

## SKIP IT OR VIEW IT: THE ROLE OF VIDEO STORYTELLING IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

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*Given more consumer control over exposure to content on social media, marketers are seeking ways to engage consumers with videos. One way to overcome challenges with content engagement is to focus on video execution style. Based on the narrative processing framework, this research examines the role of video storytelling in social media. The study exposed respondents to YouTube ads with either a straight-sell ( $n = 133$ ) or storytelling ( $n = 140$ ) execution style. Results show the superiority of storytelling video ads over straight-sell video ads on several consumer responses: attitude toward the brand, positive word of mouth, sharing, promoting, and viewing (rather than skipping the video ad). Purchase intention did not differ between video execution styles. Additional findings suggest order effects and social media usage effects based on video execution style. Implications for both marketing theory and practice, limitations, and future research on video storytelling in social media are discussed.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Video has emerged as a popular tool in the digital world. As noted by some authors: “If text was the medium of the analog era, video is the medium of the digital age” (Berthon, Pitt, & DesAutels, 2011, p. 1047). Video seems appropriate since it is well aligned with social media’s “ability to grab our attention, fire up our imagination and share our own story out to the larger world around us” (Mancuso & Stuth, 2014, p. 18). Video has been credited with being a quick attention grabber in digital marketing (Lessard, 2014). In 2016, over 8 billion videos were viewed on Facebook per day; more than 300 hours of YouTube videos were uploaded per minute; and over 10 billion videos were viewed daily on Snapchat (Simply Measured, 2016). In 2016, 60% of more than 5,000 marketers used video content and 73% indicated increased use of video content in social media marketing (Social Media Examiner, 2016). Even more impactful is the acknowledgement by marketers that video is a more effective conversion tool than other content formats (Lessard, 2014). These trends show the potential of video for marketers using social media.

With the potential of video for social media marketing come challenges for marketers. Brands face the challenge of using video such that they become part of the conversation. A greater challenge for brands is holding consumers’ attention long enough so that they *actually* tune in to the video on social media. This task is particularly challenging given that consumers actively try to avoid ads and marketing messages, e.g., using various tools, such as DVRs and digital streaming services (e.g., Netflix). Avoidance of marketing messages is further facilitated by digital media that allow consumers to skip ads. YouTube allows viewers to skip some ads and has even launched a subscription service called YouTube Red to deliver an ad-free entertainment experience for viewers. Given that the consumer has more control over exposure to content on social media, marketers are tasked with finding ways to keep consumers engaged with video content. To compound this challenge, social media users may suffer from shorter attention spans and may split attention among various activities while using social media.

To overcome challenges in engaging social media users with video, marketers may need to reconsider their conversation style on social media. Though some control over marketing is lost in the co-creative nature of social media marketing, marketers can control how they

present the brand in video format on social media. They can start by strategically examining a video's production elements, including length, format, and execution, which may affect user processing of the message. This starting point in crafting a video strategy on social media brings to the forefront video execution style, which is "the way a particular appeal is turned into an advertising message presented to the consumer" (Belch & Belch, 2015, p. 301). A popular execution style in promotions is the straight-sell or factual execution style, which uses "a straightforward presentation of information concerning the product" with a strong emphasis on product features, attributes, and benefits (Belch & Belch, 2015, p. 312). Despite its popularity, the straight-sell execution style may present challenges in getting consumers to tune in to the video ad on social media. Since social media has been viewed as a means through which brands can "tell their story" (Judson, Devasagayam, & Buff, 2012, p. 131), this situation highlights the potential of an alternative execution style that is gaining ground in the marketing world – storytelling.

Though much has been done on storytelling in marketing, past research has not adequately examined consumer responses to video storytelling on social media. In fact, research to date on storytelling lacks focus on the co-creative side of social media marketing (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Furthermore, "much has been written about the power of stories in branding, but very *little empirical evidence* [emphasis added] exists of their effects on consumer responses" (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, & van Riel, 2013, p. 283). Thus, there is a paucity of research on the effects of storytelling on consumer behavior amplified by social media, e.g., word of mouth and ad avoidance. To address this gap, this research examines the role of video storytelling execution styles on consumer responses to branded video content on social media.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Storytelling has been part of the fabric of human civilization for ages (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). Storytelling entails "conveying messages and sharing accumulated knowledge and wisdom to help navigate and explain the

world around us" (Mancuso & Stuth, 2014, p. 18). Stories are "the products of human tendency to see causality in the world" (Hirschman, 2010, p. 581). They are "fictions filled with character, plot, points of view, and an implied purpose called a meaning" (Twitchell 2004, p. 484). Stories are in the "narrative" form, structured in temporal format ("beginning, middle, and end") in related episodes (Escalas, 2004, p. 169).

