

NATIVE ADVERTISING AS A STORYTELLING TOOL:
FRAMING OF BRAND MESSAGES

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FRAMING OF BRAND MESSAGES

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ABSTRACT

The given study employed framing theory to analyze content of 15 pairs of native advertisements and news stories from the New York Times to understand and compare framing of brand messages. Findings concerning framing in native advertising were tested against a predetermined set of framing strategies common in PR research.

The study showed that framing of brand messages in native advertising dramatically differs from journalism but is somewhat similar to framing in PR. Branded storytelling uses topics that align with brands' themes to highlight essential attributes and create a positive image of a brand. Native advertisements use critical issues and socially significant causes to demonstrate values and qualities of brands. On the contrary, journalism stories frame brands as examples in a larger picture of a complex social reality.

Chapter One: Introduction

American journalism likely couldn't avoid the disruption brought by information technology. As Castells (2010) argues, “information technology became the indispensable tool for the effective implementation of processes of socioeconomic restructuring” (p. 373). These processes have also affected the publishing industry. According to Pew Research Center (2009), the Internet was at the core of the major changes for media. It brought cheaper ways to deliver content and advertising messages, altering the centuries-old business model of legacy news organizations. Display advertising, a digital equivalent for print ads, can't substitute the revenues newspapers are used to making by selling print space to advertisers (Pew Research Center, 2009). According to Olmstead (2014), while that digital advertising pie is growing, the numbers show that news organizations are competing for an increasingly smaller share of those dollars. More than half of digital advertising revenues go to five top technology firms – Google, Facebook, Yahoo, AOL, and Microsoft. At the same time, according to the Newspaper Association of America (2014), in 2013 print ad revenue fell 8.6 % while digital ad revenue grew only 1.5 % and couldn't balance out print losses.

It appears that the media industry has found a solution for the problem of disproportionate digital and print ad revenue. The rise of sponsored content denotes an important stage for the evolving business models of media. The media analyst firm BIA/Kelsey predicts native advertising will grow faster than any other kind of digital advertising (eMarketer, 2013). Native advertising, or sponsored content, is a new way to

market an old idea of the advertorial, a message that is mimicking the format of editorial content, but contains commercial appeal (Wasserman, 2013). The term of native advertising is used inconsistently across trade and academic literature: the same concept of commercial content, which aims to look like editorial content, is named differently. The names of the phenomenon include sponsored content (Sebastian, 2013); paid content, content integration, editorial integration, native advertising and embedded marketing (Macnamara, 2014); advertorial (Wasserman, 2013); feature advertising (Cameron & Haley, 1992); and hybrid messages (Balasubramanian, 1994). Armed with digital storytelling tools, advertorials take new shapes. The purpose of this proposed study is to explore the storytelling tools of native advertising.

How do brand publishers communicate about themselves in a meaningful way and how is this communication different from traditional journalism? This study uses framing theory to discover and analyze patterns for communicating brand messages in native advertisements and news stories. The study employs content analysis to examine how brands are framed in native advertisements and editorial stories and interprets these frames through Hallahan's (1999) seven types of framing, commonly used for research in PR. The content pairs from the New York Times and its T Brand Studio were used for the research. The study presents a list of the most common framing strategies that reflect brands' attempts to blend commercial messages into sponsored content.

The research aims to induce academic conversation about native advertising as a form of content creation, which has not previously been addressed from the standpoint of framing theory. Trade publications address the phenomenon focusing on the effectiveness

of native advertising and benefits it brings to advertisers (Loechner, 2013; Barinka, Erlichman, 2013). Much of the existing academic literature discusses the ethical concerns surrounding the phenomenon of native advertising (Carlson, 2014; Macnamara, 2014; Sebastian, 2013). The purpose of this paper is not to argue pros and cons of native advertising, but to focus on its content to understand how it is framing brand messages.

The study is important for a number of reasons. First and foremost is that native advertising will likely become a common practice and there will likely be a range of digital-native publications that build their business models around the concept of content marketing. Branded content forms the core of entertainment on soft news websites. For example, in the online publication Quartz a piece of native advertising is inserted between every four or five editorial posts (Sternberg, 2013). Second, for brands, native advertising becomes a key strategy to communicate their messages in an extremely cluttered media environment. This is a critical moment for the industry to start the conversation about the quality of this content and the means, by which brands embed their messages into the editorial space.

This study consists of four main sections. The first section, the literature review, contains a review of the important literature and the analytical framework for the study. Throughout this section, the literature focusing on the news media crisis that led to the rise of native advertising as well as studies discussing ethical concerns about native ads, their effectiveness, and key characteristics are discussed. The second and third sections, the method and analysis, identify frames to be used for the study, a sampling strategy and an explanation of the method. The results part presents findings and the last section

summarizes research outcomes and lays out the ground for future work.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

American journalism is experiencing an existential crisis. For newspapers, the era of vast profits is over (McChesney & Pickard, 2011). American media went through a huge paradigm shift: for decades they were lucrative businesses but met the technological disruption unprepared. Almost ten years ago researchers thought that “the financial performance of newspapers [was] less volatile than is true of many other industries” (An, Jin & Simon, 2006, p. 131). Back in 2005, newspapers “exhibited profit margins higher than most industrial sectors and the largest share of advertising expenditures of all media” (Boczkowski, 2005, p. 3).

The global financial crisis of 2008 became a tipping point for the newspaper industry. According to the Pew Research Center (2009), newspaper ad revenues fell 23% during 2008-2009. The Center says during this short period of time some papers were in bankruptcy, and others had lost three-quarters of their value. After the financial crisis began, the audience’s transition online was even more obvious. As indicated in the 2013 report by the Interactive Advertising Bureau, Internet advertising became the fastest-growing technological industry in the U.S. In every year since 2005, the annual growth rates of Internet advertising have exceeded those of other advertising media (IAB, 2013a). However, the newspapers that transitioned online didn't profit from the technology-driven Internet advertising boom as much as was expected.

The digital-born publishers were first to turn to the idea of integrating advertising messages into editorial content and selling editorial space to marketers, or in other words,

making these messages native to the platform on which they are run, bought or sold. As Couldry and Turow (2014) put it, advertisers use the weakened state of media to incorporate commercial messages directly into editorial content, influencing media publishers' editorial decisions.

Native advertising could solve the revenue problems for publishers, given that they can attract sufficient readers. According to predictions by the media analyst firm BIA/Kelsey, native spending will grow at a faster rate than display spending. In April 2013, the company estimated that native spending in the context of US social media advertising would climb to \$4.57 billion in 2017, from \$1.63 billion in 2012 (eMarketer, 2013). The rise of sponsored content introduced an opportunity for publishers to grab some of the dollars intended for content marketing by brands (Sebastian, 2013).

Scholarly literature and trade journals have mostly examined native advertising from within dimensions of media ethics and consumers' perceptions of native ads (Couldry & Turow, 2014; Macnamara, 2014; Sebastian, 2013; Becker-Olsen, 2003; Khan, 2013; Kim, Pasadeos & Barban, 2001; Wasserman, 2013; Zhou, 2012; Tutaj & Reijmersdal, 2012). There's a need for studies that look at the textual properties of the new form of content that is being created in this digital space.

The notion of native advertising is still being shaped by industry participants, publishers, advertisers and digital marketing firms, with the support of professional organizations, such as the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB, 2013b). Different parties use the term "native advertising" interchangeably with such concepts as sponsored content (Becker-Olsen, 2003), branded content, sponsored posts, partner posts and

advertorials, paid content, content integration, editorial integration and embedded marketing (Macnamara, 2014). For the sake of convenience, we will also use them as synonyms hereafter.

All these concepts fit into the broader definition of “textual, pictorial, and/or audiovisual material that supports the aims of an advertiser (and is paid for by the advertiser) while it mimics the format and editorial style of the publisher that carries it” (Couldry & Turow, 2014, p. 1716). IAB identifies native advertising as “paid ads that are so cohesive with the page content, assimilated into the design, and consistent with the platform behavior that the viewer simply feels that they belong” (IAB, 2013b, p. 3).

Native advertisements can also be viewed as hybrid messages, which are messages that combine both advantages and disadvantages of public relations messages and advertisements. As Balasubramanian (1994) states, “hybrid messages include all paid attempts to influence audiences for commercial benefit using communications that project a non-commercial character” (p. 30).

Such publishers as *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, *BuzzFeed*, *Forbes*, *Mashable*, *Business Insider* and *Gawker* have already adopted native advertising strategies (Sebastian, 2013).

Some industry professionals argue that native advertising is anything but new and that it has been around since the creation of media. In this sense, all advertising that appears in print and in broadcast media is native, as it repeats the form of the original content. Khan (2013) states that all display advertising is non-native, whereas all ads at the largest marketing platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, are native.

Becker-Olsen (2003) argues that sponsored content is an invention of the recent years, having emerged as a response of media organizations to the inflation of display ad prices. According to Sebastian (2013), news media have lost their full control over the distribution of information. Marketers have realized that they can create and distribute interesting content, which attracts readers' attention as effectively as the editorial content. This shift deepens as we see web publishers, such as the *BuzzFeed*, offer the services of their writers to create content that would best follow the editorial style and help commercial messages blend in (Sebastian, 2013).

With a brand's strategic communication efforts, native advertising seems to be at the intersection of paid, owned, and earned media. It's been paid for, but, according to IAB's definition, it is inclined to look like owned or earned media. Another topic for discussion is if the labeling of the native ads is sufficient enough to make it clearly distinguishable from organic editorial content (O'Guinn, 2015).

Blurring the business-editorial divide

By virtue of native advertising, we are possibly seeing changes in the ethics of the media business. As ads mimic editorial content, the line between editorial and business sides of media gets blurry (Carlson, 2014). Macnamara (2014) sees native advertising as a product of the convergence between journalism and PR. As Macnamara states, these placements raise questions about the transparency of making it clear, which content is editorial and which is an ad.

