.1.1. Objectives of Narrative Advertising

The primary objectives of narrative advertising are to enhance emotional engagement, improve brand recall and recognition, convey information, build trust and credibility, and influence consumer behavior.

Narrative advertising aims to evoke emotions in the audience, creating a stronger bond between the consumer and the brand. This emotional engagement can lead to increased brand loyalty and preference (Escalas, 2004). Similarly, emotional engagement through storytelling in advertisements fosters a deeper relationship between the brand and its consumers (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). By tapping into the emotional responses of consumers, brands can create more memorable and impactful advertising experiences.

Using compelling stories, narratives in advertisements help in improving brand recall and recognition. Stories are more memorable than plain facts or data, making it easier for consumers to remember the brand (Green & Brock, 2000). Additionally, storytelling in advertising improves memory retention by creating vivid and engaging mental images (Escalas, 2007). This enhanced recall and recognition are crucial for brands aiming to stand out in a crowded marketplace.

Moreover, narrative advertising can simplify and convey complex information in a more digestible and relatable manner. This is particularly useful for products or services that require some explanation (Lundqvist et al., 2013). By utilizing storytelling, brands can effectively communicate intricate details in a way that resonates with their audience.

Through authentic storytelling, narrative ads can build trust and credibility with the audience. When consumers see stories that reflect their own experiences and values, they are more likely to trust the brand (van Laer et al., 2014). Narratives that reflect consumers' personal experiences enhance perceived credibility and trustworthiness of the brand (Adaval & Wyer Jr., 1998). Establishing trust through narrative advertising can lead to stronger consumer relationships and long-term loyalty.

Lastly, a well-crafted narrative can inspire consumers to take action, whether it's making a purchase, sharing the story with others, or engaging with the brand on social media. Effective

storytelling in marketing campaigns can drive consumer actions and increase engagement with the brand (Pulizzi, 2012). Narrative advertising encourages consumers to interact with and take action towards the brand, fostering greater engagement (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). By motivating consumers to act, narrative advertising can enhance brand performance and visibility.

## 2.2. Storytelling Theories and Narrative Elements

## 2.2.1. Storytelling Theories in Marketing and Narratology

Narratology and Marketing offers several theories that can be effectively applied in advertising to enhance the impact of storytelling. Here, I evaluate key narratological and marketing theories and their applicability in the context of advertising.

Structuralism, focusing on the underlying structure of narratives, is particularly relevant in advertising. By identifying common patterns and functions in storytelling, advertisers can craft messages that resonate deeply with their audience. Vladimir Propp's identification of narrative functions in folktales, for instance, can be utilized to create advertisements that follow a familiar structure, ensuring easy engagement with the story (Propp, 1968). Additionally, the use of archetypal characters and plot structures can evoke a sense of familiarity and trust, making the message more persuasive (Lévi-Strauss, 1963).

Exploring the formal aspects of narratives, Formalism examines elements such as style, structure, and language use, which are crucial in crafting effective advertisements. Its concept of "defamiliarization" is particularly useful, as it presents novelty, capturing the audience's attention and enhancing their perception (Shklovsky, 2023). Formalism allows storytellers to make their messages more memorable and impactful (Eichenbaum, 1965).

Theories of time and space in narratology explore how narratives represent and manipulate these dimensions. The concepts of anachrony, duration, and frequency can be employed to control the pacing and structure of an advertisement (Genette, 1980). Techniques like flashbacks, slow-motion effects, or repetitive sequences can emphasize key points and create a dynamic narrative. Additionally, focalization helps choosing the right narrative perspective to influence viewers' perceptions of the brand, product or service (Bal, 2009).

Psychoanalytic narratology delves into how narratives reflect unconscious desires and conflicts, providing rich insights for advertising. Sigmund Freud's theories on symbolism and the unconscious can be applied to create ads that tap into deep-seated desires and fears, making the message more compelling (Freud, 1983). Jacques Lacan's concepts, such as the mirror stage, can craft narratives that resonate with the viewer's sense of self and identity, enhancing emotional engagement and persuasion (Lacan, 2001).

Post-structuralism challenge fixed meanings, highlighting the fluid nature of interpretation. Roland Barthes' concept of the "death of the author" suggests that the meaning of a story is not fixed by the teller but is created through the audience's interpretation (Barthes, 1967). This approach makes advertisements more thought-provoking and memorable.

Applying narratological theories in advertising allows for creating more engaging, memorable, and persuasive ads. By leveraging these theories, advertisers can craft narratives that resonate deeply with audiences, enhancing the overall effectiveness of their campaigns. Now let's explore the theories in the field of marketing and the mechanisms behind their success.

Narrative Transportation Theory posits that individuals become absorbed in a story, experiencing a state of 'transportation,' which leads to shifts in their attitudes and beliefs. According to Green and Brock, when consumers are deeply engaged with a narrative, they are less likely to counter argue the persuasive message, enhancing the impact on their attitudes and intentions (Green & Brock, 2000). Further research indicates that narrative transportation enhances empathy and identification with characters, thereby increasing the persuasive impact (Van Laer et al., 2014). The theory underscores the importance of emotional and cognitive involvement, which ultimately influences consumer behavior and decision-making.

People learn by observing others in social contexts, a concept central to Social Cognitive Theory. This includes media representations where consumers can adopt behaviors, attitudes, and values by observing characters in narratives. Research emphasizes the role of modeling and vicarious learning, where viewers imitate behaviors they see rewarded in stories (Bandura, 1986). Empirical studies show that storytelling ads effectively model desirable behaviors, influencing consumer attitudes and actions (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). By portraying relatable characters and situations, advertisers promote social learning and behavioral change.

Integrating the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) with narrative persuasion, the Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (E-ELM) suggests that narratives engage the audience through peripheral routes rather than central, analytical processing. When individuals are engaged in a story, they are less likely to scrutinize the message critically, making the persuasive content more effective (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Research supports this, showing that narrative ads enhance message processing and persuasion by reducing counterarguing and increasing engagement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Emotional and immersive storytelling is thus crucial in diminishing audience resistance to persuasion.

Audiences form emotional bonds with characters, as explained by Affective Disposition Theory. In advertising, creating likable characters enhances the message's effectiveness since consumers' positive feelings towards these characters translate to the brand (Zillmann, 2013). Studies demonstrate that advertisements with strong character development increase viewer engagement and positive brand attitudes (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999). This theory highlights the significance of emotional attachment and character development in shaping consumer responses to narrative ads.

The Transportation-Imagery Model posits that the mental imagery evoked by a narrative leads to deeper emotional and cognitive engagement. Vivid and detailed narratives create a more immersive experience, making the audience more receptive to embedded messages (Green, 2004). Research shows that more vivid and engaging narratives have stronger persuasive effects due to enhanced emotional and cognitive processing (Escalas, 2004). This model emphasizes the power of vivid storytelling and mental imagery in boosting the persuasive impact of advertisements.

Identification Theory suggests that individuals are more likely to be persuaded by narratives in which they see themselves reflected in the characters or situations. This identification leads to a greater emotional connection and acceptance of the narrative's message (Cohen, 2018). Research corroborates this, indicating that higher identification with characters results in more positive attitudes towards the brand and greater behavioral intentions (De Graaf et al., 2012). The theory underscores the importance of relatability and personal connection in narrative advertising.

Finally, Entertainment-Education Theory involves placing educational content within entertainment narratives to promote social change. In advertising, this approach subtly educates consumers about a product's benefits while entertaining them (Singhal & Rogers, 2012). Studies find that this dual function of educating and entertaining is effective in changing attitudes and behaviors (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). This theory highlights the potential of narrative advertising to achieve both entertainment and educational goals, leading to positive social and behavioral outcomes.

Collectively, these theories offer a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms behind the effectiveness of storytelling both in advertisements and stories alone. By synthesizing them, we can appreciate the importance of immersive engagement, organized storytelling, and thoughtful narrative construction in creating effective narrative advertisements. These insights guide development of campaigns that capture attention and leave a lasting impression on the audience. Now I will dig into structural views of narrative advertisements, breaking down its components, the objects of this research.

### 2.2.2. Elements of Narratives and Narrative Advertisements

Seymour Chatman's Theory, in Narratology, proposes a distinction between the 'story' (what is told) and the 'discourse' (how it is told) (Chatman, 1978). According to Chatman, the story

comprises the content of the narrative, including events (which is normally referred as the plot), characters, and settings, while the discourse refers to the expression or the means through which the story is communicated, such as the narrative voice, style, and structure.

Elementally speaking, other authors, such as Schank and Berman (2003), say a story is characterized by central themes, protagonists' goals, actions taken to fulfill those goals, and the outcomes of those actions. Padgett and Allen (1997) further elaborate by defining a story ad as one involving "actors with motives, an event sequence, a setting that has physical, social, and temporal components" (p. 53). Escalas (1998) complements these views by suggesting that a narrative ad is characterized by two structural components: chronology, which refers to the specific sequence of events, and causality, which defines the relationships between story elements and what causes things to happen.

Eunjin, Ratneshwar, and Thorson (2017), takes these views and proposes an interesting structural definition of narrative advertisement that outlines its essential elements separated in 5W1H and chronology (who, what, when, where, why, how, and chronology). "Who" refers to the presence of main actors, characters, or protagonists in an ad, providing a human element with which the audience can connect. "What" involves the actions taken by these actors, the outcomes of those actions, and the ultimate fate of the characters, driving the narrative forward (which is basically the plot). "When" and "where" define the situation, setting, or context in which these actions occur, grounding the narrative in a specific time and place. "Why" delves into the goals or motives (such as a brand message) behind the story, whether explicitly stated or implied, adding depth and purpose. "How" portrays the manner in which the story unfolds, detailing the voice and style of the dynamics involved. Finally, chronology refers to the sequence of events in the ad (commonly referred as the narrative structure or plot structure), ensuring a coherent and logical flow that makes the story comprehensible and engaging for the audience.

Additionally, storytelling advertising often integrates branded elements and brand messages, which are not explicitly part of any framework mentioned previously but are essential in commercial contexts (Escalas, 2004; Stern, 1994). The integration of the brand in the advertisement, include adding brand identity (logos, slogans, values), brand stories, and products or services into the narrative (Pfannes, Meyer, & Orth, 2021; Kılıç & Yolbulan Okan, 2021), usually they should feel seamless and natural, by associating it with the story's engaging elements (Glaser, M., & Reisinger, H., 2022). Similarly, a clear and compelling brand message or theme helps reinforce the advertisement's overall impact, making it more memorable (Lundqvist et al., 2013).

In the following section, I will delve into the essential elements of narrative advertising and its mechanisms, focusing exclusively on the components of the story, object of this study. This research gathers different literatures and understands that the elements that compose a story in an advertisement are: the characters, the plot, the settings, the messages, and the integration of the brand.

### 2.2.2.1. Characters

Characters are central to the effectiveness of narratives. Characters are divided into main and side characters, the main characters push the plot forward and side characters support main characters and provide depth to the setting as as world building mechanism (McGann & Schwartz, 1988). Characters in advertisements make the stories more relatable and memorable (Nemčoková, 2010). Similarly, characters facilitate identification and emotional connection with the audience, making the narrative more engaging (Kim, Ratneshwar, & Thorson, 2017). By serving as a bridge between the audience and the advertisement, characters enhance the story's impact and retention.

Characters in advertisements evoke empathy and emotional connections, which are crucial for ad effectiveness. Characters in narrative ads create strong emotional connections, making the ads more engaging (Chang, 2009). Empathy is crucial for the persuasive power of narrative advertisements (Boller & Olson, 1991), emphasizing that characters who evoke empathy can significantly enhance the ad's impact. Characters fostering empathy lead to higher consumer

engagement (Park & Lee, 2014), illustrating the psychological mechanisms behind empathy in advertisements.

Identification with characters is another critical factor for the success of narrative advertisements. Character identification, particularly with human characters, is essential for ad success (Dessart, 2018). Character identification enhances consumer engagement (Escalas, 2003). These studies illustrate that relatable and identifiable characters are essential for building strong connections with the audience.

Characters also significantly influence consumer perception of brands. Different types of characters in advertisements affect brand perception (Sympson, 2016), noting that well-developed characters can improve brand loyalty and engagement. Linking characters to the product enhances persuasion (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022), ensuring the characters are integral to the brand story. This integration helps shape a positive brand image and reinforces the advertisement's message.

### 2.2.2.2. Plot

In narratology, plots are fundamental for structuring narratives and differentiating them from mere sequences of events. Plots are essential for organizing events within a narrative, providing a cohesive structure that engages the audience (Raven & Elahi, 2015). Furthermore, plots are the essence of narratives, setting them apart from simple event sequences by creating a structured and meaningful storyline (Escalas & Stern, 2020). These structural elements are crucial for making narratives compelling and memorable.

Well-structured plots in narratives evoke strong emotional responses from the audience. Advertising narratives with strong plots evoke stronger emotional responses, making the advertisements more effective and impactful (Escalas & Stern, 2020; Kühn & Boshoff, 2023). Plots in advertisements share similarities with literary narratives, enhancing their persuasiveness by engaging the audience emotionally (Stern, 1991). Emotional engagement is essential for the success of both literary narratives and advertisements, and well-constructed plots play a central role in this process.

Additionally, structural theories of narrative, such as Aristotle's Arc and Freytag's Pyramid, provide frameworks for understanding the organization of the plot. Aristotle's Arc, one of the earliest narrative structures, emphasizes the importance of a clear beginning, middle, and end, which guides the audience through a cohesive and logical progression of events (Heath, 1997). Freytag's Pyramid, developed by Gustav Freytag in the 19th century, further elaborates on this structure by dividing the narrative into five parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution (Freytag, 1895). This detailed structure helps in creating a dramatic arc that captures and retains the audience's attention.

Plots are crucial in narrative advertising for making advertisements relatable and persuasive. The effectiveness of narrative advertising is significantly enhanced when products are integrated into the story plot, making the advertisements more relatable to the audience (Yıldız & Sever, 2022). Additionally, the role of plot in enhancing the persuasiveness of advertisements is well-documented, as it helps create a structured and engaging narrative that resonates with the audience (Stern, 1991). By integrating products into the plot, advertisements become more engaging and persuasive.

Identifying and addressing plot holes is crucial for maintaining narrative coherence and effectiveness. Plot construction involves ensuring that the narrative is free from inconsistencies and logical gaps that could undermine its impact (Ryan, 2009). A coherent plot is essential for differentiating narratives from simple event sequences, as it provides a structured and meaningful storyline (Escalas & Stern, 2020). Avoiding plot holes is vital for ensuring the effectiveness and coherence of both literary narratives and advertisements.

### 2.2.2.3. Settings

Settings in narrative advertisements play a crucial role in enhancing familiarity and engagement, making the ads more relatable and memorable. Research indicates that familiar

settings can significantly increase the effectiveness of narrative ads by boosting audience engagement (Gillespie & Joireman, 2016). Moreover, varying the settings in repeated ads helps maintain audience interest and keeps the narrative fresh (Chang, 2009). Familiar settings make advertisements more relatable, while diverse settings help sustain audience interest and engagement over time.

Settings also provide essential context that enhances the storyline of advertisements, improving recall and evoking emotional responses. Effective settings enrich the narrative, making it more memorable (Escalas, 2003). In fashion advertising, settings create aspirational contexts that attract consumers and add depth to the narrative (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). By providing a contextual backdrop, settings make it easier for consumers to remember and emotionally connect with the advertisement.

Furthermore, real-life settings in narrative ads increase relatability and authenticity, making them more impactful. Studies have shown that realistic settings enhance consumer engagement by making the ads more believable and trustworthy (Yıldız & Sever, 2022; Gillespie & Joireman, 2016). Realistic and relatable settings provide means to enhance the authenticity of the ad.

### 2.2.2.4. Messages

The messages are the underlying theme or moral of the story that communicates the brand's key points and values to the audience (Pulizzi, 2012). Enhancing the credibility of brand messages is crucial, research shows that using narrative techniques can improve the believability and trustworthiness of advertising messages (Kim et al., 2022). Through storytelling, brands can convey messages implicitly and explicitly in the story and resonate more authentically with consumers, thereby increasing the overall impact and acceptance of their messages (Ryoo et al., 2020).

Engaging consumers emotionally is key to making brand messages clearer and more compelling. Effective storytelling helps convey brand messages in a memorable way (Kang et al., 2020). Additionally, the enjoyment derived from narratives significantly boosts the effectiveness and recall of brand messages (Gillespie & Joireman, 2016).

In industries like fashion, communicating aspirational themes through brand messages is particularly effective. Research highlights that aligning brand messages with consumer aspirations and desires significantly enhances brand image and persuades consumers to engage with the brand (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). This strategic alignment positions the brand positively in the minds of consumers, driving engagement and loyalty.

### 2.2.2.5. Integration of the Brand

Multiple literatures from brand storytelling consider brand integration in advertisements. It is the the subtle use of brand identity, brand stories, and/or branded products or services within the narrative (Kılıç & Yolbulan Okan, 2021; Pfannes, Meyer, & Orth, 2021; Chang, 2009).

The integration of the brand, such as its logos, slogans, values, within a narrative context is emphasized as essential for linking a brand to a fabricated story, ensuring that not only the narrative but also the brand resonates with consumers (Kılıç & Yolbulan Okan, 2021). By leveraging brands in storytelling ads, it's possible to strengthen brand-consumer connections, the process of embedding brand stories and its elements within narratives helps in creating an emotional bond (Escalas, 2004). Heritage brands, in particular, utilize continuous narratives across various mediums to weave their historical and cultural values into the storyline, thereby crafting a distinctive brand image that resonates with their legacy and identity (Pfannes, Meyer, & Orth, 2021).

Additionally, narrative ads are particularly effective in providing detailed product information, which enhances consumer engagement and understanding, especially for service brands (Chang, 2009). By incorporating comprehensive product details into the narrative, advertisers ensure consumers are well-informed about the product's features and benefits. Establishing a strong product-story link significantly increases the ad's persuasiveness, as seamlessly integrating the

product into the story makes the brand message more compelling and creates a coherent, engaging narrative (Glaser & Reisinger, 2022). Furthermore, narrative storytelling enhances memory retention and fosters positive attitudes towards the product, creating memorable ads that leave a lasting impression and improve consumer attitudes, leading to a higher likelihood of purchase (Delgadillo & Escalas, 2004).

**2.2.2.6. Summary of the Elements of Narrative Ads Relevant to the Research**

The key dimensions of narrative advertising include characters, plot, settings, messages, and the integration of branded elements. Together, these elements work synergistically to create advertisements that tell a story. This framework is supported by various scholarly sources, as detailed in the table below (table 1), which outlines the dimensions, descriptions, and references for each element of narrative advertising that will be used in this research.

| Dimension | Synthesis Description | References |
|---|---|---|
| **Characters** | Central to the effectiveness of the narrative; they evoke empathy and emotional connection, facilitating character identification. Main characters are central to the story plot and side characters work as supporting the world building and main characters' events. | Chatman (1978), Kim et al. (2017), Nemčoková (2010), Escalas (2004), McGann & Schwartz (1988) |
| **Plot** | The structured sequence of events that provide coherence and engage the audience emotionally. Usually organized in Exposition, Conflict, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and, Resolution. | Chatman (1978), Escalas & Stern (2020), Kühn & Boshoff (2023), Stern (1991), Freytag (1895) |
| **Settings** | The contextual backdrops, including locations and time, make the narrative relatable. Varying settings, familiar settings and realistic settings are choices to enhance audience attention and believability in the ad. | Chatman (1978), Gillespie & Joireman (2016), Yıldız & Sever (2022), Chang (2009) |
| **Messages** | The underlying theme or moral of the story that conveys the brand's key points and values. Messages are introduced either explicitly or implicitly in the story. | Pulizzi (2012), Kim et al. (2022), Kang et al. (2020), Ryoo et al. (2020), Phillips & McQuarrie (2010) |
| **Brand Integration** | Brand history, identity, and branded product or service seamlessly integrated into the story. | Kılıç & Yolbulan Okan, (2021); Pfannes, Meyer, & Orth, (2021); Chang, (2009) |

**Table 1:** Summary of the Elements of Narrative Ads Relevant to the Research (Source: Author)

## 2.3. Cognitive Processes, Memory Retention and Factors Influencing Recall of Advertisements

### 2.3.1. Cognitive Processes

Information Processing Theory explains how humans process and store information, offering valuable insights into the engagement and retention of narratives in advertising. Cognitive processing is divided into three stages: encoding, storage, and retrieval. During encoding, sensory inputs are transformed into a storable format. Storage maintains this information over time, while retrieval involves accessing stored information when needed (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968).

Encoding is the initial stage of memory formation, where sensory input is transformed into a format suitable for storage. The depth of processing, as highlighted by Craik and Lockhart (1972), significantly influences the durability of encoded memories. Deep, semantic processing creates stronger memories compared to shallow, superficial processing. For instance, when individuals encode information by making meaningful connections or understanding its significance, they are more likely to retain it over time (Craik & Tulving, 1975). This underscores the importance of active engagement and elaboration during the encoding process.