Story ads place the brand within "narrative elements (e.g., goals, actions, outcomes)" (Escalas, 2004, p. 171). This format of advertising, also known as narrative advertising, has been conceptualized as creating consumer empathy toward ad characters through consumer-character identification and vicarious participation in the experiences of the character in the story (Boller & Olson, 1991). Stories are pleasurable for viewers because viewers can be both parties in the storytelling experience – the protagonist and the audience (Megehee & Woodside, 2010). For the brand, storytelling works to "help build awareness, comprehension, empathy, recognition, recall, and provide meaning" (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012, p. 189). When brands side with protagonists to achieve their goals, the outcome is favorable consumer-brand relationships (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008).

To understand how storytelling works in marketing, it is helpful to start with how consumers process information in story format, i.e., narrative processing. Among other message formats, stories can be used to enter the consumer's thought processes and to bring meaning to everyday objects (Twitchell, 2004). Though other formats may tap into certain memory systems (semantic or episodic, per Tulving, 1972), storytelling taps into "a broad array of unconscious consumer brand knowledge from episodic and implicit/procedural memory" (Koll, von Wallpach, & Kreuzer, 2010, p. 589). Past research suggests that such access is possible since consumers tend to think in narrative terms rather than in argumentative terms (see Woodside et al., 2008), especially when they are trying to ascribe meaning to events (see Escalas, 2004). Thus, "a substantial amount of information stored in and retrieved from memory is episodic – stories that include inciting incidents,

experiences, outcomes/evaluations, and summaries/nuances of person-to-person and person-and-brand relationships within specific contexts” (Woodside, 2010, p. 533).

Narrative advertising is expected to “prime narrative thought” (Escalas, 2004, p. 171). This situation contrasts with that of argumentative ads (also known as expository or factual ads) that tend to encourage more analytical processing and more counterarguing than narrative processing (Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010). Specifically, stories help consumers focus on story elements and allow consumers to be immersed in the story, rather than directing their attention to brand attributes, thinking about attribute arguments, or “tuning out the ad” (Escalas, 2004, p. 171).

The literature suggests that narrative processing can also facilitate connections between the audience and the story. Good or “memorable” stories have tensions with incidents that cause the protagonist (or main character) to create and achieve goals, ultimately having experiences that cause the viewer to feel emotional and involved in the story (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 101). Indices or touch points in the story connect to people’s lives, making the story more relatable to experiences stored in memory (Woodside, 2010). The greater the touch points, the more memorable the story compared to other formats, such as a lecture or attribute-based argumentative formats commonly used in advertising (Woodside, 2010).

Narrative processing also facilitates connections between the brand and consumer. Stories give meaning to the consumer’s life and help them construct the consumer’s self (Cooper, Schembri, & Miller, 2010; Schembri, Merrilees, & Kristiansen, 2010). Based on the narrative self-brand connection (SBC) framework (Escalas, 2004), narrative advertising enables narrative processing, which results in a “matching process,” where consumers compare and match their personal experiences with that of the ad story (Escalas, 2004, p. 171). This matching process strengthens SBCs, which in turn produce positive consumer responses. Research shows these effects to hold, with narrative storyboard ads leading to higher SBCs, and in turn, more

favorable attitudes toward the brand and higher purchase intentions (Escalas, 2004).

## HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The current research expands on the narrative processing framework from the literature and applies it to the context of video ads used in social media marketing. Given the positive effects of storytelling on consumer behavior, it can be proposed that storytelling may increase consumer engagement with the video on social media. The central premise is that in the realm of social media marketing, the storytelling execution style associated with narrative advertising would be more effective than a traditional straight-sell execution style, which resembles a lecture style or a hard sell on product attribute information using an argumentative style (Woodside et al., 2008).

The following section presents hypotheses on the effects of video storytelling on six types of consumer responses. Though attitude toward the brand and purchase intention have been examined in past research on storytelling, these constructs are re-examined in the realm of video storytelling on social media marketing. The remaining constructs examined are consumer behaviors amplified by social media marketing, i.e., positive word of mouth, sharing, promoting, and skipping versus viewing behavior.

