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Native advertising in online-only and hybrid media

Master Thesis

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Introduction

The main concept of native advertising is that it stands in between journalism and marketing, i.e. the advertising content blends into the editorial environment, thus being mutually beneficial for the audience – since it receives meaningful, relevant content, and for the clients due to a more seamless user experience. Therefore, there is a higher probability of more efficient promotion of their brand, products and services. This phenomenon is not new; advertising content embedded into the media was present in print magazines, TV shows, movies, etc. long before modern day, but today it is the internet that allows new opportunities for this type of advertising to flourish.

Publishers treat native advertising, also known as sponsored content, as a way of telling a story or at least delivering useful information to the readers, just like any editorial piece. Trevor Fellows, a global head of ad sales for The Wall Street Journal, supported this point in the following way, ‘We do not think most people want to come to a site like ours and read content from an advertiser that replicates a normal article. If it looks like a puff piece, nobody is going to read it. It is got to be at least as engaging as the content around it.’¹ Moreover, within the survey conducted among 14 American media outlets using native advertising, participants stressed that sponsored content has to be relevant, engaging and credible to meet brand goals. It also means that the content should fit with their publications – adopting the voice and tone of their overall editorial report and meeting their audience’s expectations.²

Statistics also argue that classical revenue models relying on basic advertisements like banners, widgets and other forms of intrusive adverts are not

¹ Moses, L. (2015, April 9). The Wall Street Journal's native approach: 'If it looks like a puff piece, nobody's going to read it.' *Digiday*. URL: <http://digiday.com/publishers/wall-street-journals-native-approach-looks-like-puff-piece-nobodys-going-read/>.

² Mclellan, M. (2016). The rise of native ads in digital news publications. *Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism*. URL: <http://towknight.org/research/native-ads/>.

efficient anymore. The average clickthrough rate of display ads across all formats and placements is only 0.05%.³

Given less intrusive and integrated advertising experience that allows benefiting both brands by delivering stories connected with their products, and audience of the media outlets by receiving meaningful relevant engaging content, native advertising is on the rise at the moment.⁴ According to the study conducted by The Native Advertising Institute in cooperation with the network for global media FIPP, within which 140 magazine executives from 39 countries were surveyed, 19% is the average percentage of publisher's overall advertising revenues that comes from native advertising in 2015, and 79% of those surveyed expect to increase the percentage of native advertising in their overall advertising revenues.⁵ Moreover, according to the data released by Adyoulike, one of the leading European agencies specialised in producing native advertising content, the worldwide spend on native advertising is expected to double by the end of 2018, rising from \$30.9Bn in 2015 to \$59.35Bn in 2018.⁶

In the following thesis, we are focusing on native advertising in online media outlets, given the overall rise of online advertising and particularly due to the potential capacity of the native advertising articles: 66% of publishers that took part in the aforementioned survey by The Native Advertising Institute and FIPP see online articles, or in-feed native advertisements as one of the most effective

³ Chaffey, D. (2017, March 8). Display advertising clickthrough rates. *Smart Insights*. URL: <http://www.smartinsights.com/internet-advertising/internet-advertising-analytics/display-advertising-clickthrough-rates/>.

⁴ Sutton, R. (2016). Can video and native formats rule mobile advertising? *Trusted Media Brands*. URL: http://www.tmbi.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TMBI_CES_NativeVideoMobileAdv_WhitePaper-FINAL.pdf.

⁵ Native Advertising Trends 2016 Report (2016). *FIPP & The Native Advertising Institute*. URL: <http://d1ri6y1vinkzt0.cloudfront.net/media/documents/Native%20Advertising%20Trends%20Report%202016.pdf>.

⁶ Native advertising is eating the world (2015). *Adyoulike*. URL: <http://public.adyoulike.com/Info/native-advertising-is-eating-the-world/index.html>.

types of native advertising.⁷ The points discussed above argue **relevance** of the chosen topic for the following master thesis.

It is evident that native advertising is an example to show where advertising and journalism are becoming close. Yet there is a lack of proper research that thoroughly analyzes examples of how different online media are designing sponsored content to mimic the editorial content in a way that facilitates promotion of the specific brand, stays relevant to the media outlet's audience and concurrently does not mislead the readers in regards of where the solely editorial content ends and advertising begins damaging media credibility. This supports **novelty** of the aspect we are interested in.

The **purpose of the following research** is to fill this lacuna and compare how two types of online media – hybrid and online-only – are utilizing textual and visual elements in their native advertisements in order to create a coherent relationship to the brand and the product, as well as to meet the audience's needs. Online-only are those types of media outlets that are distributed solely online. We have focused on a specific type of online-only media outlets – so-called digital-natives that are denoting in this research those outlets that are not only distributed on the Internet but also were launched online adhering to the born-on-the-web strategy, while the notion of hybrid media implies in this research relates to online versions of the print media outlets, or online-alternative media. We are going to discuss whether differences in integrating native advertisements into editorial formats and delivery platform in the chosen media depend on the region it was founded in, on its origin or on other factors.

The **object** of the following master thesis is the phenomenon of native advertising in online media. The **aspect** chosen is utilization of textual and visual elements in native advertisements in the online-only and hybrid media outlets.

⁷ Native Advertising Trends 2016 Report (2016). *FIPP & The Native Advertising Institute*. URL: <http://d1ri6y1vinkzt0.cloudfront.net/media/documents/Native%20Advertising%20Trends%20Report%202016.pdf>.

In order to reach the aim of the present research, we have to fulfill the following **tasks**:

1. To describe the modern revenue models used in online media;
2. To explain how native advertising is applied in online media as a revenue source;
3. To describe the methodology of analyzing in-feed native advertisements in the chosen media outlets;
4. To conduct textual and visual analysis of in-feed native advertisements in the chosen media outlets in order to extract messages, brand relations expressed in the advertisements, and to find out how visual tools are utilized;
5. To discuss differences and similarities of blending advertising and editorial nature in the native advertisements by the chosen media outlets.

Sample and chronological framework. To make the scope broader whilst keeping the sample feasible, we have chosen three online-only and three hybrid media outlets in three regions – America, Europe and Russia. Thus, the study is focused on online-only Quartz (USA), Mashable UK (U.K.), Meduza (Russia) and hybrid The New York Times (USA), Süddeutsche Zeitung (Germany) and Forbes.ru (Russia).

We are going to analyze 12 native advertisements from each of the media outlets. We have chosen three following criteria for selecting texts that are to be analyzed: time scope – the study looks at the most recent examples published during the last year (March 2016 – March 2017), except for the Süddeutsche Zeitung case, since we analyzed the texts retrieved from the most recent media kit in March 2017; brands promoted – in order to diversify the analyzed content, we were taking into account that often media outlets publish several advertisements in a partnership with one company and we were not analyzing more than one text per brand; type of the native advertisement – we will focus on in-feed units, or sponsored articles as a specific type of native advertising in order to keep the

sample homogeneous and also given the popularity of this type of native advertisements described above.

Literature review. For the purpose of learning basic principles of advertising, such as how to conduct a market research, negotiate with clients, facilitate and assess efficiency of the advertisements, works of Sandage and Fryburger (1971), Ogilvy (1983) and Berdyshev (2010) to name a few were examined. The phenomenon of online advertising as a revenue model was discussed within the works by Timmers (1998), Al-Debei (2008), Bateman (2015) and others, as well as the overall role of the Internet in brand building that was emphasized in several works by Anderson (2011) and Turow (2012). These works allowed us to find out that establishing promotion on the Web implies a lot of factors to be taken into consideration, including the Internet's interactivity, problem of its credibility, rich opportunities of content personalization and native advertising as one of the examples of such dynamics. Books and articles by Cameron (1996), Kim, Pasadeos and Barban (2001) and others were examined in order to scrutinize the phenomenon of native advertising, namely approaches to defining the term and separating it from the notion of advertorial, which is sometimes mistakenly used as a synonym of sponsored content, and the problems that usage of native advertising may entail. In order to learn more about the latter aspect, surveys assessing level of credibility of the sponsored content among different audiences conducted by Howe and Teufel (2014), Yang (2004) were also taken into account. This enabled us to come to a conclusion that unlabeled advertising content affects readers' perception of the media outlet and undermines their trust. Moreover, we should highlight the playbook prepared by Interactive Advertising Bureau (2013) that is commonly used by researchers who are exploring the sphere of native advertising, since it was one of the first attempts to formulate general characteristics, typologies of native advertisements and provide the native evaluation framework, along with the white paper from The Altimeter Group (2013), that have been a rich source of knowledge for learning more about

opportunities and drawbacks of exploiting native advertising as one of the revenue sources.

In order to find methodological foundation for exploring utilization of textual and visual tools applied in the native advertisements in the chosen online media, the findings of Chandler (2007), Beasley and Danesi (2002) were used. They largely contributed to choosing relevant research methods, such as qualitative content analysis and semiotic analysis, while research of Dyrbye, Kernahan et al. (2014) was used as an example of applying these theoretical perspectives. Books and articles by Rosental and Kohtev (1981), Parry et al. (2013) conveyed about textual and visual traits of different types of advertising, as well as described methods that could be used for conducting analysis. Their findings allowed us to outline the difference between roles of symbolic and literal visuals in the advertising, and also learn more about typologies of advertising texts and requirements to an efficient advertisement.

Additionally, we reviewed works by Vartanova (1999), Bodrunova and Litvinenko (2013), Cunningham et al. (1998) to formulate clear definitions of online-only, digital-native and hybrid types of media outlets and avoid ambiguous understanding of these notions in the present thesis.

However, we see that the area we are specifically focusing on, namely the problem of using visual and textual tools in native advertising in a way of blending it into the media outlet's environment, as well as the general problem of symbiosis of sponsored and editorial content is neglected in academia so far.

Methodological foundation. We are going to conduct qualitative content analysis of each native advertisement in order to uncover the structures produced by these texts, since we are following constructivist and structuralist understanding of communication and adhere to the opinion that text constructs the meaning rather than carries it. Thus, we will be able to understand how native advertisements are constructing the basic message that should be conveyed to the reader and how brand mentions are embedded in those structures. We will also take a semiotic

approach in order to articulate possible connotations that visuals used in the native advertisements are generating. We will build a signification system, as it was suggested by Beasley and Danesi in one of their research articles, in order to fully grasp potential meanings that are hidden in the way of visual representation of the brand and, overall, main ideas of native advertisements. Moreover, we will extract, which functions visuals are playing, whether they are literal, denoting the factual information about the brand and product, typical for classical advertisements, or symbolic that are creating specific meanings around the product promoted, enabling associations generation or embedded solely for aesthetics.

Structure of the work. The dissertation includes introduction, two chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography of references and sources and appendices.

Chapter 1. Native advertising as an income generator in online media

In this section of the present study, the first notion under scrutiny is native advertising. In order to articulate the definition of native advertising, its part in the process of generating income in the media business and portray main problems connected with using native advertising for raising revenues, we will, first of all, give a brief overview of the modern revenue models used in online media today.

1.1. Modern revenue models in online media

The term revenue model often overlaps with the term business model. To avoid ambiguity, we consider it important to explain the difference between these two notions.

Business model is a frequently used term, but approaches of scientists to define it are different. Some of them have a more comprehensive approach and define business model as a strategy, which clearly demonstrates architecture of the value production, information flows and services, including description of business actors, business partners, their roles, potential profits and sources of revenues. According to Timmers⁸, Torbay et al.⁹ and Osterwalder et al.¹⁰, the term business model should explicitly explain the business logic of a company.

Others such as Magretta¹¹, Rappa¹² and Linder and Cantrell¹³ are focusing on the revenue sources, asserting that business model should explain how business would make money, providing particular value to a particular audience.

⁸ Timmers, P. (1998). Business Models for Electronic Markets. *Electronic Markets*, 8(2), 3-8.

⁹ Dubosson-Torbay, M., Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y. (2002). E-business model design, classification, and measurements. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 44(1), 5-23.

¹⁰ Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y., & Tucci, C. L. (2005). Clarifying business models: Origins, present, and future of the concept. *Communications of the association for Information Systems*, 16(1), 2-25.

¹¹ Magretta, J. (2002). Why Business Models Matter. *Harvard Business Review*, 80: 5, 86-92.

¹² Rappa, M. (2000). Managing the Digital Enterprise. URL: <http://digitalenterprise.org/index.html>.

Trying to accumulate different definitions of a business model, Al-Debei et al. have articulated the following definition: ‘The business model is an abstract representation of an organization, be it conceptual, textual, and/or graphical, of all core interrelated architectural, co-operational, and financial arrangements designed and developed by an organization presently and in the future, as well as all core products and/or services the organization offers, or will offer, based on these arrangements that are needed to achieve its strategic goals and objectives.’¹⁴

Thus, we adhere to the opinion that business model is broader definition than the revenue model, which implies strategy of generating and increasing income.¹⁵ From the point of view of the majority of scientists, revenue model is a cornerstone of a business model, but it cannot substitute the whole term. Since in this research we are only focusing on the strategies of monetization in modern online media on the example of native advertising, we are going to use the term revenue model.

The processes of digitalization and crisis in the sphere of traditional print media have forced media to adopt various sustainable business strategies in order to establish successful business and revenue models and adapt to new reality in the context of Internet-based economy. In this regard, Martijn de Waal distinguishes three main strategies of generating income, which are currently relevant: income generated by services, cost-cutting and income generated by content.¹⁶ We will describe each strategy, applying respective examples of modern revenue models used in online media today.

Income generated by services. Amid obvious crisis in the industry of old media and, therefore, the simultaneous crisis of classical monetization models, some media companies are looking for new sources of profit. Here, the term

¹³ Linder, J., Cantrell, S. (2000). Changing Business Models: Surveying the Landscape. *Accenture Institute for Strategic Change*, 2-12.

¹⁴ Al-Debei, M. et al. (2008). Defining the Business Model in the New World of Digital Business. URL: <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/2887/1/AMCIS2008.pdf>.

¹⁵ Afuah, A. (2004). Business Models: A Strategic Management Approach. *Journal-Operational Research Society*, 56(11), 1343-1344.

¹⁶ De Waal, M. (2014). Business and ownership of the media in digital times. *Mapping Digital Media: global findings*, 193-201.

‘services’ encompasses different ways of getting additional revenue, apart from well-known and widely used classical sales of content to the audience and of this audience to the advertisers. For example, the Guardian has developed and now is operating the dating website Soulmates, whose ‘profits are reinvested into the Guardian Media Group to sustain journalism that is free from commercial and political interference.’¹⁷

Another example of successful diversification in the British media is Monocle, which became popular and well known among professionals not only for its online radio station and sophisticated articles in its life-style magazine, but also for travel guide series and different accessories and clothes sold under the brand Monocle in its own shop. German newspaper Bild follows the same strategy, producing and selling various products under its brand name. One of the biggest news agencies in Russia Novosti has also taken a diversification path, not only selling ad space, but also organizing commercial events, gathering statistics for businesses, administering apps, etc.

Cost-cutting. It may also be counted as a distinct strategy for improving publishers’ balance sheets.¹⁸ There are different ways of cutting costs, from reducing investments in the media company’s particular departments up to experimenting with convergence trends and creating generation of mojo (e.g. establishing cross-media newsrooms, using user-generated content, etc.)

Income generated by content. The strategy of generating income through content remains rather popular in online media. De Waal mentioned independent digital-native Huffington Post, as well as various online subsidiaries, including German Der Spiegel, Rheinische Post and Süddeutsche Zeitung (will be analyzed in the next sections of the present study) that are becoming profitable independent media.

¹⁷ Guardian News and Media Limited. (2016). Soulmates. URL: <https://soulmates.theguardian.com/help#contact>.

¹⁸ De Waal, M. (2014). Business and ownership of the media in digital times. *Mapping Digital Media: global findings*, 196.

In the 1960's, Smythe proposed a theory that media sells not only content, but its audience as well. Advertisers are buying services of specific audiences with specific specifications, which will pay attention in predictable numbers.¹⁹ According to this theory, media owners are gathering and correcting their audience scope with the content, which is relevant to the particular social groups. Then they are selling access this audience to respective advertisers. In other words, he described this process in three stages: producing, purchasing and using targeted audiences. Thus, the border between consumer and worker is becoming more and more vague.

Resale of audiences is still adequate for the monetization models, which implies ads as the main source of the revenue and a special type of the journalistic content. Advertisers are paying for ads in order to increase their own revenue or from image considerations – advertorials and other forms of native adverts are widely used for increasing customer loyalty (B2C) or partner loyalty (B2B).

Online advertising stays one of the backbones in digital media business, steadily showing regular increase. Therefore, digital adspend grows as well. For example, UK digital adspend grew 16,4% in 2015, according to the British Internet Advertising Bureau's annual report.²⁰ Fastest-growing digital advertising formats are mobile (60% growth), video (51%), content and native ads, including advertorials (50%), and ads in social media (45%).

Obviously, adspend would not grow that fast if it did not show good and steady revenue results. According to the report published after the research conducted by the US Interactive Advertising Bureau and PwC Advisory Services, only in the United States online ads revenues increased more than 20%, comparing

¹⁹ Smythe, D.W. (1977). Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism. *Canadian Journal of Political and Society Theory*, 1: 3, 1-28.

²⁰ Digital Adspend Grows at Fastest Rate for Seven Years. (2016). *Internet Advertising Bureau UK*. URL: <http://www.iabuk.net/about/press/archive/digital-adspend-grows-at-fastest-rate-for-seven-years>.

to 2014.²¹ The forecasts on global digital advertising revenues are rather positive as well.²²

Thus, classical advertising models still show potential to grow, especially in the sphere of digital media business. David Silverman, partner at PwC US, even called Internet advertising a disruptive innovation, and added that ‘three key disruptive trends – mobile, social, and programmatic – continue to fuel this exceptional rate of growth.’²³ There are different innovations, which are making online advertising a promising way of generating income.

First of all, the Internet provides instruments for targeting audience and for collecting results of the advertisement to count conversion and assess efficiency of the ad.²⁴ Secondly, online ads have evolved more adequate intermediation markets (e.g. keyword bidding system and contextual ads). Moreover, new industry has given birth to new specialized advertising platforms like Google, Amazon Advertising Platform, advertising.com, etc.²⁵

There are different typologies of online ads existing. For example, Scott Bateman distinguishes online advertising models by a way of counting price and assessing efficiency:

1. Cost per click (CPC) – fits text-oriented ads more, helps to split risks and rewards between advertiser and publisher;

²¹ IAB Internet Advertising Revenue Report. (2016). *Interactive Advertising Bureau*. URL: <http://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/IAB-Internet-Advertising-Revenue-Report-FY-2015.pdf>.

²² Digital advertising revenue worldwide from 2015 to 2021. (2016). *Statistica*. URL: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/456679/digital-advertising-revenue-format-digital-market-outlook-worldwide/>.

