FROM ONLINE INFORMATION SEEKING TO NATIVE ADVERTISING EXPOSURE: EXAMINING THE THAI MILLENNIALS ON ONLINE INFORMATION CUES, AD CLICK-THROUGH AND BRAND AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

Three types of native advertising were examined: paid search units, in-feed units, and recommendation widgets. Online information seeking behaviors, online information cues recognition, and native advertising click-through behaviors of Thai millennials were investigated. Qualitative research was conducted. Methodological triangulation was used to compare data from in-depth interviews, observations, and coding sheets. Online information cues can be classified into two main categories: disclosure language and advertising executions. Participants recognized both categories as online information cues. Advertising executions were more remarkable when compared to disclosure languages. The advertising images used by in-feed units and recommendation widgets were product/service images, brand presenters, and brand name and logo. Text messages that participants frequently received featured all three types of native advertising. Participants pointed out that text messages of native advertising were persuasive, impulsive, and used straightforward selling messages. Advertising images and text messages were used to induce participants' click-through behaviors and buying decisions. Recommendation widgets were the first type of native advertising that participants did not want to click through. Paid search units came in second place and in-feed units came in third place. Most participants knew the brands before being exposed to the click-through native advertising. Their intentions directed their online information seeking, communicating, product/service searching and buying. Without consumers own intentions, the opportunity of native advertising click through is hard to happen.

Keywords: Native advertising; advertising exposure; online information cues; disclosure language; advertising click through; advertising avoidance

1. INTRODUCTION

Native advertising, a new category of online advertising, is said to have evolved from advertorial formats. Native advertising formats are designed to be unobtrusive to consumers while they are using the Internet. Effectiveness of native advertising is critical to advertisers who spend a lot of money on online marketing. There are two different viewpoints toward native advertising. The first view considers native advertising as a new and effective brand communication tool that reaches a broad online target audience on various digital platforms. Native ad spending has been growing, especially on social networking sites (eMarketer, 2017). On the contrary, native advertising is viewed as being deceptive in brand communication due to its executional styles designed to blend with its online platforms and illustrate advertised brands. How consumers perceive and processes native advertising content is not well known (Wojdynski, 2016). The similarity of native advertising to non-commercial content on web pages raised concerns among consumer advocates, academics, advertisers, online publishers, and regulators regarding the potential deceptiveness of native advertising.

In an interview with Clare O'Brian, Head of Industry Programs at Internet Advertising Bureau, Kristiansen reported on measuring quality in native advertising. As explained by O'Brian, native advertising measurement is going beyond the basic digital display advertising measurement. However, since digital media is multi-layered and multifaceted, it is therefore difficult to explain individual consumer behavior with a single measuring instrument. Therefore, the instrument to measure the quality of native advertising should be explored. Quantity measurements have traditionally been managed by the digital advertising industry, but the qualitative measurement is considerably more difficult to examine, such as emotional connections between the advertising and the consumers. Consumers' brand likability or brand favorability are studies that the digital advertising industry needs to conduct not only through quantitative but also qualitative measurement (Kristiansen, 2017).

This study, therefore, sought to examine native advertising experienced by Thai millennials. The purpose of this study was to delve into online information cue recognition leading to native advertising click-through behaviors and brand awareness. It seeks to determine how Thai millennials recognize or overlook native advertising as commercial content. What information cues of native advertising are located on the various Internet platforms and publishers' Internet services that facilitate Thai Millennials click-through behaviors and brand awareness? Therefore, online information-seeking behaviors, online information cue recognition, native advertising click-through behaviors, and brand awareness of Thai millennials were investigated.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What online information cues of native advertising can Thai millennials recognize while seeking online information?
2) Are Thai millennials aware of native advertising as commercial content?
3) To what extent do Thai millennials click-through native advertising?
4) Do Thai millennials attain brand awareness after clicking through native advertising?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Definition of native advertising

Native advertising is defined as a paid marketing communication tool (Marks et al., 2019). Native advertising is more likely to look just like all other articles and pieces of content around it with the goal of creating brand awareness (Taboola, n.d.). Formats of native advertising blur the line between organically published content and paid content (Wojdynski and Golan, 2016). Brands pay for the placement of content (verbal or non-verbal components) on platforms outside of their own media (Pulizzi, 2015).

Native advertising studies indicated low levels of consumers' recognition of native advertising styles. This led the industry and regulatory units to call for mechanisms such as disclosures that can increase native advertising recognition (Marks et al., 2019). In addition, native advertising has less impact on the perception of corporations that sponsor ads than media outlets that publish them (Wu et al., 2016). Media outlets are websites, search engines, and social media networks of web publishers; corporations that sponsor the ads are advertisers.

Internet advertising placements on websites, search engines, and social media networks are significant to consumer's advertising recognition and online brand awareness. Generally, native advertising appeared in web streams (e.g., a list of news articles or social media posts and look like the surrounding non-sponsored content) located on web publishers by a bidding and ranking system that does not allow advertisers to preselect the rank position for the advertising. For web publishers, the number of ad impressions it can sell

is not infinite, and some publishers want to enhance advertising revenue by selling more advertising slots. However, too many ad slots may jeopardize perceived website quality and viewer experience.

3.2 Online information seeking

Online information seeking has been studied by scholars in many different areas including information science (Marchionini, 1995; Bruce, 1999), health & medical science (Lareau and Miczo, 2017), and online business & marketing (Delter et al., 2003; Dutta and Das, 2017).

