Unraveling plot-based native advertising: Is it overpraised?

A quantitative study on Chinese consumers' responses to plot-based native advertisements

Student Name: Qing Ni
Student Number: 447564

Supervisor: Dr. Suzanna J. Opree

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Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

In recent years a new type of advertising, called plot-based native advertising, became prominent in web series in China. Plot-based native advertising refers to the practice of using plots and settings from the dramas and creating scenes where characters from the dramas advertise for certain products and brands in explicit manners. It is an exclusive type of adverting in China, and it only exists in web dramas because of Chinese broadcasting regulations. Since 2016, plot-native advertising has become a hype: Practitioners believe that plot-based native ads are creative and entertaining and could generate more positive responses from the audience. Moreover, some successful examples convince the brands that these ads could help raise brand awareness to a large extent. Thus, the practitioners and the brands actively embraced this new type of advertising. As a result, making plot-based native ads in the web dramas become a common practice and the price of a single piece of plot-based native ad rose like a rocket. On the other hand, despite the fact that this new type of advertising has become extremely prevalent in web series, audience responses to it have actually never been investigated. This study investigates audience's perceptions of the plot-based native ads (e.g., perceived ad qualities, ad attitudes) as well as their effectiveness, comparing both to the perceptions and effectiveness of more conventional forms of advertising (i.e., product placements and regular commercials). An online experiment with a one-factor between-group design was employed. The factor was ad type and it had four levels, being plot-based native ads, visual-only placements, audio-visual placements and regular commercials. The stimulus came from *The Mystic Nine*, the most popular web drama in China in 2016, and *the* show that brought plot-based native advertising to public's attention. The target group for this study was the Chinese population aged between 18 to 35 years old, and all respondents were recruited by a professional survey platform in China. According to the experimental results, plot-based native ads did *not* differ significantly in terms of ad characteristics (i.e., perceived ad creativity, perceived ad entertainment, perceived ad informativeness, and perceived ad intrusiveness) and *nor* did they outperform in generating more positive responses from the audience (i.e., ad attitude, brand awareness, brand attitude, and purchase intention), compared with other types of advertising. In other words, the plot-based native ads are not as powerful as practitioners believe them to be. These findings are very interesting, as they indicate a huge gap between the reality and the popular "belief" in the industry. Also, these findings have

several practical implications. The first one is that the practitioners should not be too optimistic about the effects of plot-based native advertising. Second, brands, especially brands which do not have a big budget, should consider carefully before using plot-based native ads: According to the results of this study, it is difficult to argue that using plot-based native ads could still bring high ROI. Finally, brands and advertisers are not advised to continue following this hype blindly and are advised to use other forms of advertising which are more economical.

Keywords: plot-based native ads, product placements, advertisement attitudes, advertising effects, China.

Preface

Writing master thesis is a very fun and valuable experience for me, because I could devote my time to a topic that really interests me, and I have learned so much during the whole process. In fact, writing this thesis might be one of the best experiences in the master program. First and foremost, I want to thank my parents for everything they have done for me. If it weren't for them, I could never have the chance to go abroad and further my study. Also, I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Sanne Opree, who gave me the courage to start an explorative research on my own. During the whole process, she helped me revise my drafts again and again and offered a lot of valuable suggestions. Without her, my thesis could never have been the same. I feel so lucky and grateful that she could be my supervisor. Finally, I want to thank my friends, JiJi, Moon, XiXi, XYW (sorted alphabetically), for their unconditional support and love, and for the company they gave me whenever I felt down.

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1 Introduction

Web television series in China have developed rapidly since 2014, when 205 web dramas were produced in one single year (Annual report on Chinese web dramas, 2017). Since then, the industry has developed at a steady pace: In 2016, the top 50 web dramas were viewed 38 billion times (China's web television series, 2017), and in 2017, 206 web dramas were produced and were viewed 83.3 billion times (Tan, 2017). The great prosperity of web television series has drawn the attention of advertisers as well. The spending on web-drama advertising reached 44 billion RMB (about 5.8 billion Euro) in 2017 and is expected to exceed 50 billion RMB (about 6.7 billion Euro) in 2018 (Ye, 2017). In addition to conventional forms of advertising, such as regular commercials and product placements, some new forms of advertising which fit better with the dramas become popular with the advertisers (Ye, 2017). Among them, *Chuang yi zhong cha*, or *Plot-based Native Advertisements* (hereinafter referred to plot-based native ads) are one of the most favored type of advertising (Three pieces for 10 million, 2017). First introduced in 2014, plot-based native ads have already dominated the market by now: Almost all the popular web television series have plot-based native ads. In addition, the spending on plot-based native ads amounted to two billion RMB in 2017(Three pieces for 10 million, 2017). The impressive growth of plot-based native ads calls for more attention and research from the academia, and this thesis deals with the effects of plot-based native ads and compares their effectiveness with that of other more traditional forms of television advertising.

Plot-based native ads are a novel and exclusive type of advertising in China, and they are specially designed for web television series. Plot-based native ads are played during the middle of episodes, and usually last about 30 seconds. The ads borrow plots and settings from the dramas and create scenes where characters from the dramas advertise for certain products and brands in explicit manners. Plot-based native ads have special intros and endings which are tailored to the particular dramas, to separate them from the real dramas. An example of the plot-based native ads is from Tantan (a social search mobile app like Tinder) in the fourth episode of *The Mystic Nine* which was the most popular web television series in 2016 ("Laojiumen", 2017). In the drama, Chenpi (a character of the show) is trapped in a hopeless and unrequited love. Based on this, the plot-based native ad creates a funny short story. First, a special intro was inserted, the intro was a mimic of the famous intro of Metro Goldwyn Mayer films with a slogan saying: "Be careful! The real thing is coming", and then the ad began: Chenpi asks the fortune teller about how to start a new relationship, and the fortune teller tells him to download a Tantan app and teaches him how to use it. The ending for the ad was a close up of the logo of Tantan (See Appendix A).

According to the Bai Yicong, who is believed to be the "father" of this new genre of

advertising, the core value of the plot-based native ads is creativity: The ads always try to connect the advertised products with the plots of the shows in a surprising way (“Behind the plot-based native ads”, 2016). Because plot-based native ads are creative and entertaining, the responses from the audiences are very positive as well: Viewers like to watch them. For instance, the collection of plot-based native ads from *The Mystic Nine* also received millions of views (http://www.iqiyi.com/playlist408243402.html). Moreover, because the ads are “native” parts of the episodes, even viewers with VIP membership which normally allow its members to skip all kinds of ads, have to watch the plot-based native ads. In other words, no one can “escape” from them, and this makes the plot-based native ads even more attractive to advertisers.

Plot-based native ads bring high returns on investment (ROI). A convincing example came from Dongpeng energy drink, one of the advertised products in *The Mystic Nine*. According to its marketing director, the brand awareness of Dongpeng increased by 50 percent and its sale increased by 30 percent after the plot-based native ads were broadcast along with the show (Zhu, 2017). Because of successful examples like Dongpeng energy drink, advertisers have realized the huge potential of plot-based native ads and embraced them with great passion. As a result, their price rose like a rocket. Two years ago, a piece of plot-based native ad only cost about 500,000 RMB (about 65,000 Euro); now, the average cost of one piece is one and a half million RMB (about 195,000 Euro), and for those popular shows, the price can go up to three million RMB (about 389,000 Euro) or even more (Ren, 2017).

In China, plot-based native ads are often compared to product placements by the practitioners in the industry, because they bear some resemblances. For instance, they both have some connections with the stories of the dramas. Many practitioners in the industry show preferences for plot-based native ads, as they are very entertaining and memorable, which helps to increase brand awareness and brand likeness in return. Their preferences are backed up by successful examples like Donpeng energy drink. On the other hand, plot-based native ads are treated as commercials. According to the regulations in China, TV stations are not allowed to insert any commercials in the middle of the dramas. Thus, plot-based native ads in the web dramas must be deleted when the dramas are aired on TV stations. As a result, there are also many advertisers continue to advocate for product placements, as they can reach TV audience and have closer connections with the drama.

1.1 The rise of the plot-based native ads

The practitioners traced the origin of plot-based native ads to *My Own Swordsman,* a fictional situation comedy which was broadcast during 2006 (Ren, 2017). In that show, the

character also advertised for some products. However, all the products were not real, and the practices were merely to make audience laugh (Ren, 2017). Almost 10 years later, the characters finally had the chance to advertise for some real products: In 2015, *Darker 2* made the first plot-based native ads in Chinese web dramas. Nevertheless, the show was not very popular, consequently, neither the practitioners nor the audience noticed this genre of advertising.

Plot-based native ads did not receive much attention until the broadcast of *The Mystic Nine* in the summer of 2016 (Ren, 2017). Produced by iQiyi, a popular online video platform in China, *The Mystic Nine* tells the stories of nine powerful and mystic families in the city Changsha in the era of republic. This show is a huge commercial success: Three weeks after its online debut, the show had already been viewed two billion times (Zhang, 2016), and by now it has received more than 12 billion views on iQiyi (http://www.iqiyi.com/a_19rrhbeaxt.html). More importantly, this show made several plot-based native ads for seven different brands, and these ads generated about 40 to 50 million RMB (about 650,000 Euro) revenue in total. Together the show and the ads created a synergy effect: Plot-based native ads suddenly became a buzz word and advertisers went crazy for them. Nowadays, it is difficult to find web dramas that do not have plot-based native ads (Ren, 2017).

There are several reasons behind the rise of the plot-based native ads. From the macro perspective, the different advertising regulations between online video platforms and TV stations in China (“Behind the plot-based native ads”, 2016) and the development of online video platform and web TV series (CINIC, 2016) account for the prosperity of online video advertising. From the micro perspective, the transformation of online video platforms’ business model helps to boost the growth of plot-base native ads (CINIC, 2016).The most important reason of the prosperity of online advertising lies in the different regulations between online video platforms and TV stations. In November 2011, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic China (hereinafter referred to SAPPRFT) launched a ban on “all TV stations airing commercials during TV dramas” (“SARFT bans”, 2012; Yang, 2011). According to this regulation, all TV stations needed to rearrange their TV dramas and delete all the commercials which were inserted into the dramas, or else they would face “stern punishments” (Yang, 2011). Apart from a decrease of mid-roll commercials in TV dramas, another direct consequence was, ironically, a sharp increase in the price of TV commercials (Lin, 2011). That is to say, advertisers had to spend more money than before to compete for fewer advertising spots. On the other hand, there is no regulation specifically aiming at commercials on online video platforms yet. Non-VIP users have to put up with the long pre-roll ads, and two to three mid-roll ads which usually last about

thirty to forty-five seconds in the dramas. In other words, there are more advertising spots on online video platforms and the price is very reasonable compared to that of the TV commercials (“Behind the plot-based native ads”, 2016). Hence, it is not surprising for advertisers to choose online video platforms.

Moreover, in recent years, online video platforms are developing at an unprecedented speed. Since 2012, Chinese government has pushed for media convergence and advocated for collaborations between TV stations and online video platforms (Yin & Liu, 2014). An important part of the collaborations is that the TV stations and the video websites share the same content, for instance, TV series or entertainment shows (Cao, 2012). The initial aim for the collaborations was to get the synergy benefits: The TV stations and the video platforms promote for the same contents jointly and manage to reach as much audience as possible. Moreover, the collaborations also enriched the video websites and helped them get more qualitative contents from the TV stations (Li, 2012; Wang, 2012). However, after years of development, video websites have grown rapidly, even outpaced the television stations. In addition to sharing content with TV stations, major video websites nowadays also invest a great deal in self-produced dramas and entertainment shows (CINIC, 2016). Nowadays, a great deal of web dramas have high ratings and good reputations (Ma, 2018). In other words, the contents produced by video websites have become more professional and appealing for audiences. As a result, more and more viewers move from TV stations to online platforms. According to a survey (Ma, 2017), there are more than 520 million monthly active online video users. The advertisers also follow this trend and shift their focus to video websites. According to Yiguan (2017), a data analysis service provider in China, in the third quarter of 2017, China’s online video advertising market reached 13.44 billion RMB. To sum up, the continuing growth of online video advertising allows for the success of plot-based ads.

Above mentioned two reasons are from macro perspectives, as they mainly explain the prosperity of online advertising as a whole. One specific reason for the recent popularity of plot-based native ads is the transformation of the business model of online video platforms. This is revealed by the fact that membership payment has become an essential part of the websites’ revenue (CINIC, 2016). For instance, iQiyi has more than 50 million VIP members (Li, 2018), and they claimed that the revenue from advertising and the revenue from paid membership have basically reached a 1:1 revenue share (Fu, 2017). Moreover, according to industrial analysis, China’s online video platforms have more than 100 million paid members in 2017, and this number will continue to increase in 2018 (Fu, 2017). The increasing number of paid members is a good sign for the online video platforms. Nevertheless, it also poses a challenge for the advertisers. Because VIP members can skip all the advertisements, which means that the value of advertising is

strictly limited. Under this circumstance, plot-based native ads which VIP members cannot even skip, become the top choice for advertisers.

In conclusion, the prevalence of plot-based native ads is by no means an accident. The different regulations between TV stations and video platforms, the development of the online video platforms and the mature business model of video platforms all build solid foundations for the boom of plot-based native ads.

1.2 Research questions

As aforementioned, audiences show favourable attitudes towards plot-based native ads. It is reasonable to infer that this is because compared with other more conventional forms of advertising, plot-based native ads exhibit different characteristics and forms which could lead to positive attitude. Thus, this research first investigates whether plot-based native ads could generate more positive ad attitudes than other types of advertising (i.e., regular commercials and product placements).

Also, this comparative research aims to study the advertising effects of plot-based native ads in a comprehensive way and compare their effectiveness with more traditional forms of advertising (i.e., product placements and regular commercials). In order to do that, the classical hierarchy-of-effects (HOE) model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961) and the Experience-Affect-Cognition (EAC space) model (Vakratsas, & Ambler, 1999) are used in this study. The three components from the models, namely brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention, are treated as specific indicators of the advertising effects. These three components are chosen because they represent different dimensions of the models respectively and because they are considered as more relevant and are extensively studied by other scholars as well (Bruner & Kumar, 2000). Moreover, compared with more conventional forms of advertising, plot-based native ads could generate more positive ad attitudes which could lead to more positive brand attitude and purchase intention in return (e.g., Karson & Fisher, 2005; Wahid & Ahmed, 2011). Thus, this research also examines whether ad attitude has an impact on brand attitude and purchase intention.

The target group of this study are consumers aged between 18 and 35 years in China, because they are the most frequent visitors of online video websites and take up more 60 percent of the total users of online video platforms (Xin, 2017). The research questions are as following:

RQ1: Compared to more conventional forms of advertising (i.e., regular commercials and product placements), do plot-based native advertisements generate more positive advertisement attitudes among consumers aged between 18-35 in China?

RQ2: Compared to more conventional forms of advertising (i.e., regular commercials

and product placements), do plot-based native advertisements outperform in increasing brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention among consumers aged between 18-35 in China?

1.3 Academic and social relevance

Using plot-based native ads is seen as a novel, trendy and impressive way to advertise for products and brands (Xiao, 2017) and this practice is enthusiastically embraced by the industry. Nevertheless, as a relatively new phenomenon, plot-based native ads are seldom studied by the academics. In fact, there is a lack of empirical evidence of whether plot-based native ads can generate more positive responses from the audience than other forms of advertising (i.e., product placements and regular commercials). This research examines the effects of plot-based native ads on consumers' brand awareness, ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention. By doing so, it can be determined whether the plot-based native ads have better performance over other forms of advertising and prove or disprove the popular view of the industry. More importantly, this study can narrow down the gap between the industry and academia. Hopefully, this study can draw other scholars' attention, and become the stepping stone for future research in diverse directions. As aforementioned, plot-based native ads are favoured by advertisers and are very expensive. If they do have more positive impacts on the audience, then it is worth to spend a million to produces the ads. However, if they cannot outperform other types of advertising in terms of generating positive responses from the audience, then it would be a waste of money to invest in them. Thus, this study, which is based on empirical results, can help advertisers decide whether to follow the hype and adopt plot-based native ads or not.