²³ US Internet ad revenues hit landmark \$59.6 billion in 2015, a 20% uptick over record-breaking numbers in 2014, marking sixth consecutive year of double-digit growth. (2016, April 21). *Business Wire*. URL: <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20160421005933/en/U.S.-Internet-Ad-Revenues-Hit-Landmark-59.6>.

²⁴ Evans, D. (2009). The online advertising industry: economics, evolution, and privacy. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 23: 3, 58.

²⁵ Evans, D. (2008). The Economics of the Online Advertising Industry. URL: <http://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/rne.2008.7.issue-3/rne.2008.7.3.1154/rne.2008.7.3.1154.xml>.

2. Cost per thousand (CPM) – fits image-oriented ads more, for example, banners, generates certain income for the publisher and uncertain (advertiser does not know for sure how much money he gets) for the advertiser;

3. Cost per acquisition (CPA) – recognized as not efficient and therefore it is not popular; the publisher gets income only in case an advertising delivers acquisition to the advertiser.²⁶

There is another approach of distinguishing different formats of online ads:

- Display – visual ads, which can contain both static images, like text and pictures, and dynamic, like videos, pop-ups. Three common forms: frame (banner or sidebar), floating (pop-ups overlapping content), interstitial (displayed while page is loading);

- SEM (Search Engine Marketing) – way of displaying ads, based on the potential customers' search keywords;

- Social media advertisements;

- Newsletters;

- etc.²⁷

Nowadays online media outlets are using various types of display media advertisements, especially banners. There are different approaches to managing banners – it can be shown to target audience according to their search query, using functions of inside targeting, or it can also be shown to every single reader without any sampling per se. In any case, layout of the banner has a key role: the design should make it noticeable but not glaring, it also makes sense to use hyperlinks, animation and other effects with help of Java- and Flash-technologies – of so-called, rich media.

However, according to the statistics of Invesp, the average person is served over 1,700 banner ads per month and only half of them are ever viewed.²⁸

²⁶ Bateman, S. (2016, April 5). Online Advertising Models, CPC, CPM or CPA? *Promise Media*. URL: <http://www.promisemedia.com/online-advertising/best-revenue-deals-cpm-cpc-or-cpa>.

²⁷ Digital advertising formats. (2016). *Tube Mogul*. URL: <https://www.tubemogul.com/digital-formats/>.

Therefore, advertising products in online media outlets are often going beyond any typologies, while experimenting with different advertising formats and creating new, such as interactive advertising units. For example, the New York Times has created such unit for the advertising campaign of Prudential (company providing life insurance and financial services). Clicking on the interactive banner, the readers could choose his or her birthdate and see the front page of the New York Times for that date. They could also clearly see Prudential's logo embedded in the banner.

Paywall is another popular way of monetizing content, when access to full content of the online media requires digital subscription.²⁹ Experts are distinguishing three types of paywalls: hard paywalls (no free content, only headline and first paragraphs are available); metered access (certain number of free articles per certain period of time); freemium, or soft paywall (certain types of articles are available only to subscribers).³⁰

When the online version of The New York Times has followed the example of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. and launched a metered paywall in 2009, it brought a lot of criticism into the discourse.³¹ However, according to The New York Times press release, published on the 30th July 2015, digital-only subscribers have surpassed the one million mark, in addition to more than a million of print-and-digital subscribers, less than four and a half years after launching freemium

²⁸ Saleh, K. (2014). Effectiveness of online advertising – statistics and trends. *Invesp*. URL: <http://www.invespro.com/blog/effectiveness-online-advertising/>.

²⁹ Cook, J. et al. (2012). Paying for what was free: lessons from The New York Times paywall. *Redactor*. URL: http://redactor.in.ua/images/files/Paywall_NYT.pdf.

³⁰ Pickard, V. (2014). Salvation or Folly? The Promises and Perils of Digital Paywalls. *University of Pennsylvania, Scholarly Commons*. URL: http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1439&context=asc_papers.

³¹ Clark, A. (2009, May 7). News Corp will charge for newspaper websites, says Rupert Murdoch. *The Guardian*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2009/may/07/rupert-murdoch-charging-websites>.

paywall model.³² In May 2015 they reported a robust growth of digital-only subscribers (1.2 million) and fall of the revenue in print advertising.³³

What is interesting, Anderson, Bell and Shirky in their landmark report ‘Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present’ underlined that the example of The New York Times is almost always an exception and probably, most of its cases – especially the practice of paywalls – will not be applicable to other media outlets.³⁴

However, there are already some more examples of successful cases of hard paywall usage, like The Wall Street Journal, The Times, The Financial Times, The Toronto Star, Russian VOS, etc.

Crowdfunding is also recognized as a way of revenue generation. Being a type of crowdsourcing, it is a distributed funding model, within which stories are funded by small donations or payments from a large crowd of people.³⁵ Virtually, revenue model based on crowdfunding allows journalists and leaders of non-profit projects cover expenses on the launching itself and on fulfilling current tasks.

There are three main actors in any crowdfunding model: players, who are providing an idea or a project to be funded, interested groups, which are ready to finance those proposed ideas or projects and crowdfunding organization – platform (any crowdfunding organization is a platform), which brings together those who

³² The New York Times passes one million digital subscriber milestone. (2015, June 8). *The New York Times*. URL: <http://investors.nytc.com/press/press-releases/press-release-details/2015/The-New-York-Times-Passes-One-Million-Digital-Subscriber-Milestone/default.aspx>.

³³ Ember, S. (2016, May 4). New York Times Co. Reports Loss as Digital Subscriptions Grow. *The New York Times*. URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/04/business/media/new-york-times-co-q1-earnings.html?_r=0.

³⁴ Anderson, C. W., Bell, E., Shirky, C. (2015). Post-industrial journalism: Adapting to the present. *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, 7(2), 32-47.

³⁵ Aitamurto, T. (2015). The Role of Crowdfunding as a Business Model in Journalism: A Five-layered Model of Value Creation. *Crowdfunding the Future. Estados Unidos: Media industries, Ethics & Digital Society*, 189-205.

are coming up with initiatives and those who may wish to support them.³⁶ The biggest crowdfunding platforms today are Kickstarter, Gofundme, Indiegogo, etc.

Probably, one of the most well-known crowdfunding platforms for journalists was Spot.us, launched in 2008. On this website, registered users were presenting their ideas of an article or a photo piece and the users were donating money on realization of the projects they were interested in. After gathering the needed amount of money, authors could publish their journalistic pieces on any platform. Some of them were spread in the New York Times, The Times and other major media outlets.

In 2011 David Cohn, the founder of the project Spot.us, sold it to the corporation American Public Media, who has assessed the efficiency of the platform together with Carlson Ventures Enterprise at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management. Analysis that they conducted has shown that most of the projects were fund exclusively by friends and relatives of the authors and majority of those funders have never come back to the website after donating once. Moreover, general market analysis has also shown that there is still not that much room for scaling journalism-oriented crowdfunding platforms, since the consumer demand is not sufficient (donations on journalistic projects account for around 0,13% from the whole market) and, moreover, journalism related projects have 63% failure rate comparing to 56% of other projects.³⁷

On the other hand, example of the Spot.us failure does not mean that crowdfunding cannot be an efficient way of generating income. For instance, Dutch journalism platform De Correspondent, which focuses on investigative reporting and sophisticated analysis and which is ad-free, being funded only by its

³⁶ Ordanini, A., Miceli, L., Pizzetti, M., Parasuraman, A. (2011). Crowdfunding: transforming customers into investors through innovative service platforms. *Journal of service management*, 22(4), 443-449.

³⁷ Easton, J. (2015, February 11). Spot.us is going away, but its legacy inspires new chapters of crowdfunding playbook. *Public Insight Network*. URL: <http://www.publicinsightnetwork.org/2015/02/11/spot-us-is-going-away-but-its-legacy-inspires-new-chapters-of-crowdfunding-playbook/>.

members, broke a world record for crowdfunding in journalism in September 2013 after raising more than one million euro in the first eight days after their campaign was launched. Now De Correspondent is funded by subscribers.

Another example of a successful crowdfunding experience is The Texas Tribune – nonprofit online news organization, which writes about politics, public policy and statewide issues. As well as De Correspondent, it was launched with the help of private donators interested in the idea of its founders, John Thornton, Ross Ramsey and Evan Smith. According to their annual report, in 2015 The Texas Tribune has raised over six million dollars due to crowdfunding, subscription, support from various funds, and also due to organizing events and selling sponsor packages of their native advertisements.³⁸

Crowdfunding strategies are also becoming popular in Russia. The most famous and successful crowdfunded journalistic project in the country so far is the website about modern culture Colta.ru. Its fundraising campaign was launched on one of the most popular crowdfunding platforms in Russia – Planeta.ru. Now Colta is funded by subscription, its supervisory board of famous Russian media managers, philanthropists and social activists and has already received donations from those, who are just interested in their project. Colta has already introduced another round of its fundraising campaign on Planeta.ru and raised 287 210 rub (3 934 euro) out of the announced 300 000 rub (4 110 euro) for four months. Herewith, Colta has also established a reward system for its donators: each person, who supports the project, may get a present; it can be a free ticket for an event, T-shirt, celebrity's autograph, etc.

Taking into account the examples described above, we come to the conclusion that a model of full monetization through crowdfunding is not sufficient for online media. Crowdfunded capital can often help to launch a project

³⁸ The Texas Tribune. Annual report. (2016). *The Texas Tribune*. URL: <http://static.texastribune.org.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/TT-Annual-Report-2016-0224.pdf>.

and then to support it partially. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that organization of crowdfunding campaign is a time-consuming task: project members should correct the business plan, optimize the project on a crowdfunding platform, come to an agreement with suppliers of rewards and prizes for donators (like in case of Colta), etc. To justify the choice of the revenue model based on crowdfunding, it is crucial to assess efficiency of the newsroom and its KPI and then to compare those indexes and factors to the time and effort other ways of generating income would take: selling online ads, implementing paywalls or native advertising.

Generally, we can conclude that there are a variety of options for choosing a unique and efficient revenue model, but online advertising stays one of the most promising ways of income generation. In the next section we are going to focus on native advertising as a type of online advertising, explore definitions articulated by different researchers, typologies and problems, along with looking at the key factors that should be taken into account in case native advertising is chosen by the media outlet's management as one of the income generators.

1.2. Native advertising: definitions, key characteristics and approaches to revenue generation

Native advertising is one of the evident trends among other forms of online advertising. There is no standard definition of native advertising yet. In the following paragraph we will specify the most common ones.

Kim, Pasadeos and Barban articulated their definition of native advertising over a decade ago in 2001. They defined it as a type of an advertiser-sponsored content, which is designed to appear to the user as similar to editorial content.³⁹ However, it tells nothing about mutually beneficial experience for both, readers

³⁹ Kim, B., Pasadeos, Y., Barban, A. (2001). On the deceptive effectiveness of labeled and unlabeled advertorial formats. *Mass Communication & Society*, 4: 3, 266.

and customers that have chosen the specific media as an advertising platform. This requirement was taken into account by other researchers and organizations that were focusing on the research of this particular type of advertising. For instance, according to the most commonly used definition of Altimeter Group, native advertising is a type of advertisement designed to fully integrate commercial messaging into a specific delivery platform that provides benefits both to users, in terms of receiving engaging and attractive content, and to the clients, increasing their relevance and value to their target audiences.⁴⁰ Thus, they focused on the main advantage and at the same time controversy of any native advertisement that consists in it being merged with the content of a platform upon which it is published.

According to the Russian researchers, naturalness of such type of advertising in online media is achieved upon integration of the ad unit into design and content of a media outlet.⁴¹ Thus, it drives attention of the audience and does not become a blind spot within the layout, as it usually happens with more traditional types of advertising, such as banners.⁴²

In other words, such form of an advertisement is embedded in the media outlet's system of values, format and style. Tony Hallett, director at Collective Content (UK) – a content agency specializing in content strategy and content creation – in his column about native advertising for the Guardian brought an example of BuzzFeed: when BuzzFeed works with a brand like Virgin Mobile, its

⁴⁰ Defining and Mapping the Native Advertising Landscape Altimeter Research Theme: Mecosystem. (2013). *American Press Institute*. URL: <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/report-defining-mapping-native-advertising-landscape-rebecca-lieb.pdf>.

⁴¹ Melekhova, A.S. (2015). Native Ad as an Element of Digital-Communicational Strategy of the Brand. *Bulletin of economics, law and sociology. Issue 3*. [Мелехова А.С. Нативная реклама как элемент digital-коммуникационной стратегии бренда. Вестник экономики, права и социологии. Выпуск № 3]. 242-244.

⁴² Butkovsky, Y.V. (2016). Comparison of content marketing and native advertising. *Materials of the 24th Russian national conference 'Problems of managing-2016'*. [Бутковский Ю.В. Сравнительный анализ контент-маркетинга и нативной рекламы. Материалы 24-ой Всероссийской студенческой конференции 'Проблемы управления-2016']. 51-52.

goal is not only to create a good-looking native content, which will be relevant to the interests of the readers and fit their expectations – a native ad’s goal is to go viral as well, to be shareworthy. Such effect is impossible with simple display advertising.⁴³

It is worth mentioning that in the 1980’s and 1990’s, researchers have already noticed the steady rise of hybrid advertising-editorial messages in print media, which are mimicking newspapers’ and magazines’ content. And in 1996, Cameron, Ju-Pak and Kim suggested one of the most exhaustive definitions of a new phenomenon. They called native advertising, as we know it today an advertorial and defined it as a ‘paid-for, commercial message, featuring any object or objects that simulates the editorial content of a publication in terms of design/structure, visual/verbal content, and/or context in which it appears.’⁴⁴

According to the most recent data available, Internet users are paying attention to native ads 52% more frequently than to banners and 32% of them wanted to share a native advertisement comparing to 19% ready to share the banner.⁴⁵ Native Advertising Institute in collaboration with the network for global media FIPP prepared their annual report, based on interviews with 140 executives from 39 countries about their insights into native advertising.⁴⁶ As the results showed, researchers found out that more and more publishers prefer using native adverts to traditional ones, whereas 49% admitted that around 10% of their overall advertising revenues are coming from native ads and most of them are expecting steady growth of those indexes.

⁴³ Hallet, T. (2015, November 4). What is native advertising anyway? *The Guardian*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network-outbrain-partner-zone/native-advertising-quality-scalability>.

⁴⁴ Cameron, G. et al. (1996). Advertorials in Magazines: Current Use and Compliance with Industry Guidelines. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 73: 3, 722.

⁴⁵ Automotive Trends: Automotive as a media channel and a life application. (2014). *IPG Media Lab Research*. URL: <http://www.ipglab.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014-Lab-Trends-and-Outlook-for-Automotive-Final.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Pollitt, C. (2016, June 21). 2016 Native Advertising Trends for Publishers. *The Huffington Post*. URL: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chad-pollitt/2016-native-advertising-t_1_b_10570340.html.

There are different approaches to differentiating native advertisements. For instance, Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) in its ‘Native Advertising Playbook’ has introduced six criteria of choosing relevant native ad unit:

1. Form (how does the advertisement fit the overall design);
2. Function (whether it delivers the same type of content experience);
3. Integration (how well does the advertisement match surrounding content);
4. Buying and targeting (whether the advertisement placement guaranteed on a specific page/website, and what kind of targeting it is);
5. Measurement (what metrics are used for assessing efficiency);
6. Disclosure (is the disclosure clear and prominent).

Following those criteria, IAB came up with six core types of ad units, which are frequently deployed for achieving their objectives:

1. In-feed units, or in-feed social ads (story written by or in partnership with the publisher’s team, which fits with normal surrounding content; sold with the guaranteed placement; largest variation in execution);
2. Paid search units (found above organic search results; look exactly like surrounding search results; sold with a guaranteed placement);
3. Recommendation widgets (integrated in the page; are not sold with a guaranteed placement);
4. Promoted listings (commonly found on sites that typically do not have a traditional editorial content; designed to fit seamlessly into the browsing experience);
5. In-ad with native element units (placed outside of the editorial well, contains contextually relevant content within the ad; sold with a guaranteed placement; advertiser knows exactly what content will surround it);

6. Custom, or ‘Can’t be contained’ (examples, which do not fit proposed framework yet, or too platform-specific).⁴⁷

This is not the only existing approach to outlining types of native advertisements. For example, Glick and Neckes suggest other ways of distinguishing them. They divide native advertisements into three categories, based on the key differences from classical forms of advertising and on whether they are fully native: tourist ads (step up from a classical banner advertisement – with well-conceived layout and expanded size, contain useful content, offer some social functionality), resident ads (integrated in the website more fully than a tourist ad) and citizen ads (match the site’s style, presented as a core aspect of the content experience).⁴⁸

However, in this research we are going to focus only on the typology of IAB, namely on the first category as the most widespread type of the native adverts in the online media outlets – in-feed units.

Coming further to the native advertising as a way of raising revenue, we find it important to outline how Altimeter Group defines critical elements that enable native advertising to become an integral part of the income generation strategy as follows:

1. Transparency, disclosure and trust (always disclose that the content is of advertising nature, provide links to the media’s advertising strategy and an inquiry channel);
2. Content strategy (establishing strategic directives on advertising approaches);
3. Collaboration (encouraging internal collaboration within the departments and external collaboration with the client, along with ensuring teams’ agility);

⁴⁷ The Native Advertising Playbook. (2013). *Interactive Advertising Bureau*. URL: <http://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IAB-Native-Advertising-Playbook2.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Glick, J. (2013). Native Advertising 101: understanding the native continuum. *Gigaom*. URL: <https://gigaom.com/2013/09/22/native-advertising-101-understanding-the-native-continuum/>.

4. Earned component and content portability (adding sharing capabilities and narrating story in a way that will ensure that the content will be valuable for other media and, therefore, increasing chances of it to be further distributed and shared);

5. Training (given that native advertising is a fairly new phenomenon, sales, management teams and others in the media company's ecosystem should be trained on how to approach these projects);

6. Ability to scale (acceptance of exclusiveness of each native advertising project, since it is endemic to the specific platform it is published on);

7. Measurement (in order to assess efficiency of each native advertising campaign, respective metrics should be established).⁴⁹

There are also several important problems connected with the operationalization of native advertising in journalism that will be further discussed.

First of all, it is interesting that journalists from different media outlets tend to title the content integrated into their articles differently. For example, the editor-in-chief and one of the owners of the Russian online newspaper Meduza, Galina Timchenko, always underlines that they are not spreading 'tricky advertorials', the newsroom prefers calling it a special project or a partnership article. Kaylee King-Balentine, founder and executive producer of T Brand Studio – a team of journalists, video producers, technologists and strategists, which creates and distributes native advertising in The New York Times – adheres to the same opinion.⁵⁰ In an interview given to Meduza, King-Balentine highlighted that she

⁴⁹ Defining and Mapping the Native Advertising Landscape Altimeter Research Theme: Me-cosystem. (2013). *American Press Institute*. URL: <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/report-defining-mapping-native-advertising-landscape-rebecca-lieb.pdf>.