Envisioned by Marchionini (1995, pp. 1-3), people have been dealing with electronic digital information in different forms, available in many sources and in larger volumes. Digital information is now accessible and complicating; however, it is not directly perceivable to humans unaided by technology. Electronic digital information is manipulated by using the computational power of computers to systematically aggregate, classify, compare, change, and transmit information. Information seeking is a process in which humans purposefully engage to change their state of knowledge related to learning and problem solving. The term 'search' is used to explain the behavioural manifestation of humans engaged in information seeking and is used to describe the actions taken by computers to match and display information objects (Marchionini, 1995, p. 5). In online information seeking, people apply different mixes of analytical and browsing strategies. It is an interactive process both systematic and opportunistic. Based on studies by Marchionnini, information seeking is a human–computer interaction. There is a dependency of information seekers on information systems while they are interacting with computer systems. Problems of information seekers can be solved in both systematic and opportunistic ways in the searching processes. According to Wang et al. (2016; 2019), the consumer online information search is the process by which a consumer browses and inspects a shopping environment for appropriate information to select a product or service from available options. Consumers search the Internet for information for a variety of reasons such as looking for interesting products, reading product reviews, or following the brand they want to acquire.

Delter et al. (2003) pointed out that pre-purchase online seeking behaviors through web retailing sites entail searching and browsing tasks. Dutta and Das (2017) studied consumers who intended to buy laptops and mobile phones and searched for information prior to their final purchase. There are four types of information sources of the two products: manufacturer's websites, distributor's websites, seller's websites, and other websites. The study found influencing factors of the consumers' pre-purchase information search. Consumers who have greater education level and more internet experiences search through more information sources and gain more benefits.

This study focuses on online information seeking of consumer products and service purchasing. The term "information seeking" and "information searching" are used interchangeably.

3.3 Disclosure of native advertising

Consumers should be able to distinguish between paid advertising and publishers' content. Disclosure of native advertising is the main principle that guides advertisers in practice and in respect to consumers' rights. Advertisers should take into consideration the variety of devices and platforms that consumers use to view online advertisements (Federal Trade Commission, 2013). The advertising must be truthful and not misleading. Advertisers must have evidence to back up their claim, and their advertisement cannot be deceiving. When making or implying claims, advertisers should consider all elements of the advertisement which are text, product name, phrases or statements, and depictions (Federal Trade Commission, 2013).

3.4 Impact of online information cues on selective exposure

Lazarsfeld' s interest in active audience behaviour, or selective exposure/attention theory has been proposed to explain the characteristics of active audiences. Currently, the theory is used in studies of mass media and new media. The theory explains how audiences choose to expose themselves or respond to messages that consciously or unconsciously meet their various psycho-logical, social, and instrumental needs (Nabi and Oliver, 2010).

Media technologies could have impacts on message choices of online consumers. Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2015, p. 409) pointed out that new media context should be reconsidered. New communication technologies in the present context refer to digital and computer-based communication, typically supported by the Internet (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). At present, selective exposure perspective focuses more on message choices than on channel choices. Media exposure is thought to occur as selections are made from options provided by readily available channels (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, p. 325). When messages from different sources appear on screen during online information seeking, additional online cues may channel users' message choices in various ways. These cues were designed to facilitate media choices (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, pp. 336-340).

Knobloch-Westerwick (2015) studied online cues that facilitate media selective exposures. The rating scale is one method used to examine frequencies and time estimations of media exposure. In addition, time units and actual occurrence counts present a better alternative for media exposure examination than a Likert-

style rating. However, methods for acquiring the data such as self-reports, actual observation, and a specific and recent time span were applied beyond the basic question of units. Observation of actual media choices, personal observation, videotaping, and the use of technical devices are approaches used to study selective exposure of consumers (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, pp. 105-106). Empirical research pertaining to the online information cues outlined above is very scarce. These online information cues (indicators) deserve attention in the context of selective exposure research.

This study classified online information cues into two sub-categories: disclosure languages, and advertising executions, based on Knobloch-Westerwick's types of online information cues. Disclosure languages are counted as sources indicators (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, pp. 336-340). Online content are assembled, lined up, and presented to consumers. Sources indicators indicate owner and types of online content. Advertising executions, additionally, is defined as sale and popularity indicators. Knobloch-Westerwick explained sale and popularity indicators as popularity on ranking, downloading, and viewing based on most viewed and most downloaded. These types of indicators present the bandwagon effect of online messages (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, p. 338). This study defines advertising executions as sale and popularity indicators which are additionally designed to draw consumers' attention and influence their buying behaviors.

Lastly, this study uses the term "online information cues" to represent both disclosure languages and advertising executions (visual components, verbal components) that make participants aware of native advertising and click-through native advertising.

3.5 Consumers' advertising avoidance

Internet advertising is now pervasive. The clutter of websites and the irrelevance of most ads cause consumers to avoid Internet advertising (Katz, 2019). Advertising clutter is a problem for brand communication since mass media is used as a major resource for reaching target audiences. Consumers often filter, block, or avoid Internet advertising. These consumers' reactions to Internet advertising lead to low levels of click-through rates (Wang et al., 2019). Online audiences, after facing too many typical display advertisements (web banner and pop-up ad) attain "banner blindness" (Einstein, 2017, pp. 166-167).

Navigating the Internet is difficult due to the disruptiveness or intrusiveness of Internet advertising. Consumers may feel themselves to be inadvertently exposed to Internet advertising. However, Internet advertisements are designed to feed and target (Cho and Cheon, 2004). The advertising affects consumers' overall search for desired information, which may result in withdrawing from the source of interference (i.e. advertising avoidance) (Cho and Cheon, 2004). Outbrain, the Internet advertising developer and feeder, stated that in the competitive online marketplace filled with savvy, on-the-go and distracted consumers, simple ads cannot break through. Advertising banner blindness occurs due to this situation (Outbrain, n.d.). Therefore, online publishers attempt to avoid advertising clutter without reducing advertising revenues.