### Attitude toward the Brand

Past research suggests that activation of persuasion knowledge may affect narrative processing of ads. The persuasion knowledge model posits that consumers activate persuasion knowledge as a defense mechanism when they think they are trying to be sold something, i.e., when they sense persuasive attempts by marketers (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In the realm of storytelling, research has shown that when cues for manipulative intent are made less salient, narrative ads generate a higher level of positive affect, stronger SBCs, and more positive attitudes than fact-based expository ads (Wentzel et al., 2010). However, when cues for manipulative intent are made more salient, consumers process narrative ads and expository ads in a similar manner, becoming suspicious of

the narrative ad and activating persuasion knowledge (Wentzel et al., 2010).

The emotional link between the audience of an ad and the brand is strengthened because stories are memorable and easily absorbed (Yu & Chang, 2013). This finding is consistent with recent research that shows the power of video storytelling in generating emotional experiences with the storyteller in peer-to-peer communities on social media (Pera & Viglia, 2016). Furthermore, the level of consumer affect during ad storyline elements (introduction, premise, development, and conclusion) has a positive relationship with evaluation of both the ad and brand (Burton, McAlister, & Hoyer, 2015).

Given past research, it can be argued that video ads with a storytelling execution style may be less likely to activate persuasion knowledge since the consumer will be less likely to believe that the ad is trying to persuade them to do something. Thus, it is possible that the storytelling execution style may result in a more favorable change in attitude toward the brand than the straight-sell execution style. Since the emotional connection to the brand is best captured by attitude toward the brand as an affective component, a video ad with a storytelling execution style should generate a more favorable change in attitude toward the brand than one with a straight-sell execution style. Therefore:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style will generate a more favorable change in attitude toward the brand than one with a straight-sell execution style.

### Purchase Intention

Research shows that “consumers are engaging in twice the amount of content online year-over-year leading up to a buying decision” (Pulizzi, 2012, p. 119). With consumers searching for and consuming more content before making their purchase decisions, marketers should explore communication strategies that connect with consumers and keep the product/brand on the top of the consumer’s mind. Such strategies should help the marketer’s content stand out from the rest and increase the likelihood of purchase by the consumer.

The literature suggests that consumers are more engaged and better remember information when an ad is presented in the form of stories. Based on the narrative SBC framework, SBCs are associated with a higher likelihood of purchase (Escalas, 2004). Research also suggests that “a well-crafted firm story may create positive associations with a brand and ultimately increase consumers’ willingness to pay for it” (Lundqvist et al., 2013, p. 291). Since sales may suggest return on investment from social media, it seems appropriate to re-examine the role of storytelling on purchase intentions related to video on social media. It is proposed that brands that use video storytelling in social media should see higher purchase intentions from consumers than those that use video ads with a straight-sell execution style. Therefore:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style will generate greater purchase intention than one with a straight-sell execution style.

### Positive Word of Mouth

Word of mouth marketing has proven itself to be a robust tool for marketers in the age of social media. By crafting brand messages in the form of stories, the marketer may facilitate word of mouth for the brand on social media. Consumer engagement with brands extends beyond the purchase into more participatory and involved interactions with the brand on social media (Parent, Plangger, & Bal, 2011). Since word of mouth communication is most often in the form of stories (Delgadillo & Escalas, 2004), a video with a storytelling execution strategy should facilitate word of mouth about the brand on social media. Such word of mouth may also be conceptualized as sharing content and promoting the brand on social media. Thus, similar outcomes are expected for sharing-related behaviors, i.e., word of mouth about the brand, sharing the video content, and promotion of the brand. It follows that:

**H<sub>3a</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style will generate greater positive word of mouth about a brand than one with a straight-sell execution style.

**H<sub>3b</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style is more likely to be

shared than one with a straight-sell execution style

- H<sub>3c</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style will increase promotion of the brand more than one with a straight-sell execution style:

### View It

An important question facing marketers today is: how to increase viewing behaviors (and reduce skipping behaviors) for content shared on social media? The idea that consumers would view the ad (and not skip it) can be tied to persuasion knowledge. Wentzel et al. (2010) found that in the absence of manipulative cues, consumers' reactions were more favorable to narrative ads than to fact-based expository ads. Since storytelling videos are intended to tell a story, they may not lead consumers to think they are being persuaded, resulting in persuasion knowledge not being activated, or at a minimum, the activation is delayed. Since argumentative ads may be more likely to be tuned out (Escalas, 2004):

- H<sub>4</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style is more likely to be viewed than one with a straight-sell execution style, which is more likely to be skipped.