Cameron and Haley (1992) define feature ads as print advertisements that look like a short feature article in a page of editorial copy. New forms of digital advertising try

to hide the persuasive intent of messages (de Pelsmacker & Neijens, 2012). Critics say that the native advertisement is “the hoary advertorial dressed up in twenty-first century clothes” (Wasserman, 2013). In other words, the goal of the native advertising, which has a lot other names (sponsored content, content marketing, advertorials), is to trick a reader into consuming advertising content. This is a clear violation of one of the SPJ's Code of Ethics principles, which suggests that journalists should “distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two” (Society of Professional Journalists, para. 37).

Apart from blurring of business-editorial divide, another threat to media ethics posed by native advertising is in the nature of human cognitive processes, namely the “sleeper effect” of persuasive communications. The “sleeper effect” is the delayed increase of the effect of persuasive communication that is accompanied by information source cues. Opinions change toward high credibility sources. It is also suggested that the source of information is forgotten on a more rapid pace than the content (Schulman & Worrall, 1970). Native advertising may experience similar effects: people may remember the messages but may not recall the source of the information and its advertising nature.

Journalism has always been a capitalist enterprise once making gigantic returns on investment. As a quasi monopoly, newspapers had no competition, were making huge revenues, and could claim a certain level of autonomy – but not from shareholders. The practice of native advertising alters core principles of journalism, even more reducing the distance between journalism and its funding sources. Carlson (2014) examined reactions to a controversial Church of Scientology native advertisement on the *Atlantic* web site, in

order to assess how competing processes of norm-making and boundary work shape normative understandings of online journalism. The researcher came to a conclusion that new types of inquiry need to be developed in order to assess these new practices in an online news environment. According to Carlson (2014), native advertising results in the prevalence of soft news; and cooperation between advertisers and journalists “presents a radical break from previous organizational arrangements” (p. 14). Native advertising becomes a common practice as more media employ it (IAB, 2013b).

Effectiveness of native advertising

The media industry has already seen numerous efforts to measure the effectiveness and impact of native advertising for brands, publishers, and consumers. First of all, native advertising has recently been found effective in making content viral (Maggi & De Pellegrini, 2014). Second, sponsored content contributes to brand equity or brand recognition. Becker-Olsen (2003), as well as Kim, Pasadeos and Barban (2001), found that sponsorship is an ultimate strategy for brands to cut through the online clutter. Online sponsorship may become “a value-added alternative or supplement to banner advertising for companies looking to develop strong customer relationships” (Becker-Olsen, p. 29).

A survey of advertisers, publishers and agencies conducted by Hexagram and Spada, as cited by Loechner (2013), found that 84% of publishers, 81% of agencies, and 78% of brands believe that native advertising adds value for consumers. The study also found that publishers think the most effective forms of native advertising for monetization are blogs (58%), articles (56%), and videos (53%).

Internet readers are aware that they are being bombarded by commercial messages. Hervet, Guérard, Tremblay, and Chtourou (2011) used eye-tracking technology to investigate if Internet users avoid looking at textual advertisements online. They found out that the content was remembered better if the ad was congruent with editorial content. They also concluded that if the page structure was changed with an insertion of an ad, readers tended to fixate on it, verifying the usefulness of an ad presented in the editorial area. The study used text-only banner ads. Although the results of this study could be challenged by the fact that banner ads are famous for their inefficacy, the authors suppose that the presentation of contextual information — such as the editorial content during a web-site visit— acts as a prime and activates the participants' related knowledge in memory. It is possible that similar factors could contribute to native advertising efficacy.

The 2013 study by IPG Media Lab and Sharethrough tested over 4,700 participants aiming to look at the behavior and perceptions towards native ads, utilizing both eye tracking technology and surveys. The study found that native ads establish higher brand awareness than traditional ads. It concluded that native advertisements registered 9% increase for brand affinity and 18% higher lift for purchase intent responses than traditional banner ads (PRWeb, 2013).

The framework of major consumer behavior theories of audience involvement developed by Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) speaks in favor of the effectiveness of native advertising. Scientists identify four levels of involvement: pre-attention, focal attention, comprehension, and elaboration. A higher level of involvement results in an increase of

cognitive and attitudinal effects. The Sharethrough study found that consumers looked at the original editorial content and the native ads for a similar amount of time (PRWeb, 2013). Kim, Pasadeos and Barban (2001) tested the effects of advertorial messages on reader involvement. They found that advertorials induce greater message involvement than traditional advertising formats. In other words, advertorials “fool reader[s] into greater involvement with an ad” (Kim et al, 2001, p. 265). The study registered low recall of the presence or absence of labels in the advertorial groups, suggesting that some respondents recognized the content as advertising based on the nature of the content, but not because of the label.

As we can see, native advertising can be a very valuable tool for brands as it lifts the brand equity in times when highly educated web users are likely to avert their eyes from knowingly commercial content (PRWeb, 2013). Ethical controversies surrounding native advertisement open a field for research and improvement in terms of quality of native advertising, which for some news outlets becomes the main source of content. For example, as Bloomberg reported, *BuzzFeed* doesn't rely on traditional banner ads in its revenue generation model. Instead, it creates sponsored versions of its articles for advertisers. The estimated revenue growth of *BuzzFeed* for 2014 is \$120 million (Barinka, Erlichman, 2013). Publishers such as *BuzzFeed* are shifting journalism practices closer to content marketing, disrupting the core of the traditional two-sided media market; instead of using the editorial content to attract attention, which are then sold to advertisers, “advertising itself begins to attract audiences” (Carlson, 2014).

Characteristics of native advertising

Persuasiveness is one of the features of native advertising that is similar to both journalism and traditional advertising. Zhou (2012) conducted genre analysis of a set of advertorials and found that advertorials carry characteristics of both news stories and editorials. They are informative and persuasive at the same time: “advertorials intrinsically share the same communicative purposes as advertisements but not as straightforwardly: to provide positive information and to persuade on behalf the sponsors” (p. 338). Advertorials mimic the structure of news content while giving detailed information about products and services.

Advertisements in the form of editorial content do not trigger persuasion knowledge resistance, even if clearly labeled. Friestad and Wright (1994) developed the Persuasion Knowledge Model, which shows how consumers' knowledge about persuasion intent affects perception of advertising messages. A non-persuasive atmosphere gives marketers an opportunity to overcome consumers' resistance to messages. On the contrary, if the persuasive intent of a message is clear, consumers are likely to accept an ad with skepticism or avoid it altogether. Native advertising online is a new way to market an ad format that seeks to hide marketers' intent (Wasserman, 2013). Zhou (2012) writes that the primary intent of advertorials is to persuade in favor of sponsors. However, the commercial objective of these messages is camouflaged with editorial style and similarity to news stories.

Tutaj and Reijmersdal (2012) investigated the effects of two ad formats, sponsored content and banner ads, in light of the Persuasion Knowledge model. Though, arguably, banner ad efficiency is often questionable. Researchers came to a conclusion that sponsored advertisements were not as annoying as banner ads; at the same time, sponsored posts were more informative and entertaining. That is to say, naturally integrating persuasive messages to the content is beneficial both for consumers and advertisers. Balasubramanian (1994) writes, in the case of hybrid messages, which combine characteristics of both publicity messages and advertising messages, the fact of persuasion affects message credibility. Hence, if the information about the sponsor is not significant, a brand-related story seems credible.

According to IAB, native advertising has emerged as a way for digital marketers to engage with the consumer and a revenue source for publishers (IAB, 2013b). But if the branded content can be credible enough to attract the audience it needs is not clear. (Sebastian, 2013). Given the fact that native advertising will never be able to supplement journalism, however, it could become a source of quality soft and entertaining content as long as content creators respect ethical norms (Carlson, 2014).

Native advertisements might help brands communicate their information in natural ways and engage with consumers who seek in-depth information about a particular product or service or a group of products. Instead of being deceptive, this emerging ad format can be in some way authentic (Carlson, 2014). For example, Chipotle's recent "Farmed and Dangerous" web series on Hulu quickly earned viewers. Restaurant chain Chipotle sponsored production and promotion of this comical series,

depicting PR practices of fast food giants. The messages shown in these series are consistent with the rest of Chipotle's content. “‘Farmed and Dangerous’ simultaneously promotes the brand's food with an integrity mission statement, while entertaining on a platform that its consumers frequently use,” wrote Entrepreneur’s Jon Salm (2014).

In summary, the majority of scholarly studies reviewed discuss the deceptive and unethical nature of native advertising. There's a dearth of qualitative studies that would assess the unique format of native advertisements in terms of presenting the brand messages to the reader. Obviously, there is a need to seek out a comprehensive classification of the key characteristics of these messages.

Theoretical framework

The native advertisement is most suitable for creating brand equity and raising brand awareness (Becker-Olsen, 2003). In this regard, framing theory, which suggests that how something is presented to the audience influences the choices people make about how to process that information and what decisions and what conclusions to make (Goffman, 1974), is the most appropriate framework to guide the research.

Among the first concepts of framing was addressed and analyzed by Erving Goffman (1974). In his works, he argued that framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition, but at the same time this concept focuses on the essence of more concrete issues rather than just some overall topic. The basis of framing theory is that mass media focus their attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning.

Thus, according to Goffman (1974), frames then are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning. Gitlin (1980) argues that frames refer to

principles of selection and emphasis. On the other hand, a number of other researchers, such as Robert Entman (1993), believe that frames also define problems, make moral judgments and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). According to Entman, journalistic frames “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

Also, frames organize and structure and, therefore, are bigger than topics (Rees, 2010). Hertog and McLeod (2001) refer to frames as structures of meaning made up of a number of concepts and the relations among those concepts. Generally, there are a variety of ways frames can be defined and a number of approaches to studying them (Matthes, 2009).

To an extent, framing can also be viewed as second-level agenda-setting (Goffman, 1974) – frames not only tell the audience what to think about, but also how to think about that issue. When making methodological decisions in a framing study, Reese (2010) suggested one should pose these questions:

Where does the frame reside (in text, culture, or the cognitions of the perceiver)?
How does one convincingly establish that a frame exists (or is it the subjective construction of the researcher)? Is framing a subset of agenda-setting or vice versa? Where do topics and themes leave off and frames begin? What is the unit of analysis—that is, what is to be counted or examined? (Rees, 2010, p. 17).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) distinguish between issue-specific and generic

frames. They argue that issue-specific frames apply only to certain issues, while generic frames typically describe structural aspects and features of news that can apply across different topics or issues. Goffman's (1974) underlying assumption is that individuals are capable users of these frameworks on a day-to-day basis, whether they are aware of them or not.