The encoding specificity principle suggests that memory retrieval is more effective when encoding and retrieval conditions are compatible, as demonstrated in studies on emotional and neutral advertisements (Friestad & Thorson, 1993). Additionally, mental simulations play a vital role in retrieval, reactivating the same cortical circuits involved in encoding (Kent & Lamberts, 2008). Divided attention also highlights differences between controlled encoding processes and resilient retrieval processes (Naveh-Benjamin et al., 1998).

The storage of memory involves maintaining encoded information over varying periods. The Multi-Store Model by Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) outlines a framework comprising sensory memory, short-term memory (STM), and long-term memory (LTM). Sensory memory holds fleeting impressions of sensory information, STM temporarily stores and processes information with limited capacity, and LTM retains information for extended durations. Baddeley and Hitch's (1974) Working Memory Model further elaborates on STM by introducing components that actively manipulate and manage information, essential for complex cognitive tasks. This model highlights the dynamic nature of memory storage and its role in everyday cognitive functions.

Lastly, Retrieval is the process of accessing stored memories and bringing them into conscious awareness. The success of retrieval depends on various factors, including the presence of effective retrieval cues and the context of encoding. Tulving's (1993) work on episodic and semantic memory emphasizes the significance of contextual and related cues in facilitating recall. Studies such as Godden and Baddeley's (1975) research on context-dependent memory demonstrate that matching the retrieval context to the encoding context enhances memory performance. This illustrates the interconnectedness of encoding, storage, and retrieval processes in the overall functioning of memory.

Effective retrieval is facilitated by cues that match the type of information encoded, enhancing recall and recognition (Keller, 1991). The neural basis of retrieval involves specific brain regions overlapping with those engaged during encoding, highlighting the interconnectedness of these processes (Nyberg, 2006). Moreover, differences between encoding and retrieval, such as the impact of solving anagrams, demonstrate the complex dynamics of memory processes (Mulligan & Lozito, 2006).

### 2.3.2. Memory Retention

There are two important theories in psychology that provide understanding about the memory processes occurring over time. Memory Decay Theory and Multi-Store Memory Model are foundational and will provide a light under which retention of ads could be explored.

Memory Decay Theory, first proposed by Ebbinghaus in the late 19th century, posits that memory traces weaken over time if not actively maintained or rehearsed (Ebbinghaus, 1885). The foundational principle of this theory is that the strength of a memory trace decreases exponentially over time, leading to a gradual loss of information. This process of forgetting is natural and occurs unless the memory is reinforced through rehearsal or mnemonic strategies (Craik & Watkins, 1973). In the context of advertising, Memory Decay Theory is relevant because it helps explain why consumers may forget advertisements and brand messages over time.

According to the decay theory, the primary cause of forgetting is the time-dependent weakening of the neural traces that support memory (Kahana, 2012). This concept is further elaborated by research indicating that the strength of a memory trace declines as a power function of the time since the memory was encoded, with a rapid initial decline followed by a slower decay over time (Anderson & Schooler, 1991). Additionally, decay theories suggest that memories fade over time because the neural substrate of the memory trace gradually deteriorates (Nairne, 2002). Together, these perspectives highlight the critical role of time and neural deterioration in the process of memory decay, using this theory in advertisements will allow us to explore which narrative components are retained longer and more vividly than others.

Atkinson & Shiffrin Memory Model, or Multi-Store Memory Model, introduced in 1968, delineates memory into three distinct stages: sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). Sensory memory captures fleeting sensory information, which is then transferred to short-term memory if attended to. Short-term memory, also referred as working memory, holds information temporarily and is limited in capacity and duration. Information in short-term memory can be encoded into long-term memory through processes like rehearsal and meaningful association (Baddeley, 1992).

This model illustrates how information is processed and stored, such as information from advertisements contents. Translating the model in advertising terms, an advertisement enters sensory memory through visual and auditory channels. If the ad captures the consumer's attention, it moves into short-term memory, where the ad and brand message are processed. For ad content informations to be effective in the long term, it must transition from short-term to long-term memory, where it can be retrieved later from long-term memory (Baddeley, 2000).

Integrating Memory Decay Theory with the Atkinson & Shiffrin Memory Model provides a comprehensive understanding of memory processes over time. Memory Decay Theory emphasizes the temporal decline of memory strength, while the Atkinson & Shiffrin Model elucidates the stages through which information passes before becoming a long-term memory. Together, these theories offer a dual perspective on both the process of storing and the longevity of memory. By considering both theories, advertisers can better understand the dynamics of advertisement recall. For example, they can design strategies that not only ensure initial encoding into long-term memory but also mitigate decay over time. This integrated approach underscores the importance of further explore the factors that influence retrieval in the next sections.

### 2.3.3. Factors Influencing Recall of Advertisements

Retrieval is a fundamental cognitive process that involves accessing and bringing to consciousness information stored in memory. It encompasses various mechanisms such as recall, recognition, and relearning. Recall involves retrieving information without any cues, while recognition involves identifying information from a set of options (Lai, 2024). Relearning, on the other hand, is the process of refreshing memory traces, which enhances recall accuracy and strengthens memory retention (Reed et al., 2021). Studies have shown that successful retrieval practice can significantly improve long-term memory retention and reduce the forgetting rate (Rawson & Dunlosky, 2013). Considering recall is a measurement of advertisement effectiveness, this study will focus on recall rather the other mechanisms of retrieval (Wells, 2000).

One of the primary factors influencing recall is the level of attention and focus that the advertisement can capture from its audience. Attention is the first step in the memory process, and

without it, information cannot be effectively processed or stored (Kahneman, 1973). Advertisements that use striking visuals, compelling headlines, and engaging content are more likely to capture the viewer's attention (Pieters et al., 2010). For example, an advertisement with bright colors and dynamic visuals can stand out amidst a cluttered media environment, prompting viewers to pay attention.

In addition to visual elements, the placement of advertisements also plays a significant role in capturing attention. Advertisements placed in high-traffic areas or during prime viewing times are more likely to be noticed (Iyer, Soberman, & Villas-Boas, 2005). Plus, research has shown that advertisements placed at the beginning or end of a commercial break are more likely to be remembered than those placed in the middle (Teixeira et al., 2012). Summarizing the importance of attention, it is a critical factor that determines whether an advertisement is noticed and processed, thereby influencing recall.

Emotional engagement is another crucial factor that influences the recall of advertisements. Advertisements that evoke strong emotions, whether positive or negative, tend to be more memorable (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). Emotions can enhance memory by triggering deeper cognitive processing and creating a more vivid and lasting impression (Phelps, 2004). For instance, an advertisement that tells a touching story or uses humor can create an emotional response that enhances recall. Studies have shown that emotional arousal can lead to better retention of information because it activates the amygdala, which plays a key role in the consolidation of memories (Kensinger & Schacter, 2006).

Additionally, the context in which an advertisement is viewed influences its recall (Godden & Baddeley, 1975), this factor links to the attention factor. Context includes the physical and social environment where the ad is encountered, as well as the medium through which it is delivered. Advertisements viewed in a cluttered environment with many competing stimuli are less likely to be remembered compared to those viewed in a less distracting setting (Batra & Ray, 1986). Additionally, social context, such as whether the ad is viewed alone or with others, can influence recall. Viewing advertisements in a social setting can lead to discussions and shared experiences, which can reinforce memory (Rosen, 2009).

Novelty is also a factors that can enhance the recall of advertisements. When an advertisement presents something unexpected or different from the norm, it captures attention and creates a memorable impression. Novel stimuli are processed more deeply and stored more effectively in memory (Berlyne, 1970). Studies have shown that novelty not only capture initial attention but also enhance the likelihood of the advertisement being shared, discussed, and remembered (Tellis, 2003).

In conclusion, understanding the factors that influence the recall of advertisements—such as attention, emotional engagement, context, and novelty—provides a robust framework for studying ad recall. Presenting advertisements that have never been seen before allows researchers to measure recall without the influence of prior exposure. Selecting contexts where viewers can maintain undivided attention helps isolate the impact of the advertisement itself. Utilizing ads with high emotional charge leverages the strong connection between emotion and memory. Additionally, considering the medium of delivery and ensuring viewers are isolated to prevent discussions can offer clearer insights into how advertisements are processed and remembered.

## 2.4. Methodological Approaches in Recall Studies

### 2.4.1. Overview of Recall Study Methodologies

Studying recall is pivotal in understanding how information is retained and retrieved over time. This understanding is essential in various fields, including psychology, education, and advertising. To study recall, researchers have traditionally employed quantitative methods, which include structured techniques like surveys and experiments (Chessa & Murre, 2007). These methods rely on numerical data and statistical analysis to measure recall accuracy and frequency (Zinkhan,

2012). On the other hand, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and longitudinal studies have been introduced to capture the complexity and nuances of recall (Nelson, Narens, & Dunlosky, 2004). These approaches focus on understanding the context and depth of memory retention through rich, descriptive data (Okechuku, 1992). To fully appreciate the effectiveness of these methodologies in recall studies, a critical comparison is necessary, considering their respective strengths and limitations (Mehta & Purvis, 2006). In qualitative research, triangulation is often used to enhance credibility, reliability, and scientific rigor. By incorporating various data sources, methods, or researchers, a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon being investigated becomes possible, reducing the risk of biases that may arise from relying on a single perspective (Santos et al., 2020).

Quantitative approaches have long been the cornerstone of recall studies due to their ability to provide measurable and generalizable data. Surveys and questionnaires are common tools used to assess recall, often involving participants recalling specific information after a set period. These methods allow for the collection of data from large sample sizes, making it possible to identify trends and patterns in memory retention (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Experimental designs, another quantitative method, involve controlled environments where variables can be manipulated to observe their effect on recall. This method is particularly effective in isolating specific factors that influence memory, such as the impact of different types of content on recall rates (McBride, 2013). However, while quantitative methods offer statistical rigor and the ability to generalize findings, they often fall short in capturing the subjective and contextual aspects of recall. The structured nature of these methods may overlook the deeper cognitive processes and personal experiences that influence how and why certain information is remembered or forgotten (Cornish, 1978).

Qualitative approaches provide a complementary perspective by delving into the intricacies of memory and recall. In-depth interviews allow researchers to explore participants' experiences and perceptions in detail, uncovering the underlying reasons for their recall patterns. This method is particularly useful for understanding the recall nuances that quantitative methods might miss (Belk, 2017). Longitudinal studies, which involve repeated observations of the same participants over time, offer valuable insights into how recall evolves. These studies can track changes in memory retention and identify long-term patterns that single-time-point studies cannot (Small, Dixon, Hultsch, & Hertzog, 1999). While qualitative methods are adept at capturing rich, contextual data, they are often limited by smaller sample sizes and the potential for researcher bias. Despite these limitations, the depth and detail provided by qualitative approaches are invaluable for understanding the complexities of recall.

## 2.4.2. Quantitative Approaches to Study Recall

Surveys and questionnaires are widely used quantitative methods in recall studies. These tools typically involve structured questions that participants answer to measure their ability to remember specific information after a certain period. One of the primary strengths of surveys and questionnaires is their ability to gather data from large populations efficiently, allowing researchers to identify trends and patterns in recall across different demographics (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This method is particularly useful for its scalability and the ease with which data can be analyzed statistically. However, surveys and questionnaires also have significant limitations. They often fail to capture the depth and complexity of recall processes because they rely on self-reported data, which can be affected by biases such as social desirability and inaccurate self-assessment (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, these tools are limited in their ability to explore the contextual and nuanced aspects of memory retention, often providing a superficial understanding of how recall functions in real-world settings (Stanton et al., 1987).

Experimental designs are another key quantitative method used to study recall. These designs involve controlled environments where researchers manipulate one or more variables to observe their effect on memory retention. By controlling extraneous variables, experiments can establish causal relationships between specific factors and recall outcomes (Cook, & Campbell, 2007).

This method is highly effective in isolating variables such as the type of content, presentation style, and timing of exposure to assess their impact on recall. The ability to control the experimental conditions and randomize participants helps in reducing biases and increasing the validity of the findings (Field & Hole, 2002). However, the artificial nature of laboratory settings can limit the generalizability of the results to real-world scenarios. Additionally, experiments often focus on short-term recall due to practical constraints, which can leave gaps in understanding long-term memory decay and the sustainability of recall over extended periods (Roediger & Butler, 2011).

### 2.4.3. Qualitative Approaches to Studying Recall

In-depth interviews are a powerful qualitative method used to explore recall in detail. Unlike quantitative methods, which often focus on breadth, in-depth interviews provide a depth of understanding that can reveal the intricacies of memory processes. This method allows researchers to probe deeply into participants' thoughts and experiences, uncovering the underlying reasons for their recall patterns (Patton, 2014). The open-ended nature of interviews enables participants to express their memories in their own words, providing rich, descriptive data that can capture the complexity of recall (Dempsey, 2010). Additionally, in-depth interviews can adapt to the flow of conversation, allowing new themes and insights to emerge organically. This flexibility is particularly beneficial in recall studies, where the nuances of how and why certain information is remembered can vary significantly among individuals (Brewer et al., 2005).

Longitudinal studies are another essential qualitative approach, offering valuable insights into how recall changes over time. These studies involve repeated observations of the same participants at different time points, allowing researchers to track the evolution of memory retention and decay (Bryman, 2016). By examining how recall shifts from immediate to short-term and long-term periods, longitudinal studies can identify patterns and factors that influence memory durability. This approach is particularly effective in understanding the temporal dynamics of recall, as it provides a continuous view of the memory process rather than a snapshot at a single point in time (Pipe et al., 1999). Longitudinal studies also help in identifying the stability or fluctuation of recall across different contexts and conditions, offering a comprehensive picture of memory decay (Powers, et al., 1978).

Qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews and longitudinal studies, offer significant advantages in capturing the nuanced experiences of recall. These approaches allow for a detailed exploration of the subjective and contextual factors that influence memory, providing a richer understanding than quantitative methods alone. By leveraging the depth and flexibility of qualitative research, this study can gain insights into the complex interplay of cognitive and narrative elements in recall processes. This detailed understanding is crucial for developing more effective strategies to enhance memory retention and counteract decay, particularly in fields such as advertising, where the impact of narrative elements on recall is of paramount importance (Cooke et al., 2008).

### 2.4.4. Thematic and Longitudinal Analysis in Qualitative Studies

Thematic analysis is a versatile and widely utilized method for analyzing qualitative data, especially in understanding recall processes in advertising. This method allows researchers to identify patterns and themes within data, providing deep insights into how consumers remember and respond to advertisements. Thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach, making it suitable for various research contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, conducting rigorous thematic analysis ensures valuable and credible findings (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

In the context of advertising, thematic analysis is particularly useful for uncovering the intricate patterns of recall and memory retention among consumers. By identifying recurring themes related to consumer memory, researchers can better understand the factors that influence recall of

narrative elements of ads. The flexibility of thematic analysis allows researchers to adapt their methods to different research questions and data types (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016).

Conducting thematic analysis involves several critical steps, including data familiarization, coding, theme development, and reporting. A six-step framework for thematic analysis ensures a systematic and thorough approach (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Considering sample size when planning a thematic analysis is essential, as it impacts the power and validity of the study (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Ensuring methodological rigor is crucial for producing reliable and meaningful insights into advertising recall.

When it comes to longitudinal data analysis, it is considered a powerful method for studying recall, as it allows researchers to track changes and patterns in consumer memory over extended periods. By examining how recall evolves, longitudinal studies can provide valuable insights into the retention of advertising campaigns and its elements. This approach is particularly beneficial in identifying long-term trends and understanding the dynamics of memory retention (Small et al., 1999). Additionally, longitudinal data analysis helps in comparing initial responses with later recall, offering a comprehensive view of how advertisements impact consumer behavior over time (Powers et al., 1978).

These studies involve repeated observations and in-depth interviews with participants, allowing researchers to delve into the evolving nature of consumer memory and brand recall. For instance, understanding how consumers' perceptions of an advertisement change over time can provide insights into the lasting impact of marketing strategies (Schwartz et al., 2004). The flexibility of qualitative methods also enables the exploration of new themes and patterns as they emerge, offering a richer understanding of recall processes (Busse & Ferri, 2003).

Conducting longitudinal qualitative analysis requires careful methodological planning to ensure reliable and meaningful results. Repeated observations and in-depth interviews are common methods used to gather data over time, providing a detailed view of changes in recall (Lewis, 2007). It is essential to address potential recall bias and maintain consistency in data collection to ensure the validity of the findings (Powers et al., 1978). Additionally, researchers must consider the impact of participant drop-out and develop strategies to mitigate this issue, ensuring the robustness of longitudinal studies.

While longitudinal and thematic analyses offer significant benefits, it also presents challenges such as maintaining participant engagement, dealing with the complexity of analyzing extensive data, maintaining consistency, and addressing researcher bias. Ensuring consistency in data collection and addressing recall bias are critical for obtaining accurate results (Busse & Ferri, 2003). Thematic analysis requires careful consideration of how themes are identified and interpreted (Lochmiller, 2021). Despite these challenges, the benefits of longitudinal and thematic analyses are substantial. These approaches provide rich, contextual data that reveal the long-term impact of advertisements on consumer memory (Grünhagen et al., 2008), and allows for a detailed exploration of subjective experiences and contextual factors (Campbell et al., 2021), offering valuable insights for marketers.

### 2.4.5. Quantitative Analysis in Qualitative Studies

Quantitative analysis of qualitative data, often referred to as "quantitizing," involves converting qualitative information into numerical data that can be subjected to statistical analysis. This approach allows researchers to integrate the depth and richness of qualitative insights with the rigor and precision of quantitative methods. The process of quantitizing enhances the ability to identify patterns, test hypotheses, and draw objective conclusions from qualitative data, making it a valuable tool in mixed methods research (Banha et al., 2022; Sandelowski et al., 2009; Collingridge, 2013).

A primary step in quantitizing qualitative data is the codification and labeling of responses. This involves categorizing qualitative data, such as interview transcripts or open-ended survey responses, into themes or codes. Each theme or code is then assigned a numerical value. This

transformation allows researchers to perform statistical analyses, such as frequency distributions or correlation studies, on the qualitative data (Banha et al., 2022; Sandelowski et al., 2009).

The process of quantitizing requires careful consideration of what aspects of the qualitative data to count and how to do so. Balancing numerical precision with the narrative complexity inherent in qualitative data is crucial. Researchers must make informed decisions about the units of analysis, the granularity of coding, and the methods for ensuring reliability and validity in the coding process (Sandelowski et al., 2009; Collingridge, 2013). This systematic approach helps maintain the integrity of the original qualitative data while enabling meaningful quantitative analysis.

Quantitizing often involves counting the occurrence of themes or codes and analyzing these counts statistically. Methods such as dichotomizing themes (e.g., presence or absence of a theme) and applying statistical tests to code counts are commonly used. Permutation testing offers a rigorous alternative to traditional significance tests, allowing for robust analysis of code frequencies and associations (Collingridge, 2013). These statistical techniques provide valuable insights by quantifying qualitative themes, enabling researchers to identify patterns and correlations within the data.

Transforming qualitative data into quantitative form poses several challenges. Researchers must ensure that the coding process is consistent and that the resulting numerical data accurately reflect the richness of the original qualitative data. Issues such as maintaining the contextual integrity of qualitative responses and avoiding oversimplification are critical considerations. Careful calibration, presentation, and sensitivity testing of quantitized data are essential to address these challenges (de Block & Vis, 2019; Sandelowski et al., 2009; Banha et al., 2022).

## 2.5. Identified Gaps in Current Research

Despite the substantial body of research on advertising and memory, there are notable gaps in the literature regarding the long-term retention and recall of specific narrative components, there is no studies exploring the components recall separately in periods of time like one month.

In that sense, a significant gap in the literature is the scarcity of longitudinal studies that specifically examine how different narrative elements in advertisements are remembered over extended periods. While numerous studies have explored immediate recall and short-term memory effects, no one has investigated how these elements are retained after extended periods of the initial exposure. This gap is relevant because understanding long-term recall can inform strategies to better construct narrative ads and improve its longevity (Schank & Berman, 2003; Escalas, 2004).

Most existing research tends to avoid dissecting the individual contributions of specific narrative components. This approach overlooks the potential differential impact these elements might have on memory retention. For instance, characters may create stronger emotional connections than other elements, well structured plot increase memory retention, or familiar settings might enhance the relatability of an ad, influencing how well the advertisement is remembered (Kim, Ratneshwar, & Thorson, 2017; Gillespie & Joireman, 2016). More focused studies on each narrative element are needed to tailor advertising creation and improve ad memorability.

Lastly, many studies on advertisement recall rely heavily on quantitative methods, which, while valuable, may provide cues and influence participants responses and not capture the nuances involved in memory retention. There is a need for more qualitative methods that allow participants to freely recall their memories and that can provide deeper insights into how narrative elements are remembered over time (Belk, 2017; Bryman, 2016). Such studies could employ in-depth interviews and both thematic and quantitative analysis to uncover the complexities and patterns of memory retention and decay of narrative elements, offering richer data to inform advertising strategies.

