

## Guide to the Communication Strategy of Native Advertising

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### Abstract

To adapt to the ever-changing digital technology revolution and the challenges posed by the information explosion in the communication environment, traditional advertising has sought reconstruction and enhancement. Native advertising is one of the advertising industry's innovations and breakthroughs, appearing on a variety of platforms such as social media, news websites, and search engines. Native advertising's major goal is to provide consumers with relevant information, unique content, and a positive experience. The ongoing development of native advertising has inspired many scholars to discuss it. However, the native advertising research stream is still in its fancy. Thus, this conceptual paper reviews the various definition of native advertising. Based on the various definition, this paper aims to discuss the communication strategy of native advertising from three different levels that are format, content, and users. The results imply that native advertising's communication strategy includes embedding, creativity, and interactive communication from format, content, and users respectively. These three communication strategies have made great contributions to the communication and development of native advertising.

**Keywords:** Native Advertising, Format, Content, Users, Communication Strategy

### Introduction

With the advancement of Internet technology and the widespread use of smartphones and computers, information transmission has gradually surpassed the constraints of conventional media such as newspapers and television, removing geographical barriers and increasing the pace of dissemination. As consumers' access to information expands, the guiding role of advertising in their lives and consumption processes is likewise challenged. Consumers now have a plethora of options and are guided to make an informed assessment if they are not blinded by marketing (Wibowo et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the advancement of information

technology does not simply provide consumers with a plethora of options. Additionally, it is the increased number of advertisements that enables them to propagate products at a lower cost. Consumers are constantly bombarded with advertising messages. The advertiser have not achieved an acceptable result to a certain extent. In terms of media companies, excessive advertising information had a huge impact on the user experience and resulted in a massive user loss. This reflects the depletion of advertising space and resources, advertisers' and media operators' impotence, and a dearth of fresh marketing models (Johnson et al., 2019; Tran & Nguyen, 2020). To address these concerns, marketers must reimagine how media may be used to promote businesses in a more appropriate format and with more innovative content.

As a result, marketers sought to improve the effectiveness of advertising through many new attempts, particularly Internet advertising. Among those endeavors, native advertising is one of the most effective methods (Campbell & Marks, 2015). Native advertising has grown in popularity during the last five years. The reason behind this is because in native advertising scenarios, the intrusiveness and annoyance of advertising were minimized. Unlike traditional advertising (e.g., banner advertising), native advertising takes the audience's use patterns into account first, ensuring that the advertising message does not annoy consumers (Lee et al., 2016). In terms of advertising creativity, native advertising creators shift their focus from product to customer, processing advertising innovation through the lens of consumer thought to ensure advertising messages are relevant to consumers' lives (Hayes et al., 2019). Thus, the consumer perceives native commercials to be familiar and relevant, encouraging them to pay attention to advertising material. This is the nature of native advertising: to visually integrate commercials into the posted website, ensuring that the shape and style of the advertisements are compatible with the website in order to be unobtrusive (Talapaga & Sudha, 2020). Simultaneously, focusing on the user experience when promoting advertising ensures that it is not interrupted (Amazeen & Muddiman, 2017). Additionally, the native advertising message must be useful and beneficial to the user (Eyada & Milla, 2020).

In general, native advertising, as a representative kind of online advertising, places a higher premium on user experience, content quality, and communication techniques (Ferrer Conill, 2016). As a result, advertisers and consumers alike embrace it. Native advertising has benefited marketers and media organizations in recent years, even though it is still in its infancy. Apart from the advertising industry, scholars have taken an interest in the concept of "native advertising." With the popularity of native advertising, scholars developed many definitions of native advertising from various perspectives. Simultaneously, understanding the communication strategy of native advertising is also important for researchers as its characteristics and transmission channel are not similar to traditional advertising. Considering the mentioned facts, this conceptual paper aims to discuss the definition of native advertising based on extant studies. Further, as mentioned in previous section, native advertising places a premium on user experience, content quality, and communication techniques. This study believes that the communication strategy of native advertising could be explained by three aspects that are form, content, and user. In order to conduct an overview of native advertising communication strategy, this study would like to carefully view extant studies related to native advertising and try to combine examples to explain the communication strategy of native advertising. Reviewing existing studies, researchers employed survey (Ibrahim et al., 2021), experiment (Mishra, 2020) to discuss varied types of advertisement. However, this