From the literature above, a conclusion can be made that frames help interpret reality. According to Chong and Druckman (2007), framing refers to "the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (p. 104).

Framing in advertising

Academic research has applied framing theory to various aspects of media. In particular, attention has been given to message framing as an advertising strategy for brand communication.

Tsai (2007) proposes the Message Framing for Brand Communication model. This framework defines the theoretical foundation, that lays on the basic principles of a hedonic approach (happiness) and avoidance (pain), that are well-established in motivation psychology. Tsai (2007) tested negative and positive framing against three criteria – self-construal, consumer involvement and product knowledge – and found that brand communicators can enhance persuasiveness of a brand by carefully choosing the brand message exposure scenario. If the consumers have low motivation to process the content of advertising, then it's better to frame the message in a positive way. Negative framing works better under the condition of high consumer motivation, but might present

an ethical challenge. Marketers are to decide which of these scenarios might fit into the general brand strategy and will benefit the brand.

Chong and Drukman (2007) distinguish two types of frames that affect consumers' perception of reality: equivalency and emphasis frames. Equivalency frames present consistent information in a positive or negative way (e.g., 90 % employment versus 10% unemployment). Emphasis frames focus readers' attention on a specific issue, presenting two logically different considerations (e.g. free speech or public safety) for the tradeoff.

Native advertising stands at the intersection of public relations, advertising and journalistic writing (Macnamara, 2014). Framing theory targets each of these areas. Public relations, for example, can be examined within seven areas of framing (Hallahan, 1999). In the field of public relations, framing operates simultaneously on different levels, including situational framing, attribute framing, framing risky choices, action framing, issue and responsibility framing, as well as news framing. In application to native advertising, semantic framing of attributes can be used to focus attention on particular attributes or brands. Framing of choices can provide insights about risk-taking and decision-making processes: the case of losses and gains, referred above as equivalency frames.

Deighton, Henderson and Neslin (1994) studied brand switching in terms of framing. They argue that advertising interacts with the usage experience to enhance the likelihood of repeat purchasing. Researchers define two types of framing: predictive and diagnostic. Predictive framing occurs before the brand experience, when a consumer is

given the knowledge about the best attributes of a product. Diagnostic framing occurs after the purchase, influencing what is retained in memory. In the end, both models deal with the consumer's knowledge about the brand, refining his experience.

Framing in journalism

Everyday news shapes the way audiences perceive and interpret reality. News presents and defines issues (de Vreese, 2005). In journalism, the process of framing consists of three stages: frame-building, frame-setting and individual and societal consequences of framing (d'Angelo, 2002). Frame-building refers to the element that influences qualities of frames (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Frame-setting refers to the interaction between media frames and a receiver's prior knowledge and experience (de Vreese, 2005).

According to de Vreese, frames in the news may affect learning, interpretation, and evaluation of issues and events. The consequences of framing may be seen on the individual and the societal level. An individual-level consequence may be changing attitudes about an issue after viewing news coverage framed in a specific way. On the societal level, frames may have a larger impact, such as shaping high-level processes such as political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions (de Vreese, 2005).

Framing theory in journalism is challenged by the fact that journalists are in the need to be objective. Even if journalists try to write objectively, they still can unconsciously incorporate frames in their reporting. According to Baran and Davis (2009), the framing theory intends to be a vehicle for adding more ideas, making the reporting more versatile. Journalists cast information in either negative or positive light,

which is known as valence framing effects (Levin, Schneider, & Gaeth, 1998). The standard valence framing effect example is the “Asian disease problem”. If the choices are described in negative terms (i.e. “lives lost”), readers tend to choose the riskier of options. If the choice is described in positive terms (i.e. “lives saved”), readers choose the most certain outcome (Tversky & Kahneman’s, 1981).

Also, news stories are dominated by episodic framing or thematic framing. Iyengar (1991) distinguishes that episodic framing as focuses on particular events or cases, while thematic framing places news and events in some general context. Iyengar argues that episodic framing in the news changes public’s attribution of responsibility for political issues and problems.

To sum up, the framing theory allows the researcher to examine native advertisements against the criteria that inform the most popular brand message strategies. If the same brand appears in the news, the framing theory gives us tools to examine how it was presented to the reader. By comparing two perspectives, it is possible to see how frames differ and how they are similar in native advertisements. This research contributes to scholarship describing brand message framing within the emerging paradigm of native advertising. The following research questions are posed:

RQ 1 How do native advertisements frame brand messages and how do news stories frame brands?

RQ 2 How do the frames of brands differ or how are they similar in native advertisements and news stories?

RQ 3 How do frames of brands in native advertisements match most common

framing strategies used in advertising and PR?

Chapter Three: Method and Analysis

The purpose of this research is to discover and analyze patterns of communicating brand messages in native advertisements and news stories in the light of framing theory. The study used a combination of etic and emic approaches in qualitative content analysis to examine framing of brands in native advertisements in light of Hallahan's (1999) seven types of framing, used for research in PR, compared to framing of the same brands in news stories. The study implemented a pragmatic iterative approach explained by Tracy (2013) as alternating between emic use of the emergent interpretations of the data and etic application use of existing models (in our case, fragments of framing theory).

Native advertising, or sponsored content, which mimics the editorial copy but is clearly labeled as advertising, alters core journalistic standards since it reduces the distance between the business and journalism sides of media (Carlson, 2014). Native advertising became a new revenue stream and a lifeboat for a variety of soft- and hard-news outlets (Macnamara, 2014). Not only did it enable advertisers to change the journalistic workflow, it also gave them an opportunity to penetrate the so-called sacred editorial space, which previously was reserved for news content, and allowed marketers to influence journalistic decisions. In this regard, the emerging format of native advertising becomes an interesting topic for qualitative inquiry.

The goal of the proposed study is to look at native advertising from the perspective of framing of brand messages within traditional editorial formats.

Qualitative content analysis

Aiming to understand how brands communicate their unique value propositions in native advertising, the qualitative approach has been chosen. According to Mason (2002), qualitative research derives captivating reasoning about “how things work in particular contexts” (p. 1). The desire to explain the functional characteristics of native advertising as a format at the intersection of content marketing, PR and journalism guided this research.

Along these lines, this study implemented qualitative content analysis to acquire a deeper understanding of the framing of brand messages in native advertising. The rationale for this approach follows.

Siegfried Kracauer, a German sociologist, in his 1952 essay states that “overemphasis on quantification tends to lessen the accuracy of analysis” (p. 652). This essay is sometimes considered a manifesto of qualitative content researchers. Kracauer believes that only qualitative research of communications can reveal true meaning of dynamic content:

Finally, one may legitimately ask whether communications research, as such, should really try to match exact science. Documents which are not simply agglomerations of facts participate in the process of living, and every word in them vibrates with the intentions in which they originate and simultaneously foreshadows the indefinite effects they may produce (p. 642).

Content analysis is an ideal method to study media messages, because it investigates a text through the lens of its contextual meaning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and a

“systematic reading of a body of text, images and symbolic matter” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 11).

Going beyond text is especially important as native advertising employs a wide range of online content types to enhance its message: images in .jpeg and .gif formats, videos, information graphics, drawings, videos, and interactive elements.

Content analysis is a well-defined, but flexible and omnifarious method, its roots going beyond the 18th century (Krippendorff). Wright (1986) described the content analysis as “a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories” (p. 125). This definition applies to both qualitative and quantitative approaches to content analysis. Macnamara (2013) insists that in-depth analysis of content using qualitative research is required to understand the content.

As Krippendorff states, “content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use” (p. 18). The scholar states that qualitative approaches to content analysis are sometimes given the label ‘interpretive’. Krippendorff also mentions that this scientific tool is independent from the researcher's personal influence and guides practical actions. He argues that “all reading of texts is qualitative in nature, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers” (p. 22).

As mentioned by Kracauer, “qualitative exegesis also penetrates textual dimensions which are completely inaccessible to quantitative techniques” (p. 639). Qualitative analysis is designed to explore an issue, to describe it and to assess it, opening

a field for the future quantitative research. Though the qualitative approach allows exploration of a discourse (Macnamara, 2005), it is true that qualitative research has certain controversies.

Qualitative content analysis was also selected because it was successfully used in a number of similar mass communication studies. For instance, Cummins et al. (2014) explored the ability of consumers to identify sustainable messages in environmental advertising and the effect of these messages. They used content analysis to gain insight into consumer perceptions of the depth of environmental advertising messages. Mayers (2013) conducted a content analysis of more than 1,000 print ads in 15 different magazines to identify 10 underlying themes for website naming. Wood et al. (2014) conducted a large-scale qualitative examination of how newsprint media framed the debate around the harms of alcohol consumption to others during the development and passing of minimum unit pricing legislation in Scotland. It concluded that the harm caused by alcohol was widely reported. Reading of these studies helped to understand usage of content analysis in mass media research. In particular, examination of these studies helped focus the research on secondary coding stages.

Framing analysis

Krippendorff defines several types of content analysis: discourse analysis, rhetorical analysis, ethnographic content analysis, and conversation analysis. This study looked for common frames in native advertising. The framing analysis is a discourse analysis method that has emerged as a result of combining linguistics approaches with theories of power and ideology (Hope, 2010).

Under the umbrella of framing theory, researchers can do content analysis by identifying and evaluating clusters of messages (frames) (Entman, 1993). Content analysis helps to find patterns, in which these frames appear.

This study used Entman's categorization of frames, which includes problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation frames. According to Entman, these four elements that constitute a frame might be present in one single sentence, or might not be present at all. In the case of native advertising, these four frames lead consumers through the path of decision-making towards a certain brand. First, the problem is identified, which implies communicating about costs and benefits, determined within a particular culture. Second, educational native advertising content identifies causes creating the problem and evaluates their effects (casual interpretation and moral evaluation frames). Then, native ads offer treatments and predict their likely effects (treatment evaluation).