# 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

## 3.1. Methodology

### 3.1.1. Introduction to the Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative longitudinal design to explore the decay of recall for different narrative elements in advertisements over time. The research methods involved initial exposure to selected advertisements followed by repeated in-depth interviews at three time points: immediately after viewing, one week later, and one month later. These interviews aimed to capture detailed recall experiences of participants, focusing on characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integrations (Chatman, 1978; McGann & Schwartz, 1988; Escalas, 2004; Pfannes Meyer & Orth, 2021).

The chosen methodology for this study is well-suited for understanding the nuanced aspects of recall over time, particularly when dealing with the detailed and intricate nature of narrative advertisements (Small et al., 1999; Schwartz et al., 2004). The qualitative aspect allows for capturing rich, detailed insights into how participants recall various elements of advertisements over extended periods. The longitudinal nature of the study enables the examination of how these recall elements evolve or decay over time (Powers et al., 1978; Schwartz et al., 2004).

A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because it provides the flexibility needed to explore participants' experiences in depth. Unlike quantitative methods, which often rely on structured surveys and statistical analysis, qualitative methods allow participants to express their thoughts and memories freely, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their recall processes (Belk, 2017; Patton, 2014). This freedom is crucial in capturing the complexity of memory and the factors that influence it (Nelson, Narens & Dunlosky, 2004; Okechuku, 1992).

One significant advantage of using a qualitative longitudinal design is the ability to track changes in recall over multiple time points. This design facilitates the observation of how participants' memories of the advertisements change immediately after exposure, after one week, and after one month (Small et al., 1999; Schwartz et al., 2004). By conducting repeated in-depth interviews, the study can capture detailed accounts of participants' recall experiences and identify patterns and trends in how different narrative elements are remembered or forgotten over time (Brewer et al., 2005; Pipe et al., 1999).

Additionally, this approach allows for the exploration of participants' recall without prompting or cues, ensuring that the memories retrieved are as spontaneous and authentic as possible. This aspect is critical in understanding natural memory decay and the elements of advertisements that are most resilient or susceptible to forgetting (Craik & Watkins, 1973; Ebbinghaus, 1885).

### 3.1.2. Sampling Method

To address the research question on how different narrative elements in advertisements decay in participants' recall over time, a purposive sampling strategy was employed. This strategy was chosen to ensure that the sample consisted of individuals who could provide relevant and rich data for the study's objectives and to make the study feasible given the need to maintain contact with participants for one month and control the environment where they would watch the ads (Patton, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Consequently, participants had to be from my city and university.

The study began with a total of 40 participants, including 4 participants in the pilot study. Throughout the course of the research, 3 participants from the pilot study and 9 participants from the main study decided to drop out or were eliminated for not respecting the rules, resulting in a final sample size of 28 participants for the main study. This number of interviewees did three interviews, providing 84 data collections, and was deemed sufficient to reach data saturation, where

additional data collection no longer contributes new insights (Small, Dixon, Hultsch & Hertzog, 1999), and enabled the identification of themes and patterns in recall while maintaining the study feasible for the resources at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Purposive sampling was selected for its effectiveness in identifying and selecting information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2014). The sample was drawn from Erasmus students at the University of Liège and HEC Liège. These institutions provided a homogeneous group in terms of background and age, allowing for a focused investigation into the recall of narrative advertisements without the confounding effects of significant demographic variability. Additionally, as Erasmus students, participants were proficient in English, ensuring they could be interviewed effectively in English.

The rationale behind choosing university students aged 18-25 years old as the sample population includes several considerations. Firstly, a homogeneous sample ensures that variations in recall can be more accurately attributed to the elements of the narrative advertisements rather than differences in demographic factors. Secondly, this age group is at a stage where cognitive functions, including memory and recall, are well-developed, providing reliable data for studying memory decay. Thirdly, university students are generally accessible and willing to participate in studies, and they often have the time and motivation to engage in research activities, enhancing participation rates and data quality. Additionally, having participants from my city and university made it feasible to maintain contact over the one-month period and initially bring them to a controlled environment for ad viewing.

To ensure the validity of the data collected, specific criteria were established for participant selection. Participants must not have had prior exposure to the selected advertisements and after initial exposure they could not reinforce those memories anyhow, which was crucial to ensure that all recall data collected originated from the study's exposure sessions, knowingly that novelty is a factor that influences recall, therefore we standardize this factor in the study (Berlyne, 1970; Tellis, 2003). This eligibility was determined after the initial exposure to avoid influencing the participants by explaining the ad beforehand. Additionally, participants were required to have no diagnosed mental or attention disabilities that could impair their ability to recall information, maintaining the integrity and reliability of the recall data (Sweller, 1988). Although the sample was homogeneous in terms of age and background, it included a mix of male and female participants to capture a range of perspectives and experiences (Stern, 1991).

Participants were recruited through university WhatsApp and Facebook group chats, where details of the study were posted along with an invitation and a motivation to participate. However, given the longitudinal nature of this study, retention strategies were critical to maintain participant engagement and ensure data integrity over time (Busse & Borromeo Ferri, 2003). During the pilot study, it was observed that some participants did not adhere to the guidelines of non-reinforcement between interviews or were dropping out before the last interview. As a result, several retention and suitability strategies were developed and implemented in the main study .

To encourage participation and ensure commitment throughout the study, incentives in the form of gift vouchers for the bar Shamrock were offered to those who completed all phases of the research. Consent for participation and for respect of rules was obtained during the first interview, prior to ad exposure (appendix 7.2.). The consent form detailed the study's purpose, procedures, duration, confidentiality measures, voluntary participation, risks, and compensation, ensuring participants were fully informed and agreed to participate truthfully and adhere to study guidelines. Moreover, participants were engaged through regular communication, including calendar reminders and personal messages one day before each scheduled interview to confirm their presence. This consistent contact helped maintain their commitment to the study (Busse & Borromeo Ferri, 2003).

### 3.1.3. Pilot Testing

The pilot testing phase was an essential component of the study, designed to ensure the effectiveness and feasibility of the research methodology before full-scale implementation (Belk,

2017; Patton, 2014). This phase aimed to identify and resolve potential issues in the data collection processes, refine the interview guide, test the suitability of the selected advertisements as stimuli for the study, and develop strategies for participant retention and adherence to study guidelines.

The objectives of the pilot testing were to test and refine the research methodology, including data collection processes and participant retention strategy, ensuring they were clear and effective. Additionally, the pilot aimed to evaluate the suitability of the selected advertisements for eliciting detailed recall data over time and to develop and assess strategies for participant retention and adherence to study guidelines, including non-exposure between interviews (Santos et al., 2020; Busse & Borromeo Ferri, 2003).

The pilot study involved 4 participants, selected using the same purposive sampling strategy as the main study. Two participants were first exposed to one of the selected advertisements and the other two to the other advertisement, all in a controlled environment. The viewing took place in a reserved white room (appendix 7.3. and figure 1) at a student residence near the university called Chick n Kot Sauvenière, ensuring no external stimuli could influence their attention (Godden & Baddeley, 1975). Immediately following the ad exposure, participants were moved to a different room to conduct the first interview. This change of setting was intended to prevent contextual cues from aiding recall (Powers, et al., 1978).

During the first interview, participants were asked detailed questions about what they remembered regarding the characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integrations in the advertisement. This interview aimed to capture their immediate recall and test the clarity and comprehensiveness of the interview guide (Belk, 2017; Brewer et al., 2005).

The second interview was conducted one week after the initial exposure, and the third interview took place one month after the initial exposure. Both follow-up interviews were conducted via Zoom to maintain consistency in the non-exposure context and manage the practicalities of scheduling (Powers et al., 1978). These tests provided insights on adding new questions to the interview guide, since many participants had actively rehearsed their memories of the ad since first exposure, then at the beginning of each follow-up interview guide, it was added the confirmation that they had not watched the advertisement again, discussed it with anyone, or sought additional information about it. This confirmation was crucial to ensure that any memory reinforcement was avoided (Craik & Watkins, 1973; Ebbinghaus, 1885).

The pilot study provided valuable insights into several aspects of the research design. Firstly, it allowed for the refinement of the interview guide, ensuring that the questions were clear and effective in eliciting detailed recall data (Small et al., 1999; Belk, 2017). Participants' feedback and the initial analysis of their responses helped identify areas where the guide could be improved to better capture the nuances of their recall (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Secondly, the pilot study confirmed the suitability of the selected advertisements. The ads were chosen based on specific criteria to ensure comparability in terms of length, complexity, emotional impact and presence of the elements that are core to the study (Chatman, 1978; Escalas, 2004; Kim et al., 2017). The pilot testing validated that these ads were appropriate stimuli for the study design, as participants could provide detailed and varied recall responses.

The pilot study also highlighted the need for effective participant retention strategies. Three out of the four pilot participants dropped out before the study was completed, emphasizing the importance of maintaining engagement throughout the research period. Based on these findings, several retention strategies were developed and implemented in the main study. These included, as already mentioned, the establishment of written consent, regular communication and engagement through WhatsApp and Facebook, calendar reminders, reminders of the study rules, and incentives such as gift vouchers for bar Shamrock for those who completed all three interviews (Busse & Borromeo Ferri, 2003).

### 3.1.4. Data Collection Process

The data collection process for this study was meticulously designed to capture detailed accounts of participants' recall of narrative advertisements at multiple time points from the two different advertisements, same as those used in the pilot test. The use of different time points and different advertisements was chosen to leverage source triangulation (Santos et al., 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The process consisted of participants coming to a controlled environment for signing the consent form and the initial exposure to one of the two advertisements, followed by a series of in-depth interviews aimed at assessing recall immediately, then repeating interviews after one week and one month after the initial exposure.

Participants were exposed to the selected advertisement in a controlled environment. The viewing took place in the same reserved room (appendix 7.3. and figure 1) at the student residence used in the pilot study, specifically chosen to ensure that no external stimuli could influence their attention (Godden & Baddeley, 1975). The room was white, with no windows and no extra stimuli, such as pieces of art or decoration. The room was equipped with a large television and comfortable seating, providing an optimal setting for watching the advertisement. This controlled environment was crucial to standardize the exposure across all participants and minimize any distractions that could affect their initial recall (Gillespie & Joireman, 2016).

Half of the participants were exposed to one of the two selected advertisements, while the other half watched the other advertisement. This division ensured a balanced distribution of exposure and allowed for comparative analysis of recall across different narrative advertisements (Schwartz et al., 2004; Kim, Ratneshwar, & Thorson, 2017). The data collection procedure mirrored the pilot testing phase, as it proved to be effective and efficient in capturing the necessary recall data (Small et al., 1999).

Immediately following the advertisement exposure, participants were moved to a different room to conduct the first interview. This change of setting was intentional to prevent contextual cues from aiding recall, as it is known that being in the same environment as where the memory was encoded can enhance recall (Godden & Baddeley, 1975).

The data collection process involved a series of three in-depth interviews with each participant. The first interview was conducted immediately after the initial exposure; the second interview took place one week later, and the third interview was conducted one month after the initial exposure. These interviews were designed to capture changes in recall over time and identify which narrative elements were more retained or forgotten (Small et al., 1999; Escalas & Stern, 2020).

The first interview occurred right after the participants watched the advertisement. This interview aimed to capture their immediate recall of the characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integrations (Escalas, 2004; Chatman, 1978). The interview guide included open-ended questions that allowed participants to freely describe what they remembered without any prompting or cues. This approach ensured that the recall data collected reflected the participants' natural memory of the advertisement (Schank & Berman, 2003; McGann & Schwartz, 1988).

The second interview was conducted one week after the initial exposure. This interview aimed to assess how participants' recall of the advertisement had changed over a week. Participants were again asked to describe what they remembered about the characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integrations. The focus was on identifying which details had been retained and which had decayed over the week (Yıldız & Sever, 2022; Wells, 2000). The interview was conducted via Zoom to maintain consistency in the non-exposure context and manage the practicalities of scheduling.

The third interview took place one month after the initial exposure. This interview aimed to evaluate long-term recall and identify which narrative elements were still remembered or had decayed (Small et al., 1999; Escalas & Stern, 2020). Similar to the second interview, participants were asked to describe their recollections of the characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integrations. Conducting this interview via Zoom ensured that the recall data was collected in a consistent manner, free from contextual influences that could aid memory (Godden & Baddeley, 1975).

At the beginning of both the second and third interviews, participants were asked to confirm that they had not watched the advertisement again, discussed it with anyone, or sought additional information about it. This confirmation was crucial to ensure that any memory reinforcement was avoided (Craik & Watkins, 1973; Ebbinghaus, 1885). Participants were reminded of the study rules at the end of each interview to confirm their adherence to the guidelines.

Throughout all interviews, I followed a strict systematic approach to ensure consistency and reliability in data collection (Patton, 2014). All interviews were recorded using Zoom and subsequently transcribed using Microsoft Word's transcription feature. The transcriptions were initially cleaned using ChatGPT to remove stutters and punctuation mistakes, and then manually reviewed to ensure accuracy.

### 3.1.5. Research Instruments

The research instruments employed in this study were carefully selected and designed to ensure that the data collected would effectively address the research question on how different narrative elements in advertisements decay in participants' recall over time. The primary instruments included the selected advertisements and the structured interview guide.

### 3.1.5.1. Selected Advertisements

The advertisements chosen for this study were selected based on specific criteria to ensure they were appropriate stimuli. Two advertisements were selected to avoid bias, with participants randomly assigned, yet proportionally balanced, to view either one of the ads. This random assignment helped ensure that any differences in recall could be attributed to the narrative elements rather than the specific content of a single advertisement (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Small et al., 1999).

The selection criteria for the advertisements included their length, complexity, use of the relevant narrative elements, and the industries of the ads. Both advertisements were approximately four minutes long, providing enough time to develop a plot, introduce multiple characters, and present various settings and brand integrations (Keown & Freundschuh, 2012). This length was deemed sufficient to create a complete narrative. Additionally, both ads were produced by leading companies in two different industries (technology and automotive industries).

Emotional impact was another key criterion. The advertisements were chosen for their distinct emotional appeals, with one being more sad and dramatic and the other more tense and chaotic. This variation allowed for the examination of how different emotional tones might influence recall over time (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Phelps, 2004).

Variety of characters was also considered. Each advertisement featured a range of human identifiable characters, including main and side characters, enabling a detailed analysis of character recall (McGann & Schwartz, 1988; Escalas, 2004). The narrative structure of both ads followed a logical sequence with a clear beginning, middle, and end, incorporating plot points such as exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution (Freytag, 1895; Stern, 1991). This structure facilitated the study of plot recall.

Diverse settings were included, with each advertisement depicting at least five different locations, providing a rich context for examining settings recall (Chatman, 1978; Gillespie & Joireman, 2016). Both ads integrated brand elements; one presented its logos and identity more explicitly (Samsung) and was more focused on showcasing branded products and services, and the other presented its brand identity more subtly (Mercedes-Benz) and was more focused on showcasing the history behind the brand (Kılıç & Yolbulan Okan, 2021; Pfannes Meyer & Orth, 2021). This variety allowed for an in-depth analysis of how settings and brand integration are recalled over time. Additionally, both advertisements conveyed clear messages, with a mix of both explicit (written on the screen) and implicit (subject of interpretation), aligned with the brand's values and promises (Ryoo et al., 2020).

The chosen advertisements were "We'll Take Care of You, Wherever You Are" by Samsung (technology industry, posted in December 2016, lengthening 4:00 minutes) and "Bertha Benz: The Journey That Changed Everything" by Mercedes-Benz (automotive industry, posted in March 2019, lengthening 4:03 minutes), see appendix 7.4. (table 2) for a summary of each ad and appendix 7.5.1 (table 3) and 7.5.2. (table 4) for the full tables with descriptions of both ads elements. These descriptions were generated using Gemini AI, it analysed the ads scene-by-scene and I manually checked and improved in the sequence. Later, these tables were used as the initial codebooks for the elements recall. Additionally, these advertisements were pre-tested during the pilot study, confirming their suitability for the main study. Participants provided detailed recall responses, validating that the ads were effective stimuli for the research design.

### 3.1.5.2. Interview Guide

The interview guide (appendix 7.1.) was developed to systematically capture participants' recall of the narrative elements at three different time points: immediately after viewing the ad, one week later, and one month later. The guide was designed to elicit detailed and spontaneous recall without prompting or giving cues, ensuring that the data reflected the participants' natural memory processes.

The interview guide included an introduction phase where participants were welcomed, the study was briefly explained, and confidentiality was assured. Participants were informed that their participation involved discussing an advertisement they would watch and then participating in three interviews over a one-month period. The importance of not discussing the advertisement, watching it again, or looking up any information about it after the initial exposure was emphasized. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and were asked to confirm their understanding and agreement.

During the immediate recall interview, conducted right after the advertisement exposure, participants were first asked if they had seen the advertisement before to ensure eligibility. They were also asked to confirm if they had any mental or attention disorders that might affect their participation. If participants confirmed prior exposure or a relevant disorder, their participation was politely discontinued. The interview then proceeded with questions aimed at capturing their initial impressions and detailed recall of the narrative elements, such as characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integrations.

To ensure the participant's attention was fully engaged during the advertisement, an attention check was included: "How was your attention during the advertisement? Did you feel focused throughout?" This question helped assess whether any lapses in attention might have affected recall accuracy. Additionally, questions about their relationship with the brand were asked to check for any potential biases: "What is the brand from the ad?" and "What are your thoughts on the brand from the ad?"

For the 1-week and 1-month recall interviews, which were conducted via Zoom, participants were again asked if they had discussed the advertisement, watched it again, or looked up any information about it since the initial exposure. If participants confirmed any of these actions, their participation was discontinued to avoid reinforcement of memory traces. The same structured questions from the immediate recall interview were used to capture changes in recall over time.

The first questions in each interview varied slightly to account for the time elapsed since the initial exposure and to ensure that participants had not reinforced their memories through external interactions. In the immediate recall interview, participants were asked, "How was your attention during the advertisement? Did you feel focused throughout?" to gauge their engagement level and ensure they had fully absorbed the content. Additionally, questions like "What is the brand from the ad?" and "What are your thoughts on the brand from the ad?" were included to identify any pre-existing biases towards the brand that could influence their responses.

In the 1-week and 1-month recall interviews, the initial questions focused on confirming that participants had adhered to the study guidelines by not discussing the advertisement, watching it

again, or looking up any information about it. Questions such as "Since our last interview, have you discussed the advertisement with anyone, watched it again or looked up any information about it?" and "Since the first exposure to the ad, have you discussed the advertisement with anyone, watched it again or looked up any information about it?" were asked to ensure that the recall data remained uncontaminated by external influences.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed, with the transcriptions undergoing initial cleaning through ChatGPT to remove stutters and punctuation errors, followed by a manual review for accuracy. The qualitative data collected through these interviews were analyzed using AtlasTI to identify themes and patterns related to recall.

### 3.1.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in any research study, particularly in studies involving human participants. This study adhered to stringent ethical guidelines to ensure the rights, well-being, and privacy of all participants were safeguarded throughout the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014).

Obtaining informed consent from all participants was the first and foremost ethical consideration. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits before agreeing to take part (Patton, 2014). A detailed informed consent form was provided, which included an introduction explaining the study's aim and the investigator's contact information, a clear outline of the study procedures, including the viewing of an advertisement and participation in three interviews over a one-month period, assurance of confidentiality and the anonymization of their responses, information about their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and confirmation that participants did not have any mental or attention disorders that might affect their participation. Participants were required to sign this consent form before the initial exposure to the advertisement, ensuring they fully understood and agreed to the study's terms (Belk, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were rigorously maintained. All data collected were anonymized, and pseudonyms were used in reporting to ensure that individual participants could not be identified (Patton, 2014). Data were securely stored and only accessible to the research team. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that no identifying information would be shared in any reports or publications resulting from this research (Belk, 2017).

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences or penalties (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This was reiterated at the end of each interview, ensuring that participants were always aware of their rights and felt comfortable continuing with the study.

To maintain the integrity of the study, it was crucial that participants did not watch the advertisement again, discuss it with others, or look up any additional information about it between interviews. This measure was necessary to avoid reinforcing memory traces and ensure that recall data reflected natural memory decay (Craik & Watkins, 1973; Ebbinghaus, 1885). Participants were reminded of this requirement at the end of each interview and were asked to confirm at the beginning of the 1-week and 1-month recall interviews that they had adhered to these guidelines (Small et al., 1999).

The well-being of participants was a primary concern. The study was designed to minimize any potential discomfort or distress. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with and could withdraw from the study at any point (Patton, 2014). Additionally, the interview environment was kept neutral and non-threatening, conducted in familiar and comfortable settings for the participants (Belk, 2017).