study would not pay much attention on research methodology due to this conceptual paper mainly want to give abroad view of native advertising communication strategy. The result of this research may be able to provide a basic native advertising communication approach and assist individuals in comprehending the features of native advertising.

### **The Divergent Definition of Native Advertising**

In 2011, at the OMMA global conference, American businessman Fred Wilson claimed that a new type of advertising will emerge within the website's "native monetization system." This is the first time the term "native" has been used in advertising. In 2013, "native advertising" became a big subject at The Interactive Advertising Bureau's annual conference (IAB). And even though native advertising has been an undeniable growth trend in recent years, advertising professionals and academics have yet to agree on native advertising's definition.

According to Fred Wilson's definition, native advertising is a revenue model that grows out of websites and users' usage experiences; it is driven by advertising content and integrates the website's and APP's design. Besides, native advertising referred to "any paid advertising that takes the specific form and appearance of editorial content from the publisher itself (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016)." Native advertising, as defined by the native advertising organization Sharethrough, is a form of paid advertising that mimics the website structure and user behavior when delivered and seeks to disguise commercial content as ordinary content. Like this definition, Lee et al (2016) also emphasized "the similarity between the format of native advertising and its surrounding media content." Alternatively, native advertising could be described as "a form of paid media where the commercial content is delivered within the design and form of editorial content (Conill, 2016)." Additionally, Wojdyski and Golan (2016) defined native advertising as a marketing approach that distributes advertising information to consumers through a publishing platform's design and content. Advertisers leverage the credibility of publishers in native advertising. Several essential issues about native advertising can be identified based on the preceding topics. At first, it relies on the Internet for support. Previously, its design and format mirrored those of the publishing platform. Additionally, its content is beneficial to users.

Native advertising is always a topic of conversation on the Internet. Probably, native advertising began in social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook under the moniker "sponsored content." Native advertising is able to achieve its key objectives thanks to Internet technology: respecting audiences' usage habits, reducing advertising's intrusiveness, and providing useful information (Hanson, 2018; Chatterjee & Zhou, 2021). By combining these facts, the current study concludes that three principles are critical for the construction of native advertising. Native advertising must ensure that its content is relevant, interesting, and valuable to users (Chung & Kim, 2021). Formally, its design and format must be compatible with the publishing platform (Talapaga & Sudha, 2020). That is, each native advertisement should be designed for a single platform. More importantly, native advertising should act as a facilitator rather than a promoter throughout the delivery of advertising information (Eyada & Milla, 2020). Users may then pay attention to advertising messages and develop a favourable attitude toward native advertising. To summarize, any advertising that adheres to the aforementioned standards may be considered native advertising.

**The Communication Strategy of Native Advertising**

The preceding section examined numerous definitions of native advertising and concluded on three critical concepts for native advertising design. Following these three concepts, the following section will examine native advertising's communication strategy from three perspectives: form, content, and user.

*Embedded communication: be a part of the platform*

Nizam and Jaafar (2018) asserted that online advertising enables advertisers to reach a broader audience, encourages users to participate in advertisers' offline activities, fosters relationships between advertisers and users, and provides advertisers with a database. Native advertising, as a form of online advertising, shares these characteristics. But as for native advertising, it more emphasizes on embedded communication strategy. On the one hand, native advertising embeds the advertising and marketing process into the social network of the Internet; on the other hand, native advertising embeds the advertisement itself into the design and browsing experience of web pages (Jiang et al., 2017; Youn & Kim, 2019). The following part will discuss the two points of view in further detail.