As seen from the definition of native advertising, the task of a brand message embedded in the story is to overcome consumers' natural skepticism toward commercial information. Commercial intent might be camouflaged by making a certain piece of information “more noticeable, meaningful of memorable to audiences”, or in other words, making the information more salient (Entman, 1993, p. 53). This served as a guideline for finding frames through examination of native advertising content. Content analysis was performed with Entman's framework in mind.

It is essential that content analysis was guided by a framing paradigm: according to Entman, content analysis informed by framing theory would avoid treating all codes

and categories as equals and will help examine salience as well; in other words, framing theory helps to examine categories for being more or less noticeable and meaningful for the audience.

Research quality

According to Tracy (2013), the research should meet several criteria for excellence. First, there must be a worthy topic: native advertising is an often-discussed topic in the digital advertising press and a concept that is still being formed. The digital advertising industry is changing with an accelerating speed, and there's a need to search for new models of publisher-advertiser relations. According to Tracy (2013), rigor is the second criterion for quality. This study was designed to be rigorous as it meets the essential standards. It is designed in a way that will allow the researcher to collect a sample that will have enough data to support findings. Overall, the goals of the project were well aligned with the topic. It is suggested that sampling strategies for qualitative research should be driven by the willingness to explore a concept, but not for the sake of representativeness (Miles, Huberman [1994] as cited by Macnamara [2005b]). Miles and Huberman offer a way to yield rich results in qualitative analysis: selecting typical/representative, negative and exceptional examples. This study achieved this richness by selecting examples of native advertisements and news stories from the news outlet, which is an intermedia agenda-setter and a recognized leader for online publishing.

Credibility is one more criterion for data quality. Awareness of possible self-bias and personal motivation that might intervene in the study is at the core of this research.

Also, the study uses a contrasting method of sampling and analysis, which is known as triangulation (Tracy, 2013), looking at deviant cases. The study is transferable as it might be useful for all kinds of branded storytelling, for instance, content marketing. The method selected for the study is well-established and has proven to produce replicable results (Krippendorff, 2013).

Analysis

The given study employed a sample of 15 pairs of native advertisements and news stories related to the same brand that appeared in the New York Times during 2013-2015. The sample was formed as the framing categories emerged in developing research, and the choice of cases was based on the idea of theoretical sampling. This means that the sample uses deviant examples that challenge emerging findings, attempting to embrace the whole picture of reality (Tracy, 2013). The list includes the following brands: Wells Fargo, BMW, Ernst&Young, Master Card, HP, Chobani, Dell, Fidelity, Holiday Inn, the Weinstein Company, Intel, J&J, Netflix, Shell, and Toyota. The New York Times was chosen because it is a legacy news organization that is successfully implementing new revenue generation models, such as content sponsorships (Moles, 2014). The New York Times' native ads were as successful as editorial stories: Data indicates that people spend the same amount of time on paid posts as news stories (Tadena, 2014). According to New York Times executive Meredith Levien, as quoted by the Wall Street Journal, sometimes sponsored posts do better than traditional editorial stories. For example, the Times helped United Airlines create an interactive graphic on how far athletes had to travel for the Olympic games in Sochi. This package generated close to 200,000 views, far more than a

typical editorial story, as Meredith Levien said. She also emphasized the importance of employing storytelling techniques for brands.

The sample of native ads was collected through the Idea Lab website, which features the New York Times' advertising and editorial innovations. The website contains a list of paid posts that were produced by the New York Times' T Brand Studio since it implemented native advertising. The brand names were searched on the New York Times website and the LexisNexis database. The database search yielded more than 1,000 articles for each given brand, and search on the website helped to pick the most relevant articles. To be considered relevant, an article should satisfy all of the following criteria. First, it should be a news story, published most recently. Second, it should be a news story reporting, not an op-ed or commentary (an exception was made for movie brands, since they didn't have any pure reporting associated with them, but had a plenty of art commentary about them). Third, a brand should be at the center of the report, and preferably, the name of the brand should be mentioned in the headline. Because of the specifics of the New York Times reporting that mentions brands, which bought native advertising, the majority of news stories analyzed represent a hard news format. At the same time, native advertisements about the same brands lean toward a soft-news or general-news approach. According to Lehman-Wilzig and Michal Seletzky (2010), general news is the recent economic, social, or cultural news that could not be published immediately. It is important, but not on the present public agenda, and presenting useful information to readers. Hard news is the news that should be reported as quickly as possible as they present great significance to the public. Soft news is "light" or "spicy"

news that need not to be reported immediately or at all (Lehman-Wilzig & Michal Seletzky, 2010, p.47-48).

A conceptually representative sample of 15 pairs of native ads and news stories about different brands was collected. It includes samples that represent genre diversity, namely multimedia stories, blog posts and articles and also samples that address brand diversity, including advertising of tangible brands (consumer individual product brands) and intangible brands (pure service brands, media brands, e-brands, event brands).

The examination of texts, along the same lines with both Tracy (2013) and Krippendorff (2013), was broken down into the following steps. First, at about three quarters through the data collection, the researcher immersed herself into data by reading it multiple times. As suggested by Tracy (2013), jotting down reflections and impressions and staying open to multiple meanings the data might evoke was helpful for making sense of data and answering a question, “What is happening here?” The second stage is a process of primary-cycle coding. According to Krippendorff (2013), coding refers to the process of transforming unedited texts into “analyzable representations” (p. 85). Codes were identified as concepts, beliefs, actions, themes, cultural practices or relationships (Tracy, 2013). During this stage, data was coded and recoded several times.

To answer the RQ 1, the inductive content analysis was performed. Keeping in mind the idea that the use of inductive content analysis is recommended when there are no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon or when knowledge is fragmented (Elo, Kyngäs, 2008), the researcher realized the necessity to stay open to new frames that could emerge in the analysis. Answering RQ 3 involved deductive content analysis, identified

by Elo and Kyngäs as “testing previous theory in different situation” (p. 107). The process involved developing a categorization matrix, which consisted of the usual frames that appear in advertising and PR, developed by Hallahan (1999).

At the first stages, the researcher collected 5 pairs of content to jump-start the coding process. At the second stage, codes were organized into concepts. At this point, the researcher added more data to the original sample. On about the 12th pair of content, each new article appeared to add a little to the emergent analysis. It meant that the analysis had reached theoretical saturation. Three more pairs of content were added to the sample in search of negative and deviant cases for triangulation. Then the search for new data stopped and the coding continued.

Organizing open codes into more complex, second-level codes that inspired identification of frames was the third part of the process. As Tracy (2013) highlights, second-level codes have to explain and synthesize first-level codes and look for cause-effect projections as well as patterns among them. The method of axial coding was used to help group codes into concepts under umbrellas of emerging categories and themes. Codes and concepts were the initial units of analysis for examination in this study. Frames emerged as a result of synthesizing of concepts and categories and represent relationships between them (McLeod, 2001). Frames show the discourse of the original brand message, embedded into the native advertisements.

Each article was coded separately. In this study, inductive and deductive approaches worked closely to answer research questions. First, the texts were coded to find broader independent categories that might not be present in a preset framework (for

RQ 1). Second, the results of framing in native advertisements and news stories were compared for the RQ 2. Third, the procedure was conducted backward from established categories to the smaller units of analysis (for RQ 3).

Table 1. Hallahan's Framing Strategies for PR

What is framed:	Description:
Situations	Relationships between individuals in situations found in everyday living and literature.
Attributes	Characteristics of objects and people are accentuated, whereas others are ignored, thus biasing processing of information in terms of focal attributes.
Choices	Posing alternative decisions in either negative (loss) or positive (gain) terms can bias choices in situations involving uncertainty. Prospect theory suggests people will take greater risks to avoid losses than to obtain gains.
Actions	The probability that a person will act to attain a desired goal is influenced by whether alternatives are stated in positive or negative terms.
Issues	Social problems and disputes can be explained in alternative terms by different parties who vie for their preferred definition of a problem or situation to prevail.
Responsibility	Individuals tend to attribute the cause of events to either internal or external factors, based on levels of stability and control.
News	Using familiar, culturally resonating themes to relay information about events.

Hallahan (2009) synthesized literature describing most common frames used in public relations. The researcher insists that the most complex form of framing is

storytelling. Story framing includes “selecting key themes or ideas that are the focus of the message and incorporating a variety of storytelling or narrative techniques that support that theme” (p. 207). Hallahan found seven models of framing applicable to public relations.

These seven categories were used to conduct the deductive content analysis. Hallahan's framework was used as a categorization matrix. Then data was recoded with correspondence with identified categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

For the RQ 3, the results of inductive and deductive analyses of native ads were compared.

Macnamara (2014) identifies key text elements to look at when doing content analysis. These are adjectives used in descriptions (positive and negative) which give strong indications of a speaker's and writer's attitude; metaphors and similes used; active or passive voice of verbs; viewpoint of the narrator (i.e. first, second or third person); tonal qualities such as aggressiveness, sarcasm, flippancy, emotional language; binaries established in texts and how these are positioned and used; visual imagery; and context factors such as the position and credibility of spokespersons or sources quoted. These key text elements were examined for both inductive (RQ 1) and deductive (RQ 3) analyses and the comparison of the results (RQ 2).

The study presents a set of framing strategies used in native advertising for branded messaging and compares it to framing of the same brands in the news. This research explores storytelling techniques that brands use to communicate their messages to consumers and differences in presenting brands by independent writers. Examining

this new advertising format is important for shaping the concept of native advertising, which affects business models and journalistic practices of media.

Chapter Four: Results

The New York Times was one the first major publications to launch an in-house agency that would create custom content for brands. With a team dedicated exclusively to creating branded storytelling that feels like it is from the New York Times, T Brand Studio “unquestionably raised the bar” for native advertising (Moses, 2014, para. 9). “Our goal is to frame up a good story”, said Sebastian Tomich, Senior Vice President at the New York Times, as quoted by Digiday (Moses, 2014, para. 9). Every branded New York Times story claims that the news and editorial staff of the New York Times had no role in the preparation of the presented commercial content.

The New York Times' native ads are called “paid posts”, which is indicated at the top bar of each branded story. The bar also contains logos of T Brand Studio and the brand that sponsored the content. Oftentimes a brand’s involvement in the production of the story is emphasized within the content section. The wording can be different and include such introductions like “Presented by...” or “Proudly supported by...”. The bar always remains at the top of the page, reminding the reader about the brand. The Times' native ads also differ from the original reporting in terms of the web page designs; they use different type faces and type face sizes and colors. The design of native ads feels different from the individual articles on the New York Times home page but consistent with the overall look.