## 3.2. Data Analyses

The data analysis for this study involved a systematic coding process to ensure that the qualitative data collected from the interviews was thoroughly analyzed and accurately represented. The coding process followed several key steps: it started with deductive coding using the codebooks from appendix 7.5.1. and 7.5.2., then I organized codes into groups and categories through axial coding, and finally, inductive coding was employed to find missing themes and patterns in the realm of the elements of narrative ads (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The initial coding framework was developed using the descriptions included in the codebooks (appendix 7.5.1. and appendix 7.5.2.). These provided detailed information on the characters, plot points, settings, messages, and brand integrations for each ad, as previously presented in section 3.1.5.1, served as the basis for the initial set of codes used in the analysis.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then imported into AtlasTI, the software used for qualitative data analysis (Belk, 2017). As the coding progressed, the initial set of codes was refined iteratively. This iterative process involved revisiting the transcripts to ensure that the codes accurately captured the participants' recall and that any new themes or elements emerging from the data were incorporated into the coding framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This refinement was essential to ensure that the coding was comprehensive and reflected the nuances of the participants' recollections (Patton, 2014).

Once the coding was finalized, the codes were connected through axial coding under the time interval after exposure codes: immediate recall, one-week recall, and one-month recall; and under the main narrative elements codes: characters, plot points, settings, messages, and brand integrations (Chatman 1978; Escalas & Stern, 2020). Character codes were connected into main characters and side characters (McGann & Schwartz, 1988). Plot codes were grouped into exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, and falling action & conclusion, with the last two combined due to their brevity in the ads (Freytag, 1895). Message codes were grouped into explicit messages and implicit messages (Ryoo et al., 2020). Brand integration codes were grouped into logos & slogans, brand history, and brand products or services (Kılıç & Yolbulan Okan, 2021; Pfannes Meyer & Orth, 2021). Additionally, all codes were connected to the two advertisements codes: Samsung Ad and Mercedes-Benz Ad.

For validity of results, the study aimed at triangulation by conducting multiple types of analyses (Santos et al., 2020). Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns and themes within each element. This analysis helped to understand how participants recalled different elements over time and to identify any recurring themes or notable changes in recall (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Besides that, the longitudinal aspect of the study involved trend analyses to compare recall frequencies for each element at three the different time points (Small et al., 1999). Code co-occurrences were normalized for the groups and categories because they contained different amounts of codes within them. This comparison was made for each participant, each ad, and in each element and its code groups. By examining the changes in normalized recall frequencies over time, the study explored how extensive periods of time and memory decay affected the recall of different narrative elements (Ebbinghaus, 1885; Craik & Watkins, 1973). To support those results, an extra word frequency treemap was generated for each time interval, allowing to give extra insights on the results provided by the two previous analyses.

## 4. RESULTS

The analysis of the recall data was conducted through thematic analysis, code co-occurence analysis (time intervals codes x elements codes), word frequencies, and trend analysis, and in the lens of several established theoretical frameworks to understand the memory decay of narrative elements in advertisements over time. Chatman's (1978), Freytag (1895), and McGann & Schwartz (1988) provided the frameworks for characters, plot, and settings. The studies by Kılıç & Yolbulan Okan (2021), Pfannes, Meyer, & Orth (2021), and Chang (2009) informed the analysis of brand

integrations, while insights from Kim et al. (2022), Kang et al. (2020), Ryoo et al. (2020), and Phillips & McQuarrie (2010) guided the evaluation of message recall. Additionally, the memory decay trends were interpreted through the lens of Ebbinghaus's (1885) memory decay theory and the multi-store memory model proposed by Atkinson & Shiffrin (1968). The following sections present and analyze the data, exploring how these elements are recalled immediately after exposure, one week later, and one month after the initial viewing. See appendix 7.6. (table 5) for the complete recall frequency over time dataset (co-occurrence analysis), this dataset will be broken down into parts in the following sections for an in-depth analysis.

## 4.1. Recall of Elements Over Time

| Code Categories or Code Groups | Codes in Category /Code Group | Immediate Recall (Code Frequency) | One Week Recall (Code Frequency) | One Month Recall (Code Frequency) | Total (Code Frequency) | Immediate Recall (Normalized) | One Week Recall (Normalized) | One Month Recall (Normalized) | Total (Normalized) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand Integration | 9 | 81 (100.00%) | 54 (66.67) | 51 (63.00%) | 186 | 9.00 (100.00%) | 6.00 (66.67%) | 5.67 (63.00%) | 20.67 |
| Characters | 19 | 175 (100.00%) | 127 (72.53%) | 95 (54.29%) | 397 | 9.21 (100.00%) | 6.68 (72.53%) | 5.00 (54.29%) | 20.89 |
| Messages | 9 | 71 (100.00%) | 56 (78.83%) | 50 (70.46%) | 177 | 7.89 (100.00%) | 6.22 (78.83%) | 5.56 (70.46%) | 19.67 |
| Plot | 17 | 198 (100.00%) | 148 (74.76%) | 109 (55.02%) | 455 | 11.65 (100.00%) | 8.71 (74.76%) | 6.41 (55.02%) | 26.77 |
| Settings | 15 | 100 (100.00%) | 58 (58.02%) | 52 (52.02%) | 210 | 6.67 (100.00%) | 3.87 (58.02%) | 3.47 (52.02%) | 14.01 |
| Total | 69 | 625 (100.00%) | 443 (70.88%) | 357 (57.12%) | 1425 | 9.06 (100.00%) | 6.42 (70.88%) | 5.17 (57.12%) | 20.65 |

**Table 6:** Table of Overall Recall Frequency of Elements Over Time - Code Co-occurrence Analysis (Source: Author, exported from AtlasTI)

The overall recall of elements—characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integrations—demonstrates a clear pattern of memory decay over time for both ads together, consistent with the Ebbinghaus (1885) memory decay theory. The table 6 and figure 2 show the normalized recall frequencies of each element and the trend analysis of the data from the table. The initial recall, measured immediately after exposure to the advertisements, shows, as expected, the highest frequency of recalled elements, with all participants together able to recall 625 (100%) elements within the categories, corresponding to a normalized recall frequency of 9.06 (100%) within the categories.
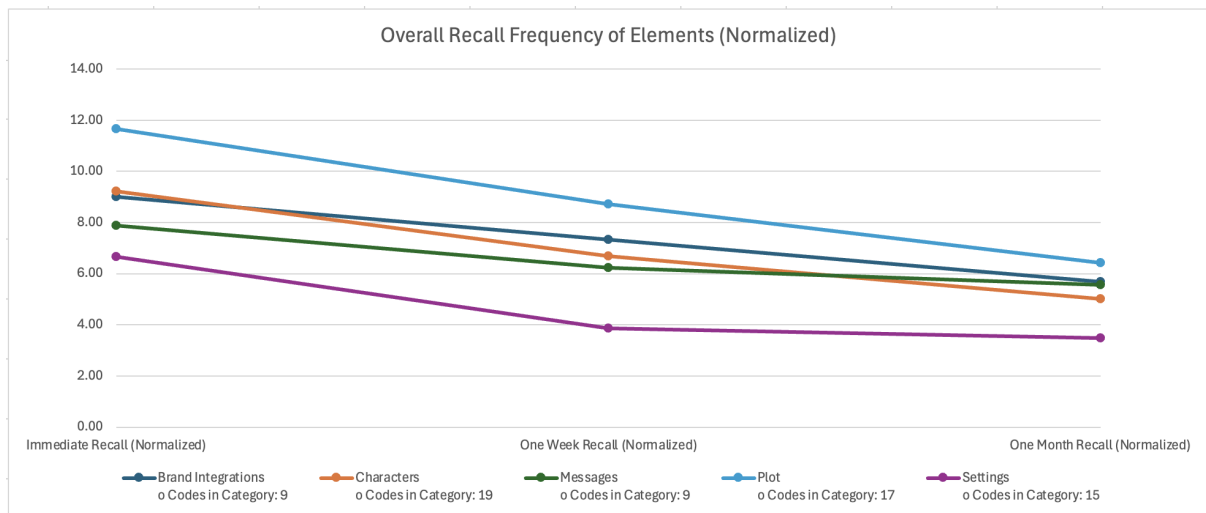
**Figure 2:** Trend Analysis - Line Chart of Overall Recall Frequency of Elements Over Time (Source: Author)

One week later, the recall frequency of all elements decreases to 443 (70.88%), with a normalized recall frequency of 6.42 (70.88%), indicating a significant decline in participants' ability to remember specific narrative details. This drop is consistent with the natural fading of memory traces as posited by the multi-model memory model (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968), where short-term memory is gradually lost unless reinforced or rehearsed.

By the one-month recall, the memory decay becomes more pronounced, with only 357 elements recalled (57.12%) and a normalized recall frequency dropping further to 5.17 (57.12%). This continued decline illustrates the challenges in retaining detailed narrative elements over a longer period, underscoring the ephemeral nature of memory when it comes to complex and nuanced content such as narrative advertisements.

When considering the analysis of recall of elements across the three time intervals and the two ads, the element plot was the most frequently recalled, with a total normalized frequency of 26.77, followed by brand integrations (20.89), characters (20.89), messages (19.67), and settings (14.01). However, the trend analysis reveals a consistent decline in memory retention across all elements—brand integrations, characters, messages, plot, and settings—over time, with settings experiencing the steepest drop. While all elements show strong initial recall, their retention diminishes significantly after one month. Notably, messages exhibit slightly better retention.

Moreover, during thematic analysis I identified that participants were pointing similar reasons for remembering certain elements, the following sub-sections will cover a summary of those reasons segmented for each element within the two narrative advertisements used in the study.

### 4.1.1. Reasons for Recall of Characters

The characters in both advertisements were recalled primarily due to the strong connections they fostered with the audience. In the Samsung ad, Amit, the Samsung technician, was remembered for his determination and effort to reach the village, symbolizing the brand's commitment to exceptional customer service. His actions highlighted themes of dedication, reliability, and going the extra mile, which resonated deeply with viewers. As one participant noted,

> "Amit, the Samsung employee. I believe he does his job very well because he didn't say, 'Ah, I can't come there today because the street is blocked.' He tried anyway because he knew she needed it. He represents us, the hard workers of the society."

Participant 26 - One Month Recall

Similarly, in the Mercedes-Benz ad, Bertha Benz was recalled for her pioneering role as a woman driving the first car, which symbolized courage, innovation, and female empowerment. This representation not only underscored the historical significance of Mercedes-Benz but also created a strong emotional link with viewers who admired her perseverance and independence. As one participant stated,

> *"It empowered women by showing a woman working on her engine, traditionally viewed as a man's job. That's a woman I'd look up to, if I were a child."*

> Participant 14 - One Month Recall

Additionally, the reactions of secondary characters, such as the blind girl and children in the Samsung ad and the little girl calling Bertha a "witch" in the Mercedes-Benz ad, further contributed to the recall by emphasizing the emotional impact of the narratives. These characters, through their roles and actions, became key touchpoints for viewers, enhancing the memorability of this element.
Also, the characters were always connected to the messages and brand integrations within the ad, they portrayed the core messages, or morals of the stories, and the brand's identity in their actions. This connection is clearly seen when interviewees associate the characters' actions to the messages and brand values of feminism and going the extra mile.

### 4.1.2. Reasons for Recall of Plot

The plots of both advertisements were structured to evoke emotional responses and highlight the brand's commitment to overcoming challenges, which made them memorable for viewers during the rising actions and climaxes. The Samsung ad's plot, centered around the challenging journey of repairing a TV in a remote village, was particularly effective in illustrating the lengths to which Samsung would go to satisfy its customers.

> *"It was emotional, mostly in the end. You have a feeling that you want to see what's happening. So you see that the guy, he really tries hard to be there at the place that he agreed to be to meet the girl."*

> Participant 2 - One Month Recall

This narrative of persistence and overcoming obstacles reinforced the brand's image as reliable and dedicated. In the Mercedes-Benz ad, the plot of Bertha Benz's historic first long-distance journey in an automobile captivated viewers by blending adventure with history education.

> *"The first trip as well, and when she stops at the first gas station ever, I thought it was very curious to discover something like that. So yeah, that's something that stood out for me."*

> Participant 27 - One Week Recall

The plot's emphasis on overcoming challenges, such as the car breaking down and needing to find fuel, reinforced themes of perseverance and innovation, making the story both relatable and inspirational, while connecting to the brands' messages of attending the customer living far away and pioneerism.

### 4.1.3. Reasons for Recall of Settings

The settings in both advertisements were crucial in creating a vivid and memorable backdrop that enhanced the narrative's impact. The rural Indian village in the Samsung ad was memorable because it provided a stark contrast to the typical urban environments often seen in ads, emphasizing the difficulty of the technician's journey and highlighting Samsung's extensive reach.

*"The conditions in the video because there was this long path that the guy had to drive to get to the blind girl. Never seen that, the roads didn't have good conditions, and also his reaction when he saw that she was blind, and that he stayed with her after fixing the TV."*

<div align="right">Participant 17 - One Week Recall</div>

The challenging terrain, unfamiliar, and remote landscape underscored the messages of perseverance and effort. Similarly, the 19th-century German village in the Mercedes-Benz ad was memorable for its historical accuracy and contrast with modern automobiles.

*"At first, I thought they were talking about the 19th century, so the situations was not the same as we can perceive them today."*

<div align="right">Participant 24 - One Month Recall</div>

The setting highlighted the revolutionary nature of Bertha Benz's journey, adding to the sense of novelty and disruption caused by the car. The bar and pharmacy settings were also significant as they played into the plot's climax, marking the first "gas station" and symbolizing the beginning of a new era in transportation and commerce. Interestingly, in both ads the settings were recalled for their contrast with viewer's reality, being totally unfamiliar with those settings.

## 4.1.4. Reasons for Recall of Messages

The messages conveyed by both advertisements were central to why they were remembered, as they resonated deeply with the viewers' values and emotions. The Samsung ad effectively communicated the company's dedication to customer service, emphasizing its willingness to go to great lengths to meet customer needs, even in challenging conditions.

*"The advertisement reflects the concern of the company to address customer satisfaction, regardless of the size of the problem that the customer has and the distance they have to go through to attend to this customer."*

<div align="right">Participant 19 - One Month Recall</div>

This message was reinforced through the narrative of the technician's journey, which symbolized Samsung's commitment to reliability and customer satisfaction. In contrast, the Mercedes-Benz ad focused on female empowerment and innovation, with Bertha Benz's journey serving as a metaphor for believing in oneself and overcoming societal challenges.

*"The main message was if she could accomplish this, it was because she not only believed in the machine, but she believed in herself."*

<div align="right">Participant 25 - One Month Recall</div>

This message not only highlighted the brand's historical significance but also positioned Mercedes-Benz as a pioneer in both automotive history and gender equality. Overall, messages were impactful because they were associated with other elements from the narratives, making them more relevant—they became integral to the stories being told. The messages were transferred in the plot by the actions of the characters, and characters were representing the brands in the stories.

## 4.1.5. Reasons for Recall of Brand Integrations

Brand integration in both advertisements was subtle yet powerful, enhancing the overall narrative without overpowering it. In the Samsung ad, the brand was integrated through the actions

of the service technician and the use of Samsung products, which subtly reinforced the brand's commitment to customer service without being overly explicit.

> *"The whole plot to illustrate the fact that they would go long distances just to attend to a customer."*

Participant 19 - One Week Recall

This allowed the story and emotional message to take center stage, making the brand's commitment feel more genuine and impactful. In the Mercedes-Benz ad, the brand was integrated through the historical narrative of Bertha Benz, with the brand's identity and legacy being revealed only towards the end of the ad.

> *"I think the ad was supposed to attach the image of cars to Mercedes because it's just not any brand of cars. It's literally the brand that started cars."*

Participant 29 - One Week Recall

This subtle integration allowed the story to unfold naturally, with the brand's role in automotive history becoming a powerful reveal that reinforced its pioneering status. Both ads effectively used the plot and characters to embed the brand within the advertisement, creating a seamless connection between the brand and the narrative's messages of reliability, innovation, and empowerment.

## 4.2. Specific Recall Within the Elements Over Time

| Code Categories or Code Groups | Codes in Category/ Group | Immediate Recall (Normalized) | One Week Recall (Normalized) | One Month Recall (Normalized) | Total (Normalized) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand Integration: Brand History | 1 | 15.00 (100.00%) | 13.00 (86.67%) | 10.00 (66.67%) | 38.00 |
| Brand Integration: Brand Identity | 4 | 7.75 (100.00%) | 5.25 (67.74%) | 5.00 (64.52%) | 18.00 |
| Brand Integration: Products or Services | 4 | 9.50 (100.00%) | 5.75 (60.53%) | 5.75 (60.53%) | 21.00 |
| Characters: Main Characters | 8 | 13.88 (100.00%) | 11.75 (84.65%) | 10.38 (74.78%) | 36.01 |
| Characters: Side Characters | 10 | 5.70 (100.00%) | 2.90 (50.88%) | 1.20 (21.05%) | 9.80 |
| Messages: Explicit Messages | 5 | 12.00 (100.00%) | 9.60 (80.00%) | 8.80 (73.33%) | 30.40 |
| Messages: Implicit Messages | 4 | 3.50 (100.00%) | 2.25 (64.29%) | 1.75 (50.00%) | 7.50 |
| Plot: Exposition | 2 | 14.00 (100.00%) | 9.50 (67.86%) | 8.00 (57.14%) | 31.50 |
| Plot: Conflict | 4 | 13.50 (100.00%) | 9.50 (70.37%) | 7.25 (53.70%) | 30.25 |
| Plot: Rising Action | 6 | 10.67 (100.00%) | 7.83 (73.38%) | 5.00 (46.86%) | 23.50 |
| Plot: Climax | 3 | 14.67 (100.00%) | 11.67 (79.55%) | 10.00 (68.17%) | 36.34 |
| Plot: Falling Action & Resolution | 2 | 8.50 (100.00%) | 7.00 (82.35%) | 4.50 (52.94%) | 20.00 |

**Table 7:** Table of Recall Frequency of Grouped Codes Within the Elements Over Time - Code Co-occurrence Analysis
(Source: Author, exported from AtlasTI)
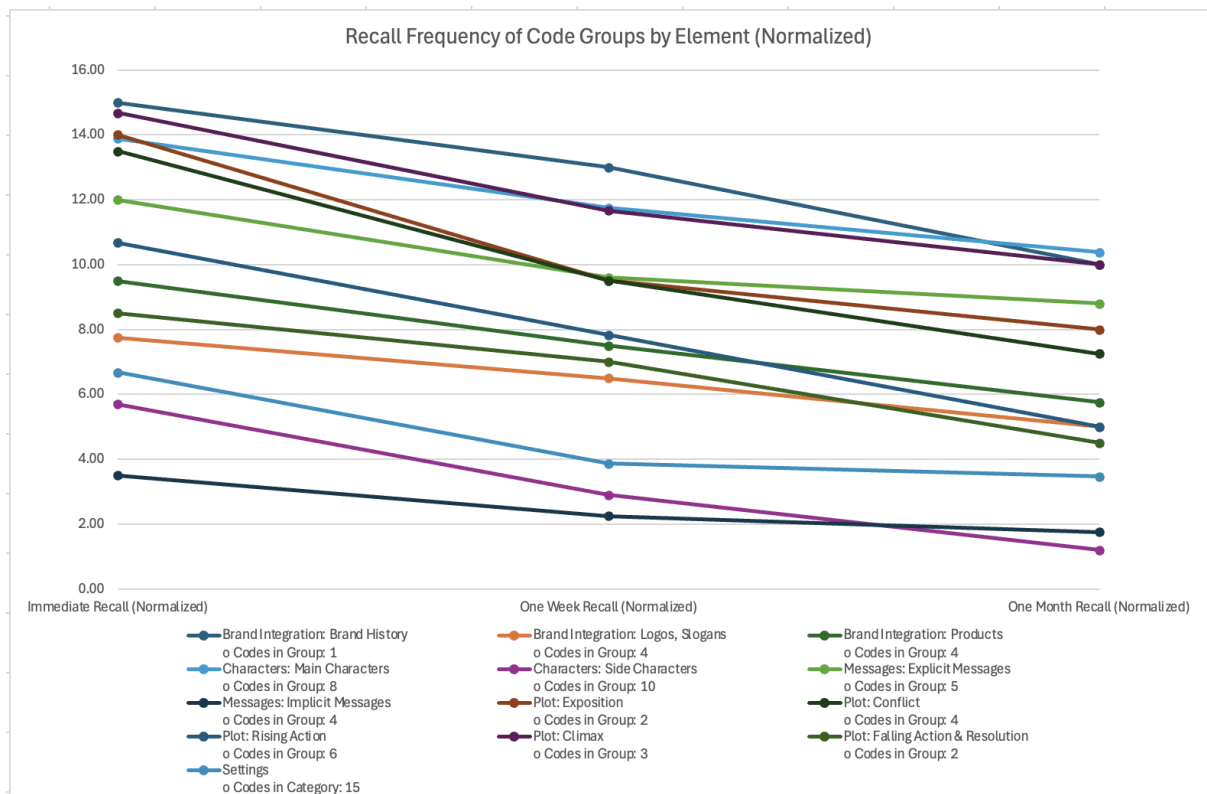
**Figure 3:** Trend Analysis - Line Chart of Recall Frequency of Grouped Elements (Source: Author)

To gain deeper insights into how different aspects within the elements were retained or forgotten over time, the study grouped these codes of the elements into categories. Each of these element categories was analyzed to observe patterns in recall, shedding light on which elements of the narrative were more resistant to memory decay. Grouping these codes allowed for a more structured analysis, making it possible to identify specific trends and variations in how different aspects/categories within the elements were remembered or forgotten by participants. See table 7 for the normalized frequencies that will be studied in depth next.