Secondly, previous studies argued that Chinese viewers were less tolerant with product placements than American viewers, and that Chinese audience tended to show negative attitudes towards product placements (McKechnie & Zhou, 2003). Nevertheless, these studies were conducted more than a decade ago. As product placements become more prevalent and viewers are more familiar with them, it is doubtful whether previous findings still hold true. Because this study incorporates product placements for comparison, it can also provide the latest findings on the effects of and the attitudes towards product placements. As a result, this study can provide the latest findings on Chinese audience's responses to product placements and verify whether previous finding still hold true or not.

Finally, this study can provide instructive information for the video platforms as well. Using plot-based native ads is an alternative and smart way to make everyone - including the VIP remembers watch advertisements. The adoption of this new type of advertising

allows online video websites to generate advertisement revenue and membership revenue, which are usually at conflicts, at the same time. Thus, viewers' reactions to plot-based native ads are of vital importance. If they like these ads, it is a win-win situation. However, if viewers are irritated by this practice, the video platforms will face a loss of members. This research studies viewers' attitudes towards plot-based native ads, hence, it can offer relevant insights and help online video platforms to rethink about their practices and make balanced choice between advertisement revenue and membership revenue.

1.4 Thesis Outline

Chapter two offers the theoretical framework for this study. First, it introduces the differences between product placements and plot-based native ads. Then, it discusses the antecedents of ad attitude and how different types of ads interact with these antecedents. After that, advertising effects models are explained to measure the effects of different types of ads. Finally, this chapter elaborates on various types of advertising could generate different cognitive and affective outcomes from the consumers. Relevant hypotheses are provided in this chapter.

Chapter three presents the methodology of this research. This chapter first discusses the experiment design: Different conditions are used to simulate different types of ads. Also, details of the implement of the experiment are clarified. Furthermore, the sampling method and the compositions of the respondents are justified. Finally, this chapter explains the scales used to measure the variables.

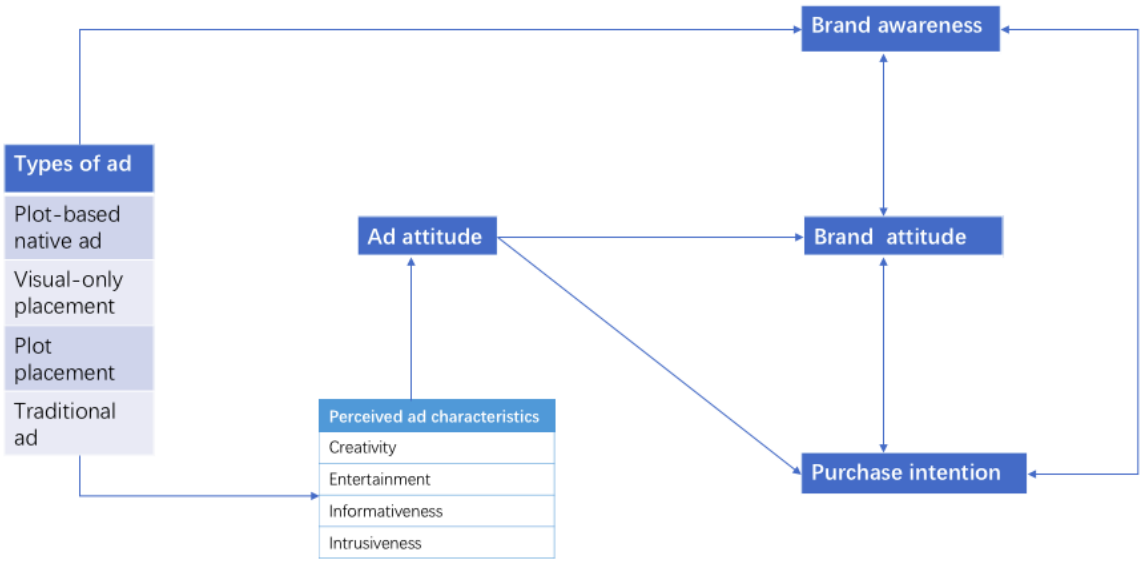
Chapter four provides the results of the experiment. One-way ANOVA tests are used to examine whether plot-based native ads have better advertising effects. Correlation tests and regression analysis tests are used to analyze the relationships between brand awareness, brand attitude, and purchase intention and whether ad attitude affect brand attitude and purchase intention.

The interpretations of the results and the answers to the research questions are provided in the final chapter. Moreover, this chapter focuses more on the rejected hypotheses and tries to provide possible explanations for the unexpected results. Furthermore, the theoretical and practical implications as well as the limitations of this study are included in this chapter. Finally, chapter five concludes with suggestions for future study.

2 Theoretical framework

This study aims to study whether plot-based native ads could generate more positive ad attitudes and more positive advertising effects (i.e., brand awareness, brand attitude, and purchase intention) than other types of advertising. In addition, it studies whether ad attitude affects brand attitude and purchase intention. Chapter two begins with the comparison between plot-based native ads and product placements. Also, it is important to know the antecedents of ad attitudes and how different types of ads could generate different attitudes from the audience. The third section elaborates on advertising effects models and explains the three dimensions of the models, namely, cognition, affect and, conation. The fourth section explains how various types of advertising could have different levels of brand awareness. The final section discusses how advertisement attitude could influence brand attitude and purchase intention. In addition, it explains as how different types of ads lead to different levels of brand attitude and purchase intention.

A conceptual model is presented as following:



(Figure 2.1 Conceptual model of this research)

2.1 Plot-based native ads and product placements

This section elaborates on the similarities and differences between plot-based native ads and product placements. Additionally, this study distinguishes between various types of product placements, namely, visual-only placements, audio-only placements and audio-visual placements, in order to facilitate the comparison.

There are some variations in the definitions of product placements (Tiwsakul, Hackley, & Szmigin, 2005). Nevertheless, all the definitions highlight the inclusion of a particular brand or product in movie or TV program and the paid nature of product placements. In this research, product placements refer to the actions of including the

name of a product or brand in a movie or in a television programme for promotional intention (d'Astous & Chartier, 2000).

Russel (2002) classifies product placements according to modality and categorises them into three types: visual, auditory or verbal, and plot connection. Visual placements mean the "appearance of the brand on the screen"; auditory or verbal placements refer to "the brand being mentioned in a dialogue", and plot placements mean that the brand is "integrated in the plot of the story", for instance, James Bond and his luxury sports cars (Russel, 2002, p.307). Plot placements usually combine both visual and auditory components (Tiwsakul, Hackley, & Szmigin, 2005) and thus, are also referred to as audio-visual placements (Gupta & Lord, 1998). This study only uses this term, hence audio-visual product placements, for consistency.

Plot-based native ads are most close to audio-visual placements, as they both incorporate audio and visual elements. Indeed, plot-based native ads and product placements share some similarities. First, both of them are paid (Balasubramanian, Karrh, & Patwardhan, 2006). Moreover, unlike regular commercials, they are connected to the plots of the dramas to some extent (Hudson, & Hudson, 2006).

On the other hand, they have distinct characteristics as well. First and foremost, product placements are subtle (Gupta & Lord, 1998) and appear natural (Russel, 2002) whereas plot-based native ads are very explicit about their advertising nature. In other words, viewers exposed to plot-base native ads clearly know that they are watching advertisements and could identify the sponsors, while viewers exposed to product placements might be uncertain about their nature: Whether they are product placements or mere coincidences? Second, product placements are integrated into the settings of the drama, they are a part of the drama (Hudson & Hudson, 2002). In contrast, plot-based native ads are independent of the show. They might borrow some plots from the story, but they do not affect the drama. The plots used by the plot-based native ads are more like secondary creations. Besides, they have special intros and endings to separate them from the real dramas.

In this research, researcher could only find the stimuli for visual-only placements and audio-visual placements, hence, only these two modalities are incorporated into the comparison. In addition, this study mainly focuses on plot-based native ads, the differences between two modalities of product placements will only be brought up when necessary.

2.2 Antecedents of advertisement attitude

Attitude towards advertisements is defined as "a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during particular

exposure situation" (Wahid, & Ahmed, 2011, p.22). Although it is not included in the advertising effects models, many scholars attach great importance to advertisement attitude, because it is a direct indicator of advertisement effectiveness (Raney, Arpan, Pashupati, & Brill, 2003).

It is widely acknowledged that advertisement attitude has a transfer effect on brand attitude as well as purchase intention (Wahid, & Ahmed, 2011, p.22). In other words, if the audience like the ads, they would probably develop favourable attitudes towards the associated brands and be more willing to buy the products. In contrast, if the audience consider the advertising is as irritating and annoying, their negative feelings would be transferred to the brands, and the brands would end up losing their market share (Chakrabarty & Yelkur, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative for practitioners to make commercials attractive and appealing for the audience. However, it is not an easy task, as people tend to show negative attitudes towards advertising in general (Blanco, Blasco, & Azorín, 2010; Wang, Zhang, Choi, & D'Eredita, 2002) and manage to avoid the advertisements whenever possible (Lee, Kim, & Ham, 2016).

Scholars devote considerable effort to study the factors that affect people's attitude towards advertisements. For instance, it can be the media through which advertisements are released (Wang, Zhang, Choi, & D'Eredita, 2002), the content and formality (Russel, 2002) of the advertisements, the nature of the products (Tiwsakul, Hackley, & Szmigin, 2005), the advertised brands (d'Astous, & Seguin, 1999), and ad credibility (Chakrabarty & Yelkur, 2006), just to name a few. In other words, elements that make one commercial successful might backfire when applied to another one. Fortunately, researchers have highlighted certain factors which are widely acknowledged to influence consumers' attitudes towards ads.

This section focuses on factors, positive or negative, which impact people's attitudes towards advertisements. In addition, it explains how various types of ads interact with these factors and gives hypotheses about how people react differently to them.

2.2.1 Creativity

Above all, creativity is an important factor in determining advertisement attitude (e.g., Smith, Chen, & Yang, 2008; Till & Baack, 2005). According to Burnett (1968), advertising creativity is 'the art of establishing new and meaningful relationships between previously unrelated things in a manner that is relevant, believable, and in good taste, but which somehow presents the product in a fresh new light' (as cited in Jurca & Madlberger, 2015, p. 54).

Smith, Chen, and Yang (2008) conclude that advertising creativity is always defined in terms of divergence and relevance. Divergence refers to "the extent to which an ad

contains elements that are novel, different, or unusual", while relevance means "the extent to which ad elements are meaningful, useful, or valuable to the consumer" (p.48). This study uses the definition offered by Smith and his colleagues (2008) and defines creativity as a two-dimensional concept that includes both divergence and relevance.

Empirical studies have found creativity to be essential for various forms of advertising such as TV commercials (Till & Baack, 2005), web advertisements (Raney et al., 2003) as well as advertisements on SNS sites (Lee & Hong, 2016). This is because creative ads contrast with consumers' advertising schema. A schema is a lasting perception of certain phenomenon which does not easily change once it is established (Jurca & Madlberger, 2015). In the context of advertising, the schema makes audience to interpret the ads as persuasive messages and provokes their negative responses, for instance, avoiding exposures to advertising (Jurca & Madlberger, 2015). Creative ads can challenge the advertising schema, because they offer high divergence and high relevance which are seldom seen in regular ads (Ibid.). In other words, they challenge people's perceptions of advertising. This contrast, or schema incongruity can stimulate people's positive attitudes which could lead to improving advertising effectiveness (Ibid.). In fact, Lee and Hong (2016) also argue that creative ads grab more attention and lead to more positive attitudes.

Smith, MacKenzie, Yang, Buchholz, and Darley (2007) contend that ad creativity has a strong and positive effect on attention to ad, and more importantly, ad attitude (Smith et al., 2007). In addition, they identify the interaction between divergence and relevance as the key determinant of the perceived ad creativity. In a later study led by Smith, which was also about ad creativity, the researchers focused exclusively on ad divergence and ad relevance (Smith et al., 2008). Again, the positive impact of creativity on ad attitude is confirmed, and the impact can reach maximum effectiveness when both divergence and relevance are achieved (Smith et al., 2008).

From the very beginning, plot-based native ads are characterized by their creativity. In Chinese, they are called *Chuang yi zhong cha* which means creative mid-roll ads, which already reveals their creative nature. The practices of creating funny stories and using characters in the show to advertise were completely unfamiliar and novel to the viewers. In other words, plot-based native ads are divergent from more conventional forms of advertising. Besides, plot-based native ads offer specific information about the products and brands which can be relevant for potential consumers.

In contrast, product placements (both visual-only and audio-visual) are less creative, as the products are only placed as props of the dramas to make the settings more real (Russel, 2002). In addition, people are already very familiar with them. As for regular commercials, despite the fact that practitioners have racked their brains to make them

creative (Sasser& Koslow, 2008), they are still far from being creative in most cases. Hence, it is reasonable to argue that regular commercials and product placements would be perceived as less creative than plot-based native ads.

Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 are formulated as following:

H1: Plot-based native ads are perceived as more creative than visual-only placements, audio-visual placements, and regular commercials.

H2: Perceived creativity has a positive effect on advertisement attitude.

2.2.2 Entertainment

Entertainment is another element that positively affects advertisement attitudes (Hudson & Hudson, 2006; Lee & Hong, 2016; Raney et al., 2003). Entertainment is "the ability to arouse aesthetic enjoyment" (Blanco, et al., 2010, p.4). Entertaining ads are exciting and cool (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). They can enhance the arousal, or emotional response of the audience which would positively affect advertisement attitudes in return (Raney et al., 2003). This is also in line with the intuitions, if the ads are entertaining and funny, people are prone to show positive attitudes towards them. Blanco and his colleagues (2010) argue that hedonic aspect of ads, namely, entertainment, has a positive impact on consumers' attitudes towards the practice of advertising. Similarly, Raney and his colleagues (2003) conducted an experiment to study the effects of web advertising contents which included entertaining and interactive elements. According to the results, they contend that perceived entertainment level is a strong indicator of attitudes towards the sites.

As discussed before, plot-based native ads are designed to be entertaining. The sceneries of the plot-based native ads tend to be funny and amusing. Moreover, the producers of the ads also manage to incorporate memes from popular culture to better entertain the audience. Hence, it is reasonable to argue that plot-based native ads are entertaining. Product placements might also be entertaining if they are woven into entertaining plots. However, they are mainly used to make the settings of the shows more realistic (Russel, 2002), and they have limited execution freedom to be entertaining. Similarly, regular commercials are far from being entertaining in most cases (Huang, Su, Zhou, & Liu, 2013). In other words, compared with plot-based native ads, product placements (both types) and regular commercials are expected to be less entertaining.

Relevant hypotheses are formulated as following:

H3: Plot-based native ads are perceived as more entertaining than visual-only placements, audio-visual placements, and regular commercials.

H4: Perceived entertainment has a positive effect on advertisement attitude.