General findings

In-depth qualitative analysis of pairs of native ads and original stories showed that in

each pair brands are presented in a completely different fashion.

Table 2. Brand Message Frames in Native Advertising

Frame	Description
Alignment	An in-depth exploration of a theme that is related to a brand. The alignment happens when a brand is positioned as an independent party, enjoying the story the same way the consumer does. “You are what you are talking about”. The frame is suitable for lifestyle and luxury brands.
Associations/Properties	Storytelling emphasizes properties (values) that are to be associated with/attributed to a brand. Key values are highlighted within the content. The frame is suitable for any kind of brand that wants to create/improve its image.
Social significance	Emphasis is placed on the social significance of the cause a brand is supporting or promoting. Putting an emphasis on a brand's role in resolving issues that are important for the society/community. Social significance frame makes content appear newsworthy and thus brings it closer to journalism.
Expertise/Factual storytelling	A brand is presented as an industry expert giving valuable advice. Research and facts-heavy storytelling appealing to logic. Stories vary from complex and interactive scientific/historical journalism narratives to blog posts quoting experts to support claims.
Problem	Attracting audience's attention to a brand by presenting a challenging situation or problem. The challenge or problem, along with an explanation how events unfolded and how this problem can be resolved, turns a press release into a story.
Emotional storytelling	Branded storytelling appealing to emotions/feelings. Emotional storytelling produces empathy with a brand that created this content experience for the consumer.
Interaction	Calls to action to interact with a brand or with the cause a brand is supporting. These can be interactive games, social media contests, calls to pledge to a significant cause or participate in an online activity. Interaction frames go beyond asking a consumer to click a link or share a post and leverage web interactivity possibilities in an interesting way. This frame helps create an additional level of connection to the brand.

The results this study yielded speak in defense of native advertisements: Controversial as

they are, native ads are not likely to be confused with the New York Times' original reporting by attentive New York Times readers. A thoughtful reader, familiar with New York Times quality reporting, is likely to identify the differences and get the feeling that native ads lack necessary components inherent to the New York Times news stories. The framing analysis helped identify these differences and a few similarities between native ads and news stories.

Throughout the research, frames were identified as concepts behind the organization of theme associated with a brand in a story, or, in other words, principles of emphasis (Gitlin, 1980). Below is the categorization matrix of seven major frames found in native advertisements:

These frames intersect in meaning and complement each other. For example, alignment frames could also be association frames at the same time. Framing up a problem could be linked with expert advice. The native advertising frames work together to create a unique brand experience.

The aforementioned frames deal with consumers' knowledge about a brand and echo ideas in all major frameworks, such as Chong and Drukman's (2007) equivalency and emphasis frames; diagnostic and predictive framing (Deighton, Henderson & Neslin, 1994); issue-specific and generic frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000); problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993); and Hallahan's seven models of framing (RQ 3).

In the case of native advertising, a glass is always half full rather than half empty. An equivalency frame (Chong & Drukman's, 2007) shifts towards highlighting positive

aspects of reality to be associated with a brand.

Table 3. Brand Message Frames in News Stories

Frame	Description – How is a brand positioned?
Leadership	Emphasizing brand's leadership position in the industry.
Industry comparisons/analysis	Unbiased competitor and industry analysis to balance out too much attention to one particular brand. A brand is positioned as “one of many” other brands in the market.
Public Interest	A brand is positioned as an example to illustrate a bigger trend that is affecting a lot of people and thus is in the area of public interest.
Conflict	A brand is involved in a resonant conflict and is being accused in something. Negative framing.
Transformation	A brand/company is going through some sort of transformation. A brand is pictured as an example of a company that goes through development/degradation and succeeds/fails during that process.
Values	Positive framing that highlights brand's values by describing activities, in which a brand is involved.
Extraordinary examples	A brand is framed as an extraordinary example of something. Positive/negative framing, depending on story context.
Independent reporting	A story about a brand is full of independent commentary/comparisons with other brands to highlight reporter's independent and unbiased approach.
History/Heritage	A brand is positioned as a speck in a bigger picture, representing a particular era in history/culture.
Personality behind a brand	A brand's image is tailored to the company's owner or CEO and a brand is presented through this person's story. This way, a news article is attributing person's qualities to a brand.

All seven frames, found through this research, present a brand in a positive fashion, highlighting its specific advantages. Problem, expertise and storytelling frames rest under the umbrella of diagnostic and predictive framing (as well as problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation frames), telling a

consumer about a problem and a way to fix it with the help of a brand (Entman, 1993). Hallahan's seven models of framing in PR also overlap in meaning the proposed framework in terms of accentuation of expedient characteristics of a brand.

The following framework was developed for brands' representations in news stories that were analyzed for this research:

News-tailored frames are more diverse than framing of brands in native advertisements, as journalists have more autonomy and editorial independence than custom content creators. Completely different forces shape these two sets of frames: content marketers and journalists have interrelated, but still very different, goals; advertisers have to sell products, whereas journalists need to provide food for thought for citizens. According to Plaisance (2014), journalism' foundational values are truth-seeking, accuracy, and honesty. Plaisance defines "instrumental" understanding of truth in such disciplines as advertising and PR, meaning "people using media channels to persuade or advocate are expected to avoid outright lies but to use truth selectively in the service of promoting a cause or a product or interest" (Plaisance, 2014, p. 3). At the same time, for journalists, truth-seeking is an end in itself. This explains the ideological difference between journalism stories and native advertisements.

Addressing the RQ1: How do native advertisements and news stories frame brand messages?

Native advertising is a new lucrative way for publishers to sell advertising space, as well as a new way for marketers to engage with online readers. For news publishers, native advertising has emerged as a result of a decline in display ad revenues; it is a new

way to market an old idea of the advertorial, a message that is mimicking the format of editorial content, but contains commercial appeal (Wasserman, 2013). The close examination of branded content that runs alongside traditional reporting in the New York Times showed that brand messaging in native ads frames brands in a positive way in all of the cases. Native ads “treat” problems, entertain, and, most frequently, present information about a company in a form of a corporate blog or press release. Framing shapes the interpretation of the information presented by a brand and helps a brand highlight its essential qualities. As was noted above, framing of brand messages in native ads is reflected in the organization of themes that are present in content. Frames are like dimensions: the more dimensions there are, the richer and more complete the narrative seems to be.

In the case of native advertising, the form is as important as the content. Form helps better understand contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as it provides keys to symbolic matter (Krippendorff, 2013). Framing analysis as a part of discourse analysis informed investigation of the form of each native ad. The original form of sponsored content attracts a reader, just as the good design of a product attracts consumers. What defines native advertisements and makes them stand out among other New York Times’ content is their interactivity. While many of the New York Times features have interactive content, they rarely talk about particular brands (“The year in interactive storytelling, graphics and multimedia”, 2014). At the same time, their reporting about brands is mostly text-driven.

Each native ad creates an experience for a reader that goes far beyond just

reading a text. New York Times' paid posts contain auto playing background videos, interactive information graphics, documentary videos, image sliders, online games, and interactive illustrations; these ads exhibit appreciation of the latest web design trends, such as soft parallax scrolling effects. The eye-catching design of native ads immerses readers in a branded environment. For example, New York Times' native piece "Women Inmates: Why the Male Model Doesn't Work", sponsored by the Netflix series Orange Is New Black, features parallax scrolling effects in illustrations; the textual narrative is alternated by documentary video interviews with former inmates and an author of a book that inspired the series. The piece is using muted color palette of orange and black, reflecting brand's identity (Deziel, 2014a). Another example is the "Imitation Game" movie paid post that features an interactive game linked to Twitter and based on the code-breaking Enigma Machine that Alan Turing created, a custom crossword puzzle, and an embedded trailer of the movie. The code that the online machine creates can be posted to social media and then decoded by the same online game ("World War II's Greatest Hero", 2015). Other notable examples include Fidelity's interactive information graphics, Wells Fargo's illustration slider and interactive graphics, Shell's parallax scrolling experience, and documentary video. Interactive components make native ads more engaging and are likely to compensate for the lack of newsworthiness.

Based on framing strategies native ads can be divided into four major categories: ads with purpose, entertainment ads, corporate postings, and ads that mimic the newsworthy content. Each of these categories has a different combination of initial frames, shown in Table 1.

Ads with purpose.

Native advertisements of this type portray brands as problem solvers and experts in their field. Such frames as alignment, expertise, factual storytelling, problem and social significance support the motifs of being an expert. Alignment frames align content with the brand's theme: To appear like industry experts, brands sponsor fact-heavy storytelling that tackles problems on individual and societal levels.

Expert and problem frames wrap explanatory pieces of content by helping explore industry trends and challenges. For example, Fidelity's native ad contains rich infographics, explaining IT investments and trends in IT business. Statements are supported by numerical data. The story points at the infographic, saying:

Technology firms are disrupting industries including retail, media, telecom, finance, manufacturing, and healthcare — often stealing market share in the process. Meanwhile, companies know that efficient use of technology can set them apart from competitors. Maybe that's why the tech sector is leading other sectors in growth. But unlike during the last boom, that leadership is based on value — not speculation. As this chart shows, the tech-heavy NASDAQ index is outperforming the S&P 500, but at a much more measured pace than in the dot-com era. (“Why the time is still right for tech”, 2014).

In case of Fidelity, a trendy topic is aligned with the brand's theme (alignment frame) and supported by rich data (expert and factual storytelling frames). The native ad contains calls to action to continue to the brand's website for more details and information. The brand is framed as an industry expert and a think tank, offering business insights and valuable advice.

Sometimes an important topic is addressed in the light of social significance frames. Brands need to associate themselves with publicly important causes in order to justify why they are talking about a topic. For example, Wells Fargo's native ad covers

microfinance in the light of taking care of vulnerable small business. As a snippet of a codebook shows below, the Wells Fargo coverage contains an illustrative slideshow, explaining the ins and outs of microfinance; entrepreneur stories; and an interview with the head of a microfinance organization, which is supported by Wells Fargo (“A Hand Up: In the U.S., microfinance gives the smallest businesses a chance to grow”, 2015). The banking institution is framed as a socially responsible expert in its field and a problem-solver.