The results of the trend analysis (figure 3) of this dataset indicate that elements central to the narrative and emotionally resonant, such as main characters, plot climaxes, and brand history, are retained more effectively over time, with only a gradual decline in recall. Conversely, less central elements, such as side characters and implicit messages, experience a sharper decline in memory retention. It reveals that narrative centrality and emotional engagement play crucial roles in the longevity of recall for advertisement elements (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). I will explore this further in the following section.

## 4.2.1. Recall of Main and Side Characters and Plot Points Over Time

The study grouped character codes into main and side characters, and plot codes into exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, and falling action & resolution. The trend analysis, using normalized recall frequencies, reveals distinct patterns in how these elements were remembered or forgotten as time passed.

The recall of main characters exhibited a relatively high retention rate compared to side characters across all three intervals. Immediately after exposure, the normalized recall frequency for main characters was 13.88 (100%), while side characters were recalled with a normalized frequency of 5.70 (100%). One week later, this recall declined to 11.75 (84.65%) for main characters and 2.90 (50.88%) for side characters. By the one-month mark, retention dropped further, with normalized frequencies of 10.38 (74.78%) for main characters and only 1.20 (21.05%) for side characters. This

suggests that while main characters remain relatively memorable, side characters are more susceptible to memory decay.

For instance, immediately after exposure, Participant 2 vividly described the main characters in the Samsung ad:

*"There is this guy who's the guy from Samsung. That goes to fix the TV he's wearing the uniform. He has brown hair. I don't know where they're from, but he looks a bit Indian. I don't know. And he seems really positive. Throughout the the obstacle that he faces and he really wants to to go see the girl. And then there's the girl, who's blind. She's also has brown hair. She does look Indian, I guess. And she's skinny. And then there's the other kids, I guess all of them have brown hair as well. And they wore like. Different kinds of clothing they have, like these cultural clothing. And yes, I guess that's it."*

<div align="right">Participant 2, Immediate Recall</div>

By the one-month recall, the same participant could only recall the main characters, yet vaguely, saying:

*"There was this guy and this girl who are the people that appeared mostly in the ad. I don't remember much about their appearance itself. I guess everyone had brown hair, but I'm not sure."*

<div align="right">Participant 2, One Month Recall</div>

This fading memory of detailed character descriptions over time aligns with the observed decline in normalized recall frequencies.

Regarding the plot, the exposition, conflict, and climax were among the most frequently recalled elements in the short-term. Immediately after exposure, the normalized recall frequency for exposition was 14.00 (100%), for conflict was 13.50 (100%), and for climax, it was 14.67 (100%), highlighting their importance in the narrative structure. However, only climax lasted in the long-run, with exposition recall dropping to 9.50 (67.86%) after one week and 8.00 (57.14%) after one month, and conflict showing a similar pattern with a normalized of 9.50 (70.37%) after one week, and 7.25 (53.70%) after one month, while climax recall kept high at 11.67 (79.55%) and 10.00 (68.17%), respectively.

The rising action, which plays a crucial role in building narrative tension, had a normalized recall frequency of 10.67 (100%) immediately after exposure, decreasing to 7.83 (73.38%) after one week and 5.00 (46.86%) after one month. Falling action & resolution, which often encapsulate the story's final moments, were the least recalled, with normalized frequencies of 8.50 (100%) immediately after exposure, 7.00 (82.35%) after one week, and 4.50 (52.94%) after one month.

For example, Participant 13 initially provided a detailed account of the Samsung ad's plot:

*"Amit picks up the phone and there's this girl asking for a repair on the TV. He goes with a partner that we don't see much, but there's a second person in the van. They go a very long way and through many difficulties to reach the girl's house. When he gets there, Amit is emotional because he sees that the girl is blind and she lives in a house for blind kids."*

<div align="right">Participant 13, Immediate Recall</div>

By the one-month recall, the participant's memory had significantly faded:

*"I think it started with a repair request for the guy. He went to the house, and most of the ad was about him trying to get there because it was very far away. He faced some delays, but I don't remember exactly what caused the delays."*

These findings align with the narrative theory proposed by Chatman (1978), McGann & Schwartz (1988) and Freytag (1895), which emphasizes posits main characters and pivotal plot points like the climax in the focal part of the narrative, driving it forward. The gradual decline in recall, particularly for side characters and less critical plot elements, supports Atkinson & Shiffrin (1968) multi-store memory theory, where less consolidated memories are more prone to being forgotten over time.

**4.2.2. Recall of Settings and Explicit and Implicit Messages Over Time**

The recall of settings was notably less robust compared to other elements like characters and plot. Immediately after exposure, the normalized recall frequency for settings was 6.67 (100%). This decreased significantly to 3.87 (58.02%) one week later and further to 3.47 (52.02%) after one month. This pattern indicates that the environmental context in which the narrative unfolds tends to be forgotten more rapidly than the core narrative elements.

For example, Participant 3 described the Samsung ad settings in detail immediately after exposure:

"A mountain with curvy roads, very outside of civilization, far from the city. It looked like a remote place with beautiful scenery, winding roads, and dirt roads."

<div align="right">Participant 3, Immediate Recall</div>

By the one-month recall, the participant's memory had faded significantly, stating only:

*"I just remember it being rural. I don't remember much detail, but that's pretty much it."*

<div align="right">Participant 3, One Month Recall</div>

This decline in setting recall suggests that while the environment contributes to the initial impression of the ad, it becomes less memorable over time, potentially due to its perceived secondary importance compared to the characters and plot. This finding aligns with the multi-store model of memory (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968), where sensory information like settings may be encoded in short-term memory but is less likely to be transferred to long-term memory unless it is linked to more critical elements of the narrative.

The messages conveyed in the advertisements, particularly those codes grouped into explicit and implicit messages, demonstrated varied recall patterns. Explicit messages, which are more directly communicated, had a higher normalized recall frequency across all intervals: 12.00 (100%) immediately after exposure, 9.60 (80.00%) one week later, and 8.80 (73.33%) after one month. In contrast, implicit messages, which require the viewer to infer meaning, were recalled with lower frequencies: 3.50 (100%) immediately after exposure, 2.25 (64.29%) one week later, and 1.75 (50.00%) after one month.

This trend underscores the challenges associated with retaining more nuanced or inferred messages over time. For instance, Participant 7 initially recalled an explicit and an implicit message from the Samsung ad:

*"Well, considering that it's Samsung, I think the main thing is that they will drive to you if you have a problem. If you have a problem with your TV or setting something up, they'll drive to you no matter where you are. I think also a message too, is probably not judge. Because he was on the phone with her first and then got there and realized she was completely different from what he thought."*

<div align="right">Participant 7, Immediate Recall</div>

By the one-month recall, explicit message was still remembered, though slightly less detailed, and the implicit message was completely left behind:

*"The main message from Samsung, I guess, was that they will travel wherever you are to fix what you need fixed."*

<div align="right">Participant 7, One Month Recall</div>

The retention patterns for messages align with the findings of Kim et al. (2022), Phillips & McQuarrie (2010), who emphasize the importance of aspirational and direct messaging in narrative advertising. Moreover, as noted by Ryoo et al. (2020), explicit messages are more likely to impact, and therefore to be encoded into long-term memory, as they are clearly put in the story, on the other hand implicit messages, despite their potential for deeper engagement, are more susceptible to interpretation and demonstrated to also fade over time.

### 4.2.3. Recall of Brand Identity, Brand History, and Product or Services Over Time

The grouped codes of brand integrations—brand identity, brand history, and products or services—show distinct patterns of recall over time, reflecting the narrative focus of the respective advertisements. The analysis reveals how the central focus of each ad influenced the retention of brand-related elements.

The recall of brand history is a standout in the data, with a normalized recall frequency of 15.00 (100%) immediately after exposure, decreasing slightly to 13.00 (86.67%) one week later, and 10.00 (66.67%) after one month. This consistent recall can be attributed to the fact that these numbers come exclusively from the Mercedes-Benz advertisement, which was entirely focused on narrating the brand's history. For example, Participant 29 vividly associated the ad to the brand history in the first interview:

*"It's more about the story. It's not supposed to make you want to buy a Mercedes. It's to make us realize how impactful the brand is and the problems the Benz family faced to get to today. It's more about the brand than the products because we can't buy those cars. It's a scene from 140 years ago, but that's important."*

<div align="right">Participant 29, Immediate Recall</div>

And after one month he showed his memory attachment to the brand history:

*"It was integrated by letting the audience know that the first automobile was created by Mercedes-Benz, so that gives credibility to the brand because they were the first ones."*

<div align="right">Participant 29, One Month Recall</div>

This historical narrative left a lasting impression on viewers, making the brand history a key element that participants remembered even a month after the initial exposure.

In contrast, the recall of products or services had a normalized frequency of 9.50 (100%) immediately after exposure, dropping to 5.75 (60.53%) one week later, and further to 5.75 (60.53%) after one month. These figures come predominantly from the Samsung advertisement, which was centered on promoting the brand's repair services. The ad depicted Samsung's commitment to customer service in remote areas, using the brand's products and services as the core of its narrative. As Participant 9 noted in the immediate recal of Samsung Ad, mentioning clearly all products and services present in the adl:

*"The main product is the TV. There was also a Samsung phone, and of course the service, their support service. I'm not sure if that's an actual service or just support for their products.*

*I don't know if it applies to all products or just the TV. If my phone broke, I'm not sure I could call them to fix it."*

Participant 9, Immediate Recall

Comparing it to one month later, it had been partially forgotten, leaving behind one of the three products and services mentioned:

*"I think the only product shown in the commercial is the TV and also the support that's available all across India. But that's all."*

Participant 9, One Month Recall

The relatively faster decline in the recall of products or services suggests that while functional aspects of a brand can be memorable, they may not resonate as deeply or as lastingly as emotional or historical narratives.

The recall of identity, present in both advertisements, shows a more moderate pattern of decay, with a normalized frequency of 7.75 (100%) immediately after exposure, decreasing to 5.25 (67.74%) one week later, and 5.00 (64.52%) after one month. Logos and slogans were integrated into both ads, serving as visual and verbal reinforcements of the brand identity. However, the less personalized and more ubiquitous nature of logos and slogans meant that they were less likely to stand out in memory compared to the more narrative-driven elements like brand history or the depiction of specific products or services.

For example, in the Samsung advertisement, Participant 7 initially mentioned:

*"I didn't see too many logos. I can't remember seeing too many logos other than at the end. It was also on his shirt and in the van. I remember more at the end, the logo pops up saying they will travel to you no matter how far. I didn't look for a brand on the TV or the remote either."*

Participant 7, Immediate Recall

However, by the one-month recall, the memory of these visual cues had faded, with the participant recalling in a more generalized way:

*"The Samsung worker was part of it, and then I think it showed the Samsung logo at the end."*

Participant 7, One Month Recall

The presence of brand identity elements in both ads were initially recalled, but their generic nature led to a more significant decline already in the first week, compared to more narrative-driven elements like brand history in the Mercedes-Benz ad or products/services in the Samsung ad, this was the less prominent aspect of brand integration in the ads. Additionally, the strong recall of brand history in the Mercedes-Benz ad shows the lasting impact of a narrative built around historical facts of the brand, while the faster decline in the recall of products or services in the Samsung ad suggests that functional ads may be more susceptible to memory decay.

## 4.3. Recall of Elements by Advertisement Over Time

The analysis of the Mercedes-Benz and Samsung advertisements reveals notable similarities in how both ads effectively engaged viewers and varying elements were recalled over time. Despite their different thematic focuses—Mercedes-Benz on historical legacy and Samsung on service reliability—the recall patterns demonstrate that both ads were successful in creating memorable

narratives, even at extensive periods of time. See table 8 and figure 4 for a co-occurrence data and its trend analysis.

| Code Categories or Code Groups | Codes in Category/ Code Group | Immediate Recall (Normalized) | One Week Recall (Normalized) | One Month Recall (Normalized) | Total (Normalized) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand Integrations (Mercedes) | 3 | 12.33 (100.00%) | 8.33 (67.55%) | 7.33 (59.44%) | **27.99** |
| Brand Integrations (Samsung) | 6 | 7.33 (100.00%) | 4.83 (65.89%) | 4.83 (65.89%) | **16.99** |
| Characters (Mercedes) | 12 | 8.17 (100.00%) | 5.50 (67.31%) | 3.92 (47.98%) | **17.59** |
| Characters (Samsung) | 7 | 11.00 (100.00%) | 8.71 (79.18%) | 6.86 (62.36%) | **26.57** |
| Messages (Mercedes) | 4 | 7.00 (100.00%) | 5.40 (77.14%) | 5.00 (71.43%) | **17.40** |
| Messages (Samsung) | 4 | 9.00 (100.00%) | 7.25 (80.56%) | 6.25 (69.44%) | **22.50** |
| Plot (Mercedes) | 7 | 13.14 (100.00%) | 10.71 (81.51%) | 8.29 (63.09%) | **32.14** |
| Plot (Samsung) | 10 | 10.60 (100.00%) | 7.30 (68.87%) | 5.10 (48.11%) | **23.00** |
| Settings (Mercedes) | 6 | 9.50 (100.00%) | 5.83 (61.37%) | 4.83 (50.84%) | **20.16** |
| Settings (Samsung) | 9 | 4.78 (100.00%) | 2.56 (53.56%) | 2.56 (53.56%) | **9.90** |

**Table 8:** Table of Recall Frequecy of Elements by Advertisement Over Time - Code Co-occurrence Analysis (Source: Author, extracted from AtlasTI)
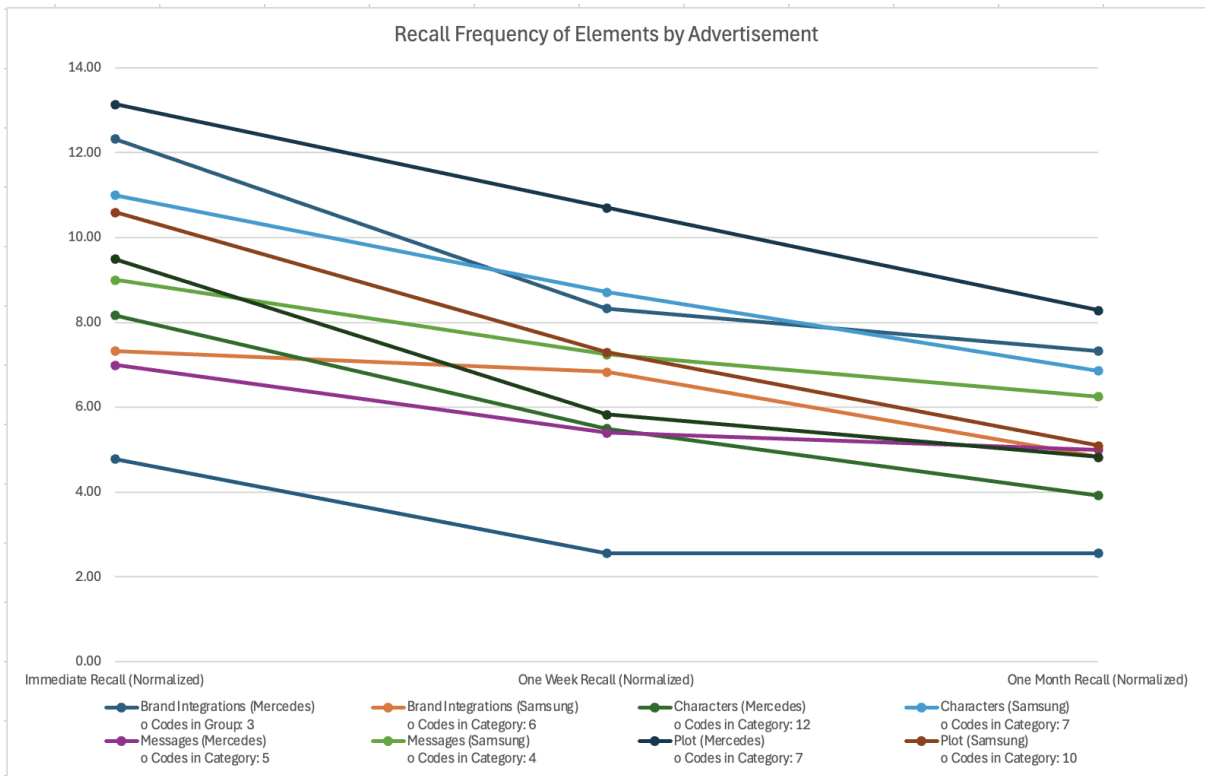
**Figure 4:** Trend Analysis - Line Chart of Recall Frequecy of Elements by Advertisement Over Time (Source: Author)

Both advertisements exhibited strong immediate recall across key elements, driven by their compelling narratives and emotional tones. The Mercedes-Benz ad, with its tense and dramatic historical narrative, had a high immediate recall frequency for plot (13.14, 100%), brand integrations (12.33, 100%), and characters (8.17, 100%). Similarly, the Samsung ad, with its beautiful and emotionally charged depiction of a technician overcoming obstacles to help blind individuals, showed high immediate recall for plot (10.60, 100%), brand integrations (7.33, 100%), and characters (11.00, 100%). These findings suggest that both ads effectively captured viewers' attention and left a strong initial impression, underscoring the importance of emotional engagement in enhancing memory retention.

A key difference lies in the nature of the emotional tone. The Mercedes-Benz ad used a more tense and historically significant narrative, which may have contributed to the strong recall of the brand's legacy. In contrast, the Samsung ad's emotional appeal was more centered around human connection and service, which resonated deeply with viewers through its portrayal of empathy and dedication.

For example, one participant's immediate recall of the Mercedes-Benz ad reflected the strong narrative impact:

*"I felt a little tense. I think it's very dark. The advertisement is not sunny at all. People are not happy. People are kind of worried. But then I felt more curious."*

Participant 16, Immediate Recall

This lasted in the participant's one-month recall:

*"It was very tense because, in the beginning, you don't know what it is about, and then everybody is very nervous about this person. It was kind of dark, maybe it was not a sunny day. It seemed old, maybe from some centuries ago. I remember being curious."*

Participant 16, One Month Recall

Similarly, in the Samsung ad, a participant talking about the advertisement in immediate recall moment:

*"At first, I thought it would just be that the woman was blind, and that was a pretty cool emotion. But then, like, 20 children who were blind came down, and that made it even more emotional. And then it got even more emotional after that when they found out that it was another blind girl from the hostel who was performing on TV. It basically went through way more emotional moments than I'm used to, which is really cool."*

Participant 5, Immediate Recall

Participant 5, kept those sensations one month later:

*"It [the advertisement] stuck to me because it was very emotional and kind of like, really sweet because it was about helping blind people."*

Participant 5, One Month Recall

One week after exposure, both ads showed a decline in recall across all elements, but they still retained a significant portion of the initial memory. The recall for the Mercedes-Benz ad's plot decreased to 10.71 (81.51%), brand integrations to 8.33 (67.55%), and settings to 5.83 (61.37%). Character recall dropped to 5.50 (67.31%), and messages decreased to 5.40 (77.14%). For the Samsung ad, character recall declined to 8.71 (79.18%), the plot to 7.30 (68.87%), and messages to 7.25 (80.56%). Brand integrations fell to 4.83 (65.89%), and settings showed a significant drop to 2.56 (53.56%). This pattern of recall decay is typical, reflecting the natural fading of memory over time. However, both ads maintained substantial recall, indicating that their narratives continued to resonate with viewers beyond the initial exposure.

By one month after exposure, both advertisements experienced further declines in recall. The recall of the Mercedes-Benz ad's plot further decreased to 8.29 (63.09%), brand integrations to 7.33 (59.44%), and settings to 4.83 (50.84%). Character recall dropped significantly to 3.92 (47.98%), but the messages remained relatively stable at 5.00 (71.43%). For the Samsung ad, the recall of characters decreased to 6.86 (62.36%), the plot to 5.10 (48.11%), and messages to 6.25 (69.44%). Brand integrations remained stable at 4.83 (65.89%), but settings recall was particularly low, staying at 2.56 (53.56%). Despite these declines, both ads succeeded in leaving a lasting impression, with key elements of their narratives—whether historical or service-oriented—continuing to be remembered by viewers. This highlights the importance of a strong narrative and emotional appeal in creating enduring memories.

A key difference between the two ads lies in the rate of decay. The Mercedes-Benz ad demonstrated a more gradual decline in recall across most elements, particularly for plot and brand integrations, suggesting that its historical narrative might contribute to more resilient memory retention. In contrast, the Samsung ad exhibited a more pronounced decline, especially in the recall of settings and plot, indicating that while its emotional appeal was powerful in the short term, it did not sustain memory as effectively over time. The Mercedes-Benz ad's narrative, rooted in historical significance, seemed to have a more lasting effect on memory retention compared to the Samsung ad's service-oriented message. This suggests that narratives with a strong historical or legacy component may be more effective in creating long-term brand retention.