2.2.3 Informativeness

Informativeness means “the ability to inform users about product alternatives that enable them to make choices yielding the highest value” (Rotzoll, Haefner, & Sandage, 1990, as cited in Lee & Hong, 2016, p.364). Blanco and his colleagues (2010) believe that informativeness is of importance to advertising effects. They explain the role of informativeness from a utilitarian, or instrumental perspective: If an ad is informative in terms of providing consumers with necessary knowledge of the products which helps consumers to make informed purchase decision, it is very likely that consumers will develop positive attitudes towards that ad. For instance, Blanco and his colleagues (2010)’ study illustrates that informativeness is positively related to consumers’ attitudes towards the ads. Their conclusion is also supported by study of Lee and Hong (2016) who conducted an experiment to study which factors have positive impacts on social media advertising. Based on the empirical results, they confirm that informativeness is a strong predictor for positive responses from the audience. In other words, informative ads are more valuable to the customers, as they can provide useful information. Consequently, customers tend to generate positive attitudes toward them.

As mentioned before, plot-based native ads are very explicit about their advertisement nature (Ren, 2017). Although the scenes are connected to the drama, the ads would always go back to and focus more the products or the brands in the end. They clearly introduce the functions or characteristics of the products and manage to provide as many details as possible. That is to say, the plot-based native ads are more useful for potential customers who have relevant needs. By the same token, regular commercials are also very informative in terms of providing details of products or brands. On the other hand, product placements are far from informative. This is especially true for visual-only placements which only stay in the background: They can be easily ignored by inattentive audience, let alone providing useful information (Russel, 2002). Audio-visual placements can be slightly more informative than visual-only placements, as they are mentioned verbally and may lead to elaboration on the products. Nevertheless, the elaboration can hardly go into more details (Russel, 2002). Thus, hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6 are formulated as following:

H5: Perceived informativeness will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads and regular commercials than in the conditions of visual-only product placements and audio-visual product placements.

H6: Perceived informativeness has a positive effect on advertisement attitude.

2.2.4 Intrusiveness

There are also many factors which negatively affect advertisement attitude, such as

repetitiveness (Lehnert, Till, & Carlson, 2013), length of the ads (Singh & Cole, 1993), and intrusiveness (Jurca & Madlberger, 2015). Plot-based native ads are relatively short. They are especially tailored to particular dramas. Thus, they never repeat themselves. In fact, even within one drama, the same brand would make different ads for different episodes. So, repetitiveness is not a problem for plot-based native ads.

This research primarily focuses on intrusiveness, as it is extensively studied (e.g., Lee, Kim, & Ham, 2016) and is more relevant for the study. Intrusiveness is defined as "a psychological reaction to ads that interfere with a consumer's ongoing cognitive processes" (Li, Edwards, & Lee, 2002, p. 39). Research has shown that intrusiveness is a significant negative predictor of advertisement attitude (Lee et al., 2016). This is because ads interrupt the viewing experience of the audience and the interruption is seen as "a threat to their behavioral freedom" (Lee et al., 2016, p.1429). According to Lee and his colleagues (2016), one way to combat this threat is to evaluate the ads in a negative way. That is why the perception of intrusiveness leads to negative attitudes toward the ads. Similarly, Edwards, Li and Lee (2002) argue that ad intrusiveness leads to feelings of irritation which in return cause negative response, such as, negative evaluation of the ad and ad avoidance. McCoy, Everard, Polak, and Galletta, (2008) conducted an experiment to study the online ad intrusiveness. They also confirmed that intrusive ads would cause feelings of irritation which directly leads to negative attitudes towards the sites as well as a decreased intention of revisiting the sites. Nevertheless, Edwards and his colleagues (2002) also claim that creative advertising strategies, for instance, increasing the relevancy of the ads and providing values to customers, can moderate and reduce perceptions of intrusiveness. To put it another way, audience would find ads that are creative and relevant less intrusive.

In this study, product placements might be the least intrusive because they are natural and seamless parts of the show (Russell, 2002; Hudson & Hudson, 2006). In addition, visual-only placements can be less intrusive than audio-visual placements as they are just visual stimulus which can be easily ignored by audience. Plot-based native ads and regular commercials are definitely more intrusive than product placements because of their explicit advertising nature. However, because plot-based native ads are more creative, entertaining, and these characteristics can lead to a decreased level of perceived intrusiveness. Regular commercials which are not creative nor entertaining are more likely to provoke negative feelings of the viewers (Blanco et al., 2010) and might be rated as the most intrusive.

H7 and H8 are formulated as following:

H7: Plot-based native ads are perceived as more intrusive than visual-only product placements and audio-visual product placements, but less intrusive than regular

commercials.

H8: Perceived intrusiveness has a negative impact on advertisement attitude.

2.2.5 Ad types and ad attitude

Plot-based native ads are creative, entertaining, informative, but intrusive. On the other hand, product placements (both visual and audio-visual) are nonintrusive, but less creative and entertaining. In fact, it remains unclear how these contradicting factors interact with each other and which one has a bigger impact on ad attitude. It is difficult to tell which kind of advertising can generate more favourable responses from the audience. However, according to literature discussed above and the fact that plot-based native ads are relatively popular with viewers (e.g., the cuts of plot-based native ads from *The Mystic Nine* received millions of views), it is reasonable to argue that compared with product placements (both types) and regular commercials, plot-based native ads could generate more favourable responses from the audience.

Thus, Hypothesis 9 (H9) is formulated as following:

H9: Advertisement attitude will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads than in the conditions of visual-only product placements, audio-visual product placements and regular commercials.

2.3 Advertising effects model

A large body of literature deals with the hierarchy of effects models which play important roles in helping practitioners and scholars understand the effects of advertising. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) proposed a six-step hierarchy model of effects (the HOE model), and their model has dominated the academia and industry ever since (Vakratsas, & Ambler, 1999). These six steps are brand awareness, brand knowledge, brand liking, brand preference, brand conviction and the actual purchase (Barry & Howard, 1990). Brand awareness refers to the stage where advertising raise the awareness of the existence of the products or the brands (Lavidge & Steiner ,1961; Wijaya, 2015). Brand knowledge means that the customers know what the products could offer (Lavidge & Steiner ,1961). The third stage is brand liking where consumers generate favourable attitudes towards the products and the brands (Ibid.). Brand preference is developed from brand liking, refers to a point that consumers express preference for this particular product over other possible alternatives (Ibid.). The fifth step is brand conviction, it describes a stage where costumers believe the message delivered via advertising (Wijaya, 2015), or in other words, consumers believe that the purchasing decision is wise (Lavidge & Steiner ,1961). The conviction can be understood as purchasing intention (Barry & Howard, 1990). The final step is the actual purchase.

The first two steps are about information and ideas (Lavidge & Steiner,1961), thus, they are classified into the cognition dimension (Barry & Howard, 1990). The third and fourth stage of liking and preference are about attitudes and feelings, and belong to the affect dimension (Vakratsas, & Ambler, 1999). The last two steps, the intention of purchasing and actual purchase, are categorized into the conation or action dimension (Wijaya, 2015). These three dimensions are considered as the crucial dimensions to understand and measure the effects of advertising on consumers (Barry & Howard, 1990).

The HOE model has been widely used by researchers and practitioners. However, in recent decades, it has incurred some criticism. One problem is about the sequences of the three dimensions. According to the traditional hierarchy models, audiences respond to advertisements in a very ordered way (Yoo, Kim, & Stout, 2004), the most common sequence is cognition-affect-conation which is also the sequence proposed by Lavidge and Steiner (1961). Nevertheless, other scholars also propose other possible alternatives. For instance, Krugman (1965, as cited in Barry & Howard, 1990) suggests a cognition-conation-affect hierarchy. In this model, consumers who are exposed to repetitive advertisements might make the purchase and then decide whether they like it or not. Similarly, Ray and his colleagues (1973, as cited in Yoo, Kim, & Stout, 2004) develop a conation-cognition-affect model. In this model, behaviour comes first, attitudes are cultivated to reinforce the action, and selective learning are further developed to support the action. To sum up, there are many variations in terms of the consequence of hierarchy, and these variations all make sense in their specific contexts.

The second problem of the HOE model is more fundamental, as some scholars even go further to question the existence of *hierarchy* of the effects (Barry & Howard, 1990; Vakratsas, & Ambler, 1999). In fact, Barry and Howard (1990) reviewed a huge body of literature and acknowledge that they could barely found any evidence to support the existence of advertising hierarchies. Likewise, Weilbacher (2001) also criticizes the hierarchical models and argues that these models are “little more than rationally and intuitively sensible” (p.2). Weilbacher (2001) argues that the knowledge of human thought processes is little known, and that advertising is only a small part of marketing communication, hence, the model is not really accurate. Furthermore, the prerequisite of hierarchical models is the implicit idea that different dimensions take place in certain orders, whatever the order is. However, these distinct dimensions do not necessarily happen in sequence, they can happen at the same time and interact with each other, and these interactions could be found in the literature (Vakratsas, & Ambler, 1999).

Although scholars cannot agree on the sequences of the hierarchy or even the existence of hierarchy, they all agree on that the three dimensions, cognition, affect, conation, are important to understand advertising effects. As a result, Vakratsas and

Ambler (1999) abandoned the notion of hierarchy and proposed a three-dimensional space model (EAC Space Model) which suggests the three dimensions could happen simultaneously and interact with each other. In the EAC space model, E stands for experience, which equals to conation or action; A is the acronym for affect and C refers to cognition. These three dimensions are also in line with the dimensions of the HOE model.

In the EAC Space model (Vakratsas, & Ambler, 1999), the coordinates of three dimensions indicate "the relative strength of the corresponding advertising effect" and the coordinate of each dimension might vary according to the specific context. In other words, one advertisement might have different levels of concentration on three dimensions. Different contexts, such as product category, target audience, competitors, would result in different positioning in the space model (Vakratsas, & Ambler, 1999). The EAC space model highlights the specific contexts and offers more flexibility in studying and explaining the advertising effects.

The primary concern of this study is to measure the advertising effects instead of establishing the perfect model. So, the study adopts the EAC Space model and studies the three dimensions without considering their hierarchies. For each dimension, a specific component is need. The three components come from Lavidge and Steiner's model (1961). This is because regardless of the controversy of hierarchy, these two models have exactly the same dimensions, and the components (stages) proposed by Lavidge and Steiner's model (1961) are still widely used.

Consequently, brand awareness (cognition), brand attitude (affect) and purchase intention (conation) are used to measure advertising effects. These three components are included mainly for two reasons. First, they are more relevant than other components and are extensively studied other scholars as well (e.g., Bruner & Kumar, 2000; Lee & Hong, 2016; Wahid & Ahmed, 2011). Second, there are well-established and reliable scales to measure them. Admittedly, the actual purchase, the ultimate goal of every advertisement, is of great importance as well. However, because this research cannot really measure it, it is not taken into consideration. It is worth mentioning that in Lavidge and Steiner 's (1961) original model, they use brand liking rather than brand attitude. But, in this study, brand attitude is used to represent the affect dimension. Both two concepts are about attitude. Brand liking, in Lavidge and Steiner's (1961) original model, is defined as a unipolar concept which already postulates a favourable attitude. Nevertheless, it is also highly possible that consumers exposed to ads eventually develop negative attitudes toward the brands, because they dislike the ads. On the other hand, brand attitude is a bipolar concept and is more neutral. Besides, other studies also use brand attitude instead of brand liking (e.g., Jurca & Madlberger, 2015; Wahid & Ahmed, 2011). Thus, brand attitude is adopted in the conceptual model.

As aforementioned, the three dimensions could happen simultaneously and interact with each other (Vakratsas, & Ambler, 1999). Thus, hypothesis 1(H1) is formulated as following:

H10: Brand awareness, brand attitude, and purchase intention are correlated.

2.4 Ad types and brand awareness

The modality of the advertising influences brand awareness. For instance, visual product placements are employed “as props to make television sets more realistic” (Russel, 2002, p. 308). The meanings they offer are no more than creating the contexts. On the other hand, auditory placements become scripts of the show. They are inherently more meaningful than visual placements as they can generate elaboration which lead to improved memory (Russel, 2002). For example, if a person is not looking at the television, he or she may miss the visual placements, however, this person can still hear the program and process the auditory placements. Based on empirical results, Russel argues that spoken stimuli lead to greater memory than visual stimuli. Similarly, Gupta and Lord (1998) also conducted an experiment and proved that audio-only placements have greater impact on viewers’ memories of the brands than visual-only placements. In summary, these studies “suggest a hierarchy of memory effects according to placement modality of a visual–verbal combination, followed by verbal-only and then visual-only placements” (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003, p.141).

As a brand-new genre of advertising, there is no academic literature concerning plot-based native ads’ impacts on brand awareness. However, since they share some similarities with product placements, relevant findings and theories can be used to predict their effects. As revealed by aforementioned research, dual-model placements have greater impact on brand awareness than placements which are implemented through one model (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003). Hence, it can be inferred that plot-based native ads can increase more brand awareness than visual-only placements.

When it comes to the comparison between audio-visual placements and plot-based native ads, the theory of prominence is needed. Prominence is usually operationalised as “the size of the product or logo, centrality in the screen……number of mentions, duration on screen, strength of placement and /or modality” (Cowley & Barron, 2008, p.90). In other words, if a brand or a product is conspicuous and recognizable, it is prominent. The more prominent the product or the brand is, the better the cognitive outcomes (i.e., brand recall or brand awareness) are (Gupta & Lord, 1998). According to Gupta and Lord (1998), there is a positive relationship between product prominence and brand recall. Likewise, d’Astous and Chartier (2000) also found in an experiment that prominent placements largely raise brand recognition and memory. These findings are also

supported by Brennan, Dubas and Babin's (1999) study, as they also argue that, prominence leads to higher recognition. To sum up, higher prominence contributes to higher recognition and awareness.

As aforementioned, prominence can be operationalised according to size of the logo, exposure time and modality (Cowley & Barron, 2008). Essentially, plot-based native ads are ads whose sole purpose is to promote the products while being entertaining. Thus, compared with product placements whose promotional purpose has to give way to the plots of the drama, plot-based native ads have more execution freedom to introduce and advertise for the products in an explicit and straightforward way. For instance, plot-based native ads can have more exposure time (around 30 seconds), more focus on the products. Thus, the researcher argues that plot-based native ads are more prominent than audio-visual placements. By the same token, regular commercials which are solely about the products should have same or almost the same effect on brand awareness.

In summary, plot-based native ads as well as regular commercials incorporate both audio and visual components and enjoy more prominence. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that they would outperform product placements (both audio-visual and visual-only placements) in increasing brand awareness.

H11: Brand awareness will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads and regular commercials than in the conditions of visual-only product placements and audio-visual product placements.

2.5 Ad attitude's impact on brand attitude and purchase intention

A popular stream of advertisement research focuses on the effects of advertisement attitude, especially its impact on brand attitude and purchase intention (e.g., Hwang, Yoon, & Park, 2011; Karson & Fisher, 2005). Both theoretical and empirical studies argue that advertisement attitude has a positive impact on brand attitude and purchase intention (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Wahid & Ahmed, 2011). If people like the advertisements, they will also like the brands and have higher purchase intention. This section explains the impact of ad attitude on brand attitude and purchase intention.

2.5.1 Ad attitude's impact on brand attitude

It was widely acknowledged that the article by MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986) explored the constructs of advertisement attitude in a systematic and holistic way (Karson & Fisher, 2005). In their study, the researchers developed four models to explain the relationship between ad attitude and brand attitude and purchase intention (MacKenzie et al., 1986). The first one is the affect transfer hypothesis (ATH) which suggests "a direct one-way causal flow" from ad attitude to brand attitude (p.131). The second one is the

dual mediation hypothesis (DMH) which proposes a direct flow from ad attitude to brand attitude, and an indirect flow from ad attitude to brand attitude via the mediation of brand cognitions. The third one is the reciprocal mediation hypothesis (RMH) which argues that ad attitude and brand attitude are mutually affected. Finally, the fourth one is the independent influences hypothesis (IIH) which assumes that there is no causal relationship between ad attitude and brand attitude, and they are affected by ad cognitions and brand cognitions respectively (MacKenzie et al., 1986).

