Effects of Native Content on Consumer Attitudes: Focusing on Content Appeal, Ad Skepticism and Website Type*

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Abstract

This experimental study examined the effects of native content appeal (informational vs. emotional), an individual’s ad skepticism level and website type (news, entertainment, Facebook) on people’s evaluations about the native content. Results indicated that, first, emotional appeal native content generated lower website evaluations than informational appeal. Second, participants showed higher persuasion knowledge when informational native content was presented in news sites and Facebook, and when emotional native content was presented in entertainment sites. Third, the research found that, in general, participants with lower ad skepticism showed a more positive attitude towards the native ad. Also, informational appeal appeared to be more effective when compared to emotional content: informational appeal ads showed more positive cognitive/behavioral attitudes and better ad credibility.

Key words: Native Advertising, Advertising Skepticism, Persuasion Knowledge Model, Advertising Appeal

* The study is rewritten by the corresponding author based on the first author’s master’s thesis.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Advertisers and marketers have been searching for new effective ways to reach consumers. Some of the first advertising methods via internet were banners and pop-ups but after a while most people found them annoying and distracting, generating a negative effect. Thus, non-disturbing new ways of online advertising must be developed in order to generate a better influence in the audience.

One of the newest ways of online advertising is the ‘native ad’ or ‘native content.’ This new form of advertising provides companies the opportunity to introduce their products or services in a more natural way via online. Native advertising is defined as “a form of paid media where the ad experience follows the natural form and function of the user experience in which it is placed”\(^1\) or as “an ad unit that can only be bought and displayed on one platform, seamlessly fitting in with the unique format of that particular platform. Facebook’s Sponsored Stories and Twitter’s Promoted Tweets are prime examples” (Murphy & Schram, 2014).

Native ads normally match the design of other contents presented in the website and it should be perceived naturally as the rest of the content there (for example, in an online news site, the ad should be presented as news). According to previous research,\(^2\) native ads receive two times more visual focus than banners. Since native ads fit into the design of the site and people are there looking for stories to read, they provide higher rates of engagement as well as brand perception. However, there is the possibility of people feeling ‘deceived’ after realizing the story they click on to read is nothing but advertising. Furthermore, in the case of news websites, there have been some arguments regarding native content. One of the arguments against native content presented in news sites is that it is not ethical to present ads in the format of news. Some people cannot tell the difference between news and native content; therefore, they may feel deceived when they are reading what they thought was an article and it turns out to be advertising or sponsored contents. On the other hand, paid content can be seen as a useful alternative for non-intrusive online advertising which can generate more views among the users and spread rapidly thanks to share rates in social networks.

Despite the increase of native content as a new form of advertising, academic studies about this new format of persuasive communication are still difficult to find. The purpose of this study is to find out how effective native content can be and how the web site type (news vs. entertainment vs. SNS) and the native content appeal (emotional vs. informational) influence user’s evaluations about the ad/website and persuasion knowledge. The study also includes an individual’s ad skepticism as one of the independent variables, arguing that the level of ad skepticism influences the evaluations of the ad/website and an individual’s persuasion knowledge. Native

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\(^1\) http://www.sharethrough.com/nativeadvertising/
\(^2\) http://www.sharethrough.com/resources/in-feed-ads-vs-banner-ads/