To begin, native advertising relies heavily on social media networks for dissemination. At the start of 2021, e-Marketer reported that social media accounted for more than 75% of native advertising revenue in the previous years. Native adverts exist in a variety of formats on social media platforms, including in-feed ads, advertorials, sponsored content, and recommendation lists. According to Campell and Marks (2015), native advertisements on social media are product of "the convergence of advertorial concepts and the social media environment" (p. 2). By integrating native advertising into users' social media feeds, advertisers and marketers can promote their products and brands, while also integrating advertising transmission into the natural flow of social media activity (Chung & Kim, 2021). The combination of advertising communication on social platforms and social functions enables digital native advertising to present itself to the user as a friend. Advertisers consider audiences as friends, and advertising are frequently shared among friends. With the aid of social media sharing and the allure of friendship, the spread of advertisements and the interaction between users are boosted even further (Hanson, 2018; Johnson et al., 2019).

Additionally, when advertising is native on social media, it appears more natural and causes fewer interruptions, ensuring that it does not disrupt the audience's behaviour (Lee et al., 2016). Similarly, Matteo and Zotto (2015) explained that social network developers and practitioners often support native advertising in-feed placement since it avoids advertising interruption and gives social network users with appropriate advertising exposure. Starbucks, being one of the most well-known coffee businesses, is a staunch proponent of native advertising. Starbucks delivered a large amount of brand information and promotional messages to people via various social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). Thus, the user can browse their friends' posts or general material while simultaneously receiving brand messaging in a more relaxed setting. Native advertising's entrenched nature benefits marketers. In-feed and content placements combined with native formats can boost customer acceptance and positive advertising impacts such as favorable attitude or buy intentions (Kim et al., 2019). Additionally, Lee et al (2016) discovered that native advertising is less obtrusive on social media, earning the audience's good attitude toward advertising. Typically, when native advertising marketing becomes integrated into the

social media process. It appears as though it could contribute significantly more to the effectiveness of native advertising.