Table 4. Wells Fargo Native Advertising Frames

Brand	First-level codes	Second-level codes	Frames
WELLS FARGO	Smallest businesses, working class, impoverished, alleviating poverty, poorest countries, donating,	Focus on disadvantaged and vulnerable	Social significance
	Gap in funding; challenges to get funding	Challenge	Problem
	Inspiring story	Business success story (case study, example)	Alignment
	Community investment group, creating jobs, opportunity to take business to grow, small businesses, helping people	Social responsibility	Social significance
	Microfinance, loans through traditional banks, lower profile in the US, financial security, funding business at early stage, donating	Industry explained	Expert

The purpose of the Wells Fargo ad seems to be explaining the growth of the microfinance industry in the U.S., while highlighting the company's social values.

Entertainment ads.

This type of ad is common for entertainment and lifestyle brands and features alignment, associations, emotional storytelling frames, and calls for interaction.

Association framing helps attribute particular qualities to a brand by highlighting those throughout the ad. The associations frame works with a topic that is not necessarily directly linked to a brand, but rather is situated on the inner circle of topics suitable for a brand. For instance, Holiday Inn's native ad tells an emotional story about a family that committed to 52 weeks of travel together some time before the wife and the mother in the family found out she had an incurable type of cancer ("The Creekmoors", 2014). The whole family starts traveling together, and after the mother dies, the father and two daughters finish off the 52 weeks of travel together. This compelling story never mentions that the family stayed in any of the hotels in the Holiday Inn chain, but the brand's identity is present throughout the story. The rich visual narrative is concluded by the following statement: "Holiday Inn is proud to support those on the Journey to Extraordinary". Framing analysis of this story showed that Holiday Inn is framed as a brand that appreciates family values and traditions; it connects to the reader emotionally (emotional storytelling) and creates empathy around such topics as journey, discovery, parents and children. (Alignment frames). The framing of the brand's message suggests that the brand supports certain lifestyle and philosophy.

For the Imitation Game movie, the New York Times' T Brand Studio produced an ad, which comprised an article about computer pioneer Alan Turing, an archival photo, a crossword puzzle and an interactive online game. The film's trailer wraps up the

narrative.

Table 5. Holiday Inn Native Advertising Frames

Brand	First-level codes	Second-level codes	
HOLIDAY INN	Show children the world, family, just us, role model, dad and daughters, mother	Family	Alignment; Associations
	Do what you want to do, new places, new things	Lifestyle	Associations
	Panic attacks, breast cancer, grieving, people crying, fears, transformation, proud of me, special week	Emotions and feelings/emotional appeal	Storytelling appealing to emotions
	Proud to support; travel	Brand's theme	Alignment
	Breast cancer, dad and daughters coping with loss	Socially important cause	Social significance

A historical picture of the time when Alan Turing lived, and a link to socially significant cause (gay rights) creates a multidimensional branded experience, prompting the reader to watch the trailer and eventually the movie itself. The story is connecting a brand to a topic of current interest:

By developing algorithms and the philosophical and practical underpinnings of the digital age, Turing's influence continues to be felt. His ACE designs, used as blueprints by the British to create a device to track Soviet aircraft, served as the DNA of the first home computer, the Bendix G-15. These days, Turing's legacy

lives on in Silicon Valley, where the founders of high-tech's most iconic companies have praised his elemental contributions to the field of computer science ("World War II's Greatest Hero", 2015).

Entertainment ads seem to be the most flexible format of native advertising and allow for a brand to put its name on any kind of engaging content, which in turn spawns associations and alignments.

Corporate postings.

Sponsored blog posts are the type of native ads that look like posts that can be found on corporate websites. On the New York Times' website they are labeled as the blogs being produced and posted by brands, whereas the rest of native advertising is produced by the T Brand Studio. Corporate blogs present company news and comments in a form of a news story that moves from the most important facts to the least important one (inverted pyramid). Corporate blogs employ a wide range of framing strategies: They use suitable themes to align with brand's industry topic; they appeal to feelings through emotional storytelling frames; they support claims by using research and expert advice; and they use web interactivity to engage readers.

For example, a Johnson&Johnson post about fathers' role in their children's development is dedicated to Father's Day and positions this company as a family brand with the use alignment and associations frames (Deziel, 2014b). The research-heavy narrative explores the theme, which is likely to resonate with Johnson&Johnson's target audience as the story appeals to the nostalgia of child-father play. The following table presents a snapshot of framing analysis conducted:

Table 6. Johnson & Johnson Native Advertising Frames

Brand	First-level codes	Second-level codes	Frames
J&J	Science, research, scientific studies	Scientific journalism narrative	Expert
	Father's day, children's well-being, helping develop skills; gift of a father, develop skills, father's impact, emotional growth, paternal approval, interacting with kids with love and acceptance;	Care, family values	Alignment Associations
	Gender stereotypes; Father's day;	Socially important cause; social life	Social significance
	Instagram collage; celebrate importance	Call to action to interact with the brand	Interaction

Native advertisements resembling corporate blogs deliver news about a company and the industry. For example, Intel’s paid post “Fashion and tech industries co-invent the future of wearables” announces a partnership between Intel and fashion firms to bring “successful smart wearables to market” (Kaplan, 2014). Written in a form of a short press-release, the piece is positioning Intel as an innovative technology firm through the use of factual storytelling frame.

Greek yogurt firm Chobani managed to embed its brand message into the pancakes recipe, giving advice on how the yogurt can be added to a classical recipe (Reardon, 2014). The alignment frame was used to position the brand's product as a necessary ingredient for perfect pancakes; the association frame linked a brand to family values.

Ads that mimic newsworthy topics

A seeming newsworthiness is created through the social significance and problem frames, complemented by expert and factual storytelling frames. In pieces of content like this, a brand is helping to resolve an important socially significant problem. A brand enters a conversation about a cause that is important for the public and is likely to appear in the news. Themes of taking care of the vulnerable and disadvantaged emerged multiple times throughout the coding process. Dell’s “Can the government become entrepreneurial?” codebook example below illustrates how a native ad framed a brand message with an important topic – success of small businesses with the help of government entrepreneurial programs (Keller, 2014).

Table 7. Dell Native Advertising Frames

Brand	First-level codes	Second-level codes	Frames
DELL	Advocates for social change, listening to small entrepreneurs, support for entrepreneurs	Socially important cause	Social significance
	Government bureaucracies	Brand's relationship with government	Social significance
	Innovation, entrepreneurship, social responsibility	Properties to be associated with a brand	Associations/Properties

Shell’s “Cities energized” native ad explores the problem of shifting to urban life and challenges and opportunities of a modern city (“Cities energized”, 2014). The rich parallax scrolling narrative contains interactive infographics and illustrations and a documentary video. All seven frames are present in the narrative: The topic aligns with the brand’s theme; a reader is presented with a challenge; the conversation is about wasted energy, social disaster and underprivileged cities translates into social

significance frames. Also, Shell is acknowledging its possible role in the interplay “between government, business and other parts of society” (“Cities energized”, 2014) through associations, framing itself as a responsible and innovative company.

Framing of brand messages in news stories.

As framing analysis showed, the most common reason a brand appears in the New York Times news coverage is that it is involved in a controversy, has relationships with government or illustrates an industry trend that impacts a society as a whole. When introducing a brand in a news story, journalists face an ethical challenge: How to justify the brand’s appearance in the news and at the same time claim to be unbiased?

Several justification frames support pretty much every mention of a brand in news coverage. Oftentimes a report starts with a leadership frame (see Table 2), which is used to emphasize brand’s leading position in the industry. For example, an article about Johnson & Johnson agreeing to make clinical trial data available to outside researchers calls a brand “health care giant”, emphasizing the importance of the move taken by one of the largest players in the industry (Thomas, 2015).

The extraordinary example frame may be used to justify a brand’s appearance in the news, in case a brand found itself to be in some remarkable circumstances. For instance, an article about Toyota says that the carmaker got the largest ever fine in the industry for failed car parts:

Eric H. Holder Jr., the United States attorney general, talked in impassioned tones on Wednesday about Toyota's behavior in hiding safety defects from the public, calling it "shameful" and a "blatant disregard" for the law. A \$1.2 billion criminal

penalty, the largest ever for a carmaker in the United States, was imposed (Vlasic, Apuzzo & Tabuichi, 2014).

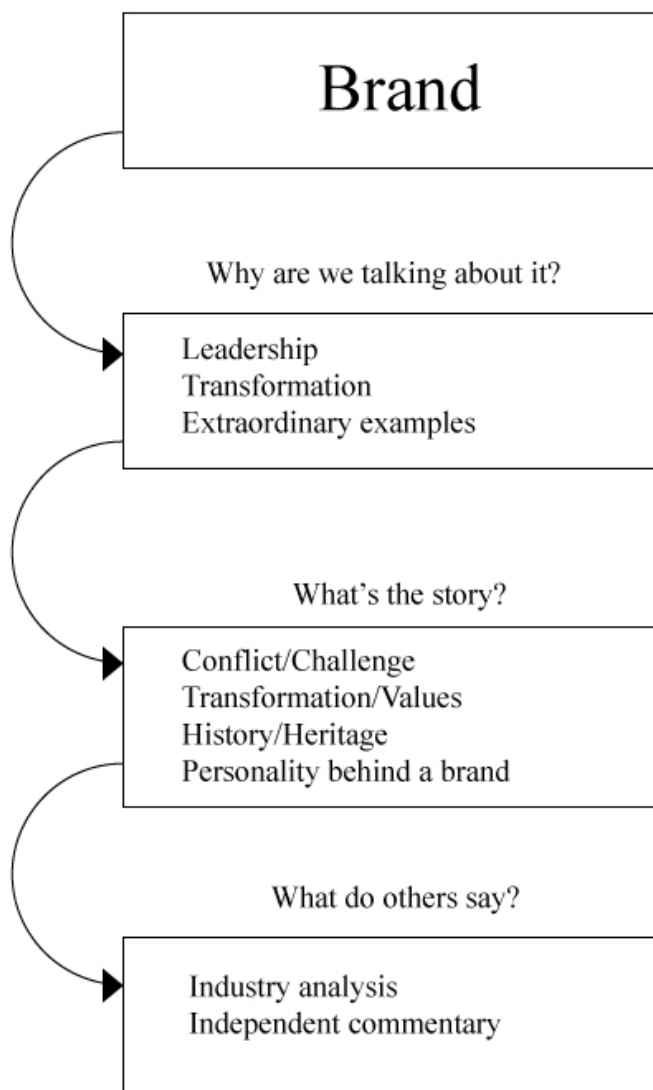
Other types of frames are used to give reasons for a brand's appearance in the news: transformation and conflict frames are among them. The transformation frame can be positive or negative. It pictures a brand as an example of a company that went through development or degradation. Business stories focused on telling a story about a brand's path to success or failure use transformation frames. For example, the New York Times news article, "Dell's life after Wall Street," emphasized the company's notable transformation:

It is a transformation Mr. Dell says he actually started six years ago, spending \$18 billion on 40 acquisitions, infuriating investors like Mr. Icahn and confounding industry analysts along the way (Hardy, 2014).