## 4.4. Word Frequency Analysis

To further understand the elements most prominently recalled by participants over time, a word frequency analysis was conducted across the Immediate Recall (figure 5), One Week Recall (figure 6), and One Month Recall (figure 7) interviews. This analysis allows for the identification of

recurring themes and elements that were most salient in participants' memories, providing additional insights into the patterns of recall over time.
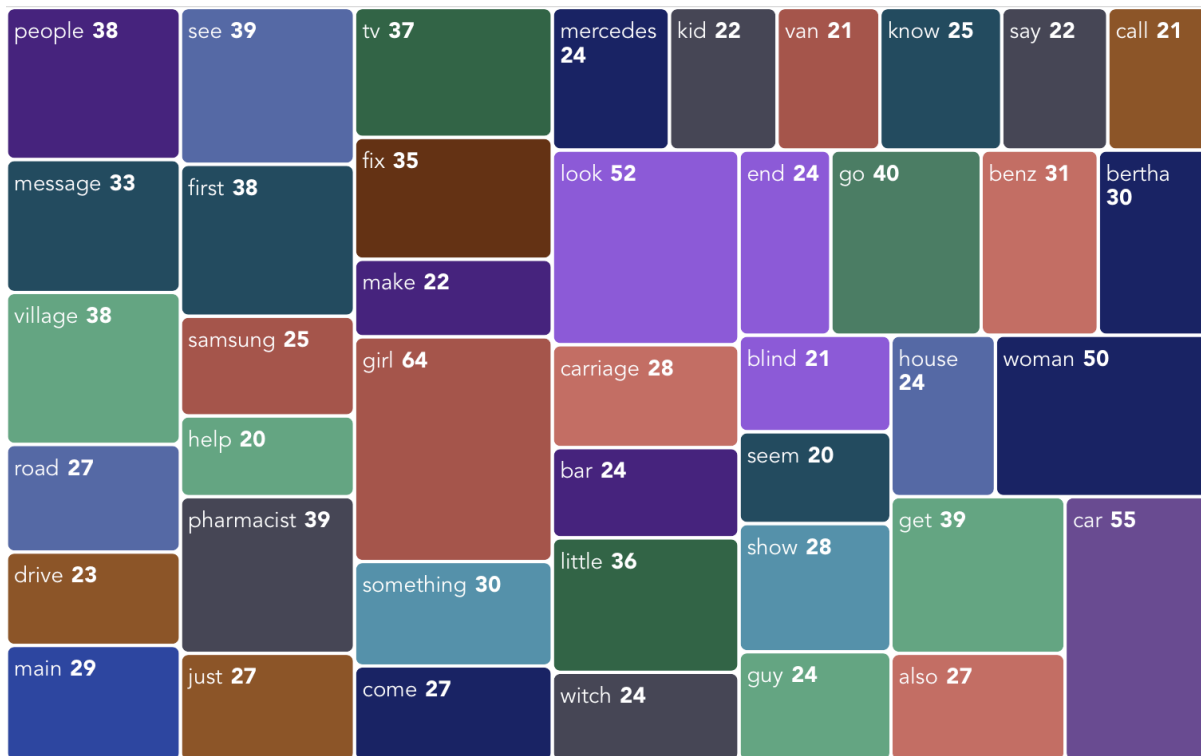


**Figure 5:** Word Frequency Tree Map - Immediate Recall (Source: Author, exported from AtlasTI)

In the Immediate Recall phase, the most frequently mentioned words were directly tied to the key elements of both advertisements. The word "car" (55 mentions) was the most recalled, reflecting the central role of the Mercedes-Benz vehicle in the ad's narrative. Similarly, "girl" (64 mentions) was another highly recalled element, primarily associated with the Samsung advertisement, which featured a young girl as a central character. The frequent recall of "TV" (37 mentions) and "fix" (35 mentions) further emphasizes the Samsung ad's focus on service and repair.

The frequent mentions of "pharmacist" (39 mentions) and "Mercedes" (24 mentions) in the immediate recall also underscore the impact of the characters and brand integration in the Mercedes-Benz advertisement. The terms "message" (33 mentions) and "people" (38 mentions) highlight the emotional connection and narrative importance in both advertisements, demonstrating how both ads successfully engaged viewers through their storytelling and character development.

One week after exposure, the word frequency analysis shows some shifts, reflecting the natural decay of memory over time. The word "car" remains highly recalled (54 mentions), indicating the lasting impression of the Mercedes-Benz vehicle in participants' memories. Similarly, the word "girl" (46 mentions) continues to be prominent, though slightly less so than in the immediate recall, indicating a slight decline in the recall of this element from the Samsung ad.

Interestingly, the word "message" (32 mentions) appears more frequently in the one-week recall compared to the immediate recall, suggesting that while specific details may fade, the overarching messages of the ads remain relatively strong in participants' memories. This reinforces the idea that narratives with strong, clear messages are more likely to be retained over time.

The appearance of the words "service" (15 mentions) and "help" (21 mentions) in this phase suggests that the functional aspects of the Samsung ad, although less memorable than the emotional and narrative elements, still held some significance for participants. This aligns with the earlier analysis of brand integration recall, where product-related elements showed a moderate decline over time.

**Figure 6:** Word Frequency Tree Map - One Week Recall (Source: Author, exported from AtlasTI)

By the one-month recall, the word frequency analysis reveals a more pronounced decline in the specificity of recall. The word "car" (40 mentions) remains one of the most frequently mentioned terms, though with fewer mentions than in previous recall phases, indicating the continued, albeit reduced, impact of the Mercedes-Benz vehicle. The word "girl" (24 mentions) also shows a significant decrease, reflecting the expected decline in memory retention over a longer period.

However, words like "message" (14 mentions) and "people" (22 mentions) continue to appear, suggesting that even as specific details fade, participants still remember the broader themes and emotional impact of the advertisements. The words "blind" (20 mentions) and "fix" (27 mentions) also persist in the one-month recall, albeit at lower frequencies, indicating that the emotional and service-oriented aspects of the Samsung ad still resonated with some participants over time.

The word frequency analysis supports the findings from the recall frequency data and reinforces the notion that both advertisements effectively created lasting impressions, though the nature of what was remembered varied over time. The Mercedes-Benz ad, with its focus on historical narrative and brand legacy, maintained a stronger recall of specific elements like the car, the woman, and the brand itself. Meanwhile, the Samsung ad, which centered on emotional appeal and service, saw a decline in the recall of specific elements but managed to sustain memory of the broader emotional impact and message.
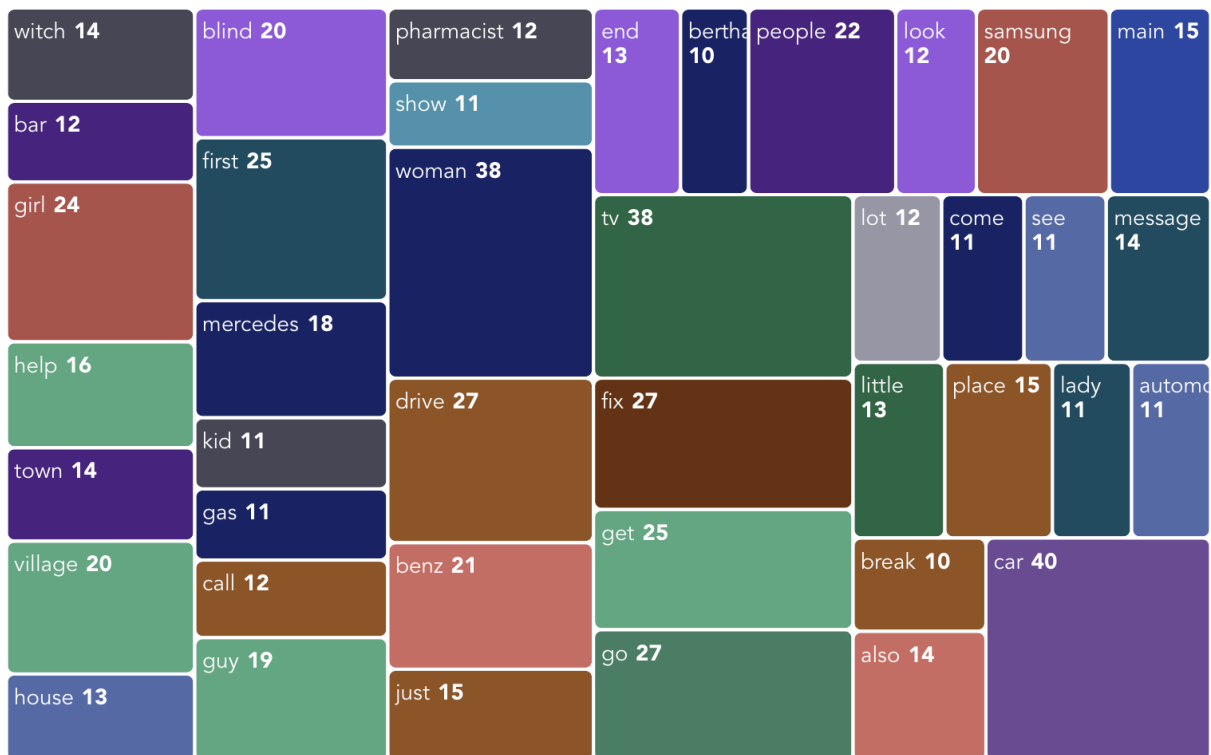
**Figure 7:** Word Frequency Tree Map - One Month Recall (Source: Author, exported from AtlasTI)

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this section, I delve into the analysis and interpretation of the findings from this study, which aims to uncover the elements of narrative advertisements that are most effectively retained by consumers over time. The research was guided by two primary questions: Which elements of narrative advertisements are most effectively retained by consumers over time? And how does the recall of specific elements—characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand elements—decay as time progresses?

The study's exploratory nature allowed for an in-depth examination of the complex and often subtle ways in which different narrative elements are processed and remembered by viewers. By employing a longitudinal design, I was able to observe how these memories evolved and decayed over time, providing a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of memory retention in the context of narrative advertising.

This research is anchored in theories of memory, narratology, and narrative advertising. I aim to provide a critical and analytical interpretation of the results, examining how they align with or challenge existing theoretical frameworks.

### 5.1. Interpretation of Findings and Relation to the Literature

The findings regarding the retention of characters suggest that main characters were generally more memorable than side characters. This is consistent with the existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of emotional engagement and identification in memory retention. Main characters, who often drive the narrative forward, tend to be more developed and therefore create stronger emotional connections with viewers, making them more likely to be retained in long-term memory (McGann & Schwartz, 1988; Escalas, 2004). This aligns with the theory of character identification discussed in the literature review, which posits that viewers are more likely to remember characters with whom they identify or emotionally connect (Kim et al., 2017).

Interestingly, side characters, though less central to the narrative, also showed varying degrees of retention depending on their narrative role and emotional impact. For example, side characters who provided emotional support were better remembered than those who were merely background figures. This suggests that even peripheral characters can be retained if they contribute to the emotional texture of the narrative. This finding can be linked to theories of emotional engagement in advertising, where the emotional resonance of characters, regardless of their narrative importance, plays a crucial role in how they are remembered (Escalas, 2004). Moreover, Chang (2009) and Escalas (2004) emphasize that characters contribute to the overall emotional engagement, and as seen in the results, even side characters had some level of emotional impact, therefore it suggests that, despite less than main characters, they still indirectly supported the retention of the narrative.

However, the retention of side characters was generally lower. One possible explanation could be the cognitive load associated with processing multiple characters, which might lead to the overshadowing of less central figures by the main character. This observation could suggest an extension to existing theories, proposing that while emotional engagement is critical, there might be a threshold to how many emotionally engaging characters a viewer can retain, especially in short-form content like advertisements. This idea is supported by the cognitive load theory discussed by Kensinger & Schacter (2006), which posits that the cognitive resources required to process complex narratives can lead to selective retention.

The analysis of plot retention revealed that certain plot components, particularly the climax, was more effectively retained than other plot elements. This finding is supported by narrative structure theories, including Freytag's Pyramid, and the concept of emotional engagement, which suggests that climactic moments in a narrative are designed to evoke strong emotional responses, making them more memorable (Freytag, 1895; Stern, 1991). The emotional intensity associated with this plot point likely enhances its retention, as discussed in the literature review under the sections on narrative persuasion and emotional engagement (Escalas & Stern, 2020).

The lesser retention of the other plot points could be attributed to their role in setting up the narrative rather than delivering the emotional payoff. These parts of the narrative, while necessary for building context, might not be as vividly remembered because they are less emotionally charged and more information-heavy. This suggests that memory retention in narrative advertisements is linked to the emotional arc of the story, with viewers more likely to remember the most emotionally impactful moments. This is further supported by Kühn & Boshoff (2023), who argue that plots in advertisements, when structured effectively, can mirror literary narratives where the emotional peak enhances recall.

In light of these findings, it may be worth considering alternative explanations such as the complexity of the narrative structure itself. More complex plots with intricate storylines might overwhelm the viewer's cognitive resources, leading to selective retention of only the most salient points. This aligns with theories on cognitive load and memory, suggesting that when presented with a complex narrative, viewers might prioritize emotionally significant plot points while discarding less impactful ones (Kensinger & Schacter, 2006).

The recall of settings in the advertisements was generally less robust than that of the other elements, possibly also due to cognitive load. However, contrary to some literature that suggests familiarity aids in memory retention, the findings indicated that settings were remembered due to being unfamiliar or unique. This suggests that the novelty of a setting can enhance its memorability, making it stand out in the viewer's mind (Berlyne, 1970).

This finding challenges the traditional view that familiarity breeds retention and supports the idea that novelty can play a critical role in how settings are encoded into long-term memory. The unfamiliarity of these settings likely triggered deeper cognitive processing, as viewers had to pay more attention to these novel environments to make sense of the narrative, thereby enhancing their retention (Pieters et al., 2010). Additionally, Chang (2009) and Yıldız & Sever (2022) highlight that

unique settings require more cognitive elaboration, further explaining why they may be better retained.

The uniqueness of certain settings, such as the medieval village and the blind hostel, also contributed to their retention, aligning with the notion that distinctive elements within an advertisement can capture attention and lead to better recall. This finding adds a new dimension to the existing literature on settings in narrative advertising by suggesting that while familiar settings can enhance relatability, unique and unfamiliar settings might be more effective in creating lasting memories, especially in competitive advertising environments where differentiation is key (Chang, 2009).

The data indicates that messages, despite not being the most frequently recalled immediately after exposure, demonstrated the least decay over time compared to other narrative elements. This suggests that messages, particularly explicit ones, have a strong associative power that helps them anchor in the viewer's memory.

This associative power stems from the ability of messages to connect with the viewer's existing knowledge, emotions, or beliefs, creating a mental link that is reinforced every time the message is recalled or triggered by related cues (Tulving & Thompson, 1973). This means that messages are not just isolated pieces of information; they are integral parts of a broader narrative structure that connects with the viewer. Messages serve as a central theme that viewers can easily recall and associate with the brand or the overall narrative. This associative quality could explain why messages decay less over time: they are repeatedly reinforced by their connections to other elements of the narrative and the viewer's personal experiences. Craik & Tulving (1975) also emphasize that this associative linking facilitates deeper encoding, making messages more resilient over time.

Additionally, results revealed that explicit messages, which are directly communicated within the advertisements, had a higher retention rate compared to implicit messages that require the viewer to infer meaning. These findings align with the literature suggesting that explicit messages are more likely to be encoded into long-term memory due to their clear and straightforward nature. This is consistent with the Atkinson & Shiffrin Memory Model, which posits that information that requires less cognitive processing (like explicit messages) is more easily transferred from short-term to long-term memory (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968).

The greater decay of implicit messages supports the notion that while these messages may engage viewers on a deeper level initially, their retention is more vulnerable over time due to the cognitive effort required to process them. This aligns with research by Phillips & McQuarrie (2010) and Ryoo et al. (2020), who noted that implicit messages, despite their potential for deeper engagement, are more susceptible to memory decay because they require the viewer to actively construct meaning from the narrative. The difference in retention between explicit and implicit messages suggests that advertisers need to balance clarity with engagement, carefully considering the cognitive load they impose on viewers.

The findings on brand integration reveal distinct patterns in recall depending on the narrative's focus. Specifically, brand history, as emphasized in the Mercedes-Benz advertisement, was recalled more effectively over time than brand identities and specific products or services highlighted in the advertisements. The high recall of Mercedes-Benz's brand history can be attributed to its integration within the narrative, which was not just a backdrop but a central theme that reinforced the brand's pioneering identity. This supports the idea that when a brand's core history is integral to the narrative, it is more likely to be retained in long-term memory. This is consistent with knowledge on brand storytelling that suggests the emotional and cognitive engagement generated by such narratives enhances their impact (Keller, 1991; Escalas, 2004).

In contrast, the recall of products or services in the Samsung advertisement, while initially high, declined more significantly over time. This finding aligns with research indicating that functional information, such as product details, is more prone to memory decay unless it is closely tied to the emotional or thematic core of the narrative (Chang, 2009; Glaser & Reisinger, 2022). I also

discussed how product-oriented narratives might be less effective in sustaining long-term recall because they often require repeated exposure to maintain their impact (Baddeley, 2000). This ties back to the broader literature on narrative advertising, which advocates for a balance between functional and emotional content to optimize both short-term impact and long-term recall (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010; Pulizzi, 2012).

In conclusion, the study answers the two research questions by explaining how memory of the elements decayed over a period of one month and what were the elements most effectively retained (the least decay) by consumers during the period, being them messages (overall), main characters, brand history, and plot climax. The investigation of the reasons why behind those patterns allowed suggest some possibilities. Messages, due to their associative power with other elements of the narrative. Main characters, due to their central role in the narrative and the strong identification and emotional connections they foster with viewers. Similarly, brand history, especially when it is a focal point of the narrative, as seen in the Mercedes-Benz advertisement, showed higher levels retention. And as with characters, plot climaxes were pointed as highly emotional by the participants, suggesting therefore emotional impact as the reason behind the recall even after one month. Lastly, a special mention to the motif behind the recall of settings, which challenge the literature on recall based on familiarity, and support insights on recall based on uniqueness and unfamiliarity. These findings answer the research questions and suggest insights into elements that are associative, emotionally charged, central to the narrative, and unique have the most likelihood to be remembered over time, even though more studies should be done to infer that statistically..

# 6. CONCLUSIONS

## 6.1. Short Summary

This thesis aimed to investigate the long-term retention of narrative elements in storytelling advertisements, focusing specifically on characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integration. The primary objectives were to determine which of these elements are most effectively retained by consumers over time and to analyze how the recall of these elements decays over a period of one month. The study employed a qualitative longitudinal exploratory design, providing a detailed examination of how these narrative components are processed and remembered by viewers over time.

The findings reveal that while all elements experienced some degree of memory decay, messages—particularly explicit ones—and brand history exhibited the least decay, suggesting that these elements have a strong associative power that helps anchor them in the viewer's memory. Main characters, due to their central role in the narrative and the emotional connections they foster with viewers, were also consistently remembered. In contrast, settings and certain plot elements, particularly those that are less emotionally charged, were more prone to memory decay. These insights contribute to our understanding of narrative advertising, offering practical guidance for crafting advertisements that are both memorable and impactful.

## 6.2. Managerial implications of your study

The findings of this research offer several key implications for managers and advertisers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their narrative advertising campaigns. These implications provide actionable strategies for optimizing long-term recall.

The study's findings highlight the importance of clear and direct messaging in narrative advertisements. Explicit messages, which are straightforward and unambiguous, were found to resist memory decay more effectively than implicit messages. This suggests that advertisers should prioritize explicit messaging to ensure that the core brand message remains salient in the minds of consumers over time. Also messages are heavily associative with other elements of the narrative, such as main characters and brand integrations. Managers should focus on crafting messages that are conveyed by the other elements during the plot and are easily understood, resonating therefore

easily with the target audience, as these are more likely to be associated and retained in long-term memory.

Main characters were consistently remembered due to their central role in the narrative, identification, and the emotional connections they establish with viewers. This underscores the importance of character development in narrative advertising. Advertisers should design campaigns that feature strong, relatable main characters who can evoke emotional responses from the audience. By fostering an emotional connection between the viewer and the character, advertisers can enhance both immediate recall and long-term retention of the narrative.

The high recall of brand history, particularly in the Mercedes-Benz advertisement, demonstrates the effectiveness of integrating a brand's heritage into the narrative. Brands with rich histories should consider weaving their legacy into their storytelling to reinforce branding and enhance recall. This approach not only strengthens the brand's position in the market but also creates a deeper connection with consumers, who are more likely to remember narratives that highlight the brand's history and values.

The study revealed that unique and unfamiliar settings were more memorable than familiar ones, suggesting that novelty plays a significant role in memory retention. Advertisers should consider incorporating distinctive or unconventional environments in their narratives to capture attention and differentiate their advertisements from competitors. This strategy can help create a lasting impression on viewers, making the advertisement more memorable in a crowded media landscape.