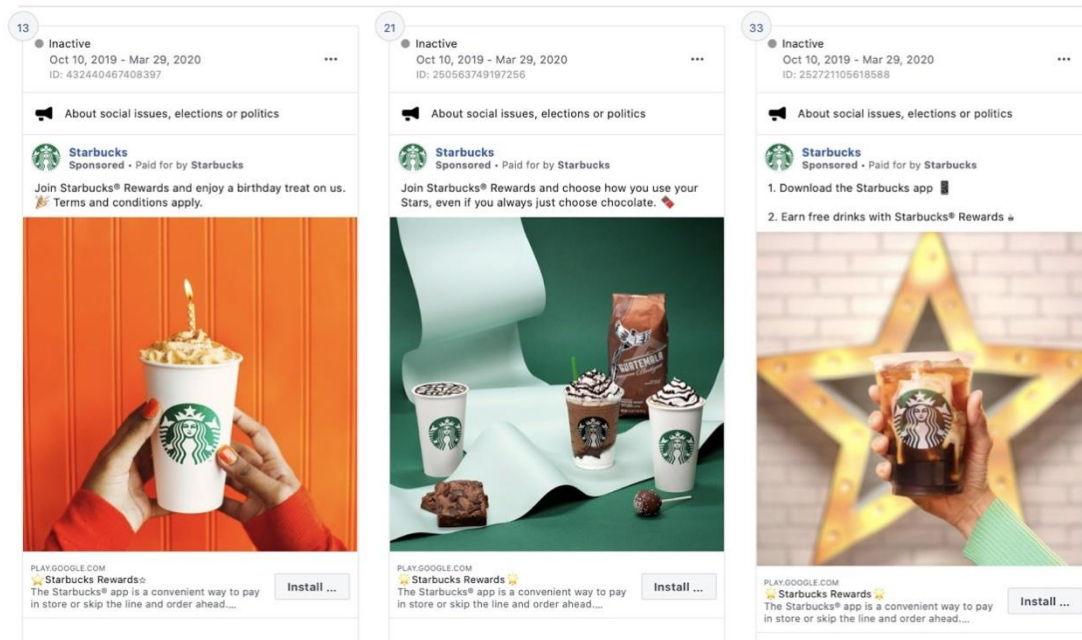


Figure 1. Starbucks In-Feed Advertising

Second, the native advertising format and design are consistent with the publication platforms (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). Native advertising's layout and look change when the publisher changes. In other words, native advertising takes on the form dictated by the platform on which it is installed. Native advertising's "native" aspect is exhibited by its design, content, or both, which mimics the hosted platform (Kim et al., 2019). As a result, Internet users cannot simply abandon them as a result of acquiring banner blindness or installing ad blockers. Academics previously believed that the "nature" of native advertising is similarity, and so the term 'similarity' was frequently used when academics studied native advertising. Similarity has been cited as one of the most important characteristics of native advertising, as both the format and content of native advertising are similar to the surrounding information (Lee et al., 2016; Hwang & Jeong, 2021). Huang and Jeong (2021) also stated that, unlike traditional advertising (e.g., banner adverts), native advertising formats vary according to the publishing platform. Native advertising is a hybrid of tailored media and environmental promotional communication that benefits from the rise of digital platforms (Matto and Zotto, 2015). Advertisers can target people on these digital platforms using covert promotion strategies (e.g., phoney reviews, fake followers); celebrity and influencer marketing (Skiba et al., 2019). From a digital platform's perspective, particularly news platforms, they not only serve as news producers but also as advertising publishers. General content editing (e.g., coverage, artistic, and expert consideration) does not appear to be the editor's primary role (Apostol, 2020). Editorial native advertising has been criticized from a journalistic and consumer perspective (Carlson, 2015; Campbell & Grimm, 2019). Native advertising's ingrained nature is detrimental to the consumer. Due to the similarity in format, content, or both of commercial and non-commercial material on publisher platforms, it impairs consumers' capacity to activate their skepticism defenses and forces them to focus their attention and time on commercial products (Skiba et al., 2019). Native advertising's embedded communication technique enables it to share the look of the hosted platform and

so genuinely become a part of it. However, publishers must be mindful of their social responsibilities while promoting native advertising.

#### *Creativity Communication: Producing Exquisite and Valuable Content*

While advertising takes on an increasing variety of forms, it is difficult for the consumer to believe the content of advertising regarding a promoted product or service. The growing cynicism of consumers toward advertising compels marketers to create content marketing tactics. In comparison to advertising, customers prefer to learn about brands through content, and if the information is informative rather than promotional, the consumer may place a higher level of trust in the brand (Slattery, 2019). And, scared of extinction as a result of the present disintermediation process, established media corporations are attempting to reclaim their supremacy in content creation by investing heavily in content marketing. According to Matto and Zotto (2015), in response to the proliferation of content marketing and brand news programmes offered by advertisers who create and distribute their own content, traditional publishers have begun to offer brand-related content products: they have developed hybrid technology that combines editorial and promotional content to assist brands in publishing informative advertisements. The publisher named it as “native advertising” or “native marketing.” Native advertising, according to content marketing specialists, is the pinnacle of content marketing (Coombs, 2019; Hwang & Jeong, 2019). Native advertising is viewed as a method that can help make online marketing more relevant to the customer while also providing much-needed additional advertising revenue to online publishers when readers express a high level of cynicism toward paid online content (Mudge, 2017). Coombs (2019) stressed the importance of native advertising in assisting marketers with well-thought-out content marketing strategies in distributing relevant and valuable material to users and enticing them to interact. Providing value to users is crucial in native advertising practice, which means that native advertising content must be beneficial and useful to users (Basmaijan, 2021). Only in this manner can native advertisements achieve their objective of influencing consumers' purchase behaviour.