In their study, MacKenzie and his collegues (1986) claim that the DMH model is superior to the other three models, as the data has a better with the DMH model. Nevertheless, later studies re-examined their models and yielded different results. For instance, Huang, Su, Zhou, and Liu (2013) apply the four models by MacKenzie and his colleagues (1986) in the context of online viral video sharing. Based on their experimental results, they argue that the ATH model best describes the process of attitude formation in the context of viral video advertising (Huang et al., 2013). According to their study, attitude towards viral video has a direct and strong effect on brand attitude, but no significant effect on brand cognitions. Similarly, Karson and Fisher (2005) also replicate the study by MacKenzie and his colleagues (1986) and substitute website attitude for advertisement attitude, as their study is about shopping websites. Again, they find out substantial evidence for the positive relationship between site attitude and brand attitude. Both of the DMH model and the ATH model have good fit, but the DMH model has a better fit.

To sum up, both of the DMH model and the ATH model could provide reasonable explanations for the effects of advertisement attitude on brand attitude (MacKenzie et al., 1986). Scholars could not reach agreement on which model is superior. Nevertheless, the fact that one's attitude towards the ads has an impact on his/her brand attitude is widely acknowledged (Najmi et al., 2012, p.125).

Thus, Hypothesis 12 (H12) is formulated as following:

H12: Advertisement attitude has a positive impact on brand attitude.

In addition, based on previous hypotheses (H9 & H12), hypothesis on brand attitude under different conditions (H13) is formulated as following:

H13: Brand attitude will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads than in the conditions of visual-only product placements, audio-visual product placement and regular commercials.

2.5.2 Ad attitude's impact on purchase intention

Purchase intention is also believed to be positively affected by advertisement attitude. Nevertheless, the relationship between ad attitude and purchase intention can be direct or indirect (e.g., through brand attitude). According to MacKenzie and his colleagues (1986),

ad attitude affects purchase intention through brand attitude. However, there are also many studies which support a direct causal relationship between ad attitude and purchase intention. For example, Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000) study the influence of company credibility and celebrity on consumers' reactions to the ads and the brands. According to their study, ad attitude positively and directly affects purchase intention. Likewise, the study by Karson and Fisher (2005) reveals a significant effect of ad attitude on purchase intention, and according to them, the impact is even stronger than that on brand attitude. In addition, Wahid and Ahmed (2011) study the advertising effects on Yemeni female consumers and confirm a significant and positive relationship between ad attitude and purchase attention. Moreover, they also disprove the previous finding which suggests that brand attitude is a mediator between ad attitude and purchase intention (Wahid & Ahmed, 2011).

The findings regarding the relationship between ad attitude and purchase intention are inconsistent. However, in this study, more recent findings are adopted (e.g., Karson & Fisher, 2005; Wahid & Ahmed, 2011). Thus, a direct causal relationship between ad attitude and purchase intention is proposed. Hypothesis 14 (H14) is formulated as following:

H14: Advertisement attitude has a positive impact on purchase intention.

Again, based on previous hypotheses (H9 & H14), hypothesis on purchase intention under different conditions (H15) is formulated as following:

H15: Purchase intention will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads than in the conditions of visual-only product placements, audio-visual product placements and regular commercials.

3 Methods

This chapter justifies the methodology of this study. This research has a quantitative approach. In order to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, an online experiment with four conditions was conducted. This chapter first introduces the research design and offers the details of the experiment. After that, the sampling process and the descriptive information of the sample are provided. Lastly, the scales to measures the variables as well as the statistical analysis techniques used are explained.

3.1 Research design

The aim of this research is to find out whether plot-based native ads have better performances in terms of generating more positive advertising effects among viewers. In order to answer these questions, it is important to have audiences exposed to the different types of ads and then compare their different reactions. Thus, an experiment is the most appropriate method for this research, because experiments allow researchers to control conditions and to study the exact effects of certain variables (Neuman, 2002). Also, experiments can provide strong tests for causal relationship through isolating the relevant variables and excluding the irrelevant ones (Neuman, 2002). In addition, the experiment for this research was conducted online. This was because an online experiment was cost-efficient and could reach more respondents regardless of the limitations of time and space (Fricker, & Schonlau,2002).

Previous studies (e.g., Russel, 2002) have categorized product placements into three types according to their modalities, and they are: Audio-only placements, visual-only placements, and audio-visual placements. Nevertheless, the researcher could only find stimuli for the latter two. Thus, only these two types of placements were incorporated into the researcher design. In this experiment, a one-factor between-group design was used. The factor was ad type and it had four levels, namely, plot-based native ads, visual-only placements, audio-visual placements, and regular commercials. The between-group design means that participants are allocated to different groups and each participant is tested once only (Field & Hole, 2003). This choice was made for two reasons. First of all, compared to repeated-measures design, between-group designs are simple: The researchers only need to randomly assign the participants to different conditions. Second, between-group designs can effectively prevent the practice effects (Field & Hole, 2003). Practice effects refers to that previous experience of taking a test would have influence on taking the same test again (Field & Hole, 2003). In this research, for example, participants would be asked about brand awareness (i.e. “I can recognize Dongpeng energy drink”). If the participants had seen all four types of advertising, they might have been more than aware of this brand, which would affect the experiment results in the end.

The target group for this research was the Chinese population between the age of 18 to 34 years oldd. In order to get to more respondents and make them feel easy to participate in the survey, the questionnaires were translated into Chinese. Wen Juan Xing, the oldest and largest online survey platform in China (https://www.wjx.cn/), was used to distribute the survey and recruit respondents. Participants could take part in the experiment via smartphones, tablets, and computers. Before entering the survey, respondents were shown a consent form, telling them that their participation in the survey was completely voluntary and that their information was only used for scientific purpose and was kept confidential. A cover story was used to mislead the respondents about the real purpose of this experiment and was also shown in the consent form. According to the cover story, the goal of the study was to investigate people's opinions towards the popular online video platforms and web dramas. Only respondents who agreed to participate could proceed with the survey.

The survey began with general demographic questions, such as gender, age, and education. Respondents who were not in the age group of this study (i.e., younger than 18 to older than 35 years) were directly sent to the end of survey. After that, respondents were asked about their video consumption habits, for example: "Which video platforms(s) do you usually use to watch videos? (Multiple choices possible)." These questions were all misleading questions and were irrelevant for this study. After finishing the misleading questions, respondents entered a new page: They were told that they would be shown a short fragment from *The Mystic Nine*, the most popular web drama in 2016, and would be asked to rate it subsequently.

There were four different video fragments containing different types of advertising, namely, the plot-based native ad, the visual-only placement, the audio-visual placement, and the regular commercial of Dongpeng energy drink. For between-group designs, it is essential to make sure that all the respondents are randomly assigned to different conditions (Field & Hole, 2003). Only in this way can researchers minimize the systematic differences between groups and attribute the different results to experimental manipulations (Field & Hole, 2003). In this experiment, the respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four fragments (conditions) by Wen Juan Xing's system.

In order to make sure the manipulations of different types of ads worked out, respondents were asked if they were able to see the video. Respondents who were not able to watch the video were directly forwarded to the end of the questionnaire. Only respondents who were able to see the video could continue with the survey. There was one question (Q8) asking what the fragment was about and it had four answers which generalized the storylines of the four fragments. Ideally, if the respondents had chosen the wrong answers, they would have been directly forwarded to the end of the survey as well.

However, the answers should vary according to the fragments the respondents were exposed to and the system was not smart enough to tell whether the answers were correct at that phase. Thus, respondents were forwarded to the following questions no matter what they chose. The researcher had to check the data file and delete the wrong answers from the data file manually afterwards. Luckily, all the respondents who saw the videos chose the right answer for Q8, thus, all of them were kept in the data file.

After the manipulation check, the respondents were asked how much they liked the show, which was a misleading question as well. Then, they were asked whether the video contained a brand (Q10) and if so, to choose that brand from four options (Q11). Respondents who did not choose Dongpeng energy drink were directly forwarded to the end of the questionnaire. This was because after these two questions, the real survey began. The following questions dealt with brand awareness, ad characteristics, brand attitude, and purchase intention. If the respondents were not aware of the ads or were not able to recognize the products, which was possible in the conditions of product placements, they were not able to answer the following questions. In the end, their answers would be treated as invalid answers anyway. For instance, in the survey, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent do they agree or disagree with following statements: “The ad is humorous,” “The ad is entertaining,” and “The ad makes me laugh.” If the respondents were not aware of the existence of product placements of Dongpeng, they were not able to evaluate the entertainment of the ads at all. Even if they managed to give answers somehow, the answers would not be accurate nor valid. Thus, respondents who were not able to identify the existence of an ad or recognize the Dongpeng energy drink, were directly forwarded to the end of survey. When the respondents finished all the survey questions, they were shown a thank you note and were encouraged to leave some comments. The English version and the Chinese version of the survey questionnaire can be found at Appendix C and Appendix D.

3.2 Stimuli

All the four fragments came from the show *The Mystic Nine* which has 48 episodes in total and all the ads came from the same brand Dongpeng energy drink. All four ads were played in the middle of the fragments, and the viewers did not only watch the ads but the fragments from the show as well. The first stimulus contained the plot-based native ad of Dongpeng and it came from the sixth episode of *The Mystic Nine.* In fact, there were four plot-based native ads of Dongpeng energy in the whole series, namely in episode six, episode seven, episode 15 and episode 36 respectively. After random sampling (by rolling dice), the ad from episode six was chosen. The plot for this fragment is as following: The troops of Changsha city are busy preparing for war, then the adjutant appears and asks

the soldiers what they are packing. One soldier answers that they are packing Dongpeng energy drink, because Dongpeng could provide them with extra energy and help us perform better in the battlefield. This ad itself lasted about 23 seconds. The fragment was about 2:04 minutes.

The second stimulus was the visual-only product placement of Dongpeng and it was directly cut from episode 31. In that episode, the two side characters are exhausted and trapped in the swamp, then one character says: “I am going to play the trump card.” Then he takes out Dongpeng energy drink and asks his friend to drink it. A close-up of Dongpeng is given, however, neither of the characters mentioned its name. Thus, it was seen as a visual-only placement and was used as a stimulus. This fragment was 2:02 minutes.

The third stimulus was an audio-visual placement which was also directly cut from episode 29. Two characters, same from episode 31, are discussing what to do next, then one man says to another: “You need to have some Dongpeng, get more energy. So, if I cannot run, you can carry me on your back.” In this scene, Dongpeng is given a close-up and is mentioned verbally. Hence, it was treated as the audio-visual placement. This fragment was 2:02 minutes.

The fourth stimulus was a fragment containing a regular commercial of Dongpeng. The commercial was downloaded from YouTube and then inserted into the middle of the fragment of episode 16. This episode was chosen because number 16 was generated (from 1-48) through an online random number generator. The plot for this fragment was as following: The butler tells Erye (one of the main characters) that his wife is going to take a boat on the lake and Erye is happy about that. Then the regular commercial broke in: In the commercial, there are several scenes of a celebrity doing his work, such as, acting, singing, and boxing. Meanwhile, the celebrity drinks Dongpeng to keep himself energetic. The line of the commercial, “If you are tired and exhausted just drink Dongpeng,” is repeated several times. After the commercial, the fragment went on: Erye goes to see his wife and finds out that his wife is vomiting blood. The commercial had no connections with the plots and it lasted about 28 seconds. The final compilation was 2:02 minutes. Admittedly, using a celebrity in the fourth fragment could have had an impact on consumers’ ad attitude (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Nevertheless, this decision was made for practical reasons. First and foremost, there were few regular commercials of Dongpeng with appropriate length: Most of them were either too short (5-15 seconds) or too long (3-5 minutes). Second, most of the regular commercials of Dongpeng which were available online had low definition. If they were inserted into the drama fragment which had high definition, the compilation would be very unnatural. In addition, all the commercials found on Chinese online video platforms had logos of the platforms and even the logos of

shopping websites, which could be distracting and confusing for respondents to identify the real sponsor. Finally, the chosen commercial was filmed five years ago, and the celebrity used in that commercial has stepped away from the limelight in recent years. The commercial itself was boring and the celebrity could not make the commercial better. Thus, the researcher still chose the 28-second-long regular commercial as a stimulus and inserted it into the compilation. The screenshots of four stimuli can be found Appendix B.

3.3 Sampling

The sample of this study was composed of Chinese citizens aged between 18 to 35 years. Admittedly, teenagers under 18 are also heavy users of online video platforms (Ma, 2017). Nevertheless, parental consents are needed for participants under age 18, thus, they were excluded from this study.

In terms of sampling, the researcher used the paid service offered by Wen Juan Xing to reach the ideal respondents. Wen Juan Xing has more than 2.6 million members in their sample library. Their members are from diverse age groups, with members aging from 20-40 accounting for 70 percent of the total population in their sample library. In addition, their respondents come from all parts of China and have different occupations. In other words, respondents from their sample library are very representative of the age demographic for this study. Wen Juan Xing sent out the link of this survey to their members via emails and respondents who finished the whole survey could get a reward of three to four RMB (less than one Euro).

The data collection lasted only three days, from April 7th to April 10th, 2018. This survey reached 420 people, however, only 164 participants could see the video(s) and finished the survey. Because Wen Juan Xing automatically deleted the invalid answers, the researcher could not find out at which question(s) the respondents quitted. Because all the respondents who were able to see the video chose the right answer for the question (Q8) what the fragment was about, all the 164 respondents were left in the data.

Out of this sample, 103 respondents (62.8%) were female and 61 (37.2%) were male. Respondents were between the age of 20 to 35 with an average age of 28.66 and a standard deviation of 3.31. Among them, 26 participants (15.9%) were between 20 to 25 years old, 90 respondents (54.9%), were between 26 to 30 years old, and 48 respondents (29.3%) were between 31 to 35 years old. In addition, most of the respondents (93.3%) have a bachelor or a higher degree (n = 153).

From this group, 41 respondents were exposed to the visual-only placement, 40 respondents were exposed to the audio-visual placement, 41 respondents were exposed to the plot-based native ad and 42 respondents were exposed to the regular commercial. Hence, the respondents were equally distributed across the conditions. According to Field

and Hole (2003), it takes at least 28 participants for each group to reach a standard α level of .05. In this study, the size of each group far surpassed the criterion of 28 people.

3.4 Measurements

This section clarifies relevant scales to measure the variables in this study. All the scales used for this research are established scales which are widely used by other scholars as well. Most of the variables, except for ad attitude and brand attitude, were measured with five-point Likert scales, ranging from (1) completely disagree to (5) completely agree. The scales for ad attitude and brand attitude were five-point semantic differential scales. All the scales were transformed into average scales for the sake of interpretation.

A factor analysis and a reliability test were performed to examine the statistical properties of each scale. In general, factor analysis is used to assess whether all the items in one scale measure the same concept (Pallant, 2016). In order for factor analysis to be allowed, the overall sample size should be more than 150 (Pallant, 2016). In this study, the sample size was 164 which exceeded the criterion. Also, for factor analysis, Bartlett's test of sphericity should be significant ($p < .05$), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value should be above .50, and the factor loading for each item should reach a minimum of .30 (Pallant, 2016).

Generally, the reliability test is to make sure that the items within the scale are internally consistent (Pallant, 2016). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient is the most common used indicator for internal consistency, and ideally, Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be above .70. Nevertheless, because Cronbach's alpha values are sensitive to the number of the scale items, it is quite common for short scales to have low Cronbach values, for instance, lower than .50 (Pallant, 2016). In this situation, the mean intern-item correlation for the items is more appropriate to report, and it should be higher than .30 (Pallant, 2016).