## METHODOLOGY

### Experimental Design

This study uses a two (execution style: straight-sell vs. storytelling) by two (brand: Extra Gum vs. Mazda) within-subjects experimental design. The experiment was administered using an online survey that was distributed to respondents via email. Respondents were given one week to complete the survey and were instructed to take the survey on a desktop or laptop computer with audio and video capability to ensure they could see and hear the videos. Respondents took an average of 9 minutes to complete the survey, with about one minute for the stimuli and the remaining time for completion of the survey.

The stimuli used in this study were four 30-second video ads. Each respondent saw two video ads; one with a straight-sell execution

style and another with a storytelling execution style for one of two brands. Two of the video ads were for Mazda and two were for Extra Gum. These brands were chosen because they did not seem to have very strong cultural followings, such as Coca-Cola, and they both use storytelling and straight-sell execution styles in their ads. Though multiple video ads were considered, the content in each video ad used in this study was deemed to achieve face validity by meeting the definitional requirements of both straight-sell and storytelling execution styles. Per Belch and Belch (2015), the video ads with the straight-sell execution style included features, facts, and information (e.g., long-lasting flavor of Extra Gum). Per Twitchell, (2004, p. 484), the video ads with the storytelling style featured "a character, plot, points of view, and an implied purpose called a meaning" (e.g., Sarah and Juan and how Extra Gum brought meaning to their lives). Moreover, each brand represents both low and high involvement products so, when combined, the effects of involvement contingent on decision-making processes can be reduced.

The first video ad with a storytelling execution style was for Mazda; "A Driver's Life-Driving Matters" (Mazda USA, 2015). This video advertised the 2016 Mazda MX-5 Miata. The video ad starts by showing a young man learning how to drive to get his driver's license and his progression through life with Mazda cars, including his family and work, before finally ending with a new red Mazda sports car. The second Mazda video ad used a straight-sell execution style. The ad was titled "Go Ahead and Judge" (Autoport Magazine, 2015) and advertised the 2016 Mazda CX-5. The video shows tight shots of the details of the car while the narrator talks about the features including an unlimited mileage warranty.

The Extra Gum video ad with a storytelling execution style was called "The Story of Sarah and Juan" (Extra Gum, 2015). The video ad was released in 2015 and advertises Extra Spearmint Gum. The video ad shows the progression of a relationship between a young couple. The video ad shows a young man artistically drawing on Extra Gum wrappers. At the end of the ad, he frames the wrappers to show relationship milestones and a new

milestone with a story yet to be told, i.e., proposing to his girlfriend. The ad ends with the campaign theme: “Give Extra, Get Extra.” The second Extra Gum video ad used a straight-sell execution style and was called “Fruit Universe” for Extra Fruit Sensations gum (Maplethorpe, 2008). The ad uses very bright colors and bold graphics to show the earth being created. The ad focused on Extra Fruit Sensations gum and its long-lasting flavors.

As part of the research method, the sample was randomly assigned to one of four treatments to form the two by two design. Two groups saw video ads for Mazda, while two saw video ads for Extra Gum. The respondents were also randomly assigned to view the video ad with a straight-sell or storytelling execution style first and the other second. The reason for random assignment into these four treatments is to allow for between-group analyses and to control for order and product effects.

### Sample

This sample comprised upper-division college students from a midsized Midwest U.S. university. College students were deemed to be appropriate for this study because they are users of social media and view videos online. From 377 respondents that initially began the survey, 104 were eliminated from the final analysis due to incomplete responses, if they indicated that a video did not play on their computer, or if they failed the validity check. To verify that the video ads were viewed, respondents were asked to describe each video ad they watched. If they could not accurately do so or if they left this item blank, their observation was removed.

The final sample size for further analysis comprised 273 respondents. In this final sample, 51 respondents saw view the Mazda straight-sell video and 82 respondents saw the Extra Gum straight sell video; 74 respondents saw the Mazda storytelling video while 66 respondents saw the Extra Gum storytelling video. Therefore, 133 respondents saw a straight-sell video ad first while 140 respondents saw a storytelling video ad first for between-group comparisons.

