INDUSTRY CONTEXT
We are living in the Mobile Age. The proliferation of smartphones and tablets has had a profound change on the way people consume content. Americans are spending an increasing amount of time on their mobile devices (tablet and smartphone), from 18 hours a month in 2011 to over 34 hours in 2014 (Nielsen, 2014). There is a near infinite amount of content, but only a finite amount of time to consume it all.

This predicament has placed an even greater premium on attention, presenting new challenges (and opportunities) for brand advertisers.

We also know that mobile users are less receptive to ads. Only 13% of Americans using mobile devices say they are willing to receive ads on their phones in exchange for services (Nielsen, 2014). And yet, mobile advertising can often be a great boon for advertisers. Studies have shown that exposure to mobile ads can produce a 45% lift in intent (Nielsen, 2014). Win their attention and mobile users can be valuable prospects.

But how does an advertiser get its audience to pay attention to their ads on mobile? And how can that attention be measured? Click-through rate (CTR, or the ratio of clicks to impressions) only tells a fraction of the story. Even the highest-performing mobile ads—those with click-through rates above 1%—still fail to convert the other 99%, which could amount to millions of unconverted impressions over the course of a campaign. Very little is being done to understand the value of these impressions because there are very few options to measure it.
The modern mobile marketer is faced with this dilemma: how do I ensure my ad receives the attention it deserves and maximize the value of each impression?

**RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

**Sharethrough**, a software company that enables leading websites and apps to manage their in-feed, native ads, commissioned a study from **Nielsen** to determine how consumers visually process mobile ads. The study applied eye tracking and neuroscience—the study of subconscious reactions in the brain—to mobile advertising. Unlike survey-based mobile measurement, which evaluates a consumer’s conscious reactions to ads, neuroscience taps into the brain’s subconscious reactions as well. This is critical: the subconscious is the motivating force behind many of our actions, including which brands we buy from.

To understand the effectiveness of mobile advertising, the study (conducted in accordance with **Nielsen’s** proprietary methodology) compared native ads and banners, both placed in-feed. **Nielsen** worked with five premium advertisers, including Boeing, creating mock ads from similar creative elements that were optimized for each format. Study participants were shown a video simulating the experience of scrolling through an editorial feed. The feed was paused and the participants were shown either a native ad or an in-feed banner. Using a combination of EEG data—measurements of neural activity in the brain—and eye tracking, **Nielsen** quantified where and how the participants’ focus was being directed.

This is an unprecedented study, a first look at what neuroscience can teach us about creating effective native ads.
FINDINGS
Using neuroscience, Nielsen and Sharethrough uncovered the following:

Native Ads Appear to Receive Two Times More Visual Focus than Banners
Across native ads and banners, eye gaze appeared to be consistently more concentrated on the native ad, even though both formats were placed in-feed. Previous studies have demonstrated native’s impact on desktop, where native ads receive 52% more visual focus than banners (IPG Media Lab). This latest study confirms that this behavior is also true on tablet devices.

Banners Are Processed Peripherally
Banner ads receive little-to-no visual focus on the text. They are processed in the peripheral field of vision as is common for images. This type of processing occurs much faster than textual processing and can hinder reading of taglines.
Native Ads Are Being Read
Among native ads, the majority of explicit visual focus was on the ad's text rather than the thumbnail. The same was true for editorial posts.

Native Ad Headlines Can Be Optimized to Trigger Associations
Words from an associative network similar to words included in the headline can result in a higher message resonance lift and can subconsciously influence brand perception.

Brand Assets Impact Brand Resonance Lift
Including key brand assets (e.g. logos, keywords, etc.) can facilitate the formation of brand associations and increase brand lift.

*Not actual results
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SUMMARY
Native ads offer marketers a higher level of reader attention. Visual focus is concentrated on native ads, specifically the text, more than on banners. This direct focus on the ad can help to form associative networks of words and brand assets in the reader’s mind, subconsciously influencing and strengthening brand perceptions.

CONCLUSION
As mobile adoption and usage grows, consumer attention will become increasingly elusive. Native ads command focus and attention. They can be an effective method for marketers to share their brand’s stories and narrative to the highly distracted mobile consumer.

Marketers must pay close attention to how their native ads are worded. One of a native ad’s most valuable assets lies in the ad’s text—the time and focus required to process it, and the word associations it calls to mind. Each adjective or noun in a headline—including the brand name—is stored in an associative network of related concepts. Activating one concept automatically triggers the others, strengthening those connections over time. When writing headlines, marketers must be strategic in their word choice, activating associations that are aligned with the brand or the campaign. To increase the likelihood of those associations, and the strength with which they are made, key brand assets (e.g. logos, thumbnails, etc.) should be included in the native ad.

There is much more to be learned and extrapolated from this research. Neuroscience has helped provide additional insights on the most effective use of creative assets and how marketers can optimize their native ads to drive the strongest brand lift.

To see the full study results and learn about additional best practices, please visit www.sharethrough.com/neuroscience.