Perceived creativity of the ad was measured with the scale used by Lee and Hong (2016) whose original Cronbach's alpha was .90. This scale included four items, and they were: "The ad is unique," "The ad is really out of ordinary," "The ad is intriguing," and "The ad is surprising." All four items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00). The KMO value was .77 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). All four items had sufficient factor loading on the overall concept (.85, .84, .69, and .76). In this research, the Cronbach's alpha was .79, suggesting a reliable scale. Deleting any item would not make the value higher, thus, all four items were kept in this scale. The mean for this scale was 3.67 and the standard deviation was 0.81.

The scale to measure **perceived ad informativeness** was also from the study of Lee and Hong (2016). In their study, the initial Cronbach's alpha was .82. The scale included following three items: "Information obtained from the ad would be useful," "I would learn a lot from using the ad," and "I think the information obtained from the ad would be helpful." All three items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction. The KMO value was .69 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). All three items had sufficient factor loading on the overall concept (.83, .84, and .89). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .81, which would not be higher if one item was deleted. Therefore, all three items were kept in the scales. The mean for this scale was 3.47 and the standard deviation was 0.89.

Perceived ad entertainment was measured with the scale used by Smith, Chen and Yang (2008). In their study, the scale had a Cronbach value of .95. The scale included three items and they were: "The ad was humorous," "The ad was entertaining," and "The ad made me laugh." All three items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction. The KMO value was .63 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). All three items had sufficient factor loading on the overall concept (.87, .69, and .84). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha was .72. Deleting the item "The ad was entertaining" would make the value higher: .77. Thus, this item was deleted. Only two items, namely, "The ad was humorous" and "The ad made me laugh" were used to measure ad entertainment. The Cronbach's alpha for this two-item scale was .77. The mean for this scale was 3.45 and the standard deviation was 0.99,

The scale for **perceived ad intrusiveness** was from the study of McCoy and his colleagues (2008). The original Cronbach's alpha was .90. The scale had seven items, starting with "When I saw the ad, I thought it was:" and ending with "distracting," "disturbing," "forced," "interfering," "intrusive," "invasive," and "obtrusive." All items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction. The KMO value was .91 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). All seven items had sufficient factor loading, ranging from .73 to .86. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .90, which would not be higher if any item was deleted. Thus, all seven items were kept in the scale. The mean for this scale was 2.61 and the standard deviation was 0.92.

Ad attitude was measured with scale used by Bruner and Kumar (2000). This scale was a semantic differential scale and its initial Cronbach's alpha was .87. This scale included following items: "good/bad," "like/dislike," "irritating/ not irritating," and "interesting/ not interesting." All four items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction. The KMO value was .80 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). All four items had sufficient factor loading on the overall concept (.89, .84, .79, and .82). In this research, the Cronbach's alpha was .85, suggesting a very

reliable scale. Deleting any item would not make the Cronbach's alpha value higher. Therefore, all four items were kept in the scale. The mean for this scale was 3.48 and the standard deviation was 0.90.

The scales to measure brand awareness, brand attitude, and purchase intention were all derived from the study of Smith and his colleagues (2008). The scale of **brand awareness** had an original Cronbach's alpha value of .94. The scale included three items: "I am aware of Dongpeng energy drink," "I can recall Dongpeng energy drink," and "I can recognize Dongpeng energy drink." All three items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction. The KMO value was .62 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). All three items had sufficient factor loading on the overall concept (.73, .72, and .71). The Cronbach's alpha was .52. The inter-item correlation of three items ranged from .27 to .29, which was in the optimal range. However, the mean of the inter-item correlation was .28, lower than .30. As revealed by the indicators, this scale was not very reliable. When interpreting the results associated with brand awareness, this has to be taken into consideration. the This scale had a mean of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.59.

In terms of **brand attitude**, respondents were asked "what is your overall evaluation of the brand you saw", and the answers included three items: "Bad/good," "pleasant/unpleasant," "unfavorable/ favourable." Its initial Cronbach's alpha was .97. All three items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction. The KMO value was .72 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). All three items had sufficient factor loading on the overall concept (.85, .86, and .88). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .83, which would not be higher if one item was deleted. Hence, all three items were kept in the scale. The mean for this scale was 3.72 and the standard deviation was 0.82.

The scale to measure **purchase intention** contained two items: "I would like be likely to purchase the advertised brand," and "I would be likely to recommend the brand to a friend." Its initial mean inter-item correlation for the items in this scale was .84. Both items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction. The KMO value was .50 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$). The two items had sufficient factor loading on the overall concept (.92, and .92). In this research, the Cronbach's alpha was .81, suggesting a very reliable scale. The mean for this scale was 3.48 and the standard deviation was 0.98.

To give a clear overview of the scales used in this research, a table with all the relevant information of each scale is presented on the next page.

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Measurements

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's alpha	Inter-item correlation mean
Perceived ad creativity	164	3.67	0.81	1.50	4.75	.79	-
Perceived ad informativeness	164	3.47	0.89	1.33	5.00	.81	-
Perceived ad entertainment	164	3.45	0.99	1.00	5.00	.77	-
Perceived ad intrusiveness	164	2.61	0.92	1.29	5.00	.90	-
Ad attitude	164	3.48	0.90	1.00	5.00	.85	
Brand awareness	164	4.21	0.59	1.67	5.00	.52	.28
Brand attitude	164	3.72	0.82	1.00	5.00	.83	-
Purchase intention	164	3.48	0.98	1.00	5.00	.81	-

3.5 Data analysis

The experiment data were analysed with SPSS Statistics, using a combination of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA), simple linear regression analyses, and correlation analyses. H1, H3, H5, H7, H9, H11, H13, and H15 about the presumed differences between the different types of advertising and they were tested with one-way ANOVA and post-hoc tests. The one-way ANOVA test is used to compare whether there are significant differences in the means across three or more groups (Pallant, 2016). The one-way ANOVA test includes one independent variable and one dependent variable: The independent variable should be categorical with three or more levels and the dependent variable should be measured at continuous level (Pallant, 2016). Each time, the independent variable was categorical, and it was the ad type with the four levels. The dependent variables were: Perceived ad creativity (H1), perceived entertainment (H3), perceived informativeness (H5), perceived intrusiveness (H7), ad attitude (H9), brand awareness (H11), brand attitude (H13), and purchase intention (H15) and they were all measured on continuous level.

There are several assumptions associated with one-way ANOVA (Pallant, 2016). First, as aforementioned, the dependent variables must be measure at interval or ratio

level (Salkind, 2007). The second assumption is random sampling, meaning that data is randomly sampled from the population, which is almost impossible in real life situations (Pallant, 2016). Thirdly, observations should be independent from each other, this means that each measurement is not influenced by any other measurement (Salkind, 2007). The fourth one is normal distribution in the populations. Again, the outcomes of the samples are often not normally distributed, luckily, the SPSS techniques are robust for the violations of this assumption (Pallant, 2016). For group size larger than 30, the violation of this assumption is not a problem (Pallant, 2016). The final assumption is the homogeneity of variance, meaning that the variability of score of each group should be similar and this is tested with the Levene's test. If this assumption is violated, the results of ANOVA cannot be used, instead, Welch or Brown-Forsythe are more appropriate to report. Post-hoc tests are usually used after ANOVA tests to examine the differences between each of the groups (Pallant, 2016). In this study, Turkey's Honestly Significant Different (HSD) test was used as it is one of the most used post-hoc tests (Pallant, 2016).

H2, H4, H6, H8, H12, and H14 were about causal relationships between variables and they were tested with simple linear regression analyses. Simple Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression tests are often used to verify linear relationships (Allen, 2017). For OLS regression analysis, both the independent variables and the dependent variables have to be measure at continuous level. There are several assumptions of OLS regression as well (Pallant, 2016). First of all, the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables should be linear. The second one is independence of observations. Thirdly, the values of each variable should come from normal distribution (Pallant, 2016). The final one is homoscedasticity, meaning that the variance should be equal for levels of the independent variables (Allen, 2017). In addition, there should be no outliers in the data set (Pallant, 2016).

It is worth mentioning that H2, H4, H6, and H8 were about how well perceived creativity (H2), perceived entertainment (H4), perceived informativeness (H6), and perceived intrusiveness (H8) could predict ad attitude. Theoretically, multiple regression, which tells how well a set of independent variables could predict the outcome of one dependent variable, could be used to test these four hypotheses simultaneously (Pallant, 2016). Nevertheless, there is one important assumption of multiple regression and it is that multicollinearity should not exist among the independent variables (Pallant, 2016). Multicollinearity refers to the phenomenon that the independent variables are highly correlated with each other and it can jeopardise the accuracy of the multiple regression model (Pallant, 2016). According to the tests, except for the correlation between ad intrusiveness and ad entertainment (r = .15, p = .056), all correlations between four variables were all significant: The pearson's Rs ranged from .15 to .67 (p < .05). In other

words, the correlation test suggested that the four independent variables were significantly correlated with each other, which meant that multicollinearity existed. In this case, a multiple regression was not appropriate. As a result, H2, H4, H6, and H8 were tested with single linear regression analyses.

H10 which assumed brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention were correlated with each other was tested with correlation tests. Generally, correlation tests are used to examine the direction as well as the strength of the linear relationship between two continuous variables (Pallant, 2016). Again, there are several assumptions for correlation tests. First, the variables should be measured at interval or rational level. Second, the observations are independent. Third, the scores of the variables should be normally distributed. The final one is homoscedasticity. The Pearson correlation coefficients (Pearson's R) are the most frequently used indicators for correlation relationship. Pearson's R can range from -1 to +1, the sign in front tells that whether the relationship is positive (+) or negative (-), the number indicated the strength of the relationship (Pallant, 2016). Also, it is worth mentioning that correlation does not automatically equal to causality: If two variables are correlated, it does not necessarily mean that one causes the other (Pallant, 2016).

Some of the hypotheses mainly focused on whether plot-based native ads could outperform other types of adverting. Thus, when it came to the interpretations of ANOVA tests, the researcher concentrated on the comparisons of plot-based native ads against the other three. As for the differences between the other three types of ads, for instance, the *p*-values for their post hoc tests, were included Appendix F and Appendix G. In this way, the result sections are more concise and relevant. In the result sections, η^2 was used to indicate the effect size of the ANOVA tests. Generally, a value larger than .01 suggests a small effect size, a value larger than .06 suggests a medium effect size, and a value lager than .14 indicates a large effect size (Cohen, 1992, as cited in Allen, 2017). Standardised regression coefficients could indicate the effect size of the regression model (Allen, 2017). In the text, the standardised regression coefficient was indicated by *b**. Generally, a value below .10 suggests a trivial effect size, a value between .10 and .30 means a small to medium effect size, a value between .30 and .50 suggests a medium to large effect size, and a value above .50 suggests a very large effect size (Salkind, 2007)

4 Results

This chapter provides the results of the experiments. There are 15 hypotheses for this study. For each hypothesis, the test used to examine it, the results of the test, as well as whether this hypothesis was rejected or accepted are presented. Furthermore, a table (Table 4.1) with the 15 hypotheses is displayed at the end of this chapter. The rejected and accepted hypotheses are highlighted in different colour. Consequently, a clear overview of the results of this study is provided.

4.1 Ad types and perceived ad creativity

Hypothesis 1 assumed that plot-based native ads are perceived as more creative than other types of advertising (i.e., visual-only placements, audio-visual placements and regular commercials). A one-way ANOVA with post-hoc test was performed to test H1 and check whether the mean score of plot-based native ad was significantly higher than the means of others. According to the test of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's statistic was 0.716 and *p* value was .544. The *p* value for Levene's test was greater than .05, meaning that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. Thus, the results of the ANOVA could be used for further analysis. According to the ANOVA test, in terms of perceived ad creativity, there were no significant differences at the $p < .05$ level between the plot-based native ad ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.91$), the visual-only placement ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.74$), the audio-visual placement ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.82$), and the regular commercial ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.80$), $F(3, 160) = 0.18$, $p = .911$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$. The means of four types of ads were slightly higher than the midpoint, suggesting that they were just mediocre in terms of ad creativity.

The *p* values for each comparison are as following: for the comparison between the plot-based native ad and the visual-only placement, $p = .995$; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the audio-visual placement, $p = .972$; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the regular commercial, $p = .999$; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual placement, $p = .908$; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the regular commercial, $p = 1.000$; for the comparison between the audio-visual placement and the regular commercial, $p = .934$. To sum up, four types of advertising showed similar level of perceived creativity and the plot-based native ad was not perceived as more creative. Thus, H1 had to be rejected.

4.2 Perceived ad creativity and ad attitude

Hypothesis 2 suggested that perceived ad creativity has a positive effect on ad attitude. An OLS regression analysis was conducted to test H2. The regression model of

ad attitude as the dependent variable and perceived ad creativity being the independent variable was significant, F (1, 162) = 107.61, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = .40$. The regression model was thus useful for predicting ad attitude and the effect size was substantial: Perceived ad creativity could predict 39.9% of the differences in ad attitude. Perceived ad creativity, $b^* = 0.63$, $t = 10.37$, $p < 0.001$ had a significant and strong association with ad attitude. For each additional point on perceived ad creativity, which ranges from one to five, there is 0.70 increase in ad attitude. This was a large effect because it entailed a 2.8-point difference in ad attitude between respondents scoring the lowest (1) and respondents scoring the highest (5) on perceived ad creativity. In other words, perceived ad creativity positively affected ad attitude and respondents were more positive to the ads they perceived as creative. Thus, H2 was accepted.

4.3 Ad types and perceived ad entertainment

Hypothesis 3 predicted that plot-based native ads are perceived as more entertaining than other types of advertising. Again, a one-way ANOVA with a post-hoc test was performed to test H3. According to the test of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's statistic was 0.567 and p value was .638. According to the ANOVA test, four types of ads scored significantly differently in perceived ad entertainment at the $p < .05$ level: F (3, 160) = 11.37, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$. However, post-hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD Test suggested that the mean of plot-based native ad ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.90$) was only significantly higher than the regular commercial ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.91$). There were no significant differences between the plot-based native ad on the one hand, and the visual-only placement ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.94$), and the audio-visual placement ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.89$) on the hand. The regular commercial was significantly lower than others, in fact, it was perceived as the least entertaining ad three types of ads. This was also revealed by the fact that the mean of the regular commercial was lower than the midpoint. Nevertheless, the mean of the plot-based native ad as well as the means of product placements were just marginally higher than the midpoint, meaning that they were not very entertaining either.

The p values for each comparison are as following: for the comparison between the plot-based native ad and the visual-only placement, $p = .694$; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the audio-visual placement, $p = .987$; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the regular commercial, $p = .000$; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual placement, $p = .486$; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the regular commercial, $p = .001$; for the comparison between the audio-visual placement and the regular commercial, $p = .000$. Tu sum up, the plot-based native ad was perceived as more entertaining than the

regular commercial, but it did not exceed the visual-only placement nor the audio-visual placement. Hence, H3 was only partly accepted.

4.4 Perceived ad entertainment and ad attitude

Hypothesis 4 suggested that perceived ad entertainment has a positive effect on ad attitude. An OLS regression analysis was conducted to test H4. The regression model used ad attitude as the dependent variable and perceived ad creativity as the independent variable. The model was significant, F (1, 162) = 29.65, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = .16$. The regression model was thus useful for predicting ad attitude and the effect size was medium to large: Respondents' scores on perceived ad entertainment could predict 15.5% of the variance in scores on the changes in ad attitude. Perceived ad entertainment, $b^* = 0.39$, $t = 5.44$, $p < 0.001$ had a significant and moderate association with ad attitude. For each step increase in perceived ad entertainment, which ranges from one to five, there is 0.36 increase in ad attitude, which was moderate as it entailed a 1.44-point difference in ad attitude between lowest score (1) and the highest score (5) on perceived ad entertainment. In other words, entertaining ads were able to generate positive ad attitudes and ad attitude was indeed positively affected by perceived ad entertainment. Thus, H4 was accepted.