The sample comprised 60.8% females (39.2% males), mostly between 18 and 24 years old

(95.2%). The sample’s social media usage was consistent with expectations for a representative sample for this study. On average, respondents actively use five social media sites, with Facebook (95.2%), Snapchat (90.1%), Instagram (80.2%), Twitter (73.6%), Pinterest (50.5%), and LinkedIn (50.2%) being most popular. In addition, most respondents are active in watching digital video content on social media, preferring YouTube (90.5%) followed by Facebook (83.9%) and Twitter (46.5%).

### Measures

Established scales were used to measure the key constructs in this study. Each scale demonstrates sufficient reliability ( $\alpha = .70$  or greater, Churchill 1979). Tables 1 and 2 show the measurement scales used in this study.

*Attitude toward the Brand* was measured twice, both pre-and post-exposure, using the four-item, 7-point, scale by Mitchell and Olson (1981). As a key measure in this study, attitude toward the brand was operationalized as the *change* in attitude toward the brand, pre-and post-advertisement exposure. Given that pre-existing interest for each brand may be a confounding issue, the use of change in attitude is appropriate. As such, the data provide attitude to the brand based on both the initial and subsequent exposure to the video ads. It should also be noted that for this analysis the first video ad seen was used to capture change in brand attitude. By doing this, the anticipated halo effect is eliminated. Such an effect would complicate the interpretation of the findings by magnifying the effects of the second ad seen by the respondent for the same product. In other words, if the respondent saw a straight-sell video ad first, their pre- and post-brand attitude scores were used to measure the effect of the straight-sell execution style on brand attitude. Similarly, if they saw a storytelling ad first, then this exposure effect was measured and used to calculate the storytelling effect on brand attitude.

*Word of Mouth (WOM)* as it pertains to the brand was measured by adapting the positive word of mouth scale by Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus (2013). The three-item positive WOM scale was used in this study. *Share* as it pertains

**TABLE 1:**  
**Multi-Item Measurement Scales**

Construct and Item	M	S.D.
<b>Attitude toward the Brand</b> , $\alpha_s=.95$ (Mitchell & Olson, 1981; $\alpha_o=.82$ )		
Bad / Good	4.86	1.46
Dislike Very Much / Like Very Much	4.68	1.36
Unpleasant / Pleasant	4.78	1.40
Poor Quality / High Quality	4.78	1.45
<b>Positive Word of Mouth</b> , $\alpha_s=.94$ (Alexandrov et al., 2013; $\alpha_o=.86$ )		
I would say positive things about this brand.	4.96	1.31
I would recommend this brand to others.	4.64	1.43
I would recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice.	4.65	1.42
<b>Share</b> , $\alpha_s=.93$ (Chen & Godes, 2014; $\alpha_o=.96$ )		
Don't tell friends about the ad / Tell friends about the ad	4.04	2.05
Don't forward this ad / Forward this ad	3.40	2.05
Don't share this ad / Share this ad	3.24	2.10

**Notes.** All constructs were measured on 7-point scales.  $\alpha_s$  = Cronbach's alpha in current study.  $\alpha_o$  = Cronbach's alpha in original study. M = Mean. S.D. = Standard Deviation.

**TABLE 2:**  
**Single-Item Measurement Scales**

Construct and Item	Straight-Sell		Storytelling	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
<b>Purchase Intention</b> (Bower, 2001)				
I do not intend to buy in the future / I intend to buy in the future	3.55	1.89	3.89	1.82
<b>Promote the Brand</b> (Reichheld, 2003)				
How likely are you to recommend the brand ( <u>Mazda or Extra Gum</u> ) to a friend or colleague, based on the ad you just watched? (0 -10)	4.94	2.53	5.68	2.54
<b>View It</b>				
If you had the opportunity to skip or view this ad, please rate how likely you are to: Skip it / View It	2.14	1.59	3.46	2.21

**Note.** Purchase Intention and View It were measured on 7-point scales. Promote the Brand was measured on an 11-point scale. M = mean. S.D. = standard deviation.

to the video ad was measured using a three-item, 7-point scale adapted from Chen and Godes (2014). *Promote* as it pertains to the brand was measured following Reichheld (2003) using a single-item, 11-point scale (0-10). To operationalize this scale in the analysis, respondents were not re-grouped as promoters (those scoring 9-10) or detractors (those scoring 0-6), as tradition suggests. Instead, the response provided (0-11) was used as a single-item variable.