⁵⁰ O'Reilly, L. (2015, October 13). We spoke to the two New York Times execs whose job is to double digital revenue to \$800 million. *Business Insider*. URL: <http://www.businessinsider.com/new-york-times-on-importance-of-branded-content-and-international-ad-sales-2015-10?IR=T>.

prefers calling their advertising solutions sponsored ads or articles, which are storymined by the T Brand team.⁵¹

On the other hand, team of the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* – one the rare media outlets in Germany that rely on native advertising as a way of income generation – always stresses that they are establishing exclusive brand stories, or so-called advertorials. In the media kit, they are also mentioning that regardless of whether their customers refer to an advertisement of their brand as an advertorial or native advertising, ‘the aim is always to communicate your brand message in such a way that it makes an optimum impact on the sophisticated readers of the SZ.’

This controversy in perceiving the idea of an advertorial and native ad unit has led to a discussion among media researchers as well. Since the late 80’s, when camouflaged advertising faced its first significant growth in media, scholars have been discussing shortcomings of such type of adverts.

The main controversial question that rose in regard of native advertising or sponsored content is credibility. Rather often the line between editorial and paid article is not obvious and special marks on the website are not noticeable enough what can lead to confusion among the readers.

Co-founder of sponsored content company Contently Shane Snow argued that branded content becomes a permanent part of the media business, which is going to save media, however journalist must give it ethically. ‘Journalism is growing a new arm. These are the growing pains,’ he highlighted.⁵² According to the media editor of USA Today Rem Rieder, ‘in this daunting time’ sponsored content is needed to make money, but he argues that the boundary should be clear, ‘The problem is sponsored content appeals to advertisers because it feels more like

⁵¹ Content should be smart. (2016, May 25). *Meduza*. [Контент должен быть умным. *Meduza*]. URL: <https://meduza.io/feature/2016/05/25/kontent-dolzhen-byt-umnym>.

⁵² Snow, S. (2013, January 17). Shane Snow: What the sponsored-content business can learn from Scientology. *Nieman Lab*. URL: <http://www.niemanlab.org/2013/01/shane-snow-what-the-sponsored-content-business-can-learn-from-scientology/>.

news and less like advertising. That can be a very slippery slope.’⁵³ Chief strategy officer of Mashable Adam Ostrow on the Federal Trade Commission workshop in regard to native advertising presumed that sponsored content is the evergreen content, which is more valuable for a reader than a simple advertisement. He believes that it is ‘thematically-aligned content that tends to be more featurey, more evergreen, and that content is incredibly engaging.’⁵⁴

At the same time, one of the surveys among the audience consuming native advertising showed that the presence of native ad units does not have a direct correlation with the website’s credibility. ‘Perception, thus, can impact how the information presented on a news website is processed (such as whether it is perceived as editorial or commercial content) and ultimately whether or not the viewer thus interprets the information as credible or not.’⁵⁵ However, authors mention that simply not all the readers might have noticed native ads, which could have influenced research results.

Nevertheless, past research indicated that when a user consumes an advertisement together with a news story, the perception of one piece of content is affected by another. For instance, users exposed to ads tended to perceive hard news stories as less newsworthy. On the other hand, advertisements embedded in hard news stories were perceived as less professional than those embedded in soft news stories.⁵⁶ A more specific study by Colle II and Greer on audience perception of branded content showed negative influence of it on the media credibility. In particular, participants of the survey found information more credible when it was presented in an editorial frame. Interestingly the researchers doubted the big

⁵³ Rieder, R. (2013, January 3). Marking the boundary: The lessons of the flap over the Atlantic and its scientology advertorial. *AJR*. URL: <http://ajrarchive.org/article.asp?id=5486>.

⁵⁴ Mallon S. (2016, June 13). What makes content evergreen? *Uberflip*. URL: <https://hub.uberflip.com/blog/evergreen-content>.

⁵⁵ Howe, P., Teufel, B. (2014). Native Advertising and Digital Natives: The Effects of Age and Advertisement Format on News Website Credibility Judgments. *#ISOJ*, vol. 4, №1, 78-90.

⁵⁶ Yang, H., Oliver, M.B. (2004). Exploring the Effects of Online Advertising on Readers’ Perceptions of Online News. *J&MC Quarterly*, vol. 81, №4, 733-749.

positive role of sponsored content for advertisers as well as the editorial frame was linked to more positive attitudes toward the brand in an only small number of cases. Thus, study says that ‘increased commerciality in custom magazines leads to lower ratings of message credibility.’⁵⁷ Moreover, some researchers managed to argue through the interviews and polls conducted that in some cases native advertisements do not affect the way readers perceive editorial articles at all.⁵⁸

In general, the advertising nature of the article can be not obvious enough to the reader, and it can even mislead him.⁵⁹ Thus, the absence of a proper marker and, what is not less important, actual advertising policies can lead to misunderstanding and scandals sometimes.

Here, we can bring the example of the high quality American magazine *The Atlantic*, which was founded in 1857 and won more National Magazine Awards than any other monthly magazine in the USA. In 2013 *The Atlantic* published a sponsored article titled ‘David Miscavige leads Scientology to a milestone year’. It was not the first advertorial published on the website. However, readers met this particular piece with hostility. In this regard, it is important to mention that the marketing team, not the editorial one, as in case of other advertorials, moderated the comments section. Some journalists claimed that this was the reason why comments on the page were supportive of the church and critical comments were instantly deleted.⁶⁰ The next day, Natalie Raabe, spokeswoman for the Atlantic, apologized on behalf of the whole team for the publication, announcing that their team ‘screwed up’ and admitting that before exploring new forms of digital

⁵⁷ Colle II, J. T, Greer, J. D. (2013). Audience Response to Brand Journalism: The Effect of Frame, Source, and Involvement. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 90(4), 673-680.

⁵⁸ Howe, P., Teufel, B. (2014). Native Advertising and Digital Natives: The Effects of Age and Advertisement Format on News Website Credibility Judgments. *#ISOJ*, vol. 4, №1, 79.

⁵⁹ Kim, B. H., Pasadeos, Y., Barban, A. (2001). On the deceptive effectiveness of labeled and unlabeled advertorial formats. *Mass Communication & Society*, 4(3), 281.

⁶⁰ Wemple, E. (2013, January 15). The Atlantic’s Scientology problem, start to finish. *The Washington Post*. URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/erik-wemple/wp/2013/01/15/the-atlantics-scientology-problem-start-to-finish/>.

advertising, they should have updated the policies.⁶¹ With the publication of that apology, the advertorial was withdrawn.

Another example of an advertorial, which caused deception, was published on the news website BuzzFeed UK. In January 2016, The Advertising Standards Authority (British advertising regulator) has reprimanded it for publishing a ‘listicle’ sponsored by Dylon – a maker of color dye for clothing, and a subsidiary of German’s Henkel AG – that was not properly identified as advertising.⁶² In the assessment, the ASA concluded: ‘The ASA noted the labels which featured alongside the references to the advertorial on BuzzFeed’s home page and search listings and considered that website visitors who clicked through to the ad from those listings would understand that they were clicking through to advertorial content. However, because consumers could arrive at the advertorial via a range of other means we considered it was necessary for it to be made immediately clear on the web page itself that it featured advertorial content.’⁶³

After observing these examples, we can come to a conclusion that presence of the label does not always mean that the advertising nature of the publication is clear to the reader and does not undermine credibility of the media outlet.

The problem of whether consumers are capable of differentiating advertising from other content and the possibilities of wide-scale misunderstandings concern even the American Federal Trade Commission. In December 2015 it has published a new guidance ‘Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses.’⁶⁴ In a nutshell, it summarizes the consumer protection principles, gives examples explaining how

⁶¹ Raabe, N. (2015, January 14). Statement from the Atlantic. *Magnetmail*. URL: https://www.magnetmail.net/actions/email_web_version.cfm?recipient_id=699462885&message_id=2459857&user_id=NJG_Atlan&group_id=0&jobid=12656579.

⁶² Ingram, M. (2016, January 13). BuzzFeed Slammed by UK Regulator for Native Ad. *Fortune*. URL: <http://fortune.com/2016/01/13/buzzfeed-native-advertising/>.

⁶³ ASA Ruling on Henkel Ltd t/a Dylon (2016, January 3). *ASA*. URL: https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2016/1/Henkel-Ltd/SHP_ADJ_315653.aspx#.V59DppOLTq1.

⁶⁴ Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses. (2015). *Federal Trade Commission*. URL: <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/native-advertising-guide-businesses>.

effective disclosure can prevent deception and features staff guidance on how to make clear and conspicuous disclosures within the format of native advertising. According to them, effective disclosure should fit three following parameters: proximity and placement, prominence, clarity of meaning. Some of their suggestions for compliant native advertising seem to be rather strict (for example, a disclosure should be included at the beginning of the native ad's URL link), others have obvious reasons as in case of well seen disclosures on the website (means that demand for well seen labels makes sense). In any case, this guidance shows the tendency that native advertising has influence in the sphere and it should be further regulated.

At the same time, properly labeled advertorials, which are relevant to the media's target audience, are not undermining their credibility and can also drive attention to the media and become independent shareable pieces. For instance, in August 2014, The New York Times published one of its first in-feed native advertising articles titled 'Women Inmates: Why the Male Model Doesn't Work'. The in-depth, high quality multimedia feature about current problems women are facing in prison was promoting the second season of the Netflix comedy-drama series 'Orange is the New Black'.⁶⁵ There are many more examples on the Net like 'Mobile-minded'⁶⁶ and 'A race through time'⁶⁷ in Mashable, 'Cocainomics'⁶⁸ in the Wall Street Journal, 'The Subway That Connects Two Continents' in Politico and so on.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Deziel, M. (2014, August 2014). Women Inmates: Why the Male Model Doesn't Work. *The New York Times*. URL: <http://paidpost.nytimes.com/netflix/women-inmates-separate-but-not-equal.html?#.VL6szYrF-IJ>.

⁶⁶ MasterPass: Mobile-Minded. (2015, November 5). *Mashable*. URL: http://mashable.com/2014/11/17/human-smartphone-relationship/#onaT0qD_ZkqH.

⁶⁷ Forza: A Race Through Time. (2015, September 15). *Mashable*. URL: http://mashable.com/2015/09/15/racing-game-history-brandspeak/#onaT0qD_ZkqH.

⁶⁸ Green, P. S. (2015, September 22). The Syndicate. *The Wall Street Journal*. URL: <http://www.wsj.com/ad/cocainomics>.

⁶⁹ Campbell, P. (2015, March 20). The Subway That Connects Two Continents. *Politico*. URL: <http://www.politico.com/magazine/sponsor-content/2015/03/the-subway-that-connects-two-continents#.V59XHZOLTq2>.

It is also important to mention another slew of issues native advertisements placement can entail. Dealing with such type of advertising, all publishers face a double-edged challenge, since their media has to please their clients and at the same time do not undermine credibility of their media brand in the eyes of their audience and publish a newsworthy piece that will fit the overall audience's needs. Bearing that in mind publishers should irreproachably know needs of their target audience and at the same time satisfy the needs of their customer. In general, native ads should be customized to the need of the client, audience and publisher.⁷⁰ It is one of the biggest issues media outlets that generate native adverts are facing that should not be neglected on each stage of preparing any native advertising project.

Finally, we see all these problems discussed within the present section worth being taken into consideration by the media outlets in case they are planning to rely on native advertising as one of the income generators.

In the next chapter we will apply this theoretical knowledge while conducting the analysis of sampled in-feed native advertisements to explore how textual and visual tools are utilized in order to create a final product that blends into the editorial content, meets the needs of its sponsors and media outlets' audiences.

⁷⁰ Hard fact: Native ads need to be customized to client, audience and publisher needs. (2016, March 25). *Publishing Executive*. URL: <http://www.pubexec.com/post/hard-fact-native-ads-needs-customized-client-audience-publisher-needs/>.

Chapter 2. In-feed native advertisements in online-only and hybrid media: textual and visual tools utilization

In the following chapter we will analyze how three online-only media outlets, namely Quartz, Mashable UK and Meduza, and three hybrid media outlets – The New York Times, Süddeutsche Zeitung and Forbes.ru – are utilizing textual and visual tools in order to create a coherent relationship to the promoted companies and their products within in-feed native advertisements, as well as to meet the readers' expectations by integrating sponsored content into these media outlets' platforms.

First of all, we find it important to shed light on two important definitions used in the following study – online-only and hybrid media. Vast majority of the notions frequently used in the online media related research comprise a relatively new field of study and lack basic academic definitions opening a large room for discussion. In this regard, notions of online-only and hybrid media as components of online media typology are not exceptions, and we are going to articulate our own definitions of these terms. However, they will be based on works of other researchers.

Applied to journalistic practice, the term of online-only media can be used as one of the characteristics of a media outlet standing for those types of media outlets that are distributed online solely, while digital-native is a subtype of online-only media denoting outlets that were launched online. Thus, these media outlets appear to be native speakers of the language of computers, smartphones, the Web and so on and so forth. In the following dissertation we will focus on the digital-native media outlets as a subtype of online-only media outlets.

To scrutinize the notion of hybrid media, we would like to discuss a quote of David Carr who was the leading media expert and columnist working for The New York Times. He speculated on the role of hybridization in the modern media business while giving an interview to the Russian online newspaper Gazeta.ru. He

admitted that all yesterday's print newspapers and magazines are going to blend with approaches of new online media and become hybrid.⁷¹ Talking about hybrid media Carr implied outlets representing the convergence of many different media, so that they can carry out more than one function at a time and combine, as in case of the camera in a cell phone.⁷² Majority of the researchers describe hybrid media as those types of media that have the ability to combine several media in one device. It can also be applied to the media strategy, and in this case hybrid media will stand for the strategic use of traditional and new media to communicate the message in a more effective way (for instance, simultaneously using text, photo, video, infographics and so on to deliver required information).⁷³

Under hybrid media we understand those outlets that are facing processes of technologic media convergence, or tech-based hybridization that implies the interconnection of information and communications technologies, computer networks and media content. Thus, the information is disseminated via various channels, such as print media, websites, TV-channels, radio, podcasts and so on.⁷⁴ In this research the term hybrid media will imply the specific embodiment of this phenomenon, namely, online versions of print newspapers and magazines.

2.1 Methodology

We adhere to the opinion that the choices made by the producers of any advertisement in regards to generated meanings, utilized visuals and text structures

⁷¹ Lyachenko, V. (2012, March 2). We will get hybrid media. *Gazeta.ru*. [Лященко, В. Мы получим гибридные медиа. *Газета.ru*]. URL:

https://www.gazeta.ru/culture/2012/03/02/a_4020449.shtml.

⁷² Jenkins, H., Deuze, M. (2008). Convergence culture. *Convergence-London*, 14(1), 5.

⁷³ What exactly is hybrid media? (2011, December 6). *The Business Times*. URL:

<http://thebusinesstimes.com/what-exactly-is-hybrid-media/>.

⁷⁴ Bodrunova, S. S., Litvinenko, A. A. (2012). Hybridization of the media system in Russia: technological and political aspects. *World of Media. Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies*. [Гибридизация медиасистемы в России: технологический и политический аспекты. *Мир медиа. Журнал российских исследований в области медиа и журналистики*]. URL: http://worldofmedia.ru/Bodrunova_Litvinenko_WofM_2012.pdf.

that are built in order to support the required meanings are not accidental at all. Advertisements, as well as any media text, are multi-semiotic, since they increasingly combine language with other semiotic forms, such as visual images, and even music and sound effects. Disregard of the symbiosis of such forms of delivering information may obscure important distinctions between different types of media texts.

Taking into consideration that we are working on analysing in-feed native advertisements that are highly dependent on the context and should mimic a full-fledged editorial story, we are going to use qualitative methodology. We see this approach as the only way to conduct a wholistic analysis and ensure that we take into account specific context of each story that was included in the sample and analyzed. We are going to base the appliance of qualitative approach on the concept of a priori reasoning that implies reasoning from self-evident propositions, basing our decisions upon a certain degree of rationality.⁷⁵

We see that visual and textual tools used in the native advertisements should also be treated as equally capable of conveying crucial meanings and as equally worthy of differentiation and analysis. Thus, we decided to choose the method of qualitative content analysis and semiotic approach that would complement the present study with an analysis of the visual elements of the texts, along with extracting text structures and looking deeper into how the signification system of the promoted brands and products is manifested within each in-feed native advertisement.

We will explore text structures taking it as a premise that there are five basic text structures we may encounter during the actual analysis: description, comparison, sequence, problem-solution and cause-effect.⁷⁶ We should take into account that text structures can also be understood as ‘knowledge structures or well

⁷⁵ Boghossian, P. A. (1997). What the externalist can know a priori. *In Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 97, 161-169.

⁷⁶ Meyer, B. J. (1975). Identification of the Structure of prose and Its Implications for the Study of Reading and Memory. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 7(1), 7-47.

recognized conventions and systems that lead a reader to preferred interpretations, assuming a reader is genuinely interested in understanding what the writer had intended.⁷⁷

To fully grasp the underneath meaning of each advertisement we will conduct the method of analyzing potential meanings embedded within the structure of the advertisements. Researchers tend to refer to this method as a qualitative content analysis that is not focusing on the number of times researchers are encountering specific predefined variables, but on the possible interpretation of ideas the text constructs. In this regard, we will mainly focus on thematic units (topics messages are covering) and meaning units (what kind of meanings or messages are carried and how these meanings' relation to the topic can be understood).⁷⁸ Hughes saw two main purposes in conducting such type of textual analysis: uncover the structures texts are producing and their potential meanings.⁷⁹ That is the approach that we are going to undertake in order to thoroughly analyze the texts sampled.

Since visuals are also playing important role in presenting and supporting meanings in the native advertisements, as it was mentioned previously, we will undertake a semiotic approach in order to fully grasp the meaning hidden in the way of visual representation of the brand and main messages of the native advertisements. This method will allow us to focus on denotations and connotations of the visual elements of the texts.

First of all, we will conduct functional analysis of the visual tools utilized using typology offered by Moriarty, within which she determined visuals and their functions on the several levels. We are interested in two levels she formulated: firstly, whether they are literal, delivering factual information about the brand, or

⁷⁷ Grabe B. (2002). Using discourse patterns to improve reading comprehension. *JALT2002 at Shizuoka Conference Proceedings*, 9-17.

⁷⁸ Frey, L., Botan, C. H., Kreps, G. (2000). *Investigating communication*. NY: Allyn & Bacon, 44-65.