While complex narratives can engage viewers more deeply, they also pose a risk of overwhelming the audience, leading to selective retention of only the most salient elements. Advertisers should carefully balance narrative complexity with the cognitive load imposed on viewers. Ensuring that key plot points and messages are clear and emotionally impactful can help enhance retention without overburdening the audience. This balance is relevant for creating narratives that are engaging, digestible, and memorable.

## 6.3. Theoretical implications of your study

This thesis makes significant contributions to the field of marketing, particularly in the area of narrative advertising and brand communication. The insights derived from this research offer a deeper understanding of how narrative elements function within marketing strategies, and they expand upon existing theories within the domain of marketing.

The study reinforces and extends the theoretical framework of narrative advertising by highlighting the elements that are most effectively retained over time. It confirms that narratives with a strong focus on branding, particularly through the integration of brand histories, are more likely to be retained by consumers. This finding supports the idea that brand storytelling is not just a creative endeavor but a strategic tool that can enhance long-term brand recall (Escalas, 2004; Keller, 1993). By weaving brand identity deeply into the narrative, marketers can create stories that resonate with consumers and stay with them long after the initial exposure (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008).

The research supports the importance of brand storytelling in building and sustaining brand equity. By showing that brand history, when effectively integrated into the narrative, is retained better than product-centric messages, the study highlights the potential of storytelling to create a lasting brand image. This aligns with the concept of brand equity, where the emotional and historical dimensions of a brand contribute significantly to its perceived value (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Marketers should therefore focus on narratives that not only promote products but also reinforce the brand's identity and heritage, thus building a stronger, more enduring brand equity (Holt, 2003; Balmer & Greyser, 2006).

Additionally, the findings provide valuable insights for content marketing strategies, particularly in the digital age where consumer attention is fragmented. The strong retention of explicit messages suggests that clarity and directness in communication are crucial for maintaining

consumer engagement over time (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). For marketers, this implies that content should be designed with clear, explicit messaging that aligns with the brand's core values and objectives. Furthermore, the resilience of explicit messages against memory decay indicates that content marketers should prioritize the development of clear and compelling messages within narratives using its main characters and branded elements to cut through the noise and send a lasting message to the audience (Keller, 1991; Pulizzi, 2012).

This thesis also contributes to the marketing literature by challenging the traditional view that familiarity is always beneficial in advertising. Instead, the study demonstrates that unique and novel settings can enhance memory retention, offering a new perspective on how environment and context can be leveraged in marketing campaigns. This finding is particularly relevant in the context of digital and experiential marketing, where creating unique and memorable experiences is key to capturing and retaining consumer attention (Berlyne, 1970; Pieters, Wedel, & Zhang, 2007). Marketers should consider incorporating novel and unexpected visuals into their campaigns to differentiate their advertisements and make a lasting impact on consumers (Chang, 2009; Yıldız & Sever, 2022).

Finally, the research highlights the delicate balance required in narrative complexity. While a well-crafted narrative can engage consumers and enhance retention, overly complex stories may lead to cognitive overload, causing consumers to selectively remember only certain aspects of the advertisement (Kensinger & Schacter, 2006). For marketers, this suggests that narrative complexity should be carefully calibrated. The goal should be to create narratives that are rich enough to engage but not so complex that they overwhelm the consumer (Stern, 1991). This strategic application of narrative complexity can help marketers craft stories that are both memorable and effective in communicating the brand's message (Escalas, 2004; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010).

## 6.4. Limitations and suggestions for future research

While this study offers valuable insights into the retention of narrative elements in advertising, it also has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. These limitations highlight the need for further research to build on the results of this thesis, to address the gaps identified, and improve the robustness of the methodology implement in here.

The sample size used in this study, while adequate for qualitative analysis, was relatively small and may not fully capture the diversity of consumer responses to narrative advertising. Future research should aim to include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the sample to include different demographic groups, such as age, gender, and cultural background, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how narrative elements are retained across various populations.

Another limitation is that this study focused on a limited number of advertisements from specific brands and industries. While this allowed for a detailed analysis of particular narratives, it also limits the ability to generalize the findings to other types of advertisements. Future research should consider examining a broader range of advertisements, including those from different product categories and industries. This would help to identify whether the retention patterns observed in this study are consistent across different types of narratives and contexts.

The observation period for this study was limited to one month, which provided valuable insights into the decay of memory retention. However, memory retention is a dynamic process that can extend over much longer periods. Future research should consider extending the observation period to several months or even a year to gain a deeper understanding of the long-term retention of elements. This would allow researchers to explore how different factors, such as repeated exposure or changes in consumer attitudes, influence memory retention over time.

Moreover, while the qualitative longitudinal approach used in this study provided rich insights into the processes of memory retention, incorporating quantitative methods could further validate and extend the findings. Future research could use surveys, experiments, or other quantitative techniques to measure recall across larger populations and to test the effects of

different narrative strategies on memory retention. Quantitative data could complement the qualitative findings by providing statistical evidence of the relationships between narrative elements and memory retention.

Another limitation of this study is the controlled use of linear plot structures in the advertisements chosen. Both advertisements employed in this research followed a traditional linear narrative structure, progressing chronologically from beginning to end. While this approach allowed for a straightforward analysis of memory retention across distinct narrative elements, it does not account for the variety of plot structures that are commonly used in advertisements today, such as stories in media res, in petal structure, and others.

Lastly, the study focused on specific narrative elements—characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integration—but there are many other variables that could influence memory retention in narrative advertising. Future research could explore additional variables such as the impact of repeated exposure, the role of individual differences (e.g., age, cognitive style, cultural background), or the influence of emerging technologies like AI-driven content personalization. Investigating these variables could provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to memory retention in narrative advertising and offer new directions for enhancing the effectiveness of advertisements.

# 7. APPENDICES

## 7.1. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

**Introduction**

- **Welcome and Introduction:**
    - Welcome the participant and introducing myself.
    - Broadly explain that the study involves discussing an advertisement they will watch, to understand their thoughts and recollections over time. For that multiple three interviews will be necessary.
    - Assuring the participant of the confidentiality of their responses and contact information, and that they can withdraw at any time without any penalty.
    - Remembering the participant that there is no right or wrong answers.
- **Health Confirmation:**
    - "Do you have any mental or attention disorders that might affect your participation in this study?"
    - If the participant confirms any such disorder, politely inform them that they may not be able to participate in the study.
- **Initial Instruction:**
    - Informing the participants that it is important for the integrity of the study that they do not discuss the advertisement with anyone, watch it again or go after any information on it after this initial exposure.
    - Politely explain that if they do watch it again, their participation in the study will be discontinued.
    - Inform that after the first interview, we will schedule the next interview and the calendar reminder and Zoom meeting link will be sent.
    - Inform that one day before each interview, I will get in touch to confirm participants presence.
    - Ask them to confirm their understanding and agreement.
- **Consent:**
    - Ensuring the participant has signed the informed consent form.

**Immediate Recall Interview (Conducted Right After Viewing the Ad - in Person)**

- **Confirmation of Prior Exposure:**
    - "Have you ever seen this advertisement before?"
    - If the participant has seen the ad before: "Thank you for your time, but since you have seen the advertisement before, we will need to end the interview here."
- **Attention Check:**
    - "How was your attention during the advertisement? Did you feel focused throughout?"
- **Brand Relationship:**
    - "What is the brand from the ad?"
    - "What are your thoughts on the brand from the ad?"
- **Engagement:**
    - "What are your thoughts on the ad we watched?"
    - "How did you feel while watching the advertisement? What emotions did you feel?"
- **General Recall:**
    - "What comes to your mind when you remember about the ad we watched?"

- ○ "What stood out the most to you in the advertisement?"
- **Plot:**
  - ○ "In sequence, what happened in the ad?"
  - ○ "Can you remember any other event?"
- **Characters:**
  - ○ "What characters do you remember from the ad?"
  - ○ "What details you remember about the characters from the advertisement?"
  - ○ "Any other characters?"
- **Setting:**
  - ○ "What were the different places you remember from the advertisement?"
  - ○ "What details do you remember about these places?"
  - ○ "Any other place or detail you can describe?"
- **Message:**
  - ○ "What do you think the main messages or themes of the advertisement were?"
  - ○ "Can you remember any other message?"
- **Branded Elements:**
  - ○ "How was the brand integrated in the advertisement?"
  - ○ "What products or services were showed in the ad?"
  - ○ "Any other integration of the brand in the ad? Where?"
- **Final Thoughts:**
  - ○ "Do you have any other thoughts or memories, about the advertisement, that we haven't discussed? What thoughts or memories?"
- **Thank the Participant:**
  - ○ "Thank you very much for your time and contribution to the study"
  - ○ "Remember, you cannot discuss the advertisement you saw here today with anyone, and all your responses are confidential. If you have any follow-up questions or concerns, feel free to contact me. See you in the next session"
- **Follow-Up Instruction:**
  - ○ Remind the participant of the importance of not discussing the about the ad with anyone, watching the advertisement again or looking up any information about it until after the study is complete.
  - ○ Schedule the next date and time of the following interview.
  - ○ Confirm their understanding and agreement once more.

**1-Week Recall Interview (Conducted One Week After Viewing the Ad - via Zoom)**

- **Confirmation of Non-Exposure:**
  - ○ "Since our last interview, have you discussed the advertisement with anyone, watched it again or looked up any information about it?"
  - ○ If the participant has looked up, discussed with anyone or watched the ad again, politely inform them that their participation in the study will be discontinued.
- **Brand Relationship:**
  - ○ "What was the brand from the ad we watched last week?"
- **General Recall:**
  - ○ "What comes to your mind when you remember about the ad we watched last week?"
  - ○ "What stood out the most to you in that advertisement?"
- **Plot:**
  - ○ "In sequence, what happened in that ad?"
  - ○ "Can you remember any other event?"

- **Characters:**
  - "Thinking back to the advertisement you watched last week, what characters do you remember?"
  - "What details you remember about the characters from that advertisement?"
  - "Any other characters?"
- **Setting:**
  - "What are the different places you remember from that advertisement?"
  - "What details do you remember about these places?"
  - "Any other place or detail you can describe?"
- **Message:**
  - "What was the main messages or themes of that advertisement?"
  - "Can you remember any other message?"
- **Branded Elements:**
  - "How was the brand integrated in that advertisement?"
  - "What products or services were showed in that ad?"
  - "Any other integration of the brand in the ad? Where?"
- **Final Thoughts:**
  - "Do you have any other thoughts or memories, about that advertisement, that we haven't discussed? What thoughts or memories?"
- **Thank the Participant:**
  - "Thank you very much for your time and contribution to the study"
  - "Remember, you cannot discuss the advertisement you saw last week with anyone, and all your responses are confidential. If you have any follow-up questions or concerns, feel free to contact me. See you in the next session"
- **Follow-Up Instruction:**
  - Remind the participant of the importance of not discussing the about the ad with anyone, watching the advertisement again or looking up any information about it until after the study is complete.
  - Schedule the next date and time of the following interview.
  - Confirm their understanding and agreement once more.

**1-Month Recall Interview (Conducted One Month After Viewing the Ad - via Zoom)**

- **Confirmation of Non-Exposure:**
  - "Since the first exposure to the ad, have you discussed the advertisement with anyone, watched it again or looked up any information about it?"
  - If the participant has looked up, discussed with anyone or watched the ad again, politely inform them that their participation in the study will be discontinued.
- **Brand Relationship:**
  - "What was the brand from the ad we watched one month ago?"
- **General Recall:**
  - "What comes to your mind when you remember the ad from one month ago?"
  - "What stood out the most to you in that advertisement?"
- **Plot:**
  - "In sequence, what happened in that ad?"
  - "Can you remember any other event?"
- **Characters:**
  - "Thinking back to the advertisement you watched one month ago, what characters do you remember?"
  - "What details you remember about the characters from the advertisement?"

- ○ "Any other characters?"
- **Setting:**
  - ○ "What are the different places you remember from the advertisement?"
  - ○ "What details do you remember about these places?"
  - ○ "Any other place or detail you can describe?"
- **Message:**
  - ○ "What was the main messages or themes of the advertisement?"
  - ○ "Can you remember any other message?"
- **Branded Elements:**
  - ○ "How was the brand integrated in the advertisement?"
  - ○ "What products or services were showed in the ad?"
  - ○ "Any other integration of the brand in the ad? Where?
- **Final Thoughts:**
  - ○ "Do you have any other thoughts or memories, about the advertisement, that we haven't discussed? What thoughts or memories?"
- **Thank the Participant:**
  - ○ "Thank you very much for your time and contribution to the study"
  - ○ "Remember all your responses are confidential. If you have any follow-up questions or concerns, feel free to contact me."

**7.2. Consent Form for Participation in Research Study**

**Investigator:**

Gustavo de Souza Netto Gomes

+32 471 96 60 29

gustavosngomesg@hotmail.com

HEC Liège

**Introduction:**

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Gustavo de Souza Netto Gomes from HEC Liège. This study is part of a Master Thesis for the Master in International Strategic Marketing. Your participation will involve watching an advertisement and participating in three interviews over a one-month period.

**Purpose of the Study:**

The goal of this study is to explore how elements of storytelling in ads are retained over time.

**Procedures:**

1. You will watch a specific advertisement in a controlled environment.
2. You will participate in three interviews:
   - Immediately after watching the ad.
   - One week after the initial exposure.
   - One month after the initial exposure.
3. Each interview will involve questions about the advertisement you watched in the initial exposure.
4. You will be asked not to watch the advertisement again or seek additional information about it between interviews.

**Duration:**

Each interview will take approximately 15 minutes. The total duration of your participation will be about 45 minutes over the course of one month.

**Confidentiality:**

All information collected in this study will be kept confidential. Your responses will be anonymized, and no identifying information will be shared in any reports or publications resulting from this research. Data will be securely stored and only accessible to the research team.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, any data collected from you up to that point will be retained and included in the study unless you request its removal.

**Risks and Benefits:**

The only risk you have is being eliminated from the study in case you fail in respecting the rules of the study. Eliminatory criteria are: you had already seen the ad shown in the experiment before, you discussed about the ad with someone you know in between interviews, you researched the ad on your own, and you watched the ad again after the initial exposure.

While there are no direct benefits to you, your participation will contribute to a better understanding of how stories in advertisements are retained over time.

**Eligibility:**

To participate in this study, you must not have any mental or attention disabilities that might affect your ability to participate in the interviews and recall information. By signing this consent you confirm you have none of the two types of disability.

**Compensation:**

As a token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a gift voucher for 5 beers in the Shamrock bar upon completion of all three interviews which you can use yourself or give to your friends.

**Contact Information:**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact me, Gustavo, at +32 471 96 60 29 or via email at gustavosngomesg@hotmail.com.

**Consent:**

By signing this form, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided above, you will tell the truth in the interviews, and you agree to participate in this study.

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**Participant Name:**

**Participant Signature:**

**Date:**

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**Researcher Name: Gustavo de Souza Netto Gomes**

**Researcher Signature:**

**Date:**

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Thank you for your participation!

## 7.3. Advertisements Exposure Room



**Figure 1:** Advertisements Exposure White Room (Picture taken by the Author)

## 7.4. Advertisement Summaries

| Ad Title | Brand | Industry | Year | Duration | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| "We'll Take Care of You, Wherever You Are" | Samsung | Technology | Dec, 2016 | 4:00 | The Samsung ad weaves a heartwarming narrative of dedication and inclusivity. Amit, the Samsung technician, embodies the company's commitment to customer service as he embarks on a journey to a remote village to fix a visually impaired woman's television. The ad beautifully portrays his unwavering dedication as he navigates treacherous roads, a rickety suspension bridge, and even a sheep-caused traffic jam. Upon arrival at the woman's home, a warm and rustic haven reflecting the simplicity of village life, he encounters a group of visually impaired children eagerly anticipating their favorite show. By fixing the TV just in time, Amit becomes a facilitator of joy and connection, symbolizing Samsung's ability to bridge distances and enrich lives, regardless of circumstance. |
| "Bertha Benz: The Journey That Changed Everything" | Mercedes-Benz | Automotive | March, 2019 | 4:03 | Released in honour of International Women's Day (8 March), the film tells the story of the world's first long distance drive in a car from Mannheim to Pforzheim, Germany in 1888. Early one morning, Bertha took her two sons out for the twelve hour, 106 km / 65 mile trip. She understood the potential of her husband's invention, and was determined to prove it worked at a time when people were skeptical of this new technology. Shot like a classic Western with modern stylization, the film conveys the fear and confusion of the people who witnessed Bertha's incredible journey, and dramatizes one of her stops along the way. Mechanics didn't exist, so she went to the pharmacy to find fuel, used her hat pin to clear fuel lines, and her garter for insulation. Through her dedication, she paved the way for the invention of the Benz Patent Motor Car. |

**Table 2:** Advertisements Informations (Source: Author)

## 7.5. Full Description of the Advertisement Elements

### 7.5.1. Samsung Advertisement (Codebook for Samsung Ad)

| Advertisement | Characters | Plot Points | Settings | Messages | Brand Integrations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| "We'll Take Care of You, Wherever You Are" by Samsung | **Amit, the Technician (Main Character)** - A young man with short dark hair and a beard. He is wearing a blue jacket with the Samsung logo on it. He is a Samsung technician, and he is committed to helping his customers even in difficult conditions.<br><br>**Blind Woman, the Customer (Main Character)** - A middle-aged woman with dark hair tied back in a ponytail. She is wearing a yellow sweater and a scarf. She is blind and is the customer who calls Amit to fix her TV. She is concerned about getting her TV fixed in time for the "Junior Indian Icon" show.<br><br>**Prerna, the Singer (Main Character)** - A young blind girl with dark hair and squinted eyes. She is wearing a shiny sequined dress. She is blind and is a contestant on the TV show "Junior Indian Icon" and a resident of the hostel. She is a talented singer who the other children excitedly wait to watch her sing on TV. | **Opening Scene (Exposition)** - A woman's hand reaches for a phone on a table. She answers the phone. Amit, a Samsung technician, is on the other end of the line. He asks her if she has filed a complaint regarding her TV. The woman confirms and asks if he can come over before 7 p.m. Amit assures her he will be there.<br><br>**Amit Begins His Journey (Exposition)** - Amit enters the van and hits the road with his supporting technician. A Samsung service van drives through a mountainous region. The van navigates a winding road, showcasing the challenging terrain. The van crosses a suspension bridge over a rushing river.<br><br>**Fallen Tree Obstacle (Conflict)** - Amit is sitting in the van, driving through a dense forest. The van is shown passing through a gap in fallen trees, indicating obstacles. Amit gets out of the van and approaches a fallen tree in the road. He examines it and tries pushing the tree out of the road. He fails and hops back in the van to take an alternative route.<br><br>**Difficult Terrain (Rising Action)** - Amit drives his van across a dry riverbed. The van struggles with the rocky terrain, indicating difficulties in reaching the destination. The van drives through the countryside. The van drives up the hills.<br><br>**Flock of Sheep Obstacle (Rising Action)** - Amit is standing on a road blocked by a flock of sheep. He explains to the woman on the phone that he is slightly stuck and will be there soon. The woman mentions that Chandu's sheep are causing a traffic jam. Amit opens the way through the sheep on the road.<br><br>**Arrival at the House (Rising Action)** - Amit reaches the woman's house and rings the doorbell. The woman opens the door and greets Amit. She is smiling and seems relieved that he has arrived. Amit realizes the woman is blind. Amit enters the house, the woman leading him inside. The interior of the house is shown, showcasing a simple yet cozy environment.<br><br>**Repairing the TV (Rising Action)** - The woman points to the location of her TV. Amit nods in understanding and approaches the TV. Amit takes apart the TV, attempting to diagnose and fix the problem. The woman observes him and expresses her hope that the TV will be fixed in time. Amit starts fixing the TV. The woman seems | **The Woman's Room** - The room is sparsely furnished, with a table and a window. It is dimly lit, with a sense of isolation.<br><br>**The Road Leading Through a Mountainous Region** - The road is winding and narrow, with steep slopes on either side. The mountains are covered in greenery, and the sky is overcast.<br><br>**A Suspension Bridge Over a River** - The bridge is made of wood and steel, and it is swaying slightly as the van crosses it. The river is raging with water, reflecting the power of nature.<br><br>Steep Hills in the Country-Side - The terrains gets to roads in steep hills with u-turns that leads to narrow roads in the country-side.<br><br>**A Dense Forest** - The forest is filled with tall trees, with branches and leaves blocking the sunlight. There are fallen trees in some places, highlighting the challenges of the road.<br><br>**A Dry Riverbed** - The riverbed is covered in rocks and gravel. The | **Commitment to Customer Service (Explicit Message)** - The advertisement consistently highlights Samsung's dedication to providing excellent customer service, regardless of the customer's location or the challenges involved. The technician's journey through various obstacles to fix a TV in a remote area emphasizes this commitment.<br><br>**Empathy and Human Connection (Implicit Message)** - The emotional and human aspect of Samsung's service is a key theme. The technician's empathy and understanding of the unique needs of the visually impaired individuals create a strong emotional connection. | **Samsung Service Van (Brand Identity)** - A white van with the Samsung logo prominently displayed is used by Amit, technician, throughout the video. It serves as a visual representation of Samsung's commitment to reaching its customers, no matter how remote they are.<br><br>**Samsung Technician Uniform (Brand Identity)** - Amit wears a blue jacket emblazoned with the Samsung logo, visually identifying him as a representative of the brand and emphasizing Samsung's focus on customer service.<br><br>**Samsung TV (Product or Service)** - The woman's TV is the subject of the repair, reinforcing the brand's presence in the home. The TV is shown in a close-up during the repair scene and again in the hostel, |

**The Blind Children (Main Character) -** There are several children in the hostel. They are all dressed in warm clothes. They are blind and are all excited to watch the "Junior Indian Icon" show and are cheering on Prerna.