3.6 Research framework

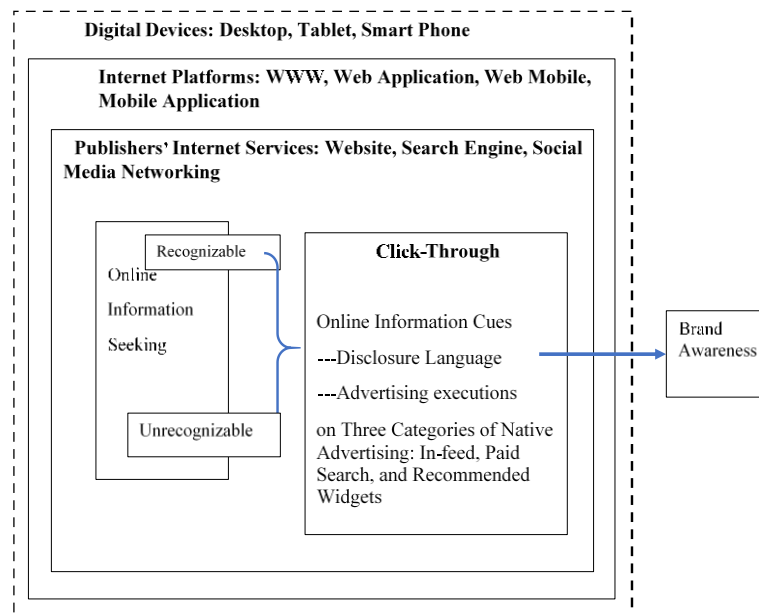The research framework (Figure 1) defines the concept and key terms used in this study.

Figure 1: Research Framework

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

4.1 Research samples

The research participants consist of Thai millennials who were born between 1980 and 1996 (2523-2539 B.E.), aged between 22 and 38. They were a 12-year age different from 4th year student in colleges to working group. Therefore, their information seeking behaviors, online information cue recognition, click-through behaviors, and brand awareness could vary. Thai millennials were considered "information rich cases" for Internet advertising. They were selected due to their dependency on the Internet and digital devices. They were familiar with many Internet platforms and Internet services. They regularly used digital devices and sought information online. If the participants fail to recognize online information cues or native advertising, the correct types of native advertising will not be revealed to them during the interview to prevent bias or prejudiced consideration in research design and data collection.

Thai millennials who met the following criteria were included in the sample group.
1) They are born between 1980 and 1996, aged between 22 and 38.
2) They are multi-device and multi-platform users.
3) They use digital devices on a daily basis.
4) They use online search engines, Internet platforms, and Internet services on a daily basis.
5) They use various Internet platforms such as websites, web applications or mobile applications on a regular basis.
6) They use at least two of the following Internet services: web portal, online news, social media.
7) They own at least one smart phone and a laptop or tablet.
8) They spend at least one hour online on a daily basis.

Thai millennials who did not meet all the criteria mentioned above were excluded as research informants or participants.

4.2 Data collection process

The data were collected through semi-structure in-depth interviews and non-participatory observation methods. Interview guides, coding sheets, photos, notes, and videos were used in data collection. All participants agreed and signed the consent forms before the interviews. They were asked to conduct online searches for products and services as they usually do in their everyday lives. Photos and videos were taken with their permission. They were later asked to identify online commercial content as well as the components of the content that allowed them to recognize native advertising. They were then questioned on native advertising awareness disclosed by online information cues. This was followed by questions regarding click-through behaviour and brand awareness. While engaging in online information-seeking behaviors, participants were questioned, and their behaviors were observed and recorded. Data from participants was monitored and analysed.

4.3 Data analysis

The study used operational definitions to conceptualize and categorize data from participants. The operational definitions helped in defining the "unit" that was used for coding the data (unitizing the data). The study used multiple methods to develop comprehensible phenomena, and compared data from in-depth interviews, observations, video recordings, and coding sheets to provide better understanding of online behaviors, especially native advertising recognition. Methodological triangulation (method triangulation) was used to analyse research data to assure validity (Tucci, 2007).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study discovered that online information seeking behaviors were similar among the participants regardless of ages, gender, occupation, and marital status. However, types of products/services searched were different among female and male participants. Female participants sought souvenirs, cosmetics, personal care products, accessories, travel service, shoes, and apparel while male participants sought for travel services, IT products, living accommodation, apparel, shoes and vehicles. Two of the participants were married with young children. They often sought products or services online for their children. Table 1 shows demographic profiles of participants.

All of the participants tended to consume online news, events, or information through social media networks such as Line, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They are exposed to different types of content more through personal mobile devices than through traditional mass media. If they wanted any information on

events or news, they typed the words into search engines instead of directly going to web addresses (websites) of news publishers. Then they chose content which appeared on Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs).

The participants used smartphones as their primary device for online activities rather than different devices for different online activities or multiple devices for one online activity (Table 2-3). Smartphones were used habitually by the participants as the device is compact, convenient to carry, and full of functions for online activities. They used smartphones for interacting with friends, family members and colleagues, information seeking, online shopping, online games, and online movies/series. While smartphones are used as a personal media device, smart tablets and notebooks tended to be used for work and for study because the devices have bigger screens.