⁷⁹ Briggs, A., Copley, P. (2002). *The media: an introduction*. Pearson Education, 42-43.

symbolic, creating meanings around the brand; and secondly, which subcategories do they represent. Among literal visuals she distinguished identification (graphically showing the brand name, its logo and package), description (what is it exactly, how it looks like), comparison (between two competitors, before and after results, etc.) and demonstration (how the product can be used by a consumer).

⁸⁰Symbolic visuals were subcategorized into the ones that are utilizing association, association using a character or celebrity, metaphor (allegorical use, unexpected substitution based on similarity of some feature, for example), storytelling (for generating and supporting specific narrative, drama, playlet, etc.) and aesthetics (in order to create abstraction, design the advertisement in a specific way, so on).⁸¹

Then we will apply semiotic approach in order to analyze meanings delivered by symbolic visuals. Semiotic as an academic discipline has a variety of definitions. For instance, Umberto Eco defined it in the following way, ‘semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign.’⁸² Charles Sanders Peirce, who is often recognized as one of the fathers of contemporary semiotics along with Ferdinand de Saussure, was focused on the logic-bound relation between the sign and the way of its interpretation, what means that we interpret signs according to a certain rule or habitual connection, as well as importance of significance the reader attaches to the signs within the text.⁸³

We will conduct subjective interpretation of the visual tools present in the advertisements, such as photos, illustrations, colour schemes in some cases and so on, in order to extract connotations, they are delivering. Bearing in mind our adherence to a priori reasoning, logic-bound semiotic perspective will allow us to develop our assumptions on how these visuals are supporting meanings generated

⁸⁰ An, D. (2003). Content analysis of advertising visuals in the magazine advertisements: The roaring twenties and the great depression. *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research*, 3(6), 1-6.

⁸¹ Moriarty, S. E. (1987). A content analysis of visuals used in print media advertising. *Journalism Quarterly*, 64(2-3), 550-554.

⁸² Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Indiana University Press, 7-34.

⁸³ Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: the basics*. Routledge, 222-257.

in the texts and what role do they play in blending advertising and editorial or journalistic nature within the in-feed native advertisements.

We will take symbolic visuals as signs, so we will investigate their latent, connotative meanings in order to better see how the signification system of brands is manifested within each advertisement. For that reason, we decided to use theoretical perspectives articulated by Beasley and Danesi in their work 'Persuasive signs, the semiotics of advertising', since we view it as one of the most modern and consistent approaches to analysing how signification systems related to brands are built in advertising. This will allow us to explore how the companies and their products are promoted within sampled native advertisements in the chosen media outlets.

Beasley and Danesi consider three factors that are important for building a signification system: among them are the brand name, logo, or logographic, and iconicity. When the product is assigned with a name, the brand's target audience can recognize it in terms of its name. Logo creates a visual symbol that also helps in recognizing the brand and product promoted. Iconicity can be explained as a signifying strategy. It can be expressed within the specific branding strategy or a specific advertisement. Thus, it can be said that of all these three factors should be taken into account and should be correctly used, so they could be capable of creating a coherent understanding of the brand, therefore, convey required connotations, or emotional and cultural meaning, as an addition to denotations, or literal meanings.

These three factors help to form the signification system for a product that is generated in order to enhance product recognizability.⁸⁴ Thus, it consists of denotations (sign without cultural interpretation or understanding of what the product is, its function and offer), extensional connotations (the basic connotative understanding of all visual elements presented in the advertisement) and social

⁸⁴ Beasley, R., Danesi, M. (2002). *Persuasive signs: The semiotics of advertising*. Walter de Gruyter, 22-42.

connotations (the values that consumer associates with the product). And each advertisement is either built upon specific signification system or generates the signification system.⁸⁵ During the analysis we will look at how specific meanings conveyed via texts and visuals enable signification system manifestation, namely investigate denotations, extensional and social connotations related to brands, what will allow us to find out whether the advertisements fulfill one of its main tasks – promotion of the companies and their products.

We are going to break the process of analyzing textual and visual tools utilized in the sampled in-feed native advertisements in two coding stages: first of all, we will conduct open coding when we will be scanning and summarizing each text in order to find distinct categories to be under scrutiny (see Appendix 1); afterwards, on the second coding stage, or the axial coding, we will come back to each analyzed text bearing in mind the categories being articulated after we finished the first stage of coding in order to see how these categories are represented within the texts. Basically, we will create a short summary of each text in order to better understand potential meanings that are to be conveyed within the text and articulate the general message at a later stage of interpreting the results, summary will also allow us to determine general text structure utilized, whether it is a descriptive or problem-solution type, for instance. After that we will dig deeper into the text in order to see, which functional parts in its general structure we could extract, how they support the message and the brand promotion. Then we will look at visuals utilized; in order to understand its role within the whole text, we will determine their types (photo, video, infographic, diagram, etc.), whether they are literal or symbolic, which function they are fulfilling, how denotations are generated and which connotations they are supposed generate, according to our subjective perception.

⁸⁵ Leth, A., Bell, M., Egholm, M., Hvass, A., Dyrbye, Z., Kernahan, A. (2015). Native Advertising. *University of Roskilde*, 16-18.

All the described methods combined will allow us to see how different textual and visual features are utilized in the sampled in-feed native advertisements and illuminate the grey zone between advertising and editorial nature embedded in the text. We will apply qualitative content analysis in order to conduct textual analysis and explore how the meanings are presented in the texts and in which parts of the structure, while semiotic and functional approach based on Moriarty's typology and Beasley's and Danesi's signification model will be of help while conducting the analysis of visual elements used in the texts. Thus, we will be enabled to see how the advertisements are mimicking the editorial stories and whether they fit the distribution platform, namely, online media upon which they were published.

In the next sections of the present study we are going to explain on which categories we were focusing in order to holistically analyze texts and visuals of the in-feed native advertisements, provide results of the qualitative analysis conducted and discuss them.

2.2 Results

After conducting a thorough analysis of the native advertisements in The New York Times, Quartz, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Mashable UK, Forbes.ru and Meduza, namely textual and visual tools used for creating a coherent relationship to the brand and meeting the audience expectations, we could distinguish the following categories worth being described and discussed based on the results of our analysis: basic approaches to native advertising production retrieved from the media outlets' media kits and interviews with their editors and other stakeholders, types of brands promoted, ways of structuring texts, meanings presented, visualization features, labeling practices and approaches to generation of the signification system of the products and sponsor companies. We will cover how each of the media outlets can be categorized within the categories chosen.

Basic approaches to native advertising production. We noticed that each of the media outlets we have analyzed undertakes different strategies to the process of production and disclosing of their native advertisements, and we found it important to give a brief overview of these strategies utilized in each of the media outlets. To do that, we looked through their websites, media kits and advertising policy sections.

The New York Times, as it was already mentioned in the previous chapter of the present dissertation, is recognized by the media experts as an exception among media outlets almost in any of their endeavors. Due to their adherence to modern practices and innovativeness of the strategies applied, The New York Times able to transform from a classical newspaper into a groundbreaker in the field. It is a daily newspaper that was founded by Henry Jarvis Raymond and George Jones in the United States, New York, in 1851. It was a penny paper that appealed to a cultured, intellectual readership instead of a mass audience. Today they position themselves as a media outlet that delivers high-quality journalism and rich, interactive multimedia storytelling in print, digitally via their website and applications for smartphones and tablets, as well as via games, puzzles and other merchandise production. The New York Times provides a vast variety of advertising opportunities for their partners: from classical print and banner advertisements to custom, multi-platform solutions of presenting branded content. As it was already stated, we will focus on the latter type of advertising – sponsored, branded, paid or native advertising content, namely on the sponsored articles they publish.

The New York Times now heavily relies on digital advertising, which increased 21 percent during the last quarter in 2016 and now comprises 36 percents on the company's advertising revenue, while print advertising faces a steep decline of over 19 percent. Thus, native advertising steadily becomes one of the cornerstones of its advertising strategy that more and more focuses on digital content.

The company takes a specific approach to producing sponsored content. First of all, it is important to mention that all native advertisements are produced by the separate division – the in-house brand marketing studio called T Brand Studio – and The New York Times executives always underline that journalists are not taking part in producing advertising content, in order not to jeopardize reputation of their journalists as unbiased professionals. This approach will be further discussed within the present study.

The other detail is that the company always labels its native advertising content in order not to cause deception of the readers. Meredith Kopit Levien, executive vice president and chief revenue officer of The New York Times Company, highlighted during one of the conferences, ‘Good native advertising is not meant to be trickery. It’s meant to be a publisher sharing its storytelling tools with a marketer,’ and she sees native advertising as a ‘sustainable path toward growing the digital business.’

All sponsored content produced by T Brand Studio is published on a special platform called ‘Paid Post’ that is not present on the website itself. The readers see only single advertisements limited amount of time as soon as they are released, according to a treaty negotiated with the sponsor of that particular article. Afterwards, the advertisement is available only via the link. However, all the sponsored articles can be retrieved from the T Brand Studio account in Twitter where they regularly post news related to the industry, along with the results of their collaboration with the customers.

Unlike The New York Times, Quartz is typically called the digitally native news outlet. It was founded in 2012 by the Atlantic Media Co., for business people in the new global economy. They are positioned as a mobile-first and tablet-focused media with a responsive design that is optimized to fit any device, which is closest at hand in order to deliver ‘bracingly creative and intelligent journalism.’

Quartz offers its advertisers two types of advertising: Engage, a multimedia display advertisement for a CPM (cost per thousand impressions), and Bulletin, in-

feed native advertising article – the one we are going to focus on within the following dissertation. As it is stated in their advertising guidelines, Quartz guarantees to ensure ‘the treatment and design of Advertising and Sponsor Content is clearly differentiated from its editorial content,’ and at the same time they expect that Sponsor Content, like their own editorial content, to address relevant issues and be written with a distinct point of view. We see it as a way of highlighting such an important issue, as a grey zone and vague border between advertising and journalism typical for native advertising content.

Moreover, as it was eloquently mentioned in Digiday, Quartz strictly separates the advertising church and editorial state: the advertisements are created in a partnership between the brand and Quartz’s marketing team.⁸⁶ Thus, journalists are also not taking part in creating the advertising content and blending it into the surrounding editorial stories, as in case of The New York Times who see it as a prevention of accusations in deliberate and wilfull fraud against their own readership.

Advertising revenue of Quartz grows rapidly, as it was reported by Advertising Age. It grew from \$3.8 million in 2013 and \$10 million in 2014 up to \$18.6 million in 2015 and \$30 million in 2016.⁸⁷ According to Quartz executive leadership team and namely to Kevin Delaney, editor in chief and co-founder, these numbers prove that they are able to show ‘that quality journalism [can be] sustainable online <...> to show that at a moment of real crisis and questioning by the industry.’

Another media outlet under scrutiny was Forbes.ru. It is the digital version of Forbes Russia, one of the most influential business magazines, launched in 2009, while Forbes is an American business magazine established in 1917 by financial

⁸⁶ Sternberg, J. (2013, May 30). Is Quartz the very model of a modern publisher? *Digiday*. URL: <https://digiday.com/media/is-quartz-the-very-model-of-a-modern-publisher/>.

⁸⁷ Barr, J. (2016, July 14). Quartz said to near \$30 million in revenue, without clickbait or standard ad units. *Advertising Age*. URL: <http://adage.com/article/media/quartz-driven-8x-increase-revenue-launch/304925/>.

columnist Bertie Charles Forbes. Today Forbes is recognized as one of the major media outlets covering business and financial issues in the world.

The portal Forbes.ru relates to the subjects, such as business, the economy, finance, career, science, politics, law and lifestyle. According to the website, its mission is to combine the traditional quality and independent approach of Forbes with a large amount of news, analysis and useful information, as well as providing state-of-the-art technological capabilities the online media offers.

Forbes.ru offers several types of advertising on their portal that is capable of reaching over seven million unique visitors of the website monthly: classic banner advertisements, sponsored ratings, videos, presence in a newsletter and in-feed native advertisement, as they call it a 'PR article, partnership article or an advertorial that allows brand to tell its story to the relevant audience.' In fact, PR articles published on Forbes.ru clearly fit the idea of native advertising article, since it fits all of its basic characteristics: it mimics the editorial content, it uses storytelling as the main tool of delivering information about the product, it avoids the logic of direct advertising. However, these aspects will be furtherly analyzed and discussed in the present and the following sections of this chapter, due to the fact that there are a variety of approaches to combining journalistic and advertising nature in native advertising pieces, as well as since the level of brand intrusiveness can be different.

Meduza, another Russian-language media outlet in our scope, is an online newspaper and news aggregator headquartered in Riga, Latvia. It was founded in 2014 by Galina Timchenko, former editor-in-chief of the Russian online newspaper Lenta.ru. They are calling themselves an independent voice for reliable, objective and unbiased information on the region. Meduza focuses on a wide range of topics, so it can be called a media outlet of general interest, and, therefore, it is interested in reach wide audiences: politicians, students, and 'anyone who is not indifferent to what is going on.' The media is constantly growing: by March 2017 they have 6,932,000 unique visitors per month. Along with the news pieces, they

publish in-depth articles, such as investigative reports, quizzes, games and cards – their special genre that breaks down complicated topics into several cards that explain key aspects of the topic, as it is also done by the American media outlet Vox.

As to advertising, they offer classic banner advertisements and native advertising solutions. All types of native advertisements offered by Meduza are divided into five categories: cards, sponsored articles/features, quizzes, games and chats. Meduza also offers posts in its profiles in social networks and as a bonus for standing customers ordering four advertisements and more: mentioning all of them on the landing page, like it was in the case of Tinkoffbank (it runs a special project 'Year of economy with the Tinkoffbank' together with the newsroom for almost one year) or in the newsletter.

An important point to mention is that majority of the native advertisements are created by Meduza's full-time journalists (mainly editors) that have to be engaged in writing in-depth stories along with advertisements, and some are written by the invited experts in the field. Bearing in mind that these articles should not harm either reputation of Meduza or of the advertiser, authors of the native advertisements have a careful approach to fact-checking and, as the outlet is underlining, they are always trying to keep the balance between presenting evident advantages of the brand and publishing objective information, which will be relevant for the readers. As Meduza also highlights, they are very selective in choosing partners and brands for their native advertisements. To that end, before signing the contract, its team gathers and accurately checks information about every potential client.

Süddeutsche Zeitung, or South German Newspaper, or SZ, is the German-language daily newspaper founded in 1945 and headquartered in Munich, Germany. In this research we are going to focus on its online version SZ.de – the newspaper's Internet edition launched in 1995 on its 50th anniversary.

SZ provides a FAQ section about their advertising policy and native advertising projects on this portal. We found it interesting that SZ call every native advertisement published upon it an advertorial. They explain this term in the following way, 'The advertorial or native advertising is a form of advertising by an external company but created with the aid of the SZ advertorial team'. However, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter of the following research, normally, the term advertorial denotes camouflaged unlabelled advertising and cannot be placed on the same footing with the concept of native advertising. The case of SZ's choice of naming native advertising units allows us to conclude that the conceptual construct of the native advertising related sphere of research is still evolving and leaves much room for dispute, as well as for ambiguous notions with arguably blurring meanings.

SZ also highlights that the newsroom always marks its advertorials in order to separate editorial content and advertising. With the same purpose, the Süddeutsche Zeitung editorial team and SZ advertorial department are working separately, unlike in Meduza, whose newsroom works in a multitasking mode. On the other hand, as well as the rest of the media outlets analyzed in this research, SZ articulates the first goal of their adverts as providing content, which will be interesting for their sophisticated readers, as well as informative and innovative. We will challenge this statement later within unveiling the results of the analysis conducted.

There are three types of packages customers of the SZ advertorial department can choose from. The most basic one is the bronze package. In this case, the customer provides all of the content, ranging from text, images and video. The SZ advertorial staff then incorporates this material into their premium layout with additional editing and consulting available if needed. Within the silver package, the customer creates and develops the content together with the SZ advertorial department.

The design of the advertorial is also based on the SZ premium layout. It consists of the following format: a landing page, introducing the subject and sub pages, offering more information. The landing page starts with a headline either up to 25 (single-line) or 45 characters (double-line). Beneath the headline, there should be an attractive cover picture, the company's or brand's logo and a short intro. The sub pages should each include a teaser image, another headline and an introductory copy up to 170 characters. It also allows for more text, an embedded video and further images. Paragraphs placed for more structure and inserting sub headlines will help to arrange the advertorial as a long read and at the same time to more user-friendly. Advertorials in the gold package are either produced as long reads or as multimedia features.

The SZ advertorial team discusses the communication objectives with the customer and then comes up with an individual graphic and editorial design. By request, the content of the advertorial can even be updated by the SZ staff during the advertising period.

In contrast to Meduza and The New York Times, the SZ does not have much of a diverse approach to advertorials. They do not come up with unique and special content such as quizzes or games, but rather stick to more traditional forms of presenting content, like long reads or multimedia features.

Along with SZ, we were analyzing another European media outlet – Mashable UK as a part of an umbrella media brand Mashable. It is a digital website founded in Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom, in 2005. Now it is a global multi-platform media and entertainment company. The outlet's main focus is technology, digital culture and entertainment content. It is separated in five outlets according to the region or country it covers: Mashable Asia, Mashable Australia, Mashable France, Mashable India and Mashable UK. In this research we are focused on the latter one. With 45 million unique users monthly it is noted as one of the most influential media outlets in the field.

The central idea of advertising offered by Mashable is to engage customers before they even realize it themselves that may sound as an incentive to, so to say, lull their readers into a false sense of security and safety from consuming advertising content that may become annoying at some point. The question of labeling of these advertisements will be further covered within this section of the present study.

They offer two major types of advertising: Editorial sponsorship, when the content is funded by an advertiser and Mashable provides a disclaimer noting this, but an advertiser does not have any influence on the content, or Branded content, this are the native advertisements created in collaboration between an advertiser and the outlet's in-house creative unit Mashable Studios. Thus, the outlet's journalists are also not taking part in branded content generation. Mashable also provides other creative forms of advertising not being in the loop of the following research, such as placement in the MashPlay Video Network, promotion on digital events and so on.

Types of brands presented. We found it important to dwell on a question what kinds of brands and products were promoted in the sampled in-feed advertising units of chosen media outlets, since it can help us to evaluate how each particular media treats the idea of the content represented in their native advertisements to be relevant to their audience, as one of the cornerstones and central ideas of the phenomenon of native advertising itself.

The New York Times presents a variety of brands and products in its native advertisements, from big international financial organizations and services they provide, such as The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., to the companies from a luxury niche, among them are the American luxury jewelry company Tiffany & Co, The Sotheby's International Realty that is specializing in selling luxury real estate and so on. What unites all of the companies presented is that they are the big well-known brands (Guinness, Adobe, Microsoft and others) with most likely high turnover and significant revenue. This may be explained by the fact that the prices

that are set for native advertising projects produced by separate unit – T Brands Studio – which, basically, operates as a separate agency right inside of The New York Times Company, which is also a big well-known brand, are higher than average, and small companies virtually cannot afford investing that heavily in native advertising, since it is very hard to predict its efficiency and ROI what sometimes makes it to be treated as unpopular way of brand promotion.