*Purchase Intention* was measured using a single item adapted from Bower (2001). To measure *View It*, a single-item, 7-point, bipolar scale was created by the authors to measure how likely the video would be viewed instead of skipped. Note that the anchors for the scale used were *Skip It* (1) and *View It* (7), so a relative low score would be interpreted as likely to skip the video ad whereas a relative high score would be interpreted as likely to view the video ad.

## RESULTS

### Treatment Effect Predictions

To test hypotheses regarding treatment effects ( $H_1$  to  $H_4$ ), between-groups ANOVA calculations with their respective student *t*-tests were used. To reiterate, this analysis reflects respondents' first view and does not include the potential confounding effect of viewing two execution styles or by a halo effect that could exist in response data from a second ad exposure. The following summarizes results from hypothesis testing.

Results show that *Attitude toward the Brand* increases significantly (pre-exposure mean = 4.76 to post-exposure mean = 5.07,  $t = 3.35$ , sig. = .001,  $n = 140$ ) for video ads with the storytelling execution style. On the other hand, attitude toward the brand decreases significantly (pre-exposure mean = 4.86 to post-exposure mean = 4.47,  $t = 2.89$ , sig. = .004,  $n=133$ ) for video ads with the straight-sell execution style. Therefore,  $H_1$  is supported.

The average *Purchase Intention* score after seeing video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 3.55 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing video ads with the storytelling execution style is 3.89 ( $n = 140$ ). The

difference in purchase intention between the video ads with the straight-sell execution style and those with the storytelling execution style is not significant at the .05 level ( $t = 1.31$ , sig. = .096) and does not lend support for  $H_2$ .

The average *Positive Word of Mouth* score after seeing the video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 4.47 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing video ads with the storytelling execution style is 4.81 ( $n = 140$ ). The difference in positive word of mouth about the brand between the videos with the straight-sell and those with the storytelling execution style is significant at the .05 level ( $t = 2.17$ , sig. = .015) and supports  $H_{3a}$ .

The average *Share* score after seeing the video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 2.81 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing video ads with the storytelling execution style is 3.67 ( $n = 140$ ). The difference in sharing intention between video ads with the straight-sell execution style and those with the storytelling execution style is significant at the .001 level ( $t = 4.14$ , sig. < .000) and supports  $H_{3b}$ .

The average *Promote* score after seeing the video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 4.94 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing the video ad with the storytelling execution style is 5.68 ( $n = 140$ ). The difference in promotion of the brand between the videos with the straight-sell execution style and those with the storytelling execution style is significant at the .01 level ( $t = 2.36$ , sig. = .009) and supports  $H_{3c}$ .

The average *View It* score after seeing the video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 2.14 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing video ads with the storytelling execution style is 3.46 ( $n = 140$ ). The difference in viewing intention between video ads with the straight-sell execution style and those with the storytelling execution style is significant at the .001 level ( $t = 5.54$ , sig. < .000) and supports  $H_4$ .

### Additional Findings

Additional examination of the data was done by observing execution style order and social



media use. Regarding execution style order, it is possible that each of the response variables (purchase intention, positive word of mouth, share, promote, and view it) would strengthen after exposure to the second video ad. Interestingly, the data (see Table 3) show this effect when the video ads with the storytelling execution style follow those with the straight-sell execution style, but not if the video ads with the storytelling execution style appear first. In fact, when the video ads with the straight-sell execution style appear second, the overall response reverses and the positive impact gained by the storytelling execution style is lost. The relative difference in response variable change was calculated and found to be significant in each case. The change in Purchase Intention when straight-sell preceded storytelling was .90 while the change was -.15 when storytelling preceded straight-sell. Not only is the sign reversed in our sample but also the difference is significant at the .001 level in a paired t-test ( $t = 5.19$ ). The same pattern of

significance is repeated for Positive Word of Mouth ( $t = 5.62$ ), Share ( $t = 8.87$ ), Promote ( $t = 5.73$ ), and View It ( $t = 10.12$ ).

Finally, there were differences among respondents by social media use. Respondents were asked about their usage of eight different social media sites; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Reddit, and Tumblr. Social media usage was approximated by summing the number of social media sites used. Therefore, a respondent that uses many different sites (up to eight) is assumed to be a heavy user of social media as opposed to someone that is a light user. This proxy measure for social media use is then correlated with key outcome variables and reported in Table 4.