Framing a brand through conflict or challenge is another way to talk about a brand and retain independent status. For example, a news story about Fidelity mentions the biggest challenges the company is facing as it is recovering from financial crisis:

Even as it continues to recover from losses in the financial crisis, Fidelity has experienced nearly \$10 billion in net investor withdrawals from its open-end mutual funds in the United States this year through September, according to Morningstar data (Alden, 2014).

Figure 8. Brand Message Framing Schemata for Journalism



Industry comparisons and independent commentary, as well as coverage of topics important for the public, add quality to the New York Times reporting about brands. All news stories contain several brand framing strategies and generally adhere to the schemata seen from Figure 1.

For example, the news article “Holiday Inn reaches back to its Memphis roots” is a business column that starts with a leadership frame (“largest hotel operator”), continues talking about the history and heritage of the brand, and mentions the challenges the company faces, complementing the narrative with industry analysis. Holiday Inn is framed as a legacy brand and compared with its competitors.

Addressing RQ 2: How do the frames of brands differ or how are they similar in native advertisements and news stories?

Due to its interactivity, native advertising allows a brand to tell a bigger story than a newsworthy press release. But the story is still smaller than news reporting because of one fundamental, if unsurprising, gap: a company cannot cover a conflict about itself. In native advertising, sensitive issues that may damage the public image of the company are avoided, which turns it into a marker to help distinguish between editorial and native ad content. Features of independent journalism, such as objectivity, independent commentary, industry and competitor comparisons are present throughout the New York Times reporting, whereas their native ads, though attempting to tell stories of public value, lack criticism of the brands.

There are several other fundamental differences between native advertisements and news stories in terms of presenting brand images. First, news reporting always presents an argument and its various sides. Native advertising is trying to present a problem, but it lacks necessary depth of a journalism story. Even if native advertising presents rich research-heavy data, it tends to avoid direct criticism and acute angles in the story. Throughout this study, one personal reflection continued to appear: a “So what?”

question. Framing of brands in native advertising is one-sided, whereas in editorial content reporters are trying to put in one story as many different perspectives as possible, which is supported by framing strategies present in news stories. For example, Toyota's native ad "Distracted parent, distracted teen" covers an important topic of teaching young people to drive. The piece mentions a large study conducted by a brand that investigated how parents' driving habits influence children. The ad prompts readers to seek Toyota's advice on how to teach teens to drive, but never challenges presented statements ("Distracted parent, distracted teen", 2015). Certainly, a particular audience will benefit from this story, but the benefit may grow dim when readers refer to the original New York Times news story about the latest scandal Toyota was involved in. The news story is about Toyota concealing information about faulty parts and putting lives at risk, but then transforming its corporate structure to repair its public image. The story compares Toyota to other car companies and talks about a conflict in a neutral tone (Vlasic, Apuzzo & Tabuichi, 2014). News articles tend to link a brand to a public cause through controversy or a brand's efforts to fight that controversy. Native ads link a brand to a socially significant problem in such a way that consumers can interact with the brand around a cause in a meaningful way. At the same time it is important to note that despite contrast in brand messaging of the news story and of the native ad, Toyota scandal is not clearly linked to distracted driving. Authors of many news stories are also forced to leave some things out and many are not necessarily deep or balanced.

Second, news stories often attribute a brand to a problem whereas native ads attribute a brand to a solution of the problem. The evidence for this shows through the

framing strategies that are present in the reporting. Public interest frames in news stories position brand as an example to illustrate a bigger trend that is affecting the society.

Social significance frames in native ads link a brand to cause it is supporting. An example for this is the coverage of Toyota in both the news story and in a native ad. Journalists talk about Toyota's faulty parts fine from the perspective of the general public, holding the brand accountable to the public safety problem. The native ad on teaching teens to drive attributes this brand to a solution of a problem of distracted driving by asking readers to seek Toyota's expert advice on the topic. Although these are two different unrelated topics, they are both connected to the safety theme and illustrate framing usage.

Third, for news stories a brand is more likely to be a part of a bigger picture, while reporting is likely to refer to industry or society as a whole to track the impact. In the case of native advertising, storytelling revolves around a brand that did something significant. For example, the New York Times article "Profit from the plunge" discusses Shell's agreement to buy BG Group for \$70 billion:

Energy companies have spent months in a state of strategic paralysis, wary of making big moves with oil prices plunging.

Now, the mind-set is shifting, as the industry giants look to capitalize on the weakness.

On Wednesday, Royal Dutch Shell agreed to buy the BG Group for \$70 billion. It is the first major deal for an oil and gas producer since prices started falling last summer.

The acquisition could provide a template in the current environment, with deep-

pocketed players taking advantage of their competitors' problems to bolster their own position. (Reed & Merced, 2015)

Here, Shell is shown in the light of leadership, conflict, and public interest frames; the reporting is focused not on Shell itself, but rather the industry. Shell's New York Times native ad is the mixture of alignment, social significance, problem, association and expert frames that highlight Shell's values. Documentary video, used in the paid post, features Shell executive Jeremy Bentham as a narrator. It is implied that Shell is the centerpiece of the story.

Articles, analyzed within this study, tell a business story through controversial examples and challenging circumstances. Native ads use controversial issues to highlight benefits of a brand. A brand is often presented as a supporter of particular values or philosophy. If in the news a brand is depicted in a positive, friendly way, then it is going through some kind of transformation and changes its values/views. For example, a notable news story about Dell's owner explores the business topic of transformation through personalization (Hardy, 2014).

Addressing RQ 3: How do frames of brand messages in native advertisements match most common framing strategies used in advertising and PR?

Deductive framing analysis and comparisons of Hallahan's (1999) synthesis of popular PR frameworks to proposed native advertising framework showed that native advertising is constructing brand messages and branded environments akin to PR. Native advertising uses persuasive means of storytelling and theme organization similar to those used in public relations. Echoing the RQ 2, native advertising is the closest relative of PR

and thus could complement a firm's PR efforts. The most common strategies in PR include framing of situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility and news. All these themes emerge in native ads.

Framing of situations

A theme of relationships between individuals in everyday situations is very common in native ads. Brands choose ordinary situations to construct branded reality that highlights brand's strengths and helps hide their weaknesses. For instance, multiple native ads use an illustrated story about ordinary individuals and their interactions in everyday life. Holiday Inn's compelling story about a traveling family, Wells Fargo's explanation of microfinance through the small business example and Toyota's native ad constructed around teen-parent relationships are examples of framing of situations. As Hallahan (1999) suggests, the major concern in framing situations is aligning the intent of all parties involved in such situations. This also applies to native advertising: Every time authors of an ad are giving advice for a real life situation, the advice should meet expectations of participants who will interact with this ad online.

Framing of attributes

Native ads accentuate characteristics of a brand through associations, expert advice, and social significance frames. Focal attributes of brands include professional and human values, traditions and qualities of products and services. According to Hallahan, framing of attributes is biasing information by highlighting aspects of reality that might be "flattering or derogatory and, thus, be advantageous or disadvantageous to message sponsors in persuasive communications" (Hallahan, 1999, p. 211). Native advertising

presents a polished picture of a brand. At the same time, native ads analyzed within this research, didn't compare given brands to other products in a particular category.

Framing of choices

Native advertising features positive framing of choices. It is implied that a brand always has a solution to a problem or a socially significant cause. Framing of risky choices focuses on gains rather than losses. For example, Fidelity's factual storytelling highlights benefits of risky investing in the IT industry that, according to numbers, is booming ("Why time is still right for tech", 2014). Echoing Hallahan (1999), framing of choices is present in advertising that involves decision-making, like, for example, attracting new customers.

Framing of actions

When losses and gains (framing of choices) are not a concern, native ads shift to motivating consumers by presenting them with negative alternatives. Toyota's native ad prompts readers to learn from a brand by describing negative consequences of "infectious habits". Negative framing of inaction is called to maximize readers' behavioral intentions. The social significance, expert, emotional storytelling and problem frames, found through initial research, all rest under the umbrella of framing of actions.

Framing of issues

In native ads, brands have the ability to explain social issues and disputes in their preferred way. Topics and problems that resonate with public are used to show brands' values and qualities. For example, Shell's native ad about urban energy supply shortages hints that the company has a cure for the problem. Focusing only on urban problems, the

coverage never mentions how giant energy companies contribute to global warming or other urban challenges. Social significance, expert, problem, factual and emotional storytelling frames all fall into the category of framing of issues.

Framing of responsibility

This is a theme native advertisements are trying to avoid. Native ads, analyzed in this study, didn't touch upon conflicts, in which a brands may be accused of something. Framing of responsibility deals with public image and native ads are not the most effective way to do that. As can be inferred from the identified framing strategies, native advertising is a tool to create a brand image, link it to favorable associations and entertain a consumer along the way.