The same strategy applies to Süddeutsche Zeitung as one of the biggest newspapers in Germany. It partners exceedingly with big brands, such as Huawei, which is recognized as one of the largest manufacturers of telecommunications equipment, Singapore Airlines, one the world's most awarded airlines, as well as with big local brands, including popular events, such as, for instance, big beer festival in Munich Braukunst LIVE.

As well as The New York Times and SZ, Quartz works with such big names, as Infiniti (the luxury vehicle division of Nissan), Porsche (high-end automobile manufacturer), Dell (multinational computer technology company, one of the leaders in the field), Deloitte (professional services multinational firm mostly working with companies from the enterprise sector) and others. Since it is a general-interest media outlet publishing 'intelligent journalism with broad worldview,' its audience is rather wide, Quartz partners with a variety of brands that work in the sphere of information technology, manufacturing, public service, etc. It is also interesting that Quartz works with governmental institutions, such as, for instance, Government of Japan and Singapore Tourism Board. This fact clearly indicates that native advertising can facilitate not only commercial brands promotion but also be of help within political campaigns and nation branding process.

This logic also applies to Meduza: as a media outlet of general interest it partners with various brands: financial (UniCredit Bank), manufacturers (Aquaphor – water filters producer), IT projects (system for transport monitoring

AutoGraph, rebranded ICQ chat), retailers (re:Store – retail chain of Apple products) and others.

Being the media outlet mostly focused on the financial agenda that is relevant for high-class audience and wealthy people, in general, Forbes.ru mostly partners with luxury brands, such as Maxx Royal chain of luxury hotels, Frame Moscow retailer of luxury clothing, as well as with big well-known brands, including major tour operator Coral Travel, Alfa Bank and others. We can expect to see the high quality products advertised within Forbes magazine and its portal Forbes.ru respectively.

Mashable UK, as well as Forbes.ru, is an outlet focused on a specific sphere of interest. In their case, it is digital technologies and entertainment. Thus, brands promoted within their native advertisements should also correlate with agenda typical for them, that is why companies that contribute sponsor content are technology or entertainment related: among them are start ups, both providing technological solutions and producing tangible ready-to-go products (IQ Chocolate – small healthy chocolate manufacturer, live streaming platform Chew.tv and others), and already operating companies, such as ghd – a high-end hair tools retailer, international innovative architecture and design practice Foster + Partners and others. We would also like to mention that Mashable UK exceedingly covers issues related to the United Kingdom, and this content strategy also works with Britain-based companies. This, as we see it, also plays an important role in meeting audience expectations.

Thus, we can see that brands promoted within the native advertisements of the analyzed media outlets highly likely correlate with their audience possible expectations: general-interest The New York Times, SZ, Quartz and Meduza represent a wide variety of brands, while Forbes.ru and Mashable UK, specialized media outlets, are focused on a specific niche and topics and it can be concluded that they are more careful and consistent in specializations of the companies they are partnering with.

Text structures. During the open coding stage we could distinguish the basic text structures on two levels – compositional and functional. On the compositional level, majority of the texts represent plain structure – a normal article structure with representing a logical sequence of paragraphs, sometimes texts are divided into sections by sub headlines. Another option of representing the order of events or thoughts within the text, we noted, is text blocks, when separate snippets are divided with the visual elements, such as listicles and solutions with customized design (special multimedia pieces rarely encountered during the analysis). This structure is typical for some advertisements suggested by Meduza (when they are explaining the problem with graphical elements and each element has a disclaimer), The New York Times (in their custom offers that are richly visualized and sometimes the text is divided into separate blocks embedded in an infographics or other visual tool). The rest of the media outlets analyzed adhere to more conservative structures of traditional plain text accompanied by several visual elements.

As it was mentioned in the previous section dedicated to the methodology we were applying while analyzing the advertisements, we took it as a premise that on the functional level text structures can be distilled down to five types: description, comparison, sequence, problem-solution and cause-effect. After finishing the second stage of coding, we could distinguish the following types of structures commonly used in the media outlets analyzed: description and problem-solution. Compare and contrast, cause-effect and sequence options were encountered in five texts out of 72 scrutinized, so they were not representative enough for making any conclusions concerning how these three types of text structure are usually presented in the media outlets analyzed.

The New York Times, Quartz and Mashable UK take quite similar approaches to structuring their native advertisements on the functional level. The discourse patterns are organized either in a problem-solution way, when they explain the nature of the issue analyzed and how the promoted brand and its

products are addressing it, or in a descriptive way, when they describe certain subject and explain how the promoted brand is linked to the subject.

Journalists and producers of native advertising content in Meduza also use problem-solution type of text structure but in the majority of cases they adhere to the descriptive structure, within which they are outlining specific phenomenon and explaining it to the readers, thus, educating them. For instance, in the story about contemporary art museum Garage and its 'Co-thinkers' exhibition created by disabled artists, Meduza described the exhibition itself along with how disabled people are creating masterpieces, as well as how they can learn the art. Then they add a call to action underlining that deaf, blind, as well as people with autism spectrum disorder could attend the 'disabled-friendly' exhibition and enjoy they showpieces.

Unlike the rest of the media outlets analyzed, Forbes.ru and SZ tend to use description structure, basing general message on the brand promoted. The only difference is that Forbes.ru often organizes its descriptive narrative in the form of an interview with the spokesperson for the company, while SZ used problem-solution structure in one article out of twelve, when they were elaborating on the investment climate in Germany, and how bankers can address this problem within one of the events traditionally organized in Germany. However, it was the exception rather than the rule.

Meanings expressed. After analyzing basic text structures used in the native advertisements we made a step forward in our analysis and distinguished what meanings are expressed within the structure and how they are related to the brand. Simply put, we looked further down into the actual content of the in-feed native advertisements. That will allow us to differ advertising and journalistic approaches mixed in the sponsored articles, examine main messages generated and see in which parts of the text structure brand relation and intrusion is meant to be evident to the reader.

In light of the meanings generated, we could see close relation to the brand in the advertisements generated by SZ and Forbes.ru. Normally, both of the media mention brand right in the headline or in the lead paragraph, so we assume that it becomes obvious to the reader that did not notice labels attached to that particular piece denoting that it is an advertisement virtually from the first line that he or she reads the advertising content.

Messages themselves also represent the brand or the product covered. To illustrate their approach, we will provide two most vivid examples. Promoting Barrett, brand of manufacturing exquisite shoes for men, Forbes.ru generated the following message – Barrett is a work of shoe art. The key words presenting the message were 'successful' and 'wealthy' (presenting target audience), 'prestige brand' and 'luxury' (relation to the brand that meets the needs of discerning consumers), 'entirely handmade', 'splendid' and 'ideal' (regarding the products). The message was also complemented by visuals fulfilling literal function, such as photos depicting pair of Barrett shoes and video about the process of their production. Its journalistic nature was in explanation of the technics of producing handmade shoes by the brand launched far in 1917. It has a historic value but however rather uncertain. In the messages of each article analyzed on the Forbes.ru website we saw direct and evident relation to the brand.

However, we should admit that the graphic representation of the texts is rather inconsistent. In several cases what comprises 30% of the overall sample, we noticed such mistakes as misspelling and punctuation errors (missed commas, periods at the end of the headlines) and other graphical flaws. That shows that probably Forbes.ru does not take part in producing the texts and apparently prefer to let their customers completely control the process of the final copy production. Unfortunately, we did not find information about whoe exactly is engaged in the process of preparing sponsored content for their website, so we can only assume that they prefer to give absolute control to their clients.

The general approach of the message generation used in SZ resembles Forbes.ru approach. They prefer to set the direct link to the brand as well. We can illustrate it with an example. In the text promoting brand Norrona – Norwegian company that produces durable outdoor equipment – they also represent the brand right from the start. As well as Forbes.ru in the case of the article about Barrett shoes, they told about the history of the brand that started as a small family company and now became one of the most innovative companies in the field that works with the extreme athletes due to simplicity of their products combined with all the necessities a man needs outdoors. Thus, the general message presented can be articulated in the following way: Norrona is a nature-friendly company that produces durable outdoor equipment that is an absolute necessity for those who like spending time in nature's lap. What we also found peculiar is that their story was narrated from the first person, on behalf of the company, using such words as 'we', 'us', 'our' and so on. Therefore, we can conclude that in this particular case SZ were distancing themselves from the story presented and were turning the stage over to their partners, to the sponsors of the content, what made this article looking even more like an advertisement than it already is due to the message generated that, from our point of view, hardly brings value to the readers as a journalistic piece.

Mashable UK sets relations to the brand promoted that are obvious to a lesser extent. It also mentions the brand or the product promoted in the headline or in the lead paragraph, which acts as an introduction. However, from our perspective, unlike Forbes.ru or SZ, it is able to bring more value to the reader, since messages generated in Mashable UK sponsored articles relate not solely to the advertised companies themselves, but to the general problems they address, what was already mentioned in the previous subsection about the text structures. Moreover, these problems are close to the readership of the media outlet that is supposed to be interested in innovations and technologies.

For example, in the article 'This innovative device dispenses life-saving medicine through breast milk', which promoted JustMilk device that will be used to deliver to infants a wide range of active pharmaceutical ingredients via the flow of a breast milk, the main message was generated around the problem that over 2.9 million babies die in their first month of life annually and how the JustMilk device can help in this regard. Hence, the article was not only promoting the startup but also educating the readers about the existing problem (see Appendix 3, text 1).

The same approach was taken in another article about hyper-local environmental startup Too Good To Go – the mobile application that pairs hungry app users and restaurants having some leftovers that are otherwise will be thrown away. The article started with introduction, within which the problem was set: restaurant industry throws away 600,000 tonnes of food in the UK every year, then it was explained how the application can solve this situation. The main message generated was again problem-based – the app is able to effectively address the significant problem of food wastage in the UK.

Thus, as we could see, in each case observed Mashable UK, first of all, makes point of why this article is relevant to the current agenda (apparently, bearing in mind that a journalistic piece should cover relevant topics and issues), as well as to their readers. We see it as a purely journalistic approach. But as an advertisement it links each problem to the solution generated by the company and its products they are promoting and we found direct brand mentions in the majority of structural nodes.

Notably, in each case we saw strong conclusion that brings the final argument repeating once again that the promoted company is capable of solving a specific issue. Moreover, we found that Mashable UK rather often uses words in superlative forms and also words and phrases of praise and encouragement such as 'the best', 'unique product', 'it might change the face of healthcare worldwide', 'it boosts the economy' that are closer to the advertising than to journalism that is intended to be less biased than advertising. But the average number of typical

promoting words in superlative forms and other structures of praise is lower than in SZ and Forbes.ru.

Relation to the brand is far more indirect in sponsored articles by The New York Times. We see it as the absolute opposite of Forbes.ru and SZ. T Brand Studio presents meanings of more journalistic nature and supports the general interests of their readership rather than delivers solely advertising pieces.

We can bring as an example the article titled 'The art of the elegant innovation' that was promoting Cole Haan – a lifestyle brand with a focus on footwear and accessories founded in 1928 in New York, USA (see Appendix 3, text 2). The authors of this piece were elaborating on how the basic principles of architecture, such as firmness, utility and form, are reflected in other fields, for instance design, cooking and dancing. To show the connection between architecture and dancing as two fields of art that are closer than people might see, the eclectism was shown through the dance of ballet dancers in one of the skyscrapers in New York – in the World Trade Center.

The plain text was accompanied by the video of how dancers are improvising inside of the building, whose structure resembles a bird taking flight. Significantly, the video was produced by T Brand Studio, while other media outlets observed in the following thesis prefer to use ready-to-go videos from the advertisers' previous advertising campaigns.

This multimedia piece had a lot of layers but the general message was clear and relatively easy to extract – integration of form and function, heritage and modernism, and utility with aesthetic value is the modern fusion that can be found in the architecture of the building, in the improvised dance and in the shoes by Cole Haan (performing dancers were wearing them).

What we found interesting is that the brand was mentioned only in the end of the article, the piece was starting with the lead paragraph that resembled soft news – it set the actual event that happened: 'Dancers were improvising in one of New York's most famous buildings'; then the narrative was more of a feature nature

– the authors were speculating about 'stunning collisions' and eclectism in art and brought the case of ballet dancers as an example. And then, in the last paragraph, shoes by Cole Haan were represented as a facilitator of this spectacular fusion, as well as an example of eclectism itself.

Another article we would like to emphasize is the story opened with the headline 'Is going virtual our new reality? As technology advances and global business becomes the norm, companies must embrace new ways of working to stay competitive. But how far can we push it?' In this article they were promoting products by Adobe – multinational computer software company founded in 1982 and based in California, United States.

The general message presented was denoting that technology companies are taking path of creating virtual offices, so there is the need for managing the employees virtually, so there is a demand for new tools, such as those provided by Adobe. In this case, as well as in Cole Haan and other in-feed native advertisements observed in this media outlet, the brand mention does not seem to be intrusive, there is no direct linkage or call to action. The article does not resemble a sales pitch. The main goal of the text looked as educating the readers about state-of-the-art of businesses, which are more and more intensively utilizing digital tools in their business processes, rather than only fulfilling advertising purposes. In this case they used their favoured approach of storytelling: instead of enumerating features of the products, they were explaining benefits companies can gain via case studies – real examples of the companies and even specific people that are using Adobe's products.

Thus, in-feed native advertisements in The New York Times not only inform their readers about certain issues and phenomenons, but also shed light upon the fact that the promoted brand plays important role in it. But unlike other media outlets analyzed, it is not doing it continually throughout the whole text but rather gently.

We see sponsored articles by Meduza and Quartz to be in-between intrusive SZ and Forbes.ru advertisements and non-intrusive The New York Times advertising approaches. They use both, direct and indirect linkages to brands promoted. We can explain it by several examples.

In the article titled 'Nesting dolls you cannot even imagine' Meduza was promoting Russian accessories brand Matryoshka established in 2015. Right in the headline and the lead paragraph we could see the words denoting the brand and its products: 'Matryoshka', 'nesting dolls', 'design masterpiece jewelry' and so on. The main message generated was the following: St. Petersburg designers from the company Matryoshka changed the tired image of the Russian nesting doll. The message was supported within the whole narrative in the text itself by denoting specific products the company provides, such as bracelets, charms, earrings and so on; and visuals – photos of the products. Significantly, Meduza often uses call to action constructions in the end of their sponsored articles and this case was not an exception, they concluded the text with the following disclaimer, 'Those who scrolled this text till the end can use a 10% discount promocode.' It is one of the main traits we noticed in Meduza's native advertisements.

Almost the same approach, except for the absence of call to action constructions, is applied by Quartz in its articles with direct links to the sponsor companies. In the article 'The power of hybrid cloud' they were promoting hybrid cloud solution produced by multinational computer technology company Dell in partnership with Intel Corporation. The main message generated could be articulated as following: Dell and Intel produced the hybrid cloud solution that eliminated the problem of long deployment and complicated maintenance of complex IT infrastructures. Within the article they stated the problem of the companies' concerns about the privacy of sensitive assets and infrastructure related to the problems of moving to the cloud, and how Dell and Intel enable companies to eliminate this issue. To make the story more convincing, Quartz narrated the story of different companies using Dell and Intel hybrid cloud solution. As we can

see, such a storytelling tool as a case study or a success story is actively utilized not only by The New York Times, but also by Quartz.

In case of the articles with indirect link to the brand we noticed an interesting twist in presenting messages. Herewith, we will also represent one example per each media. Meduza in its article promoting Aquaphor, company specializing in producing water filters founded in 1992 in St. Petersburg, Russia, built the narrative around 'shameful' questions about drinking water. Notably, Aquaphor was acting as an expert in the field rather than vendor, thus, the message was generated in the following way: clean drinking water is crucial for people and Aquaphor knows how to choose filter for cleaning it.

Meduza also mentioned relevance of the topic, the article was released in anticipation of the World Day for Water, and Meduza together with their partner found a way to celebrate it by delivering information to its readers on how to filter water. Notably, call to action that encourages readers to go to Aquaphor website and learn more about its products and ways of filtering tap water appeared only in the conclusion of the article.

Another way of setting indirect brand linkage appeared in Quartz article sponsored by Infiniti – the luxury vehicle division of Japanese automaker Nissan founded in 1989. Namely, that article was promoting new model Infiniti Q60. The article was titled 'What makes the fusion of design and technology so powerful?' and the message was generated in the following way: wearable technology is a trend of combining utility, usability and design, and Infiniti Q60 perfectly fits this trend. It can be seen from the message presented that the twist in this case is exceptionally interesting. Within the text authors were explaining the recent trend of wearable technology and gave examples of the companies already leveraging it, such as Levi's, Google, ATAP and others. They came to the conclusion that the main trait of wearable technology is that it is combining style and functionality, and new Infiniti Q60 takes the same approach of mixing technology and artistry, blending style and functionality. What is also interesting, unlike in cases of direct

link to the brand promoted, Quartz avoided any direct mentions of the specific characteristics of the product, its features and benefits it could deliver to the customer, limiting it to mentioning Infiniti in one of the examples, as well as in the traditional disclaimer as the company, on behalf of which Quartz creative services produced this content.

Above all, we found it important to conclude this subsection with a comparison of how the same brand is promoted in two different media outlets. We noticed that Alfa Bank, which is the largest private commercial bank in Russia founded in 1990 in Moscow, partners both with Meduza and Forbes.ru. We noticed that in both cases the authors of the articles chose the same text structure – listicle, on the compositional level, and explanation, on the functional level. Moreover, in both cases the brand linkage was indirect, what, however, is unusual for Forbes.ru.

In Meduza's article the main topic was built upon the premise that there are a lot of little-known but useful iPhone functions and together with Alfa Bank they gave a list of those functions, such as night shift function, assistive touch function and so on. Only within the last lifehack they mentioned how Alfa Bank is related to this topic – their mobile bank was equated with other hacks. Given that the average audience of Meduza is consuming their articles and news from smartphones, we found this advertisement fitting its needs and expectations.

In the case of Forbes.ru, audience factor was also taken into account. Since the average Forbes.ru reader is a wealthy person, as was mentioned previously, more likely a successful entrepreneur, the piece titled ‘How to enter the world where people are getting away with caprices’ should also be something Forbes’ readers do expect to see on their website. The general message presented in this article can be articulated in the following way: business lounges in the airports are changing, and high-class lounge by Aeroflot and Alfa Bank can be recognized as an embodiment of it.