Table1: Demographic Profiles of Participants

	Age		Marriage Status		Occupation			
Number of Participants = 20	22-29 years	30-38 years	Married	Single	Office Workers	Military	Students (4th year–Graduate Students)	Free-Lances
Total	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	18 (90%)	9 (45%)	2 (5%)	6 (5%)	3 (15%)
Males	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	2 (10%)	5 (25%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)
Females	9 (45%)	4 (20%)	0 (0%)	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	2 (10%)

Table 2: Digital Devices Classified by Genders

	Digital Device Usage		
	Smartphones	Smart Tablets	Notebooks
Number of Participants = 20	20 (100%)	7 (35%)	13 (65%)
Males	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	6 (30%)
Females	13 (65%)	5 (25%)	7 (35%)

Table 3: Digital Device Classified by Ages

		Digital Device Usage		
		Smartphones	Smart Tablets	Notebooks
Number of Participants = 20		20 (100%)	7 (35%)	13 (65%)
Ages	22-29	13 (65%)	5 (25%)	8 (40 %)
	30-38	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	5 (25%)

5.1 Online information seeking of Thai millennials

The study also found that both hardware (physical attributes) and software components of digital devices gave the participants access to native advertising and other forms of Internet advertising. The features of digital devices, internet platforms, and Internet services are three elements that influence the participants in information seeking and native advertising exposure.

Hardware designs (physical attributes) are a point of difference for business competition. The device's hardware (or the product features in advertising terms) has the attributes of size, weight, touchable screens, remote controls, internet connection, and scrolling direction, either vertically or horizontally. These all provide opportunities for native advertising exposure.

However, the participants were limited in their choices of brand names, functions, features, and attributes of their digital devices due to their socioeconomic status. The screen size is significant for browsing and viewing.

5.2 The internet platforms used by participants

The participants interfaced with native advertising through Internet platforms of the World Wide Web, web applications, web mobile, and mobile application. The operating system works as a back-bone digital

device. The operating system helps the participants to interface with Internet platforms. When the Internet platforms change, the online behaviors of consumers change.

A smart operation system (OS) which is fast, intelligent, and user friendly, supports native advertising exposures when the participants use different Internet platforms such as World Wide Web, web applications, web mobile, and mobile applications.

5.3 Internet services preferred by the participants

The Internet services are where web publishers interface with participants. Internet services can be search engines, websites, and social media networks available online for participants to use.

5.4 Google search

Google Search is the primary search engine that participants preferred to use. They found Google Search to be resourceful and suitable for Thai compared to other search engines. Other search engines are more western-oriented in seeking information. Ranked from highest to lowest, Google Search, Google Chrome, Safari, and Bing were listed as preferred search engines. Furthermore, one participant explained that Yahoo Search is too westernized and cannot provide information suitable for Thai. The participants did not mention other web browsers: Opera, Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer, Microsoft Edge and the search engines: MSN, AOL, Ask, Baidu, in this interview.

5.5 Social media networking

The participants reported that they used many different social media networks for communicating with family members, peers, or others. They mainly used Line, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Line was the most popular social media used by the participants. Line extends its platforms to various Internet services. The Line Official Account is the main channel for commercial content and features many brands. Most participants reported that they found native advertising on Timeline, and Line Today.

Facebook was the second most popular social media network used by the participants. Facebook contains many types of commercial content which members with similar interests can use as a channel for buying or selling products or services. Facebook Group is the place to look for these products or services. The participants were able to identify native advertising on Facebook.

Instagram came in third place as the social media network participants used most regularly. The participants found no evidence of native advertising on Twitter.

5.6 Websites

Websites were not as popular among the participants when compared to Google search and social media networks. There is a wide variety of websites and many allow native advertising feeds and placements. There is a wide variety of websites and many allow native advertising feeds and placements. Recommendation widgets are located on Web publishers' web pages.

The study found that the participants are exposed to different forms of Internet advertising. This implies the proliferation, integration, and careful orchestration of Internet advertising.

Research Question 1. What online information cues of native advertising can Thai millennials recognize while seeking online information?

Most participants were able to identify online information cues since most web publishers clearly disclose the cues (Table 4). The participants were able to recognize both disclosure language and advertising executions as online information cues of commercial content, but they did not know that these are native advertising components. Furthermore, advertising executions were more remarkable (eye catching) and got more attention when compared to disclosure language.

Disclosure languages

Most participants correctly identified the disclosure language of all 3 types of studied native advertising: in-feed units, paid search and recommendation widgets. The participants reported that they acknowledged the existence of disclosure language. They also revealed that they can differentiate the advertising from the surrounding content and context because of disclosure language. However, this was only revealed after they were asked a second or third time. Often, they showed their acknowledgement on online disclosure languages after they explained how they recognized the advertisements. Although they were able to point out and acknowledge these disclosure languages, they paid no attention to it.

Disclosure language on the commercial content viewed by participants was written in both English and Thai. The words "sponsored", "ได้รับการสนับสนุน" (or "has been sponsored"), "Ad", "โฆษณา" (or advertising), "Sponsored By" are mostly found as examples of disclosure language.

In conclusion, the participants were able to identify and recognize disclosure language and advertising executions appearing in native advertising. Types of native advertising of which the participants were able to

identify and recognize disclosure languages are, respectively, in-feed units, recommendation widgets and paid search.

Table 4: Numbers of Native Advertising Identified and Recognized by Participants

Native Advertising	In-feed Units	Paid Search Units	Recommendation Widgets
Participants N = 20	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Disclosure Languages	19 (95%)	4 (20%)	4 (20%)
Advertising Executions	19 (95%)	0 (0%)	10 (50%)

Advertising executions

Advertising executions are located on publishers' sites and link to advertisers' sites. Three types of advertising executions noticed by the participants were advertising images, text messages, and brand names of products or services. These three advertising executions were integrated to form native advertising formats. However, among these three advertising executions, advertising images were most recognized. Most of the participants ranked advertising images as primary visible advertising executions. In addition, some advertising overlaid text messages on top of images to gain better attention from the viewers (Table 5).