Framing of news

As suppliers of corporate information to media, public relations professionals are involved in framing of news. Native advertising in the form of corporate postings can also fulfill this function. As Hallahan (1999) notes, interactions between journalists and PR practitioners boil down to negotiating preferred frames. At the same time, the native advertising format allows brands to solicit sacred editorial space for their agenda without reaching out to journalists. Framing of news theme is an example of potential threat native advertising might pose to journalistic integrity if it is allowed in a given media to publish content that would clearly present a conflict of interest with the editorial staff. All corporate-style paid blogs on the New York Times website are carried out in neutral manner and touch innocuous topics. Another way native advertisements engage in framing of news is when a brand selects a culturally resonating newsworthy theme and

aligning creates coverage. For example, BMW's native ad explores the history luxury transportation, aligning a brand to this topic ("The Power of Luxury", 2015). Ads that mimic newsworthy topics all fall under the definition of Hallahan's (1999) framing of news.

As became evident after conducting the analysis, the initial study treats frames as concepts behind the major topics and hidden communication goals. Complementary to that, Hallahan's (1999) synthesized framework looks at the frames as means to distort reality through emphasis and selection. The fact that two quite different approaches yielded results that overlap is a sign of vibrant and credible study, as it is "expressing the reality that is plausible or seems true" (Tracy, 2013, p. 235).

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Native advertising is a powerful storytelling technique for brands, and yet another advertising format in an ever-changing advertising world. This study explored rhetorical means of branded storytelling in the light of framing theory through the examples of the New York Times content pairs (native ads – news stories). Undoubtedly, the New York Times is a media leader whose practices and opinion shape the media industry. An initiative to create T Brand Studio, an in-house content agency that creates custom articles for brands, marked a turning point for advertising and journalism. The New York Times’ overture to create a hybrid product that combines features of powerful New York Times content and highly demanded advertising inspired this study.

Native advertising, or custom branded content that is marked as advertising, but looks like editorial content, opens new possibilities for brands to reach banner-blind audiences. Native advertising enthusiasts suppose that the best pieces of native advertising might surpass editorial content by their performance. For example, a T Brand Studio piece for the Netflix series “Orange is New Black” generated 145,318 impressions, according to Digiday (Moses, 2014). Critics say that sponsored content damages journalistic credibility and autonomy by blurring the business-editorial divide (Carlson, 2014). As framing analysis suggests, native advertising seems to be closer to public relations and is foundationally different from journalism. Frames of brand messages that emerge in journalism stories differ dramatically from the frames that lurk in native ads.

Both journalism and native advertising lean toward publicly important topics. However, while storytelling in journalism is often focused on the greater good of society as a whole, native advertising uses themes of conflicts, problems and publicly important issues to highlight benefits of a given brand. Journalism uses brands as examples in a larger picture, whereas native advertising portrays brands as experts and problem solvers. Alignment and association framing strategies in native advertising are at the core of entertaining content. On the contrary, journalism presents arguments and uses brands to show one or the other side of a conflict.

Native ads entertain, mimic newsworthy content by connecting a brand to socially significant causes, lay out company news in form of corporate blogs, and give expert advice. Sponsored posts are pieces of highly engaging content and fully leverage web interactivity. Native ads contain auto-playing background video, interactive information graphics, documentary video, image sliders, online games, and interactive illustrations. These features complement the content and help promote the branded environment.

The New York Times paid posts immerse a consumer in the branded experience, educating and entertaining him. As content analysis showed, native ads are close relatives of press releases and other PR practices, as they frame situations, actions and issues in which brands are active participants; they use news topics and other resonant themes to align with the brand, and highlight attributes and qualities to imply about a brand. Native advertising is a result of the interplay between newest innovative storytelling techniques and modern advertising practices that, among other things, allow tailoring content to precise audiences. Native advertising might be a fashion that will slowly fade away, but

the fact that most powerful U.S. media, such as the New York Times, Forbes, the Atlantic and other introduced content production units, signifies a tectonic shift in the market that effects journalism and advertising practitioners.

Theoretical implications. Framing theory proved to be a robust tool for analyzing brand messages and comparing storytelling strategies. This research contributes to the framing theory discourse in regards of the area of its implication: advertising and PR. The outlined native framework complements Kirk Hallahan's seven framing strategies commonly used in PR and expands the knowledge about communication hybrids, or so-called blended media. This research refines existing framing models in PR by adding a layer that explores framing of brand messages in native advertising.

In this research, frames emerged as major concepts of the implicit and explicit communication goals. Echoing Goffman (1974), frames of brand messages in native advertising focus readers' attention on brands' attributes and qualities, combining this with entertainment and educational attempts. In contrast to Gitlin (1980), native ads tend to highlight aspects of reality through alignment, not calculated selection. This makes native ads an unobtrusive PR tool. The best examples of native ads, such as pieces of content sponsored by Netflix, Imitation Game and Holiday Inn, associate brands with the stories told indirectly and do not contain explicit calls to action.

The findings link back various studies, discussed in the literature review section. Negative framing of conflicts and public issues is used to emphasize brands' strengths and downplay weaknesses. Overall, native ads use positive or neutral voice for

entertainment posts and corporate blogs. If we look at the findings through the lens of Tsai's (2007) framework, it becomes clear that native ads are made to overcome consumers' natural skepticism towards advertising.. This study's findings also relate to the ideas expressed by Deighton, Henderson and Neslin (1994): Framing in native advertising is likely to target consumers with zero to full knowledge about a brand. It became clear throughout the analysis that native advertising is a format, because it combines features of PR and interactive storytelling. At the same time, the native ads in the sample don't show any examples of framing of responsibilities.

In journalism, framing of brands works on a societal level, as news stories attribute particular companies to problems that concern society as a whole. Political socialization, decision-making and collective actions are at the core of communication that involves brands. News stories from the analyzed sample use stories about brands to illustrate publicly important topics (de Vreese, 2005).

Most importantly, this study showed relationships between gathered data and previous framing research, extending and refining the knowledge in this field through the examinations of the innovative advertising format.

Practical implications. The proposed native advertising framework could be used by PR practitioners and content marketers in their creative and decision-making processes. Journalists might also benefit from reading the study, as they would get insight about reporting on topics that involve brands and how this reporting is different from content marketing and native advertising.

Brand image-makers can use this framework to evaluate different native

advertising approaches to satisfy the needs of a given brand. For example, lifestyle and luxury brands might want to invest in feature storytelling and documentaries to begin a conversation with new customers. Financial institutions and investment groups are likely to attract audiences with unsolicited financial advice and economic analysis. Regardless of the industry, every brand would benefit from a simple alignment strategy. Apart from that, one of the challenges for each brand would be to find a powerful story that resonates with the brand's main theme.

News media can use the framework to protect their journalistic integrity and establish relationships between departments that produce branded content, sell advertising and write news about the same brands. As this study has shown, threats to journalistic integrity are hidden not in the contents of native ads, but rather in how these ads are positioned on websites. Put into the wrong online context, native ads can seriously damage journalistic credibility.

Limitations. The New York Times' T Brand Studio works with internationally-acclaimed brands, such as Toyota, BMW, Dell, Holiday Inn, Wells Fargo, Netflix, etc. At the same time, New York Times content is known for its unique style and quality. Although pieces of some of the most high-profile marketing content were analyzed, this empowers, but at the same time limits, the study: High-profile cases might not show the average industry examples, produced by media that are limited in talent and finances and don't have access to contractors like Netflix or Ernst&Young.

Brand communication is an integrated effort, which tackles different media at once, creating a full picture for the consumer and increasing the chances of brand

exposure. Tracking one brand's native communication efforts across media would likely give a fuller picture of framing strategies.

The findings might be true only for the selected sample of native advertisements. Given that native advertising as a concept is still being shaped by industry participants, new forms of brand message representation might arise. Because of that, future quantitative research of native advertising that would look at the audience response to particular brand message framing strategies is encouraged.

Another major limitation is the comparison of pairs of content that belong in different format categories, namely soft news, general news and hard news. The New York Times' news reporting is generally critical about brands (except for the entertainment sections) and leans toward a hard-news approach, or the news that should be released immediately as it presents publicly important topics. Native advertising leans toward soft and general news that presents interesting topics that do not require immediate release (Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky, 2010).

The researcher acknowledges that not all formats of native advertising were present in this study, though she believes that framing strategies do not change across advertising form. Native advertising is still an open book. New modifications emerge, and the format is being actively shaped by industry creatives. For example, the New York Times doesn't produce listicles (articles that take the form of lists), although this is a highly demanded and effective native advertising format popular with such publications as Mashable, The Huffington Post and BuzzFeed. Replicating this study with other media would be the next step in refining this research.

Despite its limitations, this study is transferable to other cases in communications. For example, similar findings could have emerged if the subject of research was messages of people who create personal brands (politicians, artists and other public figures). The aim of this study was to lay out models for future research and better understanding for such topics as native advertising. Using specific frames, which are recognized in advertising and PR research, “increases systematicity” of qualitative research (Macnamara, 2014, p. 17), adds rigor and increases credibility of the study.

Future research. To investigate the emerging format of native advertising, it is essential to take into account the unique economic and technological reality in which online news businesses operate. Further research of journalism norms and attitudes that shift towards soft news and entertainment formats is needed to establish a foundation for understanding the future of media and media organizational structures (Carlson, 2014). Further research and critique of native advertising in journalism circles is needed to protect and preserve media as warrants of democratic governance and basis for a free society. Native advertising deserves scholarly attention on all levels: from content creation to audience tracking technologies (media, such as the New York Times, not only create content for sponsors, but they also share editorial analytics tools that allow tracking and targeting specific audiences). Also, journalism job market studies are needed to attend to the economic situation in the industry and potential challenges a shift to content marketing creates. Moreover, there’s a lack of studies that would look at the native advertising in context: how the ads that appear in certain spots on the webpage and near original news content are perceived and whether they are rejected or accepted by the

audiences?

Final note. Despite challenges and limitations, this research generated significant findings that can be used to refine sponsored content practices. Native advertising uses associations and alignment framing strategies to highlight attributes of brands; it is framing familiar themes and mimics newsworthy content, to attract and retain the attention of audiences. Native advertising is similar to PR practice, but is ideologically different from journalism. Treating native ads as a branded online experience, or entertainment, rather than newsworthy journalism-like content would be an ultimate strategy for marketers if they consider implementing this emerging format.

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