It was unusual for Forbes.ru that they were not mentioning the sponsor company right away but gradually moved to it via presenting to the reader main

ideas step by step: from the research of the international program Priority pass, in which it was claimed that airports business lounges are on the threshold of drastical changes, then it presented examples of the most luxurious lounges that we expect to be interesting for the readers of this media outlet, and only after they came to the point of unveiling the advertising intention via mentioning high-class lounge by Aeroflot and Alfa Bank, which is available for premium cardholders alone. Then the article was informing the readers about other ways of how Alfa Bank can serve demanding clients.

These two examples illustrate the overarching idea of native advertising: it should meet audience's needs and expectations and at the same time facilitate promotion of the sponsor company that turns consumption of the native advertisements into mutually beneficial experience for both sides. Moreover, we could observe that the brand plays an important role in preparing the article. In both cases analyzed we could see key similarities, such as text structures and ways of showing affiliation with the brand. To make it less intrusive and, this way, more appealing to the reader, the message, as we expect, has higher chances to meet the brand's target audience.

After analyzing meanings and structures of the sampled texts, we are enabled to extract three types of affiliation of the article with the promoted company:

1. No thematic link, when the advertising nature is indicated only via labels, such as disclaimers and company logo (we could observe only one example in The New York Times article promoting Goldman & Sachs);
2. Indirect link, when the company contributes to the discussed topic giving a comment (The New York Times, Meduza, Quartz);
3. Direct link, when the advertising purpose of the article is evident within the whole text flow (Forbes.ru, SZ, Mashable UK to a lesser extent, several examples from Quartz and Meduza).

Visual tools utilized. Sponsored content in The New York Times is richly visualized with illustrations, animated graphical elements, infographics (for example, they created a timeline to narrate the history of Guinness beer) or with graphs (like pie or bar charts, when they were promoting research conducted by The Goldman Sachs Group) than with photos. Photography is observed in rare cases and usually is not the only visual element. Moreover, The New York Times often uses videos as a part of their narrative. What was already previously mentioned, these videos are created by T Brand Studio as well, so the The New York Times creative unit is not using ready-to-go videos of their partners that were already used during their advertising campaigns.

Active usage of interactive visuals is another important feature distinctive for this media outlet. For example, in the case of the in-feed native advertisement about the research conducted on the base of the University of Minnesota, the interactive visual was depicting a brain with a cursor bar that the user could drag to see parts of the brain involved with drug addiction (see Appendix 4, visual 1), and advertisement about other cutting edge technologies, like chat with bot within the story about artificial intelligence. Thus, it contributed a lot to unique user experience creation.

We also noticed the more modern the product is, the more unusual visuals are, while when the brand is more conservative, the images and overall layout of the story are reserved as well. It shows that The New York Times tailors every native advertising project to every specific brand, product and message.

Visual narrative plays a major role in delivering central idea of each advertisement and, what is also important, they mostly fulfill purely symbolic function (storytelling or aesthetics mostly), rather than literal. The New York Times rarely uses visuals with literal functions that are, for instance, depicting the exact product or brand promoted. Along with providing unique user experience, this all helps to create a coherent chain of associations with the brand that, as we

see it, is of help within the process of signification system manifestation, especially the aspect of social connotations generation.

Quartz uses illustrations and photos in their stories almost equally, along with infographics and videos (in one case). But unlike The New York Times, in most of cases they are using one or two visual elements per advertisement, not four or more, being rather reserved in this regard. We also observed two cases without any visual representation.

That is also an interesting point to mention that Quartz, as well as The New York Times, avoids active usage of images with literal functions and mostly relies on symbolic visuals (mostly the ones that enable associations generation or present a metaphor) that have rather relative relation to the brand. For instance, in the story promoting new Porsche Panamera they composed the following message: definition of luxury is evolving and demands of high-end consumers are growing, so they are mostly interested in gaining experience rather than just expensive products, and Porsche Panamera is one of such cars that provides special if not exceptional experience. Since the central topic of this advertisement was luxurious experience, Quartz avoided using photos of the new car but instead used a symbolic visual – photo of the man swimming in a swimming pool on the rooftop with the skyscrapers in the background (see Appendix 4, visual 2). It supports the overall message based on a specific perception of wealth – that true luxury is about experiences and emotions, rather than about simple tangible items that can be bought by anyone.

Mashable UK is also rather reserved in its choice of visuals for the sponsored content. They do not use any interactive widgets, images or services, like The New York Times in its story about virtual reality, as we mentioned earlier. Mashable UK mostly adheres to photos and screenshots in case they promote technology-related products (see Appendix 4, visual 3). In order to show how these products work they also attach videos prepared by their partner and already used in other advertising campaigns.

In half of the cases observed Mashable UK uses images delivering literal meanings (either for the product description or for the demonstration), such as screenshots of the live streaming platform promoted called Chew.tv, photos of IQ Chocolate bars or video about augmented reality and virtual reality tool Zappar. Images fulfilling symbolic function (associations presentation at large) are also taking place and they are playing an important role in generating such connotations that result in the product being seen by the reader as modern, high quality and cutting-edge.

In the case of SZ advertorials, the visualization part focuses on pictures and videos. Within the bronze and silver packages, the first page of the advertorials always features a banner of the company or brand on the top and reaching over to left hand side. There is always a bigger picture beneath the headline and some more pictures leading to the sub pages. The multimedia features also contain embedded videos in addition to the pictures. SZ's advertorials are always richly illustrated, but unlike Meduza, Quartz or other of their counterparts, they do not include audio, infographics, screenshots or gifs, solely photos or illustrations. Thus, we can conclude that SZ focuses more on traditional ways of illustrating content.

Photos and illustrations used in their native advertisements, as a rule, normally fulfill equally literal (description) and symbolic (aesthetics, storytelling to a lesser extent) functions, unlike The New York Times, Quartz or Meduza, where we could observe evident tendency towards symbolic images usage. For instance, in the story about Huawei Watch they were using solely photos and videos from Huawei advertising campaigns and did not establish something new, as abovementioned media outlets that often prepare visuals for each particular sponsored story by themselves (see Appendix 4, visual 4).

Forbes.ru mostly uses photos to visualize their advertisements: from portrait photos of the people who represent the brand promoted (for instance, the president of Century 21 real estate agency, general partners of J&T Bank and so on) to photos depicting the specific product promoted, such as photos of the hotels that

are part of the hotel chain Maxx Roayl or photos of magazines Russian Wealth Journal issued by FPB Private Banking and Knight Frank (see Appendix 4, visual 5).

Above all, we also noticed that overall design of the sponsored content in Forbes.ru is rather inconsistent, since they do not produce visual content by themselves. It was evident in case of the story advertising Coral Travel tour operator and its offer of cheap tours to Barcelona. To make the advertisement more attractive they used stock photos depicting sights in Catalonia (see Appendix 4, visual 6). However, there were emblems of BCN pasted on the each of the photo's top right corner, what made the story looking more as an advertisement than an editorial piece.

In general, vast majority of the images used in Forbes.ru sponsored articles are literal fulfilling functions of description or demonstration. We did not find any case among twelve observed, when visuals were fulfilling symbolic function.

Meduza applies different approaches of visualizing its adverts depending on the type of the advertisement chosen by its client and the general idea of the story. It can be not only photos or infographics, but also illustrations, like in the case of the article about wine, when the editing team was using only minimalistic illustrations (see Appendix 4, visual 7), videos and even GIFs – images in graphics interchange format that support animated formats. As to the latter one, Meduza was the only media outlet among analyzed in this research that was utilizing visuals in the following format. They are using such types of visuals in case they need to add some humour to the general message. To give an illustration, we may recall the example of the advertisement that was sponsored by re:Store – retail chain of Apple products founded in Russia in 2006. Together with Meduza, they were explaining how life changed since the iPhone was developed. They did it using mostly visual narrative – ten GIFs with short disclaimers.

Observing visual narrative of the advertisements we also noticed that symbolic (association or metaphor at large) function was prevailing. Instead of

clearly showing the brand and highlighting its functions, they were using visuals that were called to be associated with the general message of the story, whilst the general message was connected to the brand, but mostly indirectly. For instance, promoting the specialized website that is a so-called search engine or a liaison between contractors and clients Remontnik.ru, they generated the message telling that there are certain problems people usually associate with renovation and Remontnik is an expert in finding ways of effectively and timely addressing them. To promote the message rather than the brand itself, they used very bright freehand illustrations depicting, as we understand it, the ideal renovation process – without any rubbish or dust. These images were fulfilling a symbolic function enabling generation of the following connotation: there is a way to avoid typical renovation problems and inconveniences associated with it and Remontnik.ru knows how to address these issues.

In general, we can conclude that only Forbes.ru and SZ tend to actively use visuals fulfilling literal functions in order to demonstrate and describe promoted companies, their products and services. Meduza, The New York Times, Quartz and Mashable UK (to a lesser extent, however) rely more on symbolic functions that are enabling readers to associate promoted brands and products with specific phenomena, features and values, as well as to generate social connotations, vital for successful signification system manifestation and overall efficiency of the in-feed native advertisement.

Labeling approaches. As it was stated in the first section of the present study, proper labeling is one of the essential parts of any native advertisement, and absence of the evident signs that it is an advertising article sponsored by a specific company and not an editorial piece may mislead the readers and undermine the credibility of the media outlet.

In The New York Times, sponsored articles are marked with the light blue disclaimer on the top, which says ‘paid for and posted by [brand name]’, as well as a small disclaimer in the bottom saying, ‘The news and editorial staffs of The New

York Times had no role in this post's preparation' (see Appendix 5, image 1) Moreover, they also add the logo of T Brand Studio as an additional marker that this content was produced by their brand marketing unit.

Quartz also marks all sponsored content with the corresponding disclaimer 'sponsor content' highlighted in orange (see Appendix 5, image 2). Each bulletin is accompanied with the brand's name on the left side as well.

Mashable UK posts its sponsored articles within a separate 'Paid content' division, as well as The New York Times, and defines its advertising nature with a light grey disclaimer on the top (see Appendix 5, image 3). At the same time, under the disclaimer there is a sidebar with recent advertisements, so readers can, as we think, clearly see that this article is a part of the range of sponsored stories.

SZ clearly labels all their advertorials as 'Anzeige', meaning advert. Within each of the packages offered, this word is visible on the top left corner of the native advertising articles (see Appendix 5, image 4). In addition, the company name and address of the customer is sometimes included either on the right side or bottom of the advertorial. In either case, it always becomes clear, which brand or product the particular in-feed native advertisement is connected to by the banner and lead picture on the front page. There is also a short disclaimer included on the bottom of each native advertising article, saying that SZ is not responsible for its content or products mentioned.

Forbes.ru marks its native advertisements solely via textual tool: above the headline they typically set a disclaimer 'Partner article / #advertisement' (see Appendix 5, image 5). What we found especially interesting is that clicking on the latter hashtag the reader is forwarded to the section that comprises all articles, either sponsor or editorial that are connected to advertising.

In order to separate editorial content from advertising and make this border less vague, Meduza always uses two signs: a disclaimer with a hyperlink to the FAQ about their native advertising solutions above and under the text of an advertisement and the disclaimer 'partnership article' embedded into a small brown

frame above the headline (see Appendix 5, image 6). Another way of labeling native advertisement is mentioning the partner, in most of cases Meduza mentions its partners in the lead passage and/or in the publication itself. Moreover, posting a link to any native advertisement in its profiles in social networks, Meduza always highlights that it is a sponsored content.

As we could see, these approaches normally combine both, textual (mention of the brand, hyperlinks and so on) and visual (companies' logos, for instance) ways of labeling advertising content in order to avoid ambiguity, and from our perspective, labels and, therefore, advertising incentives of these stories are evident to the reader.

Signification system manifestation. After scrutinizing all of the aforementioned factors, including text structures, main messages generated, level of connection of the content to the brand, ways of visualization of the message and labeling approaches, we now can conclude the following section by looking at how these tools are used for manifesting signification system of the products in each of the media outlets' sponsored content. In other words, how the in-feed native advertisements are used in order to promote companies, their products and services they are providing, thus, enabling media outlets to fulfill their contractual provisions.

As it was mentioned in the section describing methods used to conduct the analysis of native advertisements, denotations are literal meanings, so to say signs without cultural interpretation or understanding of what the product is, its function and offer; extensional connotations denote the basic connotative understanding of all visual elements presented in the advertisement; and social connotations, the values that consumer associates with the product.⁸⁸

We took it as a premise that the authors of each in-feed native advertisement observed during our case study are deliberately using certain messages and visuals

⁸⁸ Leth, A., Bell, M., Egholm, M., Hvass, A., Dyrbye, Z., Kernahan, A. (2015). Native Advertising. *University of Roskilde*, 16-18.

in order to represent the product throughout the whole narrative, even without mentioning the brand itself.

In native advertisements produced by The New York Times denotations of the signification system are supported mostly via logographic and labeling elements – logo and brand name are visually available all the time, since the bar on which the logo is located continues going down even when the user is scrolling the page. Denotations are also presented via direct brand mentions but to a lesser extent. Extensional connotations are represented in general throughout the entire advertisements and basically the authors project positive connotations of the brand due to the overall relevance of the messages generated and customized design that, as we see it, makes the reader feel that he reads stories about high-quality products worth his attention.

Social connotations become evident through the discursive understanding of the texts. Messages used in the majority of cases make it clear to the reader that the creators are trying to educate their audience on the specific societal issues or simply interesting phenomenons. Thus, social connotations connected with the products are reassuring the readers that these products can play an important role in these issues and phenomenons. The nature of the topics generated allow audience to associate the brand, which in most cases contributed to this article, with this particular topic. This way, we can conclude that in case of The New York Times the signification system is mostly manifested via social connotations expressed in the context that readers should start associating with the brand or product promoted. It is also evident due to the fact that vast majority of the visuals utilized fulfill solely symbolic functions, while literal visuals, such as screenshots of the apps promoted or photos of the specific products, are met more rarely. So, the products are promoted in a smooth manner and do not seem to be intrusive, since they educate the readers.

All the components of the signification systems of the products are also present in the native advertisements by Quartz, Meduza and Mashable UK.

Denotations are presented via both, textual elements, such as brand mentions and hyperlinks to their websites, as well as visual ones – in some cases these are the images fulfilling literal function, such as screenshots and photos of the products advertised, in case of Meduza it is also the brand's logo. Extensional connotations are also supported both, by messages generated and visuals, and allow the readers to see the best features of the products.

Social connotations are important components of the lion's share of the articles analysed in these three media outlets. The social connotations are represented due to the messages generated that are mostly built upon the problem-solution text structure, so that clearly indicates the role of a product in solving socially important issues, such as, for example, food wastage or boost of healthcare costs.

In the case of SZ and Forbes.ru we saw evident focus on presenting denotations and extensional connotations of the promoted products' signification system. In both media outlets it was done via direct mentions of brands, their offers and products, functions they fulfill and values they bring to the customer, along with presenting messages directly related to the brand and actively using visuals with literal functions. Such a literal approach leaves less room for articulating social connotations for the reader, since almost everything is already said instead of him, so he can either agree or disagree. Such intrusiveness can also cause deliberate attrition.

However, we found some consistency in how Forbes.ru was generating social connotations: in each case they were presenting the promoted company as a producer of high-end products that are able to lift their customers to the level of VIP, absolutely fitting the probable expectations of Forbes.ru target audience.

We can conclude that each native advertisement manifests the signification system of brands and products they are promoting but they differ in their focuses. Some of the media, namely The New York Times, Mashable UK, Quartz and Meduza are highlighting importance of generating social connotations, while SZ

and Forbes.ru mostly rely on presenting denotations of the signification system somewhat neglecting the importance of the social connotations.

Before conducting the analysis, we expected that native advertising articles should mostly be built in order to reach the goal of generating specific social connotations, since its aim is to blend with editorial pieces and mimic journalistic content, though keeping advertising incentives evident. However, it hardly works in each case.

In the following section of the present chapter we are going to discuss results of the analysis conducted, as well as bring comments on the basic approaches to blending native advertising into editorial formats articulated by experts from the field we shared our findings with.

2.3. Discussion

As it was already mentioned in the introduction to the following dissertation, the aim of the research conducted was to compare how two different types of online media – online-only and hybrid – are utilizing textual and visual elements in their native advertisements in order to create a coherent relationship to the brand and the product, as well as to meet the audience's needs. Herewith, we are going to discuss whether differences in blending native advertisements into editorial formats in the chosen media depend on the region it was founded in, on its origin or on other factors. Namely, we will articulate basic approaches of how examined in-feed native advertisements are established by the American media outlets The New York Times and Quartz, European Mashable UK and SZ and Russian Forbes.ru and Meduza.

We found that relation to the brand is coherent in each of the chosen media outlets' native advertisements, and the signification system of the promoted companies and products is manifesting itself throughout all the texts by using both textual and visual elements. This includes general messages, direct brand mentions

and images, in most of the cases static ones, fulfilling symbolic (with association, metaphor and aesthetics purposes at large) and literal functions (mainly product description and demonstration). It is done in different ways in each particular case and by each particular media outlet: some of them are focusing on generating social connotations, others prefer to leave more space for denotations and extensional connotations formation. Approaches to affiliating the article with the sponsor company could be distilled down to three types: no thematic link, when the advertising nature is indicated only via labels (in rare cases, only one observed within the research); indirect link, when the company contributes to the discussed topic giving a comment; direct link when the advertising purpose of the article is evident within the whole text.

Notwithstanding the approach taken to link the article to the brand and manifest the signification system, it can be concluded that one of the goals of native advertisements is reached – the brands are clearly represented, as required by demands of the client.

However, approaches to meeting needs of the audience and keeping it relevant to the recipients are also different, and these differences, from our point of view, can influence the overall outcomes of the advertisement: on the successful promotion of the brand, i.e. its efficiency for the client, as well as acceptance of such type of content by the audience of the media outlet.

There are different ways of blending advertising and journalistic nature in the in-feed native advertisements observed. We looked at the approaches we examined from a broader perspective and, as well as in case of approaches to setting relations to the brand, we could distinguish three basic types of native advertisements these media have established: the least intrusive type (The New York Times), less intrusive type (Quartz, Mashable UK, Meduza) and the most intrusive type (SZ, Forbes.ru).

The New York Times often raises societal issues within their native advertisements or simply interesting phenomena, as well as in their regular

editorial pieces. These advertising but yet sophisticated stories enable the media outlet to deliver information that should educate the readers about the world and specific issues, rather than simply disclose that kind of information that should persuade them to buy a specific product promoted, click the link, etc.

The New York Times also pays a lot of attention to the visual component of their native advertisements, using a variety of visuals, from static photos to multimedia tools, such as chats and 360-degree videos. The majority of these visuals fulfills solely symbolic function relating to the brand promoted and, thus, plays an important if not the central role in the process of forming connotations related to the brand by the reader. Mostly, it facilitates positive connotations generation due to the presence of smiling people on the photos, eloquent metaphors generated via vivid details and overall colouring approaches that always fit the colouring policy of the brand promoted (for instance, in case of the article about Adobe they were actively using vivid bright colours, while in case of Tiffany jewelry – mostly white and light-blue as their typical brand colours).