Advertising images

The advertising images used by in-feed units and recommend widgets were product/service images, brand presenters, and brand name and logo. Although advertising images were limited in size, they were made prominent by the surroundings. The images used by native advertising are of bright color, simple, and related to the products /services.

The big and bold product images were used by big brands. Close-up images of food are more persuasive and look flavourful. Big brands use color to signify their brand identity and to capture viewers' attention such as red for KFC, green and gold for Oishi Gold, and green for Milo.

Text messages

Paid search units are restricted as text only because they are found on search engines. In-feed units and recommendation widgets, on the other hand, use both advertising images and text messages. Types of text messages the participants frequently found in all three types of native advertising were price, contact information, discount price, and discount rate. The participants pointed out that text messages of native advertising were persuasive and used straightforward selling messages. The text messages tried to induce the participants' click-through behaviors and buying decisions. Advertising text messages were, for example, "2 pieces for 29 baht", "great value for 23 baht", "50 % maximum discount", "free instalment for 2 years", "full and happy meal for 299 baht (pizza), "just 69 baht", and "buy 1 get 1 free and the price is only 299 baht". Interestingly, psychological pricing or charm pricing (9, or 99 ending price) were used by many brands. These kinds of messages were overlaid on advertising images to draw attention and engagement from viewers.

Brand names

Native advertising gives an opportunity for small brands and big brands to advertise online especially on social media networks. During the interviews, participants pointed out both big brand names and small brand names advertised in native advertising formats.

Table 5: Advertising Executions Indicated by Participants

Advertising Images	Text Messages	Brand Name
1. Product image 2. Brand name & logo 3. Brand presenter	1. Discount price 2. Percent discount: 50% discount, 3. Instalment plan: 0 Baht payment for 2 years with no charge for ownership registration 4. Price: psychological pricing (end with 9, 99 Baht) 5. Contact information: Line, Facebook, telephone 6. Product attributes and benefits 7. Transaction methods	1. Small brands: SME brands, start-up brands 2. Big brands: global brands, international brand, national brands, leading brands

Research Question 2. Are Thai Millennials Aware of Native Advertising as Commercial Content?

All participants sighted dissimilarities between online commercial content and non-commercial content. They stated that commercial content was recognizable. Commercial content which participants encountered online came in different formats and placements. Native advertising is a subcategory of Internet advertising which counted as one category of commercial content. Based on the participants' perceptions,

Internet advertising is diverse and comes in many forms. The participants found commercial content through Facebook groups, Line Accounts, Web blogs, IG Stories, YouTube Videos, products/service review websites, and E-retailer sites. They reported that they coincidentally interface with different forms of commercial content while searching for product and service information online. In fact, native advertising was created programmatically, visually, and verbally to target online consumers. Neither the terms 'native advertising' nor 'creative execution' was known by participants. The terms are mostly known to those in digital advertising. Although the participants did not know which commercial content was referred to as native advertising, the ads are recognizable. The participants had no difficulty in recognizing and identifying the advertising.

The study found that advertising placement and scrolling direction provide opportunities for native advertising to be recognized by the participants. Advertising placement and scrolling direction can increase the chances for native advertising to be clicked through. The most efficient place for native advertising were the upper parts of web pages and the upper parts of device screens, especially the upper-right of the page or screen. The lower parts of web pages and device screens provided less opportunity for native advertising to be seen by the participants. For this reason, recommendation widgets were found to have low advertising exposure, while paid search was found to have high exposure. In general, scrolling directions of web pages and mobile screens are vertical, (up and down). Some online ads such as shopping ads on Google's search engine result pages (SERPs), in-feed units on social media such as Instagram Story and Facebook can be scrolled horizontally across devices' screen (carousel).

Participants reported that they tended to scroll the page or the screen up and down more often than from left to right to find information or products/services. In addition, they mostly scrolled the screen vertically and horizontally in quick motions, stopping when they found what they wanted. Scrolling speed is thus a factor that reduces native advertising exposure.

In-feed units

In-feed units can be found on Internet services: web pages, web applications and mobile applications. The participants recognized the in-feed ads easily because in-feed units use clear information cues with words like "new", "sale" and "promotion". The ads also use bright colors such as red, blue, and yellow. The visual parts of in-feed units contained a variety of media: still photos, slidable images, or videos.

Paid search units

Paid search units were seen by the participants as they were located on search engine result pages (SERPS). Paid search units are commonly found on web pages or search engines. Paid search units use text messages, not advertising images. When the participants used a web browser or search engine, they saw paid search units at the tops of web pages such as Google Search, Google Chrome, Safari, and Bing. The participants reported that they knew this content was Internet advertising because the word "Ad" appeared at the left side of the content. Paid search units on SERPs, appear at the top of notebook screens. Similarly, they appear at the top of smart tablet.

Recommendation widgets

Most recommendation widgets in Thailand are operated by Taboola, Outbrain, and website owners. Thai web publishers manage their web spaces from the lower parts of web pages for advertising revenue. From observation, the participants had to scroll down very long web pages to reach the ends. Recommendation widgets are placed at the bottom of web pages. None of the participants knew this method of native advertising industry. They were additionally unfamiliar with the brands Taboola and Outbrain.