As the data suggest, there is little correlation between social media use and purchase intention, sharing, promotion, and likelihood to view in the straight-sell condition. This finding

**TABLE 3:**  
**Mean Response Scores by Video Ad Execution Style Order**

	SS <sub>1</sub>	ST <sub>2</sub>	Diff. <sub>A</sub>	ST <sub>1</sub>	SS <sub>2</sub>	Diff. <sub>B</sub>	<i>t</i>	sig.
Purchase Intention	3.55	4.45	.90	3.89	3.74	-.15	5.19	< .000
Positive Word of Mouth	4.47	5.11	.64	4.81	4.63	-.18	5.62	< .000
Share	2.81	4.28	1.47	3.67	3.30	-.37	8.87	< .000
Promote	4.94	6.40	1.46	5.68	5.50	-.18	5.73	< .000
View It	2.14	4.77	2.63	3.46	3.11	-.34	10.12	< .000

**Notes.** Change in attitude toward the brand for SS and ST are reported in the Results section. SS = video ad with straight-sell execution style, ST = video ad with storytelling execution style. SS<sub>1</sub> = straight-sell first. ST<sub>2</sub> = storytelling second. ST<sub>1</sub> = storytelling first. SS<sub>2</sub> = straight-sell second. Diff.<sub>A</sub> = Difference between SS<sub>1</sub> and ST<sub>2</sub>; Diff.<sub>B</sub> = Difference between ST<sub>1</sub> and SS<sub>2</sub>. *t* is calculated based on the average difference between execution order (Diff.<sub>A</sub>-Diff.<sub>B</sub>) for each variable.

**TABLE 4:**  
**Correlation of Response Scores by Social Media Use**

	Straight-Sell		Storytelling		Diff.	<i>z</i>	sig.
	<i>r</i>	Sig.	<i>r</i>	Sig.			
Purchase Intention	.097	.108	.072	.235	.025	.206	.419
Positive Word of Mouth	.128	.035	.113	.062	.015	.124	.450
Share	.044	.472	.235	<.000	.191	1.596	.055
Promote	.072	.238	.150	.013	.078	.645	.259
View It	.006	.922	.158	.009	.152	1.252	.105

**Notes.** Diff. = Straight-sell *r* – Storytelling *r*. To test the difference between correlations, each correlation coefficient (*r*) was converted to a z-score using Fisher's r-to-z transformation (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Preacher, 2002). It should be noted that this test is somewhat sensitive to sample size and with a modest increase in sample size from 133 and 140, the variables of view and sharing easily become significant.

suggests that heavy and light users alike react similarly to video ads with straight-sell execution styles. Meanwhile, video ads with a storytelling execution style produce a stronger reaction from heavy social media users suggesting that social media use is positively related to video sharing, brand promotion, and likelihood to view (versus skip) the video ad. As such, execution style has an interaction effect on the relationship social media use has with sharing-related behaviors and likelihood to view (see Table 4).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research produce implications for both marketing theory and practice, with more practical implications for marketing managers using video in social media marketing. In its totality, this research adds clarity and support for a video storytelling execution style in social media marketing.

The theoretical significance of this research is the extension of the narrative processing framework to social media marketing. This research answers the call in the literature to provide empirical evidence of consumer responses to storytelling in marketing (e.g., by Lundqvist et al., 2013). Furthermore, this research adds to the growing body of empirical research on video storytelling in social media marketing in the literature, e.g., video digital storytelling in consumer-to-consumer interactions, e.g., by Pera and Viglia (2016).

The practical significance of this research is found in its identification of effective video execution styles in social media marketing. To marketers, the choice of execution style becomes a strategic one with implications for several consumer responses. First, in support of H<sub>1</sub>, findings suggest the benefits to marketers of a video storytelling execution style over a straight-sell execution style include more favorable changes in attitude toward the brand. Given first exposure to these types of ads, it would seem as though the storytelling execution style is more successful at creating a stronger affective response or emotional connection with the brand. In the context of the current research, this emotional experience is with the brand as the storyteller in the video ad. Another plausible explanation is unlike the

storytelling video ad, the straight-sell video ad may have elevated cues of manipulative intent due to its strong emphasis on product features and attributes. It is then possible that the outcome was increased activation of persuasion knowledge, resulting in brand attitude decreasing from pre-exposure to post-exposure for straight-sell ads.