At the same time, from our point of view, design and messages presented in the native advertisement do not make the advertisement intrusive but something the reader may expect to see in this media outlet, so we see the approach to native advertising observed in The New York Times as one of the most successful examples of a symbiosis of sponsored and editorial content. At the same time, due to proper labeling and clear, though not annoying brand mentions, normally in the middle or in the end of the articles, we do not see these adverts to be deceptive to the reader, since the advertising incentives are more than evident. Moreover, we see this harmonic combination of textual and visual tools facilitates both, rise of the audiences' interest in the company, its products and services promoted and the brand reach.

That is interesting that the next type comprises examples of solely online-only media from three different regions observed – American Quartz, British Mashable UK and Russian Meduza. As well as The New York Times, they

approach their native advertisements creation in a way of delivering meaningful information first. In general, the discourse patterns in these media are organized either around problems that promoted companies are addressing or phenomena they are linked to, both in explanatory ways. What is important they always state the problem or explain the relevance of the phenomenon first, like in any editorial story. Only after that the actual promotion of the brand starts. They are also actively using cases of real customers and real examples of how this particular promoted company and its products took part in solving a specific issue as a storytelling tool.

However, their stories are not as sophisticated and complex as the ones in The New York Times. If the latter media outlet sets relation to the brand that is normally not evident in the beginning and the story is gradually unveiling its purpose showing a variety of spectrums of the problem or phenomenon explored, the researched online-only media normally set this relation right from the start. This, along with a higher percentage of words and phrases of praise and encouragement and call to actions in the end of the text possibly may result in the audience paying less attention to these stories and less accepting this genre, since it diminishes the journalistic nature of the story.

Moreover, approach to visualizing content is also not as sophisticated as in The New York Times. Normally, these media outlets are rather reserved in visualizing their advertisements, and limit it to a couple of illustrations, photos or infographics. Quartz and Meduza prefer to use the images fulfilling symbolic function that, as it was already mentioned earlier, can boost the process of positive connotations generation by the reader, since they play a central role in building association with the brand. Though in the half of cases Mashable UK uses literal images, such as screenshots and photos of the products, we would say it allows them to explain at times complicated nature of the technological projects they are normally promoting.

Forbes.ru and SZ represent the third type of strategy we extracted – the most intrusive one. Though they do take into account such factor, as relevance of the brand promoted to their audience, their stories bring not as much meaningful content, as the other four media we have analyzed. We saw evident lack of the story component in their sponsor articles: they are more focused on promotion of the most visible components of the brands rather than telling relevant stories, unlike their counterparts. The signification system of the companies and their products is manifested within their advertisements, what means that their promotion obligations embodied in the treaties are fulfilled but, from our perspective, absence of informative side and relevant societal knowledge substantially reduces efficiency of such types of advertisements, since there are high chances that the readers would simply skip these articles.

In general, we could see close relation to the brand in the advertisements generated by these two media outlets: normally, the brand is mentioned right in the headline or in the lead paragraph and the narrative is constantly accompanied by words and phrases of praise and encouragement (such words and structures were also encountered in the native advertisements by Mashable UK but to a much lesser extent), what embodies more advertising than journalism.

However, the approaches to visualizing their advertisements are different. If Forbes.ru adheres solely to photos that are fulfilling literal functions at large, SZ offers not only pictures, but also videos and places emphasis on symbolic visuals that allow the readers to build suitable connotations with each brand, such as freedom, style, adventure depending on the advertisement. But looking at the overall layout of the sponsored content in both media we noticed that they could easily fit any magazine rather than their web pages. Generally, we may conclude that SZ and Forbes.ru are less successful in blending the advertising content into editorial one.

We would like to underline that these approaches are not representing any final system or framework that can fit any case of the media outlet using native

advertising as an income generator. From what we observed, each advertisement should be tailored to specifics of each brand as well as the distribution platform.

Thus, within examining the approaches of media in three regions we did not see the regional factor, as a major one. But we could conclude that the origin of the media is an important factor. The fact that media outlet either was launched online or is hybrid and only moved online from the print era, may play an important role in their approaches to native advertisements creation and distribution. Not incidentally throughout the analysis section we were describing approaches of SZ and Forbes.ru together, since their strategies are pretty similar: they are adhering to the print logic in designing their ads and choosing the messages – as with a simple advertising article. From our point of view, they still need to catch up formats utilized in other media observed in this research to drive more audience to their advertisements and make them less intrusive, thus, more effective.

However, the only exception among hybrid media we found is The New York Times. Focusing on online formats, they are recognized as the innovators in the field of online journalism and that is not surprising that they are leveraging different ways of generating income, including native advertising. They are actively combining different formats and, what is important, always tailor each advertisement to the specific needs of their clients still keeping it interesting to their audience, due to the messages they are generating that are more educational, rather than promotional.

We shared our findings with Kirill Artemenko and Maria Rzaeva – founders of Bumaga online newspaper based in St. Petersburg. They are also actively using native advertising as an income generator since 2012, so we found it interesting to ask them to elaborate on the abovementioned approaches that we could distinguish after the analysis conducted and how they correlate with the typical strategy applied in Bumaga.

Maria and Kirill see the main value in native advertising content produced by their team specifically and published on their website is that it is intergrated

with the system of values existing in their media company and accepted by their audience. Their main trait is that native advertising content is oriented to fully meet their readers' expectations and match their interests. 'In a nutshell, native advertising in our case is something that is interesting for our reader and only sponsored by a specific company,' Maria highlighted.

Thus, she underlined that they are not directly promoting their sponsors' products and services within the native advertisement, since the statistics they are regularly gathering shows that direct advertising of the company results in degraded user experience and worse return on investment for sponsors and, thusly, such approach proved to be less efficient. At the same time, articles, within which the general message presented is connected to brand promoted in an indirect way, and is focused more on a specific phenomenon or an issue that is interesting for their readership, always show positive results and become mutually beneficial – both for the readers and their clients.

They brought an example of Meduza and Forbes.ru as their counterparts that are also actively utilizing native advertising as an income generator and were under scrutiny in the present study. Both media outlets often tie general message directly with the brand (as we concluded previously, Meduza does it to a much lesser extent comparing to Forbes.ru, but more often than Bumaga).

Kirill put it in the following way, 'Such articles would not be met with open arms by our readership. When you tell about the best features of a futon produced by a specific brand is not a pure native advertising. Yes, you may provide reasons why it is important to choose a suitable futon and even add comments from the specialists in the field. But it will stay an advertisement of a futon. And when you are choosing a twist in the message, when you find a way of establishing an interesting and relevant topic that is logical to be sponsored by your partner – that is more native than anything else.'

Kirill and Maria provided us an example of one of the first native advertising articles published on Bumaga. When they were promoting Llaollao frozen yogurts,

they chose a specific feature that made Llaollao an outstanding product back those times: they sold not only frozen yogurts in their cafes but also fresh fruit and berries as toppings. Bumaga decided to build the narrative around that specific trait and wrote an article about the ways of choosing fresh season fruits.

To show affiliation with Llaollao, they traditionally used visual tools: among them is a tag ‘Partner article’, branded sidebar on the bottom of the page and Llaollao logo on the top right; and textual way of setting linkage: in the beginning of the majority of native advertisements on Bumaga it is mentioned that the article was supported and sponsored by a specific company.

We also discussed possibilities of extending media outlets’ capabilities in light of producing more complex native advertising content via recruiting designers and establishing full-fledged studios, as it is in case of T Brand Studio at The New York Times or The Wall Street Journal Custom Solutions. Thus, distinct department allows specialists to focus solely on advertising. However, founders of Bumaga have different opinion in this regard. ‘Each native advertisement is a full-fledged editorial story. Since it is not a direct advertisement – we are only covering specific topics that are indirectly linked to our partners’ companies and solely sponsored by them – we do not see any ethical problem in light of this,’ Maria replied.

Since efficiency of native advertisements directly depends on whether it appears similar to editorial content and can deliver relevant information to the readers, while examining each story we were posing a question: What value do these articles bring to the reader as a story, or even as a journalistic piece? Maria and Kirill noted that they are putting forward the same question, while working on establishing a suitable topic.

However, this often implies misunderstanding with the clients. As it was already stated, Bumaga treats native advertising as a way of telling relevant unbiased stories, rather than directly promoting brands and trying to persuade their

readers to choose their partner's products and services, and it is not something every customer understands.

Therefore, they see the main difficulty of native advertising projects creation in finding a specific angle that will make the story relevant to the readers and efficient for the client. Thus, from perspective of Bumaga founders, secret of successfully blending advertising and editorial content is in choosing the relevant topic and properly label it, rather than in specific text structures, phrases, words and images.

After conducting the interview with Bumaga founders and sharing our findings with them, we can conclude that the very first thing, which determines approach to native advertising production, establishment of the brand relations within it and even ad division separation, is how media outlet defines their general mission, while specific mission entails specific audiences with certain attitudes, interests and expectations.

As to the matter of limitations of the present study, we should admit that we were focused on a relatively small pool of cases, so the scope of our analysis was not sufficient to come up with the final classification of the approaches to blending in-feed native advertisements into editorial content.

Obviously, we as researchers may not always fit basic characteristics of the target audience of certain media outlets analyzed, such as, for example, Forbes.ru and SZ. Thus, while extracting main messages generated within the texts and visual tools utilized in the sampled in-feed native advertisements, we might have reached conclusions that were not matching possible conclusions of the target audience of Forbes.ru and SZ. Given the certain degree of subjectiveness typical for the qualitative methodology applied, the results and approaches articulated may also be not fully representative.

We also treat a lack of prior research on the topic of how in-feed native advertising articles are blending into editorial content on the textual and visual

levels as the limitation of the present research, since there is a strong demand for developing new research typologies and methods.

Lastly, we would like to underline that there is much room for further research that can be based on the findings represented in the master thesis. One of the areas could be focused on the effects different types of native advertisements in different types of online media have on the readers. For that reason, in-deep interviews should be conducted. We also see relevance in further scrutiny of the models of native advertising creation media are using, as well as in researching more on the problem of blending advertising into editorial content, since it focuses on the main problem media producers are usually facing – the problem of keeping such content relevant and not deceptive to the audience, as well as efficient for the sponsor.

Conclusion

This research was conducted in order to explore how in-feed native advertisements are blended into delivery platforms represented by the online-only and hybrid media outlets in a way of staying relevant to the audience whilst promoting the brand, as required by an agreement concluded with a client. To accomplish the goal, we fulfilled each of the tasks stated in the introduction to the present study.

In the first place, we described most common revenue models that are utilized in online media today. We could observe high potential of online advertising as an income generator, hence, one of the critical pillars of revenue models in a variety of media outlets.

Secondly, native advertising as a specific type of online advertising was analyzed. We explored different definitions of native advertising and chose the most exhaustive one that denotes it as a type of advertisement, which is designed to integrate into delivery platform and bring value both, to the readers and to the clients.

We also specified diverse approaches to differentiating native advertisements and adhered to the typology enunciated by Interactive Advertising Bureau. Accordingly, native advertising units can be distilled down to six types, such as paid search units, recommendation widgets, promoted listings, in-ads with native element units, custom solutions and in-feed units, or stories written in partnership with a sponsor – the most commonly encountered type of native advertisements in online media outlets that was analyzed within the present dissertation.

We distinguished main elements that enable native advertising to become an integral part of the income generation strategy that included transparency of advertising incentives, content portability and ability to scale it, as well as to develop suitable KPIs. In addition, we outlined main problems connected with the

operationalization of native advertising in journalism, such as problem of credibility and difficulties management teams usually encounter on the stage of measuring its efficiency.

Afterwards, we described methodology used for analyzing textual and visual tools utilized in the sampled in-feed native advertisements retrieved from the websites of hybrid media outlets, namely The New York Times, SZ and Forbes.ru, and the online-only Quartz, Mashable UK and Meduza.

We took it as a premise that visual and textual tools used in the native advertisements are equally capable of conveying crucial meanings and being used for integrating native advertisement in the environment of the media outlet. In order to conduct a wholistic analysis of these tools and how they facilitate integration of advertising and editorial formats in the chosen media, we applied qualitative methodology, specifically, qualitative textual analysis and combination of functional and semiotic analysis of the visuals. Analysis was complemented by extracting tools for the signification system manifestation, in order to examine how in-feed native advertisements observed facilitate brand promotion.

Then we provided results of the analysis conducted and could distinguish main approaches to presenting native advertising content in each of the media outlet. The New York Times richly visualizes its advertisements with mostly symbolic visuals and builds main messages in a way of educating and informing readers, as well as in case of its regular editorial pieces. Sponsor companies and their products promoted are normally mentioned in the middle or in the end of the stories, depending on the context. Thus, they mostly develop indirect linkages to brands promoted. At the same time, brand recognition is not hindered due to proper labeling of each advertisement, such as company's logo embedded in several sections of the web page.

Quartz, Mashable UK and Meduza take similar approaches to main messages generation and visualizing their native advertisements: in the majority of cases messages were tightly bound to brands promoted, and visuals utilized were

fulfilling both literal and symbolic functions, unlike The New York Times that typically avoids using literal visuals in their native advertisements. We also noticed that ways of visualizing and building text structures on the compositional level in these media outlets fully resemble design of their regular editorial pieces. Thus, in light of design, native advertisements in these media outlets should not seem intrusive to the users.

Basic strategies of establishing in-feed native advertisements by SZ and Forbes.ru also resemble. Both media outlets generate messages that are closely connected to the sponsor company and focused on their products' most visible components. Above all, visualization of native advertisements is rather reserved and normally fulfills literal functions, thus, resembling advertising article rather than a full-fledged editorial piece, whose typical goal is to deliver actual and relevant information.

Finally, on the stage of discussing results of the conducted analysis we concluded that the signification system related to the promoted companies, their products and services is manifested in each in-feed native advertisement examined, but ways of generating it differ from one media outlet to another. It became evident to us that The New York Times, Quartz, Meduza and Mashable UK are building textual and visual narratives in a way of facilitating extensional and social connotations generation, while Forbes.ru and SZ are mostly relying on presenting denotations of the signification system.

Above all, we could distinguish three basic approaches to combining advertising and editorial content within in-feed native advertisements based on our subjective perception of the level of overall intrusiveness of the native advertising content observed: intrusive (presented by Forbes.ru and SZ), less intrusive (Quartz, Mashable UK and Meduza) and the least intrusive, or more editorial-looking (on the example of The New York Times).

We came to a conclusion that the region is not the factor for the way of developing and presenting in-feed native advertisements, at least according to the

scope we covered in this research. However, origin of the media outlet, whether it is online-only or hybrid, its basic strategy towards online formats, along with the target audience are important factors that influence the way native advertising is presented and how it is blended with the editorial content.

Moreover, in order to add value to the following research, we complemented it with the comments on our key findings from the experts in the field – Kirill Artemenko and Maria Rzaeva, founders of the online newspaper Bumaga based in St. Petersburg. From their perspective, the most balanced way of presenting native advertisements is to cover a suitable topic that will be relevant to the readership, match their and the media outlet's value system and will present those meanings the client wants to be associated with. Moreover, the design of the native advertisement should correspond with the way any editorial piece is designed, but at the same time should be properly labeled, in order not to make this content deceptive to the reader and avoid reputational damages.

Kirill and Maria also endorsed our views in regards to intrusiveness of the native advertisement: the less direct brand linkage in the message of the native advertisement is, the more efficient the advertising. This claim was supported by statistics on audience perception of native advertisements Bumaga regularly gathers since 2012.

We expect our findings to be helpful for the media companies that are planning to use native advertising as a revenue source. The results of the research conducted might contribute to looking for ways of balanced integration of advertising and journalistic nature within the native advertising articles. Such kind of a study can enable media outlets to understand, which approach of combining advertising and editorial formats is the most suitable, less intrusive and at the same time not deceptive to the reader.

Anticipating further interest in the problem of audience response, we expect the results of our research to have theoretical application in light of scrutinizing

effects native advertising may have on the readership of online media outlets. To that end, in-deep interviews and surveys are to be conducted.

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Appendix 1

Categories of analysis articulated after the open coding stage

1. Name of the media outlet:

- a) The New York Times,
- b) Quartz,
- c) SZ,
- d) Mashable UK,
- e) Forbes.ru,
- f) Meduza.

2. Number of the article:

#1-12

3. Headline:

4. Company promoted:

5. Products promoted (if applicable):

6. General message articulation:

7. Type of text structure on the compositional level:

- a) Plain text,
- b) Text blocks.

8. Type of text structure on the functional level:

- a) Description,
- b) Cause-effect,
- c) Comparison,
- d) Sequence,
- e) Problem-solution.

9. Which structural units can be distinguished (introduction/exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, etc.):

10. Brief summary of each structural unit:

11. Types and quantity of visual tools utilized:

- a) Photo – #,

- b) Illustration – #,
- c) Graph – #,
- d) Infographics – #,
- e) Video – #,
- f) Other _____.

12. Functions of each of the visual tools utilized:

- a) Literal,
- b) Symbolic.

13. Denotations of each of the visual tools utilized (what is depicted):

14. Connotations of each of the visual tools utilized (what is the potential meaning).

15. Whether the signification system of the promoted company and product is manifested within the native advertisement:

- a) Yes,
- b) No,
- c) Not applicable.

16. Articulation of the key components of the signification system:

Denotations

Extensional connotations

Social connotations

Appendix 2

Interview with Kirill Artemenko and Maria Rzaeva, founders of Bumaga online newspaper (conducted on May 2, 2017)

When did you start using native advertising as a revenue source?

Maria: First money Bumaga earned on advertising was gained due to the native advertising article. However, it was accidental when nobody was jumping on the bandwagon talking about it. It was in 2012. Initially, our approach was focused on being oriented on the audience's needs as much as it is possible. Everything was written for our audience good.

Kirill: Our first advertising client was the European University at St. Petersburg – the non-state university. We just wrote the story about what EUSP is, how it differs from other universities in the city.

Why that article was considered native?

M.: It was completely fitting the needs of our readership. In a nutshell, native advertising in our case is something that is interesting for our reader and only sponsored by a specific company. So, that article was interesting to read and it delivered relevant information without directly promoting EUSP. It was a little-known non-state university that gave good education, at times better than state institutions, and we saw it to be valuable for our readers. Bumaga covers St. Petersburg, and this university was seen as a new phenomenon on the agenda and in the public sphere as such. Moreover, I think that even if we had not come across EUSP as a partner, we would have covered them within our regular editorial piece. This article was considered native because it was matching our agenda, value system and the topic chosen accorded with the normal range of topics we are usually covering.

How would you describe your approach to native advertising production in your newsroom?