From observation, Taboola was found more often than Outbrain as native advertising feeders of recommendation widgets. None of the participants knew that these two companies were native advertising feeders. They did not mention their logos appearing at the top or bottom of recommendation widgets. They were more likely to recognize native advertising from the online information cues of disclosure language and advertising executions. From close observation, most participants did not give attention to recommendation widgets.

Other types of native advertising

Unexpectedly, one type of native advertising was mentioned by the participants although it is not a subject of this study. Two participants mentioned and clicked through "Promoted Listing". Promoted Listings is a form of native advertising. It was widely used on web publishers worldwide.

Research Question 3. To what extent do Thai millennials click-through native advertising?

Native advertising reached the participants, but was given low attention. They rarely click-through native advertising. Among the three types of studied native advertising, in-feed units were the most clicked. Paid search units and recommendation widgets received respectively less clicks. Click-through behaviors of participants were low; however, this was not because they were afraid of programmatic analysis software

advertisers designed to target and follow consumers online. Rather, they reasoned that they did not click because they had no interest or intention of acquiring information about the advertised products or services. They only clicked through the native advertising when they had some intention before searching for products or services. In fact, native advertising is designed to be recognized by online consumers. However, the study found that almost all of the participants avoided clicking through native advertising. Their intentions to acquire products and services were individualistic, varied, and selective. From in-depth interviews and observations, the intentions of participants to search for information, or seek out products/ services fell beyond the analysis of data analytic software. To click or not to click through native advertising was up to the participants, not the advertisers or publishers.

Recommendation widgets

Recommendation widgets were the first type of native advertising that the participants wished to avoid. Recommendation widgets were located at the lowest part or bottom of the web pages or mobile pages. The participants had to scroll to bottom of web pages to see recommendation widgets. Many participants found the content (advertising executions) of recommendation widgets to be uninteresting. Some participants found the content inappropriate, exaggerated, and irrelevant. After reading the online content in the upper parts of web pages, the participants tended to stop scrolling and switch to other pages.

However, two participants clicked on recommendation widgets because the content met their requirements. The recommendation widget topics that the participants clicked concerned health and beauty. Some participants reported that they read the content that matched their areas of interests. As there were many recommendation widgets, they did not click on all of them.

In-feed units

The second type of native advertising that participants wished to avoid were in-feed units. They were exposed to in-feed units as the ads were placed next to non-commercial content, especially on social media networking. In-feed units were programmatically fed to match their online behaviors and profiles.

Paid search units

The participants could not avoid exposure to paid search units. Search engine released paid search units on the first and upper part of the Search Engine Result Page (SERPs). However, some participants did not want to click on paid search units. As reported by a participant, the word "Ad" at the beginning of the content made advertising content recognizable. The study also found that the participants read callout content when using search engines. They reported that they read content located below web addresses appearing on SERPs. This online content is known as a Call Out Extension, a part of Google's Ads.

Many times, the participants were accidentally exposed to native advertising while online. When they saw the text "sponsored," they scrolled away or clicked other content to skip the native advertising. The participants selectively chose to the content in which they wanted, were interested, or had experience. However, their attention and experience varied over time and were individually different. The participants reported that their intentions to search for products/ services or any information happened before going online and being exposed to native advertising. Only a few participants reported that they intentionally clicked on native advertising. Otherwise, they accidentally met native advertising while they were online. They clicked because those ads drew their attention and the advertised products or services matched their previous intentions. If the advertised products or services were related to their intentions, they may click through.

Advertising avoidance occurred in all three types of native advertising. Recommendation widget was the first type that the participants did not want to click through. Paid search units came in second and in-feed units came in third. Based on the participants' views, in-feed units seemed less intrusive compared to the other two types of native advertising.

Contrary to the true concept of native advertising in which its goal is to be unobtrusive and blend in with the surrounding content and context of online publishers, the participants found native advertising quite annoying, invasive, untrustworthy, and intrusive. They thus preferred to be exposed to advertising content that was not too persuasive and did not hinder their online behaviour and privacy. They additionally reported that the Internet is very crowded, and information was beyond their control.

Research Questions 4. Do Thai millennials attain brand awareness after clicking through native advertising?

Most participants were familiar with the brands before clicking through native advertising. Some participants knew the brands, especially big brand names, offline. They were aware of the big brands because of the brands' reputations and marketing activities (Table 6).

There were about 20 product and service categories that used native advertising and were seen on the participants' digital devices during the interviews. Those product and service categories were health products, food supplements, fast food restaurants, beverages, beauty products, apparel, e-retailers, high-rise

condominiums, residential estates, financial services, tutoring schools, computer and digital device accessories, shoes, airlines, online traveling agents, web blogs, jewelry, watches, accessories and automobiles.

The product categories of small brands appearing on Internet platforms and Internet services were health products, food supplements, beauty products, tutoring schools, education, computer games, apparel, shoes, and IT products.

Brands used native advertising to create brand awareness. From observation, big brands tended to use disclosure languages to be conspicuous and comply with regulations. On the contrary, several small brands were found not using disclosure languages.

The participants frequently believed that they were able to distinguish commercial content from non-commercial content. However, they rarely mentioned brand names and attributes of advertised brands appearing in native advertising during the interviews. The study found more than 30 small brands and 30 big brands that used native advertising formats.

The Internet gave opportunities to small brands such as local Thai brands, startup brands, and SME brands to create brand awareness. However, native advertising is paid advertising operated by big digital tech companies like Google, Facebook, Instagram, Taboola and Outbrain. Small brands may be unable to afford native advertising. They may have difficulty in keeping up with changing online media technologies. Many small brands used social media networks as an alternative way to promote their brands like Facebook, Instagram Story, and Blog on YouTube.