4.5 Ad types and perceived informativeness

Hypothesis 5 argued that plot-based native ads and regular commercials are more informative than product placements (both types). Similarly, H5 was tested with a one-way ANOVA and a post-hoc test. For the test of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's statistic was 0.303 and p value was .823. According to the ANOVA test, in terms of perceived ad informativeness, there were no significant differences at the $p < .05$ level between four types of advertising, F (3, 160) = 2.56, $p = .057$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. The post-hoc comparison with the Turkey HSD TEST further proved that: The plot-based native ad ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.90$) was not significantly higher than the visual-only placement ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.88$) and the audio-visual placement ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.88$). Also, the regular commercial ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.87$) did not score significantly higher than the audio-visual placement. Nevertheless, because the H5 was a directional hypothesis, the p-value can be divided by two. After division, a significant difference between the regular commercial and the visual-only placement was found, $p = .031$. The mean scores of the four ads were just a little higher than then the midpoint, indicating that they did not provide too much information for the potential consumers.

The p values for each comparison are as following: for the comparison between the plot-based native ad and the visual-only placement, $p = .278$; for the comparison between

plot-based native ad and the audio-visual placement, p = .652; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the regular commercial, p = .893; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual placement, p = .924; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the regular commercial, p =.061; for the comparison between the audio-visual placement and the regular commercial, p = .244.To sum up, four types of advertising were perceived as almost equally informative and only one significant difference between the regular commercial and the visual-only placement was found. Hence, H5 which argued plot-based native ads and regular commercials were more informative than product placements (both types), was only partially accepted.

4.6 Perceived ad informativeness and ad attitude

Hypothesis 6 presumed that perceived ad informativeness would have a positive impact on ad attitude and it was tested with an OLS regression analysis. The regression model of ad attitude as the dependent variable and perceived ad informativeness being the independent variable was significant, F (1, 162) = 81.11, p < 0.001, R^2 = .33. The regression model was thus useful for predicting ad attitude and the effect size was medium to large: 33.4% of the differences in ad attitude could be predicted based on perceived ad informativeness. Perceived ad informativeness, b^* = 0.58, t = 9.00, p < 0.001 had a significant and moderate association with ad attitude. For each additional point on perceived ad informativeness, which ranges from one to five, there is 0.70 increase in ad attitude. This was also considerable, as it entailed a 2.8-point difference in ad attitude between people scoring the lowest (1) and people scoring the highest (5) on perceived ad informativeness. In other words, perceived ad informativeness did positively contribute to the ad attitude. Thus, H6 was accepted.

4.7 Ad types and perceived intrusiveness

Hypothesis 7 argued that plot-based native ads are more intrusive than product placements (both types), but less intrusive than regular commercials. A one-way ANOVA and a post-hoc test were performed to test H7. According to the test of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's statistic was 2.84 and p value was .040. The p value for Levene's test was smaller than .05, meaning that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated. Thus, the results of ANOVA could not be used. Instead, Robust Tests of Equality of Means, or to be more specific, the results of Robust Welch test were used for further analysis. According to the Robust Welch tests, in terms of perceived ad intrusiveness, no significant differences were found between four types of advertising at the p < .05 level, F (3, 88.10) = 0.89, p = .452. The post-hoc comparison with the Turkey HSD TEST further

proved that: Surprisingly, the plot-based native ad (M = 2.78, SD = 0.96) had the highest mean score. The visual-only placement had the lowest mean score (M = 2.49, SD = 0.72) while the audio-visual placement (M = 2.64, SD = 0.87) and the regular commercial (M = 2.52, SD = 1.08) ranked in between. However, the differences were not statistically significant. Moreover, the means of all four types of were lower than the midpoint, which suggested that the ads were not perceived as very intrusive.

The p values for each comparison are as following: for the comparison between the plot-based native ad and the visual-only placement, p = .488; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the audio-visual placement, p = .894; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the regular commercial, p = .551; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual placement, p = .895; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the regular commercial, p = 1.000; for the comparison between the audio-visual placement and the regular commercial, p = .932.To conclude, all four types of ads showed similar level of perceived intrusiveness and no significant differences were found. Thus, H7 had to be rejected.

4.8 Perceived ad intrusiveness and ad attitude

Hypothesis 8 suggested that perceived ad intrusiveness has a negative impact on ad attitude. An OLS regression analysis was conducted to test H8. The regression model used ad attitude as the dependent variable and perceived ad intrusiveness as the independent variable. The model was significant, F (1, 162) = 105.19, p < 0.001, R^2 = .39. The regression model was thus useful for predicting ad attitude and the predictive power effect size was medium to large: Respondents' scores on perceived ad intrusiveness could predict 39.4 % of the variance in scores on the changes in ad attitude. Perceived ad intrusiveness, b^* = -0.63, t = -10.26, p < 0.001 had a significant and strong association with ad attitude. For each step increase in perceived ad intrusiveness, which ranges from one to five, there is 0.61 decrease in ad attitude. Again, this was considerable, because it entailed a 2.44-point difference in ad attitude between the lowest score (1) and the highest score (5) on perceived intrusiveness. That is to say, the more intrusive the ads were perceived, the more negative ad attitudes the ads could generate. Thus, H8 was accepted as well.

4.9 Ad types and ad attitude

Hypothesis 9 assumed that plot-based native ad would generate more favourable ad attitudes than other types of advertising and it was tested with a one-way ANOVA and a post-hoc test. For the test of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's statistic was 1.123 and p value was 0.341. According to the ANOVA test, in terms of ad attitude, there were

no significant differences at the $p < .05$ level between four types of advertising, F (3, 160) = 0.56, p = .643, partial η^2 =.01. The post-hoc comparison with the Turkey HSD TEST further illustrated that: Although the plot-based native ad (M = 3.59, SD = 0.87) scored higher than the visual-only placement (M = 3.54, SD = 0.78), the audio-visual placement (M = 3.36, SD = 0.91), and the regular commercial (M = 3.43, SD = 1.03), the differences were not statistically significant. In addition, the mean scores of four types of ads were slightly higher than the midpoint, indicating a rather neutral attitudes towards advertising in general.

The p values for each comparison are as following: for the comparison between the plot-based native ad and the visual-only placement, p = .993; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the audio-visual placement, p = .645; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the regular commercial, p = .844; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual placement, p = .805; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the regular commercial, p = 0.948; for the comparison between the audio-visual placement and the regular commercial, p = .984. To sum up, respondents did not show more positive attitudes towards the plot-based native ad. As a result, hypothesis 9 had to be rejected.

4.10 Brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention

Hypothesis 10 argued that brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention are correlated. A correlation test was performed to test H10. According to the test, there was a significant and moderate correlation between brand awareness and brand attitude, r = .45, $p < .001$. The more the respondents knew Dongpeng energy drink, the more positive their attitudes towards the brand were. Likewise, there was a significant and moderate correlation between brand awareness and purchase intention, r = .48, $p <$ 0.001. The more familiar the respondents were with Dongpeng energy drink, the higher their purchase intention. Also, there was a significant and strong correlation between brand attitude and purchase intention, r = .74, $p < 0.001$. The more positive brand attitudes the respondents had, the higher their purchase intention. To sum up, brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention were correlated. Therefore, H10 was accepted.

4.11 Ad types and brand awareness

Hypothesis 11 suggested that plot-based native ads and regular commercials could generate more brand awareness than visual-only placements and audio-visual placements. It was tested with a one-way ANOVA and a post-hoc test. According to the test of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's statistic was 2.258 and p value was 0.084.

According to the one-way ANOVA test, when it came to brand awareness, there were significant differences at the $p < .05$ level between four types of advertising, F (3, 160) = 5.90, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. A post-hoc comparison with the Turkey HSD TEST was performed to further examine the differences. The plot-based native ad ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.53$, $p = .034$) and the regular commercial ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$) scored significantly higher than the visual-only placement ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.70$), but did not score significantly higher than the audio-visual placement ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.43$). On the other hand, no significant differences were found between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual only placements. Also, the plot-based native ad, the regular commercial, and the audio-visual placement scored much higher than the midpoint, illustrating that these three ads were excel at raising more brand awareness.

The p values for each comparison are as following: for the comparison between the plot-based native ad and the visual-only placement, $p = .034$; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the audio-visual placement, $p = .879$; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the regular commercial, $p = .528$; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual placement, $p = .199$; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the regular commercial, $p = .000$; for the comparison between the audio-visual placement and the regular commercial, $p = .159$.

To sum up, in terms of generating brand awareness, the plot-based native ad and the regular commercial did perform better than the visual-only placement. However, they did not outperform the audio-visual placement, which also generated similar level of brand awareness. Thus, H11 which suggested that plot-base native ads and regular commercials exceed product placements (both types) in generating brand awareness was only partially accepted.

4.12 Ad attitude and brand attitude

Hypothesis 12 presumed that ad attitude would have a positive impact on brand attitude and it was tested with an OLS regression analysis. The regression model of brand attitude as the dependent variable and ad attitude being the independent variable was significant, F (1, 162) = 244.19, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = .60$. The regression model was thus useful for predicting brand attitude and the effect size was very large: Ad attitude could predict 60.1% of the differences in brand attitude. Ad attitude, $b^* = 0.78$, $t = 15.63$, $p < 0.001$ had a significant and strong association with brand attitude. For each additional point on ad attitude, which ranges from one to five, there is 0.71 increase in brand attitude. This was quite substantial, as it entailed a 2.84-point difference in brand attitude between respondents scoring the lowest (1) and respondents scoring the highest (5) on brand

attitude. In other words, ad attitude plays an important role in affecting brand attitude. A positive ad attitude would automatically lead to a positive brand attitude. Consequently, H12 was accepted.

4.13 Ad types and brand attitude

Hypothesis 13 predicted that plot-based native ads could generate more positive brand attitudes than visual-only placements, audio-visual placements and regular commercials. Similarly, this hypothesis was tested with a one-way ANOVA as well as a post-hoc test. According to the test of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's statistic was 0.521 and *p* value was .669. According to the ANOVA test, for brand attitude, there were no significant differences at the $p < .05$ level between four types of advertising, F (3, 160) = 0.32, p = .812, partial η^2 =.01. The post-hoc comparison with the Turkey HSD TEST further illustrated that: Though, the regular commercial (M = 3.81, SD = 0.87) scored higher than the plot-based native ad (M = 3.72, SD = 0.85), the visual-only placement (M = 3.70, SD = 0.70, and the audio-visual placement (M = 3.63, SD = 0.88), yet the differences were not statistically significant. Also, the mean scores of these ads were just slightly higher than the midpoint, demonstrating that respondents showed a rather neutral attitude towards Dongpeng energy drink.

The *p* values for each comparison are as following: for the comparison between the plot-based native ad and the visual-only placement, p = 1.000; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the audio-visual placement, p = .970; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the regular commercial, p = .955; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual placement, p = .984; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the regular commercial, p = .929; for the comparison between the audio-visual placement and the regular commercial, p = .770.To sum up, plot-based native ad did not exceed in generating more favourable brand attitude. Consequently, H13 had to be rejected.

4.14 Ad attitude and purchase intention

Hypothesis 14 suggested that perceived ad attitude has a positive impact on purchase intention. An OLS regression analysis was performed to test H14. The regression model used purchase intention as the dependent variable and ad attitude as the independent variable. The model was significant, F (1, 162) = 140.82, $p < 0.001$, R^2 = .47. The regression model was thus useful for predicting ad attitude and the effect size was medium to large: Respondents' scores on ad attitude could predict 46.5 % of the variance in scores on the changes in purchase intention. Ad attitude, b^* = 0.68, t = 11.87, $p < 0.001$ had a significant and strong association with purchase intention. For each step

increase in ad attitude, which ranges from one to five, there is 0.74 increase in purchase intention. This was a large effect, as it entailed a 2.96-point difference in purchase intention attitude between the lowest score (1) and the highest score (5) of ad attitude. That is to say, for the respondents, ad attitude is crucial for making purchase intention, a positive ad attitude is very likely to transform into purchase intention. Thus, H14 was accepted.

4.15 Ad types and purchase intention

Hypothesis 15 assumed that plot-based native ads could generate higher purchase intention than other types of advertising. Likewise, the final hypothesis was tested with a one-way ANOVA as well as a post-hoc test. For the test of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's statistic was 0.586 and *p* value was .625. According to the ANOVA test, when it came to purchase intention, there were no significant differences at the $p < .05$ level between four types of advertising, F (3, 160) = 0.31, p = .820, partial η^2 =.01. The post-hoc comparison with the Turkey HSD Test also confirmed that: Although, the regular commercial (M = 3.58, SD = 1.01) scored higher than the plot-based native ad (M = 3.49, SD = 1.02), the visual-only placement (M = 3.48, SD = 0.91), and the audio-visual placement (M = 3.38, SD = 0.99), the differences were not statistically significant. All four types of ads just scored slightly higher than the midpoint, which indicates that Dongpeng did not succeed in invoking purchase intention.

The *p* values for each comparison are as following: for the comparison between the plot-based native ad and the visual-only placement, p =1.000; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the audio-visual placement, p = .955; for the comparison between plot-based native ad and the regular commercial, p = .971 for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the audio-visual placement, p = .967; for the comparison between the visual-only placement and the regular commercial, p = 0.959; for the comparison between the audio-visual placement and the regular commercial, p = .773. To conclude, all four types of advertising generated average level of purchase intention and the plot-based native ad did not outperform. As a result, Hypothesis 15 had to be rejected as well.

4.16 Summary

To sum up, H2, H4, H6, H8, H10, H12, and H14 were fully accepted; H3, H5 and H11 were partially accepted; and H1, H7, H9, H13, and H15 were fully rejected. A table generalizing the results of this experiment is presented on next page. The accepted hypotheses are highlighted in green, the rejected hypotheses are highlighted in red, and the partly accepted hypotheses are coloured in yellow.

Table 4.1 Overview of the accepted and rejected hypotheses.

	Hypotheses
Ad characteristic	H1: Plot-based native ads are perceived as more creative than visual-only placements, audio-visual placements, and regular commercials.
	H3: Plot-based native ads are perceived as more entertaining than visual-only placements, audio-visual placements, and regular commercials.
	H5: Perceived informativeness will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads and regular commercials than in the conditions of visual-only product placements and audio-visual product placements.
	H7: Plot-based native ads are perceived as more intrusive than visual-only product placements and audio-visual product placements, but less intrusive than regular commercials.
	H2: Perceived creativity has a positive effect on advertisement attitude.

Ad attitude and its antecedents	H4: Perceived entertainment has a positive effect on advertisement attitude.
	H6: Perceived informativeness has a positive effect on advertisement attitude.
	H8: Perceived intrusiveness has a negative impact on advertisement attitude.
	H9: Advertisement attitude will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads than in the conditions of visual-only product placements, audio-visual product placements and regular commercials.
Advertising effects	H10: Brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention are correlated.
	H11: Brand awareness will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads and regular commercials than in the conditions of visual-only product placements and audio-visual product placements.
	H12: Advertisement attitude has a positive impact on brand attitude.
	H13: Brand attitude will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads than in the conditions of visual-only product placements, audio-visual product placement and regular commercials.
	H14: Advertisement attitude has a positive impact on purchase intention.
	H15: Purchase intention will be higher in the conditions of plot-based native ads than in the conditions of visual-only product placements, audio-visual product placements and regular commercials.