Second, compared to the video ad with the straight-sell execution style, the video ad with the storytelling execution style generated other favorable responses related to “shareability”: greater positive word of mouth about the brand (supporting H<sub>3a</sub>), higher intention to share the video ad (supporting H<sub>3b</sub>), and higher intention to promote the brand in the video ad (supporting H<sub>3c</sub>). Thus, marketers seeking sharing-related behaviors to capitalize on word of mouth on social media should carefully consider the type of video execution style. Marketers can use stories to build community and enhance brand meaning, while proving to their consumers that their product will add value to their life (Hirschman, 2010). This approach also has the potential to be effective in a social community where consumers are connected to large networks with opportunities to be brand influencers, sharing brand messages with others. When consumers share the message, they help generate positive publicity for the brand and move beyond being influencers to being brand advocates. Providing consumers with quality content in the form of video storytelling should make the content “shareworthy” such that they want to share and talk about the brand and its messages on social media.

Third, compared to a video ad with a straight-sell execution style, a video ad that uses a storytelling execution style is more likely to be viewed (than skipped), lending support for H<sub>4</sub>. This finding is important because there is no reason for marketers to create and pay for content if such content is just going to be skipped over by consumers. Given consumers’ ability to skip videos and scroll past them, marketers need something that will catch the attention of their target market. A storytelling execution style may be instrumental in increasing viewing (and reducing skipping) behaviors related to videos on social media.

Findings also suggest no significant difference in purchase intention between the video straight-sell and storytelling execution styles, lending no support for H<sub>2</sub>. It would seem as though marketers may need more than execution style to increase purchase intention following viewing of video content on social media. Perhaps, the brand's relevance to the consumer's lives and stage in consumer decision-making, and brand loyalty (participants may already have their preferred brand of gum or automobile) may be factors to further explore to get at purchase intention following viewing of video with branded content on social media.

Finally, additional findings reveal an interesting situation for marketers wishing to incorporate video storytelling into social media marketing. First, order effects exist such that positive outcomes arise from showing a video ad with a storytelling execution style *after* a video ad with a straight-sell execution style. This managerial implication seems pertinent to brands that are seeking to appeal to the rational side of consumers first and then following up with appealing to the emotional side of consumers. For example, brands like Coca-Cola may have started with straight-sell execution styles earlier in the brand's life to convey product features. However, as the brand and product became more well-known overtime, the brand may have moved on to the storytelling approach in marketing communications. Thus, if the brand wishes to use a straight-sell and storytelling execution style for its videos on social media, then it would be wise to start with the straight-sell approach and follow up with the storytelling approach, in that order.

Additional findings also suggest that social media usage plays a role in the effectiveness of video execution styles. Social media usage did not seem to matter for video ads with straight-sell execution styles. However, it does matter where the storytelling execution style is used. Compared to light social media users, heavy social media users seem to respond more favorably to the videos with the storytelling execution styles, engaging in more sharing-related behaviors, with greater intentions to view (and lower intentions to skip) the video ad. This additional finding has implications for segmenting the target audience by social media

usage and for using the right social media platform for videos.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Many of the limitations in this study can be addressed with future research. First, previous knowledge of the brand and ad campaign may influence respondents' answers. Future research can expand on this conjecture and see if brand and ad campaign familiarity play a role in affecting consumer responses to the video ad execution styles examined in this study.

Second, the level at which the straight-sell ad focuses on selling and not on telling a story is difficult to measure and interpret. The decision currently is left up to the researcher. Future research can expand on the criteria that consumers use to determine the difference between a straight-sell and a storytelling execution style. Future research may examine videos that are extreme cases of straight-sell versus storytelling execution styles.

Finally, this study used videos that were essentially "ads." Therefore, they fit the typical 30-second format for many ads. The deeper question that arises is: would a storytelling execution style for videos be more beneficial if the marketer produces content that departs from the traditional ad format, both in duration and content? For example, a company that focuses on consumer stories in longer videos, rather than touting its brand in a traditional ad format, may benefit even more from storytelling effects found in this study. Future research may explore storytelling in longer formats that resemble more of short films than traditional 30-second ads. Such formats may resemble Chipotle's series of longer-format video ads on YouTube.

These limitations aside, this research holds potential for future research on video storytelling in social media marketing. This research shows the power of video storytelling in the age of social media marketing, where storytelling by brands is expected to create more organic interactions with customers well into the future.

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