Among the three types of studied native advertising, in-feed units and recommendation widgets were used by both low awareness small brands and local brands as well as high awareness big brands. Paid search units (SEM) tended to be used by high awareness big brands.

Table 6: Brand Awareness after Clicking through Native Advertising

Brand Name Awareness	Participants N	n	%
Brand awareness occurred before clicking through *Participants knew the brands from other sources: online media, offline media, and other marketing activities	20	20*	100
Brand awareness occurred after clicking through *Participants knew the brand from native advertising found online and by ad click-through	20	10*	50

In-feed units

The participants found both small brands and big brands in In-feed Units. They pointed out the information on In-feed Units to show the brands' information with which they were previously aware. When comparing small brands and big brands in In-feed units, big brands were more creative in advertising production. Advertising images and text messages were better crafted. They use big and colorful images, presenters, videos, and slidable images to get attention from viewers.

Paid search units

Brands found using paid search units tended to be big brands. Well-known brands such as Traveloka, Skyscanner, Nike, Longchamp, and Uniqlo used both SEM (Search Engine Marketing) and official websites on the same SERPS. Although paid search units appeared next to official websites of the brands on SERPS, some participants preferred to click through official websites of the brands instead of paid search units or SEMs. The official website of advertised brands appeared on Google's SERPs placed below Google's SEM.

Recommendation widgets

This type of native ad was not crafted to communicate with the participants. The ad tended to use straightforward advertising images and text messages. The participants found many recommendation widgets strange or untrustworthy. Compared to the other two types of native advertising, both small brands and big brands were found using this format. Both types of brands were placed side by side which made the whole section look uninteresting and messy. The participants pointed out the advertised brands on recommendation widgets to show that they knew the brands before clicking through. The participants revealed that they paid low attention to this type of native advertising and did not want to click. However, some participants reported that they were aware of the brand only after clicking through.

The participants reported that there were big brands appearing side by side with small brands on recommendation widgets. One participant complained that there were many different types of recommendations on the lowest part of the webpages such as automobiles, sports, and news. She pointed to the overwhelming nature of native advertising.

Most participants gave little attention to native advertising. Some participants were aware of the brands because they saw the brands from other sources such as brand outlets, mass media, salespeople, or e-

retailing. Some participants knew the brands from reference groups like family members, friends, celebrities, or brand influencers. On the Internet, the participants had many alternative means to become familiar with the brands. They could read brand review pages, browse official brand websites or visit Facebook pages of the brands. They searched for the brands from e-retailers' web applications such as Shopee, and Lazada. They could view the Line application or Facebook marketplace. Clicking through native advertising is not the only way to create brand awareness. Although the participants gave little attention to native advertising, their intention to acquire the brands influenced their click-through behaviors.

6. CONCLUSION

The participants were able to recognize both disclosure language and advertising executions as online information cues. They were aware of native advertising as commercial content. Participants were exposed to native advertising, but they gave it little attention as they rarely clicked through it. Among the three types of studied native advertising, in-feed units were clicked most. Paid search units and recommendation widgets were respectively clicked less. Most participants were familiar with the brands before clicking through the native advertising. Some participants knew the brands, especially big brands, offline before searching on the Internet (online information seeking).

In line with Knobloch-Westerwick's six types of online information cues, the study found both disclosure languages and advertising executions were recognizable by the participants. Disclosure languages, as source indicators, helped the participants differentiate commercial content from non-commercial content and protected them from misleading commercial content. Advertising executions, as sale and popularity indicators, gained attention from the participants more so than disclosure languages. Advertising executions can differentiate commercial content from non-commercial content, however, they did not have a strong impact on native advertising click-through. Most participants tended to avoid native advertising. Ad executions of native advertising appearing on participants' devices were mainly sale driven.

Although the participants could differentiate commercial content from non-commercial content, they tried to avoid interacting with native advertising. They found native advertising excessive, persuasive, annoying, straightforward, untrustworthy, full of sales promotion, and requiring direct responses. From close monitoring of in-depth interviews and videotaping, all 20 participants swiftly scrolled, quickly shifted, and jumped from one web page to another. They frequently changed Internet platforms and services. The participants Internet browsing experiences were unique, selective, and personal. They skipped advertising if possible and they unfollowed if the content became too annoying. All in all, they avoided Internet advertising whenever possible. The participants were varied in demographics; however, their attitude toward native advertising was similar when relating to advertising clutter and avoidance. The research results agreed with Delter et al. (2003) Elliott and Speck (1998) and Cho and Cheon (2004). Native advertising excessiveness and intrusiveness affect the attitudes of online consumers. Native advertising avoidance leads to lower degrees of advertising exposure, affects information access and has a negative impact on advertising performance (Li, 2019). Although native advertising is designed to target certain segments of consumers, advertisers and publishers still have no control over consumers' intention to click. According to "think with Google", reach is worthless without attention (Think with Google, 2017). Native advertising may have a high reach, but receives little attention as the participants rarely clicked through native advertising. Consumers' attention alone cannot draw them to click through native advertising. The intention of consumers of whether to acquire the products/services is the most important factor for native advertising click through. Without consumers' intentions, opportunities for native advertising click-through are scarce. The participants stated that intentions such as online information seeking, communicating, product/service searching and buying directed their online behaviors.