Chapter 5 Discussions and conclusions

Despite the fact that plot-based native advertising became prominent in web series in recent years, it is seldom examined by the academia and its alleged powerful effects on consumers' perceptions have never been experimentally proved. Considering this, the researcher tried to unravel this industry myth and proposed two research questions. The first research question is *Compared to more conventional forms of advertising (i.e., regular commercials and product placements), do plot-based native advertisements generate more positive advertisement attitudes among consumers aged between 18-35 in China?* The second one is *Compared to more conventional forms of advertising (i.e., regular commercials and product placements), do plot-based native advertisements outperform in increasing brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention among consumers aged between 18-35 in China?* In order to answer the research questions, an

online experiment was conducted to examine the effects of plot-based native ads and compare their effectiveness with product placements and regular commercials.

As the final chapter, this chapter presents the conclusions and discussions of this research. The first section answers the research questions. The second section concentrates on the rejected hypotheses and tries to provide explanations for the unexpected results. After that, the theoretical and practical implications of this study are addressed in the third section. The fourth section discusses the limitations of this study. In addition, based on the limitations of this study, suggestions for future studies are also provided in this section.

5.1 Conclusions

According to empirical results, compared with more conventional forms of advertising, the plot-based native ad showed almost no differences in ad characteristics (i.e., perceived creativity, entertainment, informativeness, and intrusiveness) and advertisement attitudes, except that it was more entertaining than the regular commercial. Consequently, the answer to RQ1 is: Compared to more conventional forms of advertising (i.e., regular commercials and product placements), plot-based native ads do ***not*** generate more positive ad attitudes among consumers aged between 18-35 in China.

When it comes to advertising effects, again, no significant differences in advertising effects were found between the plot-based native ad and the other three, except that the ploy-based native ad raised more brand awareness than the visual-only placement. As a result, the answer to RQ2 is: Compared to more conventional forms of advertising (i.e., regular commercials and product placements), plot-based native ads do ***not*** outperform in increasing brand awareness, brand attitude and purchase intention among consumers aged between 18-35 in China.

5.2 Discussions of the results

Fifteen hypotheses were proposed to answer the research questions. In the following section, they are classified into three clusters in order to make the discussions easier to follow. In addition to discussing which theoretical perspectives were supported, this section pays ample attention to rejected hypotheses, providing potential explanations for the unexpected results.

5.2.1 Ad types and ad characteristics (H1, H3, H5, and H7)

H1 predicted that plot-based native ads are perceived as more creative, and it was rejected. There are several possible explanations for the rejection of H1. First of all, when plot-based native ads first came into people’s attention, audiences were amazed by their forms. However, because of the extensive usage of plot-based native ads in web series,

the audiences became familiar with them. Consequently, plot-based native ads are no longer novel or unusual as they used to be, and the audiences are bored with them as well (“No more creativity in plot-based native ads”, 2017). In addition, when the professionals talk about plot-based native ads, they always emphasize the surprising way the ads make use of the plots, the twists that the ads create and the ads’ connections to current memes (“Sogo’s plot-based native ads”, 2017). The plot-based native ad for Dongpeng is acceptable, but the way it connects to the plots is quite predictable (soldiers use energy drink in the battlefield). In other words, it was not surprising or funny enough and as a result, it was not perceived as more creative.

H3 argued that plot-based native ads were more entertaining, and it was partly accepted. The plot-based native ad was indeed more entertaining than the regular commercial. This is probably because the regular commercial itself is repetitive and boring. Nevertheless, the plot-based native ad did not outperform the product placements. Apart from the aforementioned reasons in previous paragraph, another possible explanation is the following: Because the placements are woven into the plots, and according to Hudson and Hudson (2006), when placements are integrated into the entertaining contents, they could create stronger emotional connections, which lead to more positive responses in return. The same hold true for the plot-based native ad, and that is probably why no significant differences were found between the plot-based native ad and the placements.

H5 predicted that plot-based native ads and regular commercials would be more informative than both types of product placements, and it was only partly accepted. There were no significant differences between four types of ads, except that the informativeness of the regular commercial was found to be significantly higher than the visual-only placement. One reason is the following: Dongpeng is an energy drink, the message behind it is quite straightforward. Customers do not need extra information. That is probably why respondents scored similarly on ad informativeness.

H7 argued that plot-based native ads would be more intrusive than product placements, but less intrusive than regular commercial. It was completely rejected, because no significant differences between the four types of ads were found. All four types scored below the midpoint in intrusiveness, indicating that respondents did not find these ads very intrusive. One possible explanation for this result is that the plot-based native ad and the regular commercial were too short (around 30 seconds) to be intrusive. Another reason lies in the involvement of the respondents. Compared with normal viewers, the respondents were less involved into the show: They only watched two-minute fragments, which were too short to make the respondents feel involved. This is in accordance with the work of Edwards and his colleagues (2002), as they argue that the

more the audiences are involved with the show, the more they find the ads intrusive. Vice versa, if the audiences are less involved with show, they would probably find the ads less intrusive. Thus, the fact that the ads were short and the fact that respondents were not involved with the show could explain the rejection of H7.

5.2.2 Ad attitude and its antecedents (H2, H4, H6, H8, and H9)

The next set of hypotheses argued that perceived creativity (H2), perceived entertainment (H4), and perceived informativeness (H6) have positive impacts on ad attitudes while perceived intrusiveness (H8) negatively affects the ad attitudes. All of these hypotheses were accepted, and this is in line with previous studies (e.g., Smith et al., 2008; Lee & Hong, 2016). Among these factors, perceived ad creativity and perceived intrusiveness made the strongest contribution to explain ad attitude. H9 claimed that plot-based native ads would generate a more positive ad attitude than the other three types of ads and it was rejected as well. No significant differences between four types of ads in terms of ad attitude were found. All four types scored slightly higher than the midpoint, indicating a rather neutral attitude towards the ads in general. These findings could be explained by the fact that almost no differences in perceived ad characteristics. In other words, plot-based native ad was not favored by the audiences.

5.2.3 Advertising effects (H10, H11, H12, H13, H14, and H15)

H10 suggested that brand awareness, brand attitude, and purchase intention are correlated with each other and it was supported. This finding was consistent with the theory of Vakratsas and Ambler (1999), empirically proving that the three outcomes are not independent from each other. H11 claimed that plot-based native ads and regular commercials could generate more brand awareness than product placements. This hypothesis was only partially accepted, because the plot-based native ad and the regular commercial only scored significantly higher than the visual-only placement. This result was plausible. Many scholars have found a “hierarchy of memory effects” (Karrh et al., 2003, p.141). According to this hierarchy, audio plays an important role in raising brand awareness (Russel, 2002): Placements that incorporate audio elements have more impacts on viewers’ memories than visual-only placements (Gupta & Lord, 1998). This explains why audio-visual placements generated similar level of brand awareness with the plot-based native ad and the regular commercial.

Advertisement attitude was proved to positively affect brand attitude (H12) and purchase intention (H14). This is in line with previous studies (Karson & Fisher, 2005). H13 and H15 contended that plot-based native ads would raise more positive brand attitude and higher purchase intention than other three types of advertising, and they were

rejected. Since the plot-based native ad did not exceed the other three in ad attitude, it is not surprising that it failed to outperform in increasing brand attitude and purchase intention. Another cause for having to reject the hypotheses may be respondents' brand familiarity. Dongpeng is a relatively mature brand and, as the descriptive statistics showed, respondents were quite familiar with it. When faced with familiar brands, consumers are likely to rely on their prior knowledge or previous experience (Brown & Stayman, 1992). As a result, the impacts of ad attitude are attenuated (Wahid & Ahmed, 2011). This could also be the reason why no significant differences in brand attitude and purchase intention were found between four types of advertising.

5.3 Theoretical and practical implications

According to the researcher's knowledge, this research is the first study that thoroughly investigates into the effectiveness of plot-based native ads and compares their effectiveness with their counterparts, namely, product placements and regular commercials. These findings can fill in the gap between the industry and the academia. In addition, this study has practical values as well. As plot-based native ads become more prevalent, the findings can be relevant for the practitioners.

5.3.1 Theoretical implications

First and foremost, this study introduces a completely new form of advertising and unravels an industry myth. Contrary to the popular beliefs in the industry, plot-based native ads are not more popular, and they could not generate more positive advertising effects than more ordinary forms of advertising. When plot-based native ads first came into people's attention, they were indeed surprising and novel. However, as they penetrated into every popular web series, their effects are worn out.

Secondly, this study updated the latest findings on Chinese audiences' attitudes towards product placements. McKechnie and Zhou (2003) contended that Chinese audiences were negative about product placements. Nevertheless, according to the current experimental results, the audiences showed rather neutral attitudes towards the placements. When product placements were first introduced to the Chinese audiences two decades ago, they were considered misleading and unethical (Xue, 2011). However, as product placements become ubiquitous, audiences nowadays are smart enough to recognize and ignore the placements (Xue, 2011). Consequently, their negative attitudes also wane.

Moreover, this study further proves that the modalities of product placements have impacts on audiences' brand awareness (Gupta & Lord, 1998; Russel, 2002). Placements that incorporate audio placements have stronger impacts on memory, which help to

generate more brand awareness in return. By comparison, visual-only placements are at disadvantage in terms of increasing brand awareness, because they are more likely to be ignored.

Another contribution of this study concerns the antecedents and the effects of advertisement attitudes. The study further proves that creativity, entertainment, informativeness positively affects ad attitude while intrusiveness has an adverse impact on advertisement attitudes (Smith et al., 2008; Till & Baack, 2005). More importantly, researchers could focus more on creativity and intrusiveness in future studies, as these two factors are found to be the biggest influence on advertisement attitude. In addition, this study also validates the positive impacts of ad attitude on brand attitude and purchase intention. Nevertheless, these impacts can be undermined by brand familiarity: The more the audiences are familiar with this brand, the weaker the impacts of ad attitudes are (Wahid & Ahmed, 2011).

Finally, this study makes theoretical contribution by confirming the superiority of the EAC space model. Despite the fact that the EAC space model (Vakratsas & Ambler,1999) is theoretically sound, few scholars adopt this model in their research. Nevertheless, the applicability of the EAC space model is empirically proved in this experiment: The three dimensions of advertising effects, namely, cognition, affect and conation, are correlated with each other. Thus, for further study, it is advised to use the EAC space model to study advertising effects and consider the three dimensions in a more integrated way.

5.3.2 Practical implications

The findings of the study can be useful for three different groups of stakeholders, being advertisers, the brands or companies, and video platforms. To begin with, one important lesson for the advertisers is that they should include more positive traits in ads and avoid or minimize the effects of the negative ones. For instance, the advertiser should struggle to make the ads more creative and entertaining, regardless of the types of ads. Moreover, when ad makers make plot-based native ads, they should combine the ads and the plots in a more surprising and funny way. Else, plot-based native ads would lose their special traits.

As for brands and companies, though plot-based native ads do not outperform other types of advertising, they can still be an attractive choice. This is because plot-based native ads have their own advantages: They could lead to high brand awareness. More importantly, the VIP members cannot skip them. In addition, plot-based native ads might work better for unfamiliar brands, as audiences rely more on ads when they know little about the brands. On the other hand, if the brands want to get more exposure to a larger population, they could go for product placements, which can reach TV viewers as well.

The brands are advised to use audio or audio-visual placements, because they could increase more brand awareness.

Lastly, there is one suggestion for the online video platforms as well. This study shows that audiences did not show preferences over plot-based native ads. Video platforms could, of course, continue the usage of plot-based native ads. Nevertheless, they should be cautious about their practices. If platforms continue to exploit plot-based native ads with no restrictions, for instance, making longer ads or inserting two plot-based native ads in one episode ("Plot-based native ads", 2017), the platforms probably have to face complains from their angry members in near future. In fact, there are some professionals expressing concerns for the overuse of plot-based native ads and claiming that platforms would face a drastic loss of members if they do not pay attention to this issue (Liu, 2017). Thus, the platforms should use plot-based native ads temperately, because only in this way can the platforms can achieve a tradeoff between profit and user experience.

5.4 Limitations and future directions

Although this study has made several theoretical contributions and practical implications, it has some limitations. Still, as a new phenomenon, plot-based native advertising is worth attention from other scholars and the researcher encourages more scholars to conduct more studies and further amplify this topic. Thus, after each limitation, the researcher makes a recommendation for future studies.

The first limitation of this study relates to the stimuli used in the experiment. In order to make fair comparisons, the researcher used the ads of the same brand and from the same show. However, for most of the respondents, Dongpeng is a very familiar brand and they already had prior knowledge. As a result, their attitudes towards the brand and purchase intention were not merely affected by the ads, but their own experience as well (Najmi & Mirbagheri, 2012). If the researcher had chosen a less familiar brand, the results would probably have been different. Hence, future studies could use unfamiliar brands and investigate whether plot-based native ads of these brands could provoke more positive responses from the audiences.

Another limitation was the scale used to measure brand awareness. Although this scale was proved to be reliable in the work of Smith and his colleagues (2008). However, in this research, its Cronbach's value was only .52, which was not reliable. This unreliable scale could influence the outcomes of the experiment (e.g., H10, and H11). Future researchers should be wary about this limitation and find other reliable scales.

In addition, the settings of this experiment also had some restraints. The experiment was conducted online, not in the real lab. The respondents might be inattentive to the

survey instructions and the videos or gave some random answers without carefully reading the questions (Bader & Keuschnigg, 2018). Also, in this experiment, the respondents were asked to see a video that lasted about two minutes. Nevertheless, this setting could not be comparable to the real-life situation: A video of two minutes could not make the get respondents involved with show. Future researchers are advised to invite the respondents to the lab and ask them to watch the full episode and then test ad attitudes and advertising effects.

The generalizability of this study is also a problem. The sample consists of many highly-educated people, as revealed by the fact that 93.3% of the respondents had a bachelor or a higher degree. However, in 2010, in the mainland of China, people with bachelor or higher degrees only accounted for 8.93% of the total population (‘Sixth national population census’, n.d.). In other words, the well-educated people were severely overrepresented, and the results of this study might not be able to generalize to the population with lower education level. In the future, researchers could conduct the survey on a larger scale and try to reach more people who are less well-educated.

To sum up, future studies could recruit a more diverse population, invite them to participate in a longer experiment in the real lab, and find the plot-based native ads of less famous brands. In this way, researchers could learn more about plot-based native advertising. This study has proved that plot-based native advertising is not as powerful as people believe it to be. It could not generate more positive advertisement attitudes, nor could it create more positive advertising effects. Although it is still favored by many brands and advertisers, it is losing its special traits, which distinguished itself from other types of advertising at the beginning. When producing plot-based native ads, advertisers do need to think harder and make the ads more creative and entertaining. Else, they have to face the risk of losing the advantages that plot-based native ads bring.