While native advertising is concealed within editorial content, it nevertheless grabs attention due to its unique inventiveness and advertising content (Lee et al., 2021). After carefully examining existing research, the researcher believes that providing exquisite and valuable content is critical to native advertising success. And Rishi et al. (2018) concurred with this assessment, they agreed that if brands create appealing content and incorporate it into other pieces of content while also providing critical information to users, they will achieve great success. Nowadays, marketing success is measured by how well a message resonates with people and how long they remain engaged with the material for more than five minutes (Eyada & Milla, 2020). The success of marketing grew increasingly challenging, much more so when Millennials and Gen-Z are targeted (Florenthal, 2019). However, Millennials and Generation Z have reacted positively to native advertising since it features informative messaging and creative material but is less obtrusive (Chung & Kim, 2021). According to Hayes et al. (2019), the efficiency of native advertising is determined by the utility of the information to the audience. Additionally, when users perceive native material to be valuable, they may not mind advertisers inserting commercial messages into their information feed (Hanson, 2018). Whether it is native advertising or standard advertising, the user is concerned with the quality and relevance of the information (Hayes et al., 2019). Because audiences want more content from commercials, native advertisements must deliver more exquisite and valuable

material. While creating native advertising on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, content strategy is critical as a boundary condition for the cross-platform advantage (Huang, 2019). Additionally, advertising must focus their efforts on developing a captivating story that will entice audience members and elicit good emotions. In a nutshell, the purpose of native advertising's creativity communication is to disseminate exquisite and valuable information.

#### *Interactivity Communication: Creating Equal and Effective Communication Channels*

From the user level, native advertising presents an interactive communication strategy. Users or audiences are critical in advertising because they have the potential to impact advertising outcomes (e.g., consumer attitude and buy intention) (Tan et al., 2019). Native advertising has developed its own advantages in technology, society, and psychology as a result of its unique features and database support (Hayes et al., 2019; Amazeen & Vargo, 2021). The high demand for information in the digital age enables search engines and media platforms to collect an enormous amount of user data. The database may contain information about the users' habits, hobbies, requirements, or even personal information. Programmatic native advertising is growing in popularity, owing to the advertising delivery technology built into consumer databases (Harms et al., 2019). By partnering with firms such as Taboola and Outbrain, an increasing number of media outlets and marketers have dispersed native adverts based on user data across several media platforms (Wojdyski & Golan, 2016). Native advertising's user experience will certainly be further refined with the addition of user data, new media, and new applications equipped with accurate matching technology (Johnson et al., 2019). It would allow brand content to surface at the most opportune time, in the most opportune location, and on the users' screens where it is most needed.

A distinguishing feature of native advertising is that it allows consumers to socialize with commercials in the same way they do with other shared content (Wang et al., 2020). Using WeChat Moment Advertising as an example, users can share and remark on the advertisement, which can be seen by other friends who also received the advertisement. The user can then connect with friends directly beneath the advertisement. Alternatively, the user can leave a comment on the adverts, which the brand will get. This type of dialogue between brands and people is crucial in online conversations about products that affect advertising outcomes (Johnson et al., 2019). Additionally, brands can garner user attention and support. Numerous studies have demonstrated that a series of positive interactions can lead to a user developing a positive relationship with a brand. As a result, conduct reinforces brand trust and emotional attachment (Hayes, 2019). Meanwhile, Wang et al (2020) suggested that the more dialogue between a user and a brand occurs, the more likely the user will give an advertisement a glance. Clearly, native advertising is attempting to establish a two-way communication channel with target audiences in order to increase advertising influence and brand reputation. Indeed, this is a highly practical method.