The rapid increase of online content makes the Internet cluttered. Commercial content, non-commercial content, fake news, crime, pornography, and hate speech are widespread on the Internet. Quality and irrelevant content are mixed together. Knowledgeable content is placed side by side with unworthy content. The study on "From Online Searches to Native Advertising Exposure: Examining the Thai Millennials on Online Information Cues, Ad Click-Through and Brand Awareness" revealed a phenomenon of native advertising exposure, click-through behavior, and brand awareness. Acquiring the attention of consumers does not make them click. Advertisers need to consider consumers' intentions to acquire products or services as a predominant factor and should be responsive to consumers' independence when advertising on the Internet. Publishers may consider click-through as their revenue; however, advertisers expect a conversion from online consumers since it is the key indicator of consumers interacting with the advertising and brand message.

New Research Framework

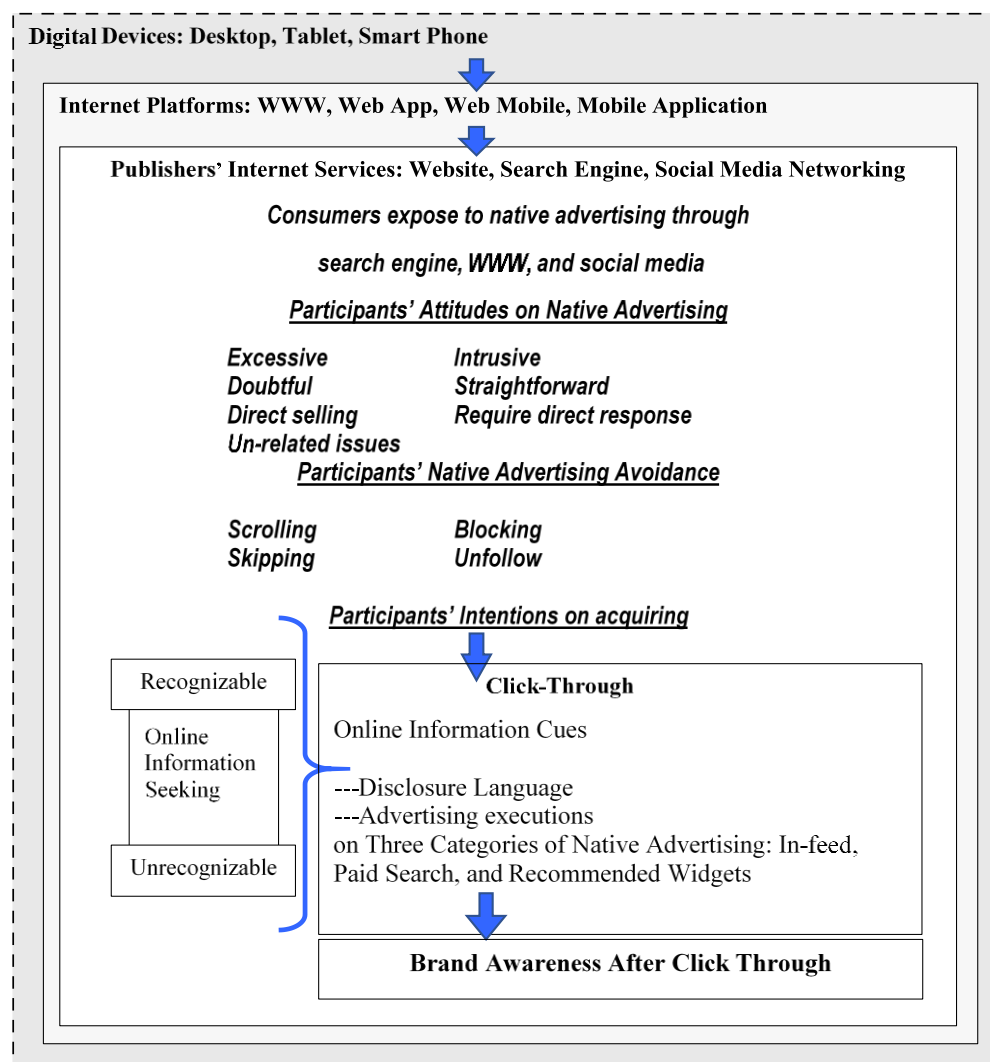The research results portray a new research framework for next study (Figure 2).

Figure 2: A New Research Framework for Native Advertising Study

7. RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study is a preliminary study on native advertising in Thailand. The research results from qualitative data indicated that Thai millennials recognized native advertising from online information cues. Attitudes and behaviors of Thai consumers toward native advertising including the intention to acquire products/services found in this study should be investigated further. Survey research is recommended to examine a greater number of consumers.

1) The results revealed that scrolling speed is a factor that lessens the opportunity for participants to be exposed to native advertising. They mostly scrolled vertically and horizontally in quick motions to avoid advertising. The next study could examine relationship of consumers' scrolling speed and directions with online product or services category searching and buying, as well as native advertising formats and placements.

2) Native advertising is diverse, dynamic, and technology driven. Native advertising formats and placements on the Internet are constantly evolving. Consumers' attitudes and click-through behaviors could be influenced by new advertising formats and placements. Therefore, online consumers' attitudes and intentions to click on native advertising are recommended for exploration.

3) Native advertising is tracking by advanced data analytic programs and is not universal to everyone in terms of access and sharing, therefore, further research on consumers' native advertising exposure, consumers' online information cues recognition, native advertising click-through behaviors and brand

awareness should be conducted. The founding of this native advertising study is a fundamental resource for students, academics, and regulators to experience and discuss. Qualitative results on native advertising of this study should be longitudinally examined and appraised with quantitative data from advertising analytic programs.

4) Consumer sovereignty is critical to Internet advertising development. The next study should explore native advertising exposures of different generations to find out their attitudes, avoidance, and intention toward native advertising. Then, native advertising practitioners can find means to improve accountability, performance, and responsibility of native advertising.

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