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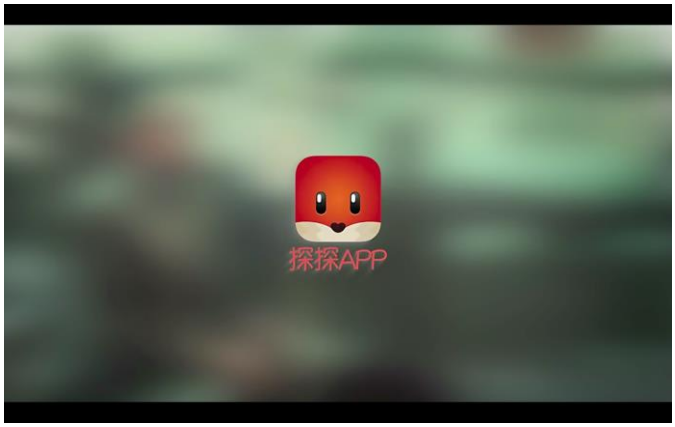
Appendix A Example of plot-based native ad from Tantan App

Link to the video: http://www.iqiyi.com/v_19rrm8h2y8.html?list=19rrkkeizq

(Intro of the plot-based native ad)



(End of the ad: a logo of the Tantan app)

Appendix B Stimuli for the experiment

1 Visual-only product placement of Dongpeng energy drink in *Laojiumen*

Link to the stimulus video: https://v.qq.com/x/page/a0614t4ymxh.html

2 Audio-visual placement of Dongpeng in *Laojiumen*

Link to the stimulus video: https://v.qq.com/x/page/f0614xyqihq.html

(The man in red: You should drink some Dongpeng get more energy)

3 Plot-based native ad of Dongpeng in *Laojiumen*

Link to the video: https://v.qq.com/x/page/v0613qx7cx6.html

4 Regular commercial of Dongpeng

The link to the video: https://v.qq.com/x/page/v06135douj7.html

Appendix C English Survey

Consent Form

Dear participant,

Thank you very much for participating in this survey. This survey is conducted by a Master student of the Media master program of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. For my graduation project, I want to investigate audience attitude towards popular online video platforms and web series in China. As part of this survey, you will watch brief video fragment. Afterwards, you will be asked to complete some questions about your liking of the video fragment.

Please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary, meaning that you can quit at any time during your participation. Furthermore, your personal information will be kept

strictly confidential and the findings of this survey will be used solely for research purposes. Hence, your anonymity is guaranteed at any time.
This research will only take 5-10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions during or after your participation, please feel free to contact the researcher: Qing Ni (447564qn@eur.nl).

I understand the above and agree in participating in this research.

Survey

Please complete the following questions about your demographics, so that I can determine whether you fit the target group for this survey.

Q1 What is your gender?
-Male
-Female
-Other

Q2 What is your age?
-17 or younger
-18
-19
-20
-21
-22
-23
-24
-25
-26
-27
-28
-29
-30
-31
-32
-33
-34
-35

-36 or older

[If respondents choose “17 younger” or “36 or older” with Q2, they get forwarded to an automated “Thank you” message and could not proceed with the survey.
If respondents fit the age criterion they are forwarded to following questions.]

Q3 What is your highest level of participated education?
-Primary school
-Junior middle school
-Senior middle school
-Vocational senior middle school
-Non-degree Zhuanke
-Upgrade to Bachelor
-Bachelor
-Master
-PhD or higher
-Other

Thank you for this information, you fit the target group. Next, I would like to ask you about your online video viewing habits.

Q4 Which device(s) do you usually use to watch videos? (Multiple choices possible)
-Laptop
-Tablet
-Phone
-Other, namely....

Q5 On average, how many hours do you spend on watching videos per day?
-Never
-Less than 1 hour
-1 to 3 hours
-3 to 6 hours
-6 to 9 hours
-9 or more hours

Q6 Which video platform(s) do you usually use to watch videos? (Multiple choices possible)

-Youku
-iQiyi
-Sohu
-LeTV
-Tencent
-Bilibili
-Acfun
-Other, namely

Laojiumen is one of the most popular web drama in recent years, and you will be shown a short fragment of this show in next page. The fragment will last about 2 minutes, please make sure that you can hear the sound on your device.
After watching the fragment, you will be asked for your opinion. Please be aware that there are no right or wrong for the answers and select the first answer that comes to mind.
Please be aware that the pre-roll commercial is added by *Tencent* and is **NOT** a part of the video. Feel free to skip it after the first 5 seconds.

Q7 Were you able to watch the fragment?
-Yes
-No

[If respondents choose “No” with Q7, they get forwarded to an automated “Thank you” message and could not proceed with survey]

Q8 What was this fragment about?
-BaYe and ChenFuguan take the unconscious FoYe (stared by William Chen) out of the tomb while Qiudekao is watching them from a distance.
-Xinyue (stared by Zhaoliying) and Yatou are going to take a boat on the lake, but ErYe (stared by ZhangYixing) finds out Yatou is vomiting blood
-Baye, ChenFuguan are going to the town to get some news and Erye (stared by ZhangYixing) is staying at home and having some rest
-Baye and ChenFuguan get lost in the swap and the female priest is being assassinated

[These four answers generalize the storylines of the four fragments respectively. Because respondents were randomly assigned to different videos, and the answers should vary according to the conditions they were assigned to. However, the system could not tell

whether the respondents choose the matching answer at this phase. Whatever the respondents chose, they could proceed to the next question. The researcher had to check the data file manually afterwards to decide whether the respondents chose the right answers. Wrong answers would be treated as invalid and would be deleted from the data set.]

Q9 How do you like the show based on the fragment you have seen?
-After seeing the fragment, I …it
[Five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly dislike, 5 = Strongly like]

Q10 Did the video contain a brand?
-Yes
-Maybe
-No
Q11 The answer to the previous question was yes: The video fragment contained a brand. Which of the following brand do think you have seen?
-Maidong Energy Drink
-Dongpeng Energy Drink
-Tantan Socail App
-Mengniu Milk

[Respondents who did not choose “Dongpeng Energy Drink” with Q11, got forwarded to an automated “Thank you” message and could not proceed with survey.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with following statements?
Though some of the descriptions are very similar to each other, it is of vital importance to provide answers to all.

Q12 After seeing the fragment ....
-I am aware of Dongpeng Energy Drink
-I can recall Dongpeng Energy Drink
-I can recognize Dongpeng Energy Drink
[Five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree]

Q13 How would you rate the creativity of the commercial you just saw?
-The ad is unique.
-The ad is really out of ordinary.

-The ad is intriguing.
-The ad is surprising.
[Five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree]

Q14 How do you feel about the information provided in the ad?
-The information obtained from the ad is useful.
-I learned a lot from using the ad.
-I think the information from the ad is helpful.
[Five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree]

Q15 How entertaining was the commercial you just saw?
-The ad is humorous.
-The ad is entertaining.
-The ad makes me laugh.
[Five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree]

Q16 Please indicate the extent to which agree with the following statements.
When I saw the commercial, I thought it was…
-Distracting
-Disturbing
-Forced
-Interfering
-Intrusive
-Invasive
-Obtrusive
[Five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree]

Q17 In general, I think the commercial was:
-Bad-Good
-Not likeable-Likeable
-Irritating-Not irritating
-Not interesting-Interesting
[Semantic differential scale with five points]

Q18 What is your overall evaluation of Dongpeng Energy Drink?
-Bad-Good
-Unpleasant-Pleasant

-Unfavorable-Favorable
[Semantic differential scale with five points]

Q19 What is your reaction towards following statements?
-I would be likely to purchase Dongpeng Energy Drink.
-I would be likely to recommend Dongpeng Energy Drink to a friend.
[Five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree]

The survey ends here. Thank you very much for your participation, your kindness is greatly appreciated. Do you have any comments or suggestions for improving this survey?

Also, if you are interested in the results, please email 447564qn@eur.nl for more information.

Appendix D Chinese Survey

同意书

亲爱的受访者,

非常感谢您参与这次调查活动。这个调查是由 Erasmus 大学传媒硕士项目的一名学生主导的。为了完成我的硕士毕业项目，我想调查中国观众对中国视频网站和网剧的态度。在填写问卷的过程中，您将会看到一段非常简短的视频片段。在这之后，您需要回答一些与该片段相关的问题。

请注意您的参与完全是自愿的，您可以在任何时候退出这项调查。您的个人信息会被完全保密，调查的结果也只会被用于这项研究。您的匿名性在任何时候都会得到保证。

这项调查需要 5 – 10 分钟，如果您在参与调查期间或者之后有任何问题，请随时联系调查者倪晴 （447564qn@eur.nl)

我明白上述信息并且愿意参与调查。

调查问卷

请您回答下列基本信息问题以确保您属于调查目标人群。

Q1 请问您的性别是?

-男性

-女性

-其他

Q2 请问您的年龄是?

-17 或者以下

-18

-19

-20

-21

-22

-23

-24

-25

-26

-27

-28

-29

-30

-31

-32

-33

-34

-35

-36 或者以上

Q3 请问您已获得的最高学历是?

-小学

-初中

-高中

-职业高中

-专科学校

-专升本

-本科

-硕士

-博士或者更高

-其他

感谢您提供的信息，您属于目标人群。接下来，您将会被问到与视频观看习惯相关的问题。

-Q4 请问您经常用哪些设备看视频? (可以多选)

-电脑

-平板

-手机

-其他，请注明

Q5 请问您每天平均花多长时间看视频?

-从不

-1 小时之内

-1 到 3 小时

-3 到 6 小时

-6 到 9 小时

-9 小时及以上

Q6 请问您经常在哪些平台看视频？ (可以多选)

-优酷

-爱奇艺

-搜狐

-乐视

-腾讯

-Bilibili

-Acfun

-其他，请注明

老九门是近年来最受欢迎的网剧之一，接下来您将会看到该剧的一个片段，此片段只有两分钟。请确认您的手机可以听见声音。片段播放之后，您将会被询问您对该片段的意见。请注意，这些问题没有对错之分，请选择您想到的第一个答案。

请注意视频前的广告是腾讯自动播放的，并不是片段的一部分，您可以在五秒之后跳过腾讯的广告。

Q7 请问您能看到视频吗?

-能

-不能

Q8 请问该片段讲述了什么剧情?

-八爷和陈副官把昏迷不醒的佛爷（陈伟霆饰）从古墓中带了出来，裘德考在远处观望他们

-新月（赵丽颖饰）和丫头准备去游湖，二爷（张艺兴饰）发现丫头病情加重，开始咳血

-八爷和陈副官准备进城打探消息二爷在家里休养身体

-八爷和陈副官在沼泽地里迷路了，大祭司即将被人暗杀

Q9 根据刚才的片段之后您对这部剧的想法如何?

看完片段后我对该剧

【1=非常不喜欢，5=非常喜欢】

Q10 刚才的片段里含有任何品牌吗?

-有

-也许有

-没有

Q11 上一题的答案是有：刚刚的片段包含了一个品牌。您觉得您看见了哪个品牌？

-脉动

-东鹏特饮

-探探 app

-蒙牛新养道

在何种程度上您同意或者不同意下列说法?

有些选项可能看起来非常相像，但请您完成所有选项，这对调查结果至关重要 。

Q12 看完片段之后 ...

-我知道东鹏特饮

-我可以回想起东鹏特饮

-我可以认出东鹏特饮

Q13 您觉得该广告的创意性如何?

-这个广告很独特

-这个广告与众不同

-这个广告让人感兴趣

-这个广告让人惊奇

Q14 您觉得该广告的提供的信息价值如何?

-该广告提供的信息非常有用

-从该广告中我了解了许多

-该广告提供的信息非常有帮助

Q15 您认为这则广告有多让人愉快?

-这个广告很幽默

-这个广告让人愉快

-这个广告让我发笑

Q16 请表明您在何种程度上同意下列说法. 当我看到这个广告的时候我认为它…

-让人分心

-让人烦恼

-强迫的

-干扰的

-打扰的

-侵扰的

-突兀的

Q17 总体来说，我认为这个广告:

-不好

-不招人喜欢

-让人厌烦

-不有趣

Q18 您对东鹏特饮的总体评价如何?

-不好

-不令人愉快

-不讨人喜欢

Q19 您对下列描述有何态度?

-我想要购买东鹏特饮

-我想要把东鹏特饮推荐给朋友

本调查到此结束。非常感谢您的参与。针对这份调查问卷，您有任何意见或者建议吗？

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如果您对本次调查的结果感兴趣，欢迎向 447564qn@eur.nl 发送邮件以获取更多信息。

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Appendix E The platform of Wen Juan Xing

The survey can be accessed via the link: https://www.wjx.cn/jq/22182899.aspx

(Because the researcher did not renew the premium account, this survey cannot be filled in anymore.)

(Laptop version of the survey)

(Mobile version)

Appendix F Table of the *p*-values of the Tukey HSD tests: Ad characteristics and ad attitude

Ad characteristics				
Perceived ad creativity				
	1	2	3	4

1 the plot-based native ad (*M* = 3.67, *SD* = 0.91)	-	-	-	-
2 the visual-only placement (*M* = 3.63, *SD* = 0.74)	0.995	-	-	-
3 the audio-visual placement *(M* = 3.75, *SD* = 0.82)	0.972	0.908	-	-
4 the regular commercial (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 0.80)	0.999	1.000	0.934	-
Perceived ad entertainment				
	1	2	3	4
1 the plot-based native ad (*M* = 3.73, *SD* = 0.90)	-	-	-	-
2 the visual-only placement (*M* = 3.51, *SD* = 0.94)	0.694	-	-	-
3 the audio-visual placement *(M* = 3.80, *SD* = 0.89)	0.987	0.486	-	-
4 the regular commercial (*M* = 2.76, *SD* = 0.91)	0.000	0.001	0.000	-

(The table continues on next page)

Perceived ad informativeness				
	1	2	3	4
1 the plot-based native ad (*M* = 3.58, *SD* = 0.90)	-	-	-	-
2 the visual-only placement	0.278	-	-	-

(*M* = 3.23, *SD* = 0.88)				
3 the audio-visual placement (*M* = 3.35, *SD* = 0.88)	0.652	0.924	-	-
4 the regular commercial (*M* = 3.71, *SD* = 0.87)	0.893	0.061	0.244	-
Perceived ad intrusiveness				
	1	2	3	4
1 the plot-based native ad (*M* = 2.78, *SD* = 0.96)	-	-	-	-
2 the visual-only placement (*M* = 2.49, *SD* = 0.72)	0.488	-	-	-
3 the audio-visual placement (*M* = 2.64, *SD* = 0.87)	0.894	0.895	-	-
4 the regular commercial (*M* = 2.52, *SD* = 1.08)	0.551	1.000	0.932	-
Ad attitude				
	1	2	3	4
1 the plot-based native ad (*M* = 3.59 *SD* = 0.87)	-	-	-	-
2 the visual-only placement (*M* = 3.54, *SD* = 0.78)	0.993	-	-	-
3 the audio-visual placement (*M* = 3.36, *SD* = 0.91)	0.645	0.805	-	-
4 the regular commercial (*M* = 2.43, *SD* = 1.03)	0.844	0.948	0.984	-

Note: The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Appendix G Table of the *p*-values of the Tukey HSD tests: Advertising effects

Brand awareness				
	1	2	3	4
1 the plot-based native ad	-	-	-	-

(*M* = 4.28, *SD* = 0.53)				
2 the visual-only placement (*M* = 3.94, *SD* = 0.70)	0.034	-	-	-
3 the audio-visual placement *(M* = 4.18, *SD* = 0.43)	0.879	0.199	-	-
4 the regular commercial (*M* = 4.44, *SD* = 0.55)	0.528	0.000	0.159	-
Brand attitude				
	1	2	3	4
1 the plot-based native ad (*M* = 3.72, *SD* = 0.85)	-	-	-	-
2 the visual-only placement (*M* = 3.70, *SD* = 0.70)	1.000	-	-	-
3 the audio-visual placement *(M* = 3.63, *SD* = 0.88)	0.970	0.984	-	-
4 the regular commercial (*M* = 3.81, *SD* = 0.87)	0.955	0.929	0.770	-
Purchase intention				
	1	2	3	4
1 the plot-based native ad (*M* = 3.49 *SD* = 1.02)	-	-	-	-
2 the visual-only placement (*M* = 3.48, *SD* = 0.91)	1.000	-	-	-
3 the audio-visual placement *(M* = 3.38 *SD* = 0.99)	0.955	0.967	-	-
4 the regular commercial (*M* = 3.58, *SD* = 1.01)	0.971	0.959	0.773	-

Note: The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).