Figure 2 WeChat Moment Advertising

Additionally, native advertising tries to alleviate the burden of advertising on users, in contrast to traditional advertising, such as banner advertising, which takes up a significant portion of the user's screen to display product information. Native advertising is gratifying since it blends nicely with the surrounding materials. And for users, such advertising content would not interfere with their actions, as native advertising blends in with the surrounding environment (Talapaga & Sudha, 2020). Native advertising takes in a variety of forms on social media platforms (e.g., in-feed advertising; advertorials), and has garnered widespread user acceptance due to its lack of intrusiveness in comparison to other forms of advertising (Campbell & Marks, 2015). Youn and Kim (2019) highlighted that due to the covert nature of native advertising, users may have a favorable attitude toward it. The lack of intrusiveness is one of the primary reasons for native advertising's popularity in contemporary society. It is commonly established that native advertising on social media can increase advertising penetration by lowering users' perceptions of advertising intrusiveness (Chung & Kim, 2021). In truth, when users actively seek information on social media or attempt to connect friends via social networking sites, the non-intrusive nature of native advertising contributes to their good attitude and behavior toward it (Harms et al., 2019). To some extent, native advertising alleviates viewers' psychological pressure by being less invasive than traditional advertising, which allows viewers to view advertising content more comfortably.

## Conclusion

Nowadays, native advertising is exhibiting a rapid growth tendency. Because of the outstanding communication effect of native advertising, it has been widely recognized by the advertising industry while scholars conducted several studies to develop their knowledge of native advertising. Most studies related to native advertising focused on its deception, its impact on traditional advertising, and its impact on consumers' attitudes and behavior. Differently, this study offers a new insight into the native advertising by discussing native advertising definition as well as its communication strategy. To be specific, this study firstly confirmed that providing relevant, interesting, and valuable information for the users is one of the most important principles for native advertising. Then, advertisers must make sure native advertisements' appearance could integrate into publishing platforms naturally. In this way, native advertising has more likely to be embraced by the users. Additionally, this research shows that providing a two-way communication channel between brand owners and consumers is certainly significant in native advertising cases. In other words, when native advertising became more interactive, the user may show a favorable attitude towards advertisement content.

Furthermore, this study found that native advertising communication strategy is made up of three dimensions: embedded communication, creativity communication, and interactive



communication. The three dimensions respectively based on native advertising's format perspective, content perspective, and users' perspective. Native advertising's embedded communication enables it to borrow the structure and style of the publishing platform to deliver information to the user while its creativity communication asks advertisers to place a premium on content production. The improvement of advertising creation technology has resulted in the development of a variety of fun native advertising formats and content (e.g., interactive native advertising, promoted video clips or photographs) that really provide viewers with valuable information. From the perspective of users, native advertising's interactive communication strategy allows advertisers to establish an equal and effective channel of communication with the user. Native adverts provide more opportunities for consumers to provide feedback to brands which may make users feel valued by advertiser. Consequently, positive responses towards advertised product or brand (e.g, share intention, positive attitude, purchase intention) may come out among users. The more a user values native material, the more likely they are to share it with their peers, resulting in increased interaction with native content. More significantly, since native advertising appears less intrusiveness, it earns more support from the user. The uses will encounter native adverts anywhere or whenever they interact with social media, as social media is the primary distribution vehicle for native advertising. However, it appears as though native advertising has not exerted significant pressure on users, as it is buried within their feeds.

These findings may explain the reason of native advertising' popularity to a certain degree. For academics, it is possible to get a general idea of native advertising communication strategies through this study. For advertising practitioners, the results of this study suggest that they should stick to their current communication strategy because consumers are more receptive to this type of advertising. Recent studies confirm native advertising is a promising marketing tool that can help advertiser deal with the industry's woes. Therefore, it is necessary to further study the communication strategy of native advertising to help it to play a better advertising effect. Also, as this study mainly discuss the communication strategies of native advertising from a broad perspective and as native advertising often show many changes too, further research need explore whether other dimension also could be utilized to explain native advertising's communication strategy. In conclusion, online advertising is in desperate need of reform in the age of big data. Advertisers, media, and users all require a more natural and personal mode of contact in order to create a win-win situation. Native advertising, as the vanguard of this transformation, must explore how to improve its design, user experience, and impact in order to alter the online advertising landscape.

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