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Native Advertising: Fair or Unfair?

Instructions: Read and discuss the article and analyze whether native advertising is fair or unfair.

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Advertising is defined as a form of marketing communication designed to persuade an audience to take or continue some type of action. Advertising informs, entertains and persuades by bringing attention to a specific type of product or service through paid announcements in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, billboards, and/or digital media. As the *economic engine* for both mass media and online media, advertising is carefully designed to attract and hold audience attention and communicate a message.



Native advertising is specifically a form of online advertising that matches the form and function of the platform on which it appears. The word *native* refers to the idea that the ad is designed to *blend in* or *look natural* by matching the other information on the website page. Sometimes this form of advertising is also called **sponsored content** or **content marketing**, which means that it is editorial content that has a marketing goal.



The practice of disguising ads as non-commercial content -- whether that content is an article from a professional newsroom or a Facebook post from your aunt -- is very profitable for media companies. Native advertising seen on a website page may look like a video, news or other content item, when in reality, it is an ad meant to be clicked and ultimately, persuade the user. Native advertising blurs the line between editorial content and advertising content, and, when most effective, engages readers in the same way as the surrounding editorial content.

Because native advertising is served to you by using the information that you provide when using the Internet, two people who visit the same website may see very different examples of native ads. You may not be aware of it, but everything you do online – every search term keyword you use, websites you visit, and photos and text messages you share – is used to customize ads and present sponsored content for you.

Is Native Advertising Fair? The Federal Trade Commission is responsible for regulating advertising in the United States. In general, they have established four principles for advertiser's responsibility to consumers: (1) Advertising must be truthful and not misleading. (2) Advertising must substantiate any express or implied claims. (3) Advertising cannot be unfair or deceptive. (4) Any disclosures necessary to make an ad accurate must be clear and conspicuous.

Fair or Unfair? You Decide. Make a list of pros and cons of sponsored content or native advertising. What are the advantages and disadvantages from the point of view of the consumer? What's your position? Is native advertising fair or unfair?

Document Your Unique Experience with Sponsored Content

Your Mission: Create a screencast to show your unique experience with the native advertising that you see when you use social media and news websites. Then compare and contrast your experience with that of a partner to see the similarities and differences you can find.

Sample Screencast: <http://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/rate/693>

Materials Required:

- Access to the Internet and computer with built-in webcam and microphone
- A free account for Screencast-o-matic: <http://www.screencast-o-matic.com>
- OR a screencast tool on your mobile phone

Instructions:

1. Explore your social media and news sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, Yahoo, CNN, NYTimes, BuzzFeed, Pinterest etc., and analyze the native advertising or sponsored content that you find on the pages you view. Follow some links to discover who is creating this stuff.
2. Review the Observation Questions below and analyze the native advertising that you experience.
3. Create your screencast by navigating on your computer, discussing and observing the native ads you see. Describe and narrate what it is and why you think it was placed there. Follow links to see what you can find about the creators of native advertising.

Native Ad Example

Observation Questions

What is it?

- What types of native advertising or sponsored content do you see on your social media pages?
- What types of native advertising or sponsored content do you find on other websites you visit?
- How can you tell that it is native advertising?
- Why is the example considered a native advertisement?

Why is it there?

- How does the native advertisement example fit into the overall page?
- Would a user be likely to recognize it as an ad? Why or why not?
- Why did you get this particular kind of native advertising or sponsored content?
- What information was gathered about you in order for this content to be placed here?

What impact does it have?

- What do online marketers know about you? Does it matter to you how much they know? Why or why not?
- What are the potential consequences of online ad personalization?
- Is native advertising or sponsored content beneficial or harmful?