M.: It is just an editorial piece sponsored by the partner. He has no influence on the opinions expressed. Of course, the topic is discussed ahead of the game, and the clients are supporting only those topics that are relevant to their brand, products and services they are providing and deliver information about those values they want to be associated with. That is why we explain to each client that the integration happens not on the level of the text and words utilized, but on the level of values disseminated by Bumaga. If you are a technology company, it makes sense for you to sponsor a text about smart city, for instance.

What was the next project after fairly successful native advertisement about EUSP?

K.: It was an advertisement about Llaollao yogurts. Its killer feature was that in their cafes they are not only selling frozen yogurts but also fresh fruit and berries toppings. So, we wrote an article about how to choose the best season fruit and berries, where to buy it and how much it will cost. It was a big St. Petersburg Fruit & Berries guide. We also added some recipes and main lifehacks of how to keep them fresh.

M.: We also found two experts – chefs. One of them was an independent one and the other – chef from Llaollao because they are specializing in fruit, so they were able to contribute to this topic. It was fair to use him as an expert. Thus, we integrated their knowledge about fruit and berries into our editorial story, added labels and published this article as a native advertisement.

How are you building brand linkages in your native advertisements?

M.: We have graphical branding: promo block on the bottom of the page, sponsor's logo on the top right of the page and tag 'Partner article' on the left; and textual branding: sometimes we integrate brand mentions right in the text and in the majority of cases add a small disclaimer right in the beginning denoting that this article is supported by a certain company, name it and give a link to its website.

Why you are titling your native advertisements 'partner articles'?

It is actively used by a variety of media outlets, including Meduza and others. We are conducting audience research every year and the last one showed that this notion is understood by them pretty well, unlike native advertising, for instance, which is a specific industry term not everyone is aware of.

Partner articles on Bumaga are prepared by their journalists and published under their names. Why you are not separating teams engaged in advertising content production and those who are preparing news and feature stories?

Our journalists are not working as advertisers. Regardless of whether it is an editorial or advertising piece, it is produced according to the same rules and values. Everything we are writing is always a journalistic endeavor. Each native advertisement is a full-fledged editorial story. Since it is not a direct advertisement – we are only covering specific topics that are indirectly linked to our partners' companies and solely sponsored by them – we do not see any ethical problem in light of this.

How do you work with partners?

M.: Sometimes it can be very hard and each media outlet should clearly understand what is their strategy. For us, it is important to do journalism, not just advertising. And when one of our clients asked to write a native advertisement covering political topic, we had to find another solution, because we are trying to stay away from being politically biased.

There are different approaches to reaching symbiosis between the editorial and advertising content and setting relations to the brand, based on the level of intrusiveness. Which approach do you consider as the most suitable one?

K.: Before, we issued native advertisements that were telling solely about the products promoted. Now such articles would not be met with open arms by our readership. Meduza and Forbes are often applying such approaches and, according to our experience, they do not work well. When you tell about the best features of a

futon produced by a specific brand it is not a pure native advertising. Yes, you may provide reasons why it is important to choose a suitable futon and even add comments from the specialists in the field. But it will stay an advertisement of a futon. And when you are choosing a twist in the message, when you find a way of establishing an interesting and relevant topic that is logical to be sponsored by your partner – that is more native than anything else.

M.: Yes, the brand should be logically integrated and those direct relations are rising a lot of questions to journalists that are producing those texts, especially in the case of Meduza, since they do not have a separate creative unit – almost every advertisement is produced by the newsroom. When the brand is directly promoted within the native advertisement, the text is not perceived by the readership as objective. Fairly, because it is not objective anymore.

Appendix 3

Examples of in-feed native advertisements

Text 1. This innovative device dispenses life-saving medicine through breast milk. Source: Mashable UK.

2.9 million babies die each year in their first month of life. Safely and practically administering vital medicine to infants is a global challenge — especially in certain countries where access to safe healthcare is limited. The very first hours and days of an infant's life carry the most risk. Recognising the difficulty faced by parents and healthcare staff in administering medical care to these young ones, one company has created an innovative solution: JustMilk.

So how does it work?

JustMilk is a disposable silicone device, which is designed to administer medicine and nutrients to infants via the flow of breast milk. The device is super-thin, meaning that medicine can be administered discreetly and effectively during the breastfeeding stage. Although the device is still in its testing stage — the company hopes the device can be used "in the global fight against malnutrition, infectious diseases and other health crises."

We caught up with Geoff Galgon, president and co-founder of JustMilk, to find out more about how the JustMilk device is innovating in the health sphere. When faced with the design challenge of preventing the transmission of HIV during breastfeeding, the team hit on an idea that could be used to deliver a range of drugs and nutrients via breast milk. And the extent of its use is pretty neat — Galgon told how the system "will be used by a mother during breastfeeding to release therapeutics such as antimalarials, antiretrovirals, antibiotics and micronutrients."

The device will allow mothers to improve their newborns' chance at life in a safe, measured way — spoons, dosing cups and oral syringes all deliver liquid formulations and can lead to dosing errors and unhygienic delivery.

When will we see the JustMilk device across the world?

To date, the company has been conducting extensive research into how well the device will be received culturally across the globe, and how it can integrate safely and effectively with breastfeeding. Its ability to prevent the passing of infectious diseases such as HIV between mother and child were found to be of great importance during studies in Kenya, and work with the University of Venda in Limpopo, South Africa found that the region preferred the JustMilk device over current methods of drug administration.

Throughout this testing phase, JustMilk has worked closely with educational institutes from across the UK including the Department of Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology at the University of Cambridge and University College London's School of Pharmacy. Here the team has conducted taste panels, tablet formulation development and testing, and dermatological work. Beyond the UK, important work is being done in collaboration with the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Venda, South Africa.

"Having multiple geographic centers (primarily Cambridge, UK and California, US) has some challenges, but also benefits including the diversity of perspectives, talent, and resources that we can work with" Galgon told Mashable. "We have been very fortunate to have our technical work led at the University of Cambridge as well as our aforementioned business school programme involvement there — it has been a great environment for development."

The JustMilk vision of integrating breastfeeding with therapeutic administration or supplementation is unique and has the potential to completely reshape the healthcare offered to infants worldwide. By encouraging the natural

and healthy practice of breastfeeding and influencing the bioavailability of intended therapeutics by using breast milk to deliver vital medicines and nutrients, the team behind JustMilk just might change the face of healthcare worldwide.

Text 2. The Art of Elegant Innovation. Source: The New York Times.

Five ballet dancers improvise a stunning collision of beauty and heart in one of New York's most famous buildings.

IN "THE TEN BOOKS ON ARCHITECTURE," first century author and architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio identified *firmita* (firmness), *utilitas* (utility) and *venustas* (form) as the principal pillars of success in the field. In 1896, a prolific craftsman named Louis Sullivan — widely regarded as the father of the modern skyscraper — proffered that the tall buildings beginning to dot skylines could be useful and also have aesthetic value. "Form ever follows function," he wrote, creating the most frequently quoted design edict of the modern age.

They were principles originally meant to guide the work of architects, but they are alive in a range of creative disciplines and staples of daily life. Just as builders explore the potential of glass, concrete and steel, choreographers push artistic boundaries through the power and possibility of the human body. Composers assemble voice and instrumentation to create seductive and melodic sounds. Chefs artfully answer the basic human need for food with inventive arrangements of simple ingredients.

Shaping Today's World

The current generation of makers continues the quest for perfect unions of form and function by working as ringmasters of an exciting mash-up of disciplines and sensibilities.

In one category are those who bring together utility and artistry. Innovators in fashion, for instance, are skillfully concealing smartphones and GPS systems in tailored garments and sleekly designed, sculptural accessories in wearable tech.

A second category is mixing heritage and modernism and reimagining legacy arts with future-forward updates. On Broadway, sellout crowds are flocking to the hip-hop retelling of the life of one of America's Founding Fathers. In film, motion pictures didn't even have sound in the 1920s, but now it's possible to experience the immersive thrill of the nearly-as-good-as-the-real-thing simulated worlds of virtual reality.

Collectively, these advances soften the effort needed to get through daily life with more ease and beauty. They also stir our minds and empower us with a bigger, bolder sense of possibility.

Modern Masters Unite

In mid-November 2015, five New York City Ballet (NYCB) dancers dressed in light palettes that complemented the sleek, airy interior, turned a subway station into a pop-up performance space. The 800,000-square-foot hub inside the World Trade Center, which is open but still under construction, connects 12 rail lines and is part of the revitalization of downtown Manhattan after Sept. 11, 2001. There, the dancers improvised choreography that smoothly integrated the beams, columns and busy commuters making their way through a structure designed to resemble a bird taking flight.

The World Trade Center transportation hub is a white-on-white maximalist cathedral of curved beams and high arches designed by architect Santiago Calatrava. The dancers are members of the storied company founded in 1948 by neoclassic legend George Balanchine. New York City Ballet has been under the artistic leadership of Ballet Master in Chief, Peter Martins, since Balanchine's death in 1983. Among his priorities has been a sustained effort to draw on the

creative talents of contemporary choreographers and composers that speak to the times in which they are working. The current resident choreographer and soloist is 28-year-old phenom Justin Peck.

His resume includes dancing as a principal in Balanchine work like “Concerto Barocco,” and the innovative spirit of his own choreography is delighting NYCB’s fan base. In winter 2016, Peck debuted his tenth work, a colorful, vibrant 56-castmember production called “The Most Incredible Thing.” It’s a narrative ballet based on a Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale. Peck’s collaborators included composer and musician Bryce Dessner and artist Marcel Dzama.

A Dance Under the Arches

The dancers in the hub are part of an ongoing collaboration with the lifestyle innovation brand Cole Haan. The quintet’s movements were neither rehearsed nor planned. They were organic responses to the hub’s lofty design and the New Yorkers on their way to jobs, home, coffee dates or wherever. The commuters brought an easy-going, nonchalant spirit to the space, and their walk through it became the theatrical backdrop of an improvised ballet.

This integration of form and function, heritage and modernism, and utility with aesthetic value was the meet-up point for a dance under the arches of a transportation hub. The performance affirms there can be just as much beauty in a walk to the subway as there is in a ballet. But sometimes, with the right luck, some moment of daily life suddenly glimmers. It shines with new beauty and purpose, and the ballet is the walk to the subway.

Appendix 4

Examples of visual tools utilized

Visual 1. Interactive image depicting a brain with a cursor bar that can be dragged to see parts of the brain involved with drug addiction. In-feed native advertisement 'Today's research, tomorrow's solutions.' Source: The New York Times.

Revealing Relapse

DRAG RIGHT AND LEFT TO COMPARE

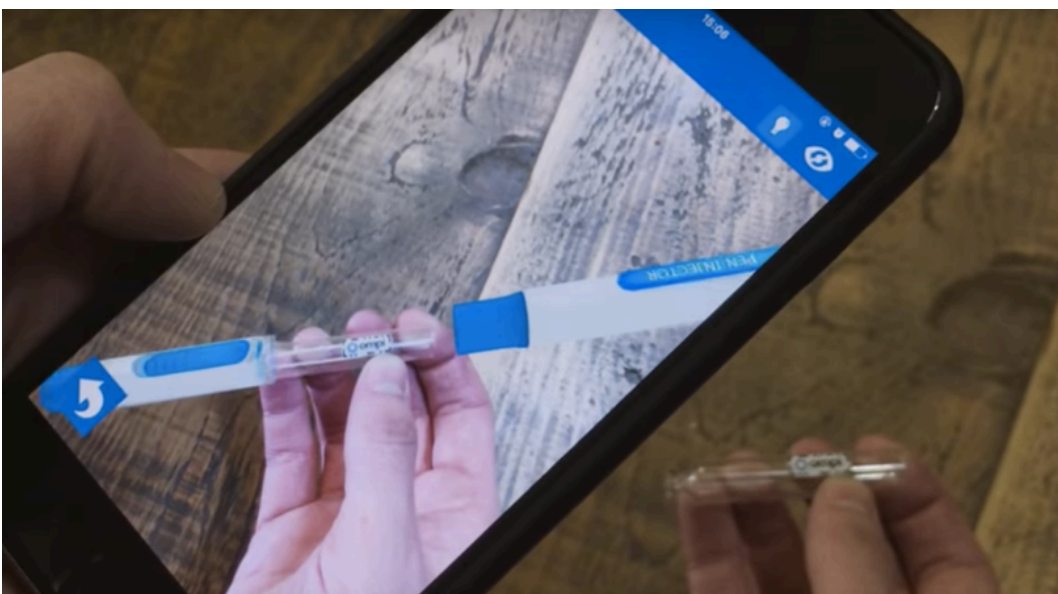


Magnetic resonance imaging has changed the way we think about drug use. Using a functional MRI, which measures blood flow and brain activity, scientists can identify the parts of the brain involved with addiction. The graphic shows areas of activity that are associated with relapse, which occurs for 80 percent to 90 percent of people in recovery within one year of treatment.

Visual 2. Photo depicting a man swimming in a rooftop swimming pool. In-feed native advertisement 'True luxury is in the experience.' Source: Quartz.



Visual 3. Screenshot of the application for augmented reality creation. In-feed native advertisement 'You can create your own augmented reality experiences with this app.' Source: Mashable UK.



Visual 4. Photo depicting Huawei watch. In-feed native advertisement ‘Aussen Zeitlos. Innen Smart.’ Source: SZ.de.



Visual 5. Photo depicting Barrett shoes. In-feed native advertisement ‘Rare art.’ Source: Forbes.ru.



Visual 6. Photo depicting Costa Barcelona landscape. In-feed native advertisement ‘Why Spain, why Costa Barcelona.’ Source: Forbes.ru.



Visual 7. Illustration depicting a wine glass. In-feed native advertisement ‘Burgundy or Bordeaux? Meduza and Grand Cru explain how to choose right wine glass.’ Source: Meduza.



Appendix 5

Examples of labeling advertising content

Image 1. Disclaimer placed above the headline of the in-feed native advertisement. Source: The New York Times.



Image 2. Tag highlighted in orange, placed above the headline of the in-feed native advertisement. Source: Quartz.

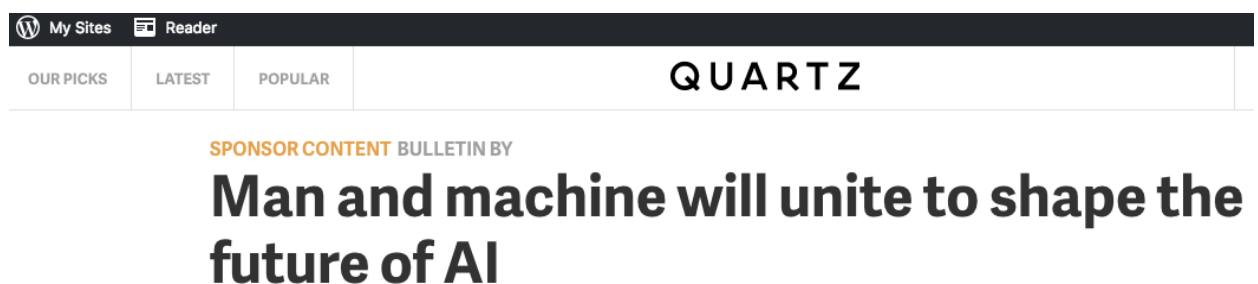
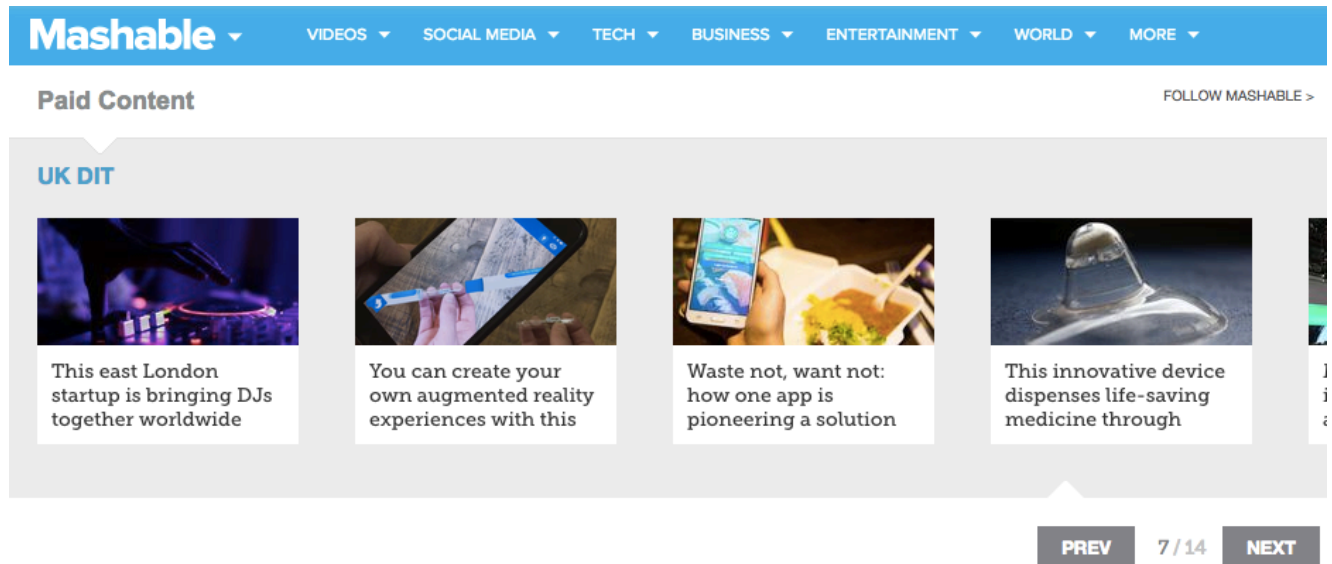


Image 3. Light grey disclaimer above the headline and the sidebar with other sponsored articles. Source: Mashable UK.



Chocolate really can be healthy – and this startup is proving it

Image 4. Disclaimer Anzeigen-Spezial (Special advertising) on the top left corner above the headline. Source: SZ.de.




Image 5. ‘Partner article / #advertising’ disclaimer above the headline ‘First hand Maxx Royal – Mehmet Arsoy about the best luxury hotels in Turkey.’ Source: Forbes.ru.

ПАРТНЕРСКИЙ МАТЕРИАЛ / #РЕКЛАМА

15.12.2016 16:24

Махх Royal из первых уст – Мехмет Эрсой о самых роскошных отелях Турции

Image 6. Disclaimer ‘Partner article. What it is?’ above the headline ‘How to take beautiful photos of apartments. Manual.’ Source: Meduza.

 ЮниКредит Банк | *Партнерский материал. Что это такое?*

ПАРТНЕРСКИЙ МАТЕРИАЛ

Как правильно фотографировать квартиру, чтобы получилось красиво. Инструкция

 Meduza  15:51, 28 марта 2017