**The Sheep (Side Character) -** A flock of sheep blocks the road, causing a traffic jam. They are white, fluffy and seem to be quite calm.

**Chandu, the Shepherd (Side Character) -** He is not shown in the video but is mentioned as the owner of the sheep. The woman says he has caused a traffic jam with his sheep.

**The Supporting Technician, Amit's Colleague (Side Character) -** A man who is seated in the Samsung service van with Amit. He is wearing a blue jacket. He assists Amit during the repair of the TV.

pleased and asks if it's done. Amit confirms that the repair is almost completed. Amit puts the TV on the wall and turns it on with the remote, showing that the TV is repaired.

**Gathering for the Show (Climax) -** The woman listens and instantly stands up. She walks to the house entrance to ring a bell and ask all the children to come downstairs, saying the show is about to start. The children, in excitement, arrive to watch TV and sit in the room; they are all blind. The woman asks Amit for the remote. The TV turns on, and the show "Junior Indian Icon" begins.

**Prerna's Performance (Climax) -** Prerna, a young girl, is the first contestant to perform in the show. Prerna starts performing beautifully, the children get excited and clap their hands in anticipation. The woman is smiling and seems proud of Prerna. Amit is seated next to the woman, watching the show and looking around at everyone vibrating in excitement. We see Prerna performing, and everybody vibrates with her singing. The woman tells Amit that Prerna, the one they are watching on TV, is actually her best friend and lives in the hostel with her and all the children. Amit seems impacted by the entire situation.

**Conclusion (Falling Action and Resolution) -** Amit exits the house, the door closing behind him. He enters the van, looking at the supporting technician, inspired by what he lived in the hostel. The van is shown leaving, a small light in the distance. The van continues to drive through the mountains in the dark. A narrator says, "At times, we must go further for the sake of relationships. That's why Samsung Service Vans go to every corner of the country." The Samsung logo appears on a black screen.

van struggles to traverse the difficult terrain.

**The Exterior of the Blind Hostel -** The house is a simple, one-story building. It is made of stone and wood, with a small garden in the front.

**The Interior of the Blind Hostel -** It is dimly lit, with wooden walls and simple furnishings, such as a table, chairs, and a bookcase. The house has a warm, inviting feel. The room is filled with furniture, such as chairs, tables, and a bookcase. A blackboard is visible on one wall, with written words in Braille, indicating that the room is a hostel for blind children.

**The Road Through the Mountainous Region, in the Dark -** The road is narrow and winding, with the mountains towering above.

**Inclusivity and Accessibility (Explicit Message) -** The advertisement promotes inclusivity and accessibility, demonstrating that technology and services can and should be accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities.

**Reliability and Trust (Implicit Message) -** Samsung is portrayed as a reliable and trustworthy brand that customers can depend on for consistent and dedicated service.

where the children watch the "Junior Indian Icon" show.

**Samsung Cellphones (Product or Service) -** The woman and Amit are shown using Samsung cellphones to call each other.

**Samsung Repair Service (Product or Service) -** Amit is shown fixing the Samsung TV, showcasing the brand's commitment to providing repair services.

**Samsung Logo on Black Screen (Brand Identity) -** The final scene of the video features the Samsung logo prominently displayed on a black screen, leaving a lasting impression of the brand's presence and message.

**Table 3:** Codebook Samsung Ad (Source: Google Gemini, adapted by the Author)

| Advertisement | Characters | Plot Points | Settings | Messages | Brand Integrations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| "Bertha Benz: The Journey That Changed Everything" by Mercedes-Benz | **Bertha Benz (Main Character) -** The central figure, a strong and determined woman dressed in a dark green dress, black hat, and gloves. She takes the wheel of the Patent-Motorwagen on the first long-distance journey, demonstrating her pioneering spirit and courage.<br><br>**Bertha's Sons (Main Character) -** Two young boys, dressed in formal clothes, accompany Bertha on her journey. They embody the innocence and wonder of the era, but also show a sense of adventure and trust in their mother's abilities.<br><br>**The Little Girl (Main Character) -** A young girl, possibly a villager, appears in several scenes. She is dressed in a brown jacket and a white cap and is shown watching Bertha's journey with awe and curiosity, highlighting the impact of Bertha's actions on the future generation.<br><br>**The Priest (Side Character) -** A man wearing a black cassock, walking in the town square. He represents the traditional and established order of society, perhaps a contrast to Bertha's revolutionary act.<br><br>**The Pharmacist (Main Character) -** A man in the pharmacy, where Bertha stops for ligroin, the fuel for the car. He symbolizes the ingenuity of the time, willing to assist Bertha in her journey.<br><br>**The Bartender (Side Character) -** A man seen tending to the bar in the tavern, likely serving drinks. He represents the everyday life and routines of the time.<br><br>**Women in the Field (Side Characters) -** Several women, dressed in simple long skirts and headscarves, are shown working the field, pulling a plow. They represent the hard work and challenges | **The Initial Chaos (Exposition) -** The scene starts with women working in the field, pulling a plow. Suddenly, chaos erupts as they see a carriage moving without horses. Milk spills next to a baby, who starts crying, adding to the confusion. A little girl spots the horseless carriage and runs towards the town.<br><br>**Spreading Panic in the Village (Conflict) -** As the girl runs through the town, she screams, "A witch! A witch! A witch is coming!" The scenes alternate between Bertha and her two sons on the automobile and the spreading chaos in the village. The town bell rings, a priest runs out from the toilet, someone observes the chaos from a barn, and people search for the source of the automobile's sound.<br><br>**Encountering Obstacles (Conflict) -** While Bertha and her sons drive through the city, a horse crosses in front of the automobile. People stare at them through windows as she confidently drives until the machine starts smoking and stops. The girl reaches the automobile, and Bertha and her sons get off to examine the smoking machine. They begin to push the automobile, and concerned villagers gather around, watching apprehensively, until they reach the town pharmacy.<br><br>**Seeking Help (Rising Action) -** Bertha instructs her sons to stay together as she heads towards the pharmacy to seek help. She steps in a puddle, prompting laughter from onlookers, suggesting their lack of support. Finding the pharmacy locked and empty, she notices a little girl who nods towards the tavern across the street, indicating the pharmacist's whereabouts. Bertha subtly smiles and nods in thanks. | **The Field -** A field, likely a cornfield or similar, with rows of tall, dry stalks. The ground is uneven and loose, giving a sense of rural agricultural land. It's a cloudy day, suggesting a time period before modern transportation.<br><br>**Countryside Road -** A rural road, likely in a village or small town. The road is unpaved, with a rough surface. The sky is gray and overcast. There are small, simple houses visible in the background, suggesting a simple, agrarian life.<br><br>**The Town -** A small town or village, likely from the late 19th century. The houses are simple, with brick and timber construction. The streets are cobblestone, and the atmosphere is dusty and unhurried.<br><br>**The Town Surroundings -** A small, wooden public toilet. It is located in a corner of the town, near a pile of firewood. It shows the basic sanitation facilities of the period. There is also a large, wooden barn, likely used for | **Innovation and Longevity (Explicit Message) -** The story illustrates the initial shock and eventual acceptance of a revolutionary invention, emphasizing how new technologies can disrupt the status quo and lead to progress. Bertha Benz's journey symbolizes the leap from traditional methods (horse-drawn carriages) to modern innovation (automobiles), showing that embracing change can lead to significant advancements.<br><br>**Belief in Oneself (Explicit Message) -** The overarching message encourages viewers to believe in themselves and their abilities. Bertha's confidence in her actions and decisions, despite ridicule and setbacks, serves as a powerful reminder that self-belief is crucial to achieving success and making a difference.<br><br>**Female Empowerment (Explicit Message) -** Bertha Benz's role in the story underscores the impact women can have in traditionally male-dominated fields. Her technical skills and resolve demonstrate that women are capable of driving innovation and making significant contributions, | **Historical Connection to the Brand (Brand History) -** The ad effectively integrates Mercedes-Benz by linking the historical journey of Bertha Benz to the brand's heritage. The depiction of Bertha's journey with the automobile showcases the pioneering spirit and innovation that are core values of Mercedes-Benz, reinforcing the brand's legacy in the automotive industry.<br><br>**Car Concept Placement and Functionality (Products or Services) -** The automobile is central to the story, highlighting its functionality and reliability. The scenes of Bertha fixing the machine and successfully continuing her journey demonstrate the practicality and dependability of the |

faced by women in that era, contrasting with Bertha's independent spirit.

**The Baby (Side Character) -** A crying baby in a crib, lying on the ground in the field. This symbolizes the fragility and vulnerability of a journey, reminding viewers of the real-life risks Bertha faced.

**The Villagers in the Town (Side Characters) -** Several men, women, and children are seen in the town square, some dressed in simple clothes and others in more formal attire. They represent the community that observes Bertha's journey, highlighting its impact on their lives.

**The Tavern Gatekeeper (Side Character) -** A man seen standing at the entrance of the tavern, likely controlling who enters, he looks intimidating. He puts someone out of the tavern.

**Tavern Customers (Side Character) -** Several men are seen seated at tables in the tavern, representing a scene of everyday life in the 19th century.

**Animals (Side Character) -** A horse pulling the cart, a small dog following Bertha, a rooster in the barn, sheep in the fields, and a pig walking through the town square.

**Confronting Skepticism (Rising Action) -** Bertha crosses the street to the tavern, where the gatekeeper throws someone into the mud but she enters anyway. Inside, everyone stares as she asks for the pharmacist. Receiving no answer, she states her need for 10 liters of ligroin. The pharmacist mocks her, saying ligroin won't remove stains from her dress, and when she says it's for her "horses," he accuses her of trying to poison them. She confidently asks if he has the ligroin or not.

**Fixing the Car and Inspiring the Girl (Climax) -** The scene shifts as the pharmacist brings the ligroin to the automobile. Bertha fixes the machine by pouring the liquid into the engine and cleaning the valves. They attempt to start the engine, which successfully roars to life. Bertha and her sons hop back on and drive away, as the inspired little girl steps out of the crowd, watching them with an impacted expression.

**Conclusion and History Facts (Falling Action and Resolution) -** A message appears encouraging viewers to "Believe in yourself." The screen fades to black and transitions to journal news explaining the facts behind the ad, such as the 12-hour, 106 km journey to Bertha's parents' house in Germany, the pharmacy being the first gas station in the world, and Bertha introducing her husband's invention to the world, changing lives forever. The ad concludes with a picture of Bertha, her birth and death years, and the Mercedes-Benz logo.

storing hay and animals. It is located on the outskirts of the town and has a large wooden door. It represents the agricultural aspect of life in that time.

**The Tavern -** A dimly lit tavern, likely a local gathering place. It has wooden walls and floors, a bar with a counter, and tables with candles for illumination. It is a rustic and cozy space, reflecting the simple life of the time.

**The Pharmacy Interior -** A cramped and cluttered interior with shelves lined with jars containing various substances. There are tools and equipment strewn about, suggesting a place where medications and remedies are prepared. The room is dimly lit by oil lamps, reflecting a time before electricity.

challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality.

**Perseverance and Determination (Implicit Message) -** Bertha's unwavering determination in the face of skepticism and obstacles highlights the importance of perseverance. Her journey, despite societal doubt and mechanical issues, exemplifies the idea that persistence and confidence can overcome challenges, inspiring viewers to stay committed to their goals.

**Don't Judge a Book by the Cover (Implicit Message) -** People should not judge before understanding what is going on in someone's life. Bertha was called a witch for driving a carriage with no horses, but in the end, she was driving a life-changing machine.

early Mercedes-Benz vehicles, subtly promoting the brand's engineering excellence.

**Brand Identity and Logo (Brand Identity) -** The ad concludes with the Mercedes-Benz logo and a brief history of Bertha Benz's journey, solidifying the connection between the story and the brand. This reinforces the brand identity and leaves a lasting impression on viewers, associating the inspiring narrative with Mercedes-Benz.

**Table 4:** Codebook Mercedes-Benz Ad (Source: Google Gemini, adapted by the Author)

## 7.6. Recall Frequencies Over Time (Count and Normalized) - Code Co-occurrence Analysis Full Table

| Code Categories or Code Groups | Codes in Category/ Code Group | Immediate Recall (Code Occurrence) | One Week Recall (Code Occurrence) | One Month Recall (Code Occurrence) | Total (Code Occurrence) | Immediate Recall (Normalized) | One Week Recall (Normalized) | One Month Recall (Normalized) | Total (Normalized) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand Integrations | 9 | 81 (100.00%) | 54 (66.67) | 51 (63.00%) | 186 | 9.00 (100.00%) | 6.00 (66.67%) | 5.67 (63.00%) | 20.67 |
| Characters | 19 | 175 (100.00%) | 127 (72.53%) | 95 (54.29%) | 397 | 9.21 (100.00%) | 6.68 (72.53%) | 5.00 (54.29%) | 20.89 |
| Messages | 9 | 71 (100.00%) | 56 (78.83%) | 50 (70.46%) | 177 | 7.89 (100.00%) | 6.22 (78.83%) | 5.56 (70.46%) | 19.67 |
| Plot | 17 | 198 (100.00%) | 148 (74.76%) | 109 (55.02%) | 455 | 11.65 (100.00%) | 8.71 (74.76%) | 6.41 (55.02%) | 26.77 |
| Settings | 15 | 100 (100.00%) | 58 (58.02%) | 52 (52.02%) | 210 | 6.67 (100.00%) | 3.87 (58.02%) | 3.47 (52.02%) | 14.01 |
| Brand Integration: Brand History | 1 | 15 (100.00%) | 13 (86.67%) | 10 (66.67%) | 38 | 15.00 (100.00%) | 13.00 (86.67%) | 10.00 (66.67%) | 38.00 |
| Brand Integration: Brand Identity | 4 | 31 (100.00%) | 21 (67.74%) | 20 (64.52%) | 72 | 7.75 (100.00%) | 5.25 (67.74%) | 5.00 (64.52%) | 18.00 |
| Brand Integration: Products or Services | 4 | 38 (100.00%) | 23 (60.53%) | 23 (60.53%) | 84 | 9.50 (100.00%) | 5.75 (60.53%) | 5.75 (60.53%) | 21.00 |
| Characters: Main Characters | 8 | 111 (100.00%) | 94 (84.65%) | 83 (74.78%) | 288 | 13.88 (100.00%) | 11.75 (84.65%) | 10.38 (74.78%) | 36.01 |
| Characters: Side Characters | 10 | 57 (100.00%) | 29 (50.88%) | 12 (21.05%) | 98 | 5.70 (100.00%) | 2.90 (50.88%) | 1.20 (21.05%) | 9.80 |
| Messages: Explicit Messages | 5 | 60 (100.00%) | 48 (80.00%) | 44 (73.33%) | 152 | 12.00 (100.00%) | 9.60 (80.00%) | 8.80 (73.33%) | 30.40 |
| Messages: Implicit Messages | 4 | 14 (100.00%) | 9 (64.29%) | 7 (50.00%) | 30 | 3.50 (100.00%) | 2.25 (64.29%) | 1.75 (50.00%) | 7.50 |
| Plot: Exposition | 2 | 28 (100.00%) | 19 (67.86%) | 16 (57.14%) | 63 | 14.00 (100.00%) | 9.50 (67.86%) | 8.00 (57.14%) | 31.50 |
| Plot: Conflict | 4 | 54 (100.00%) | 38 (70.37%) | 29 (53.70%) | 121 | 13.50 (100.00%) | 9.50 (70.37%) | 7.25 (53.70%) | 30.25 |
| Plot: Rising Action | 6 | 64 (100.00%) | 47 (73.38%) | 30 (46.86%) | 141 | 10.67 (100.00%) | 7.83 (73.38%) | 5.00 (46.86%) | 23.50 |
| Plot: Climax | 3 | 44 (100.00%) | 35 (79.55%) | 30 (68.17%) | 109 | 14.67 (100.00%) | 11.67 (79.55%) | 10.00 (68.17%) | 36.34 |
| Plot: Falling Action & Resolution | 2 | 17 (100.00%) | 14 (82.35%) | 9 (52.94%) | 40 | 8.50 (100.00%) | 7.00 (82.35%) | 4.50 (52.94%) | 20.00 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand Integrations (Mercedes) | 3 | 37 (100.00%) | 25 (67.55%) | 22 (59.44%) | 84 | 12.33 (100.00%) | 8.33 (67.55%) | 7.33 (59.44%) | 27.99 |
| Brand Integrations (Samsung) | 6 | 44 (100.00%) | 29 (65.89%) | 29 (65.89%) | 102 | 7.33 (100.00%) | 4.83 (65.89%) | 4.83 (65.89%) | 16.99 |
| Characters (Mercedes) | 12 | 98 (100.00%) | 66 (67.31%) | 47 (47.98%) | 211 | 8.17 (100.00%) | 5.50 (67.31%) | 3.92 (47.98%) | 17.59 |
| Characters (Samsung) | 7 | 77 (100.00%) | 61 (79.18%) | 48 (62.36%) | 186 | 11.00 (100.00%) | 8.71 (79.18%) | 6.86 (62.36%) | 26.57 |
| Messages (Mercedes) | 4 | 35 (100.00%) | 27 (77.14%) | 25 (71.43%) | 87 | 7.00 (100.00%) | 5.40 (77.14%) | 5.00 (71.43%) | 17.40 |
| Messages (Samsung) | 4 | 36 (100.00%) | 29 (80.56%) | 25 (69.44%) | 90 | 9.00 (100.00%) | 7.25 (80.56%) | 6.25 (69.44%) | 22.50 |
| Plot (Mercedes) | 7 | 92 (100.00%) | 75 (81.51%) | 58 (63.09%) | 225 | 13.14 (100.00%) | 10.71 (81.51%) | 8.29 (63.09%) | 32.14 |
| Plot (Samsung) | 10 | 106 (100.00%) | 73 (68.87%) | 51 (48.11%) | 230 | 10.60 (100.00%) | 7.30 (68.87%) | 5.10 (48.11%) | 23.00 |
| Settings (Mercedes) | 6 | 57 (100.00%) | 35 (61.37%) | 29 (50.84%) | 121 | 9.50 (100.00%) | 5.83 (61.37%) | 4.83 (50.84%) | 20.16 |
| Settings (Samsung) | 9 | 43 (100.00%) | 23 (53.56%) | 23 (53.56%) | 89 | 4.78 (100.00%) | 2.56 (53.56%) | 2.56 (53.56%) | 9.90 |

**Table 5:** Code Categories and Code Groups Frequencies Over Time (Occurrence and Normalized Occurrence) - Code Co-occurrence Analysis (Source: Author, exported from AtlasTI)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEYWORDS

This research investigates the long-term retention of elements in storytelling advertisements, focusing on which elements—characters, plot, settings, messages, and brand integration—are most effectively retained by consumers over time. The study is guided by two research questions: (1) Which elements of narrative advertisements are most effectively retained by consumers over time? and (2) How does the recall of specific elements decay as time progresses?

Utilizing a qualitative longitudinal research design, the study examines the memory retention of these elements over a period of one month. The findings reveal that messages, particularly explicit ones, exhibit the least memory decay, demonstrating a strong associative power that helps them remain salient in consumers' minds. Brand heritage, especially when integrated deeply into the narrative, also showed significant retention, further emphasizing the importance of storytelling in brand communication. Main characters were consistently recalled due to their central role and emotional connection with viewers, while settings and certain plot elements experienced greater memory decay, particularly when they were less emotionally engaging. The pointed reasons for high levels of retention in certain elements were due to being emotionally impactful, central to the narrative, and associative with the other elements.

These insights contribute to the field of marketing by reinforcing the strategic importance of narrative structure in advertising. The study highlights the need for clear, associative, explicit messaging, the effective use of brand history, and the strategic development of characters to enhance long-term recall. The implications of these findings extend to both marketing practitioners, who can leverage these insights to design more memorable advertisements, and to academics, by filling gaps in the existing literature on narrative advertising and memory retention over extended periods.

**Keywords:** Narrative Advertising, Memory Retention, Brand Storytelling, Advertising Recall, Longitudinal Study, Communication Strategy, Narrative Structure

**Word Count (From Introduction to Conclusion):** 25,644 words