

Секция «Журналистика»

**Branded content in social media: objectives and measurement**

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Nowadays the social media are invaded by brands seeking access to their audience. Brands have rushed to Web platforms inspired by lower costs of presence at this channel. But being “easy accessible” the social media require a different approach to communicational strategy. Traditional advertising and promotion activities in social media are frequently rejected by users, because “the social media was made for people, not for brands” [Fournier, Avery, 2011]. Users largely ignore the traditional forms of advertising in social media paying attention only on their private matters [Hadija, Barnes, Hair, 2012].

The branded content distributed in social networks is designed to answer this challenge and to catch the attention of audience. Performing this function the branded content appears as one of the tactics among the content marketing tools. Within this marketing format brands create and share the valuable informational or entertaining content in order to gain the acknowledgement from their current and potential customers.

However, branded content used in virtual environment does not belong to the marketing mix only; it can be considered as part of public relations or brand development strategy. In our study we want to discuss the different intentions of brands using this tactic.

We have carried out the case studies on use of different types of branded content and conducted the expert interviews in order to provide impartial assessment of this type of activity. We used the form of semi-structured in-depth interview with European experts who are involved in strategic brand management or e-commerce as independent consultants: Prof. Esmail Salehi-Sangari, Head of Industrial Marketing Division at KTH, and Prof. Henrik Uggla, consultant in the field of Strategic Brand Management, Brand Portfolio Strategy and the others.

**- *Marketing approach***

Using branded content solutions as tool of content marketing companies pursue various goals. According to the annual industrial report “*B2C Content Marketing: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends*” the companies from North America region are aiming at customer retention and acquisition; growth of brand awareness and engagement; increase in website traffic; lead generation; sales; thought leadership; lead management/nurturing. The most important measurement criteria reported are web traffic, direct sales, social media sharing and time spent on the website [Content Marketing Institute and Marketing Profs, 2013].

**- *Advertising approach***

Some types of branded content can be considered as a kind of advertising medium which first of all concerns the branded projects at traditional channels (TV, events), but also affects the web channels. Therefore the models for branded entertainment measurement could be introduced by advertising companies.

For instance, Ogilvy Mather use *BEAM* model based on such parameters as exposure (the reach across the

channels), entertainment (consumer engagement) and brand association within the program/content. The objectives for the advertising campaign using branded content could be *strong brand recall* measured by number of fans/followers, likes and comments or *high awareness* measured by number of views, contacts and pre/post awareness [Ogilvy Mather, 2012].

**- Strategic brand management**

From the position of strategic of brand management branded content can contribute to the brand equity by creating the new associations and other relevant brand values. In this case the most evident indicator of effectiveness is ROI (return-on-investment).

*“I would say that the branded content is a supplementary tool to create or increase brand awareness and some cases may be to enhance the top-of-mind – together with other tools, of course. But also it would be possible to create associations for the brand which is part of brand equity”* [Interview with Henrik Uggla, 2012].

*‘The increase and decrease in the sales is giving the signal if the brand strategy is effective or not. That’s the only way to get the response from your market’.* [Interview with Esmail Salehi-Sangari, 2012].

We believe that in all approaches companies have to take into account the participation of audience in social media. Branded content in social media cannot be described or measured only in terms of exposure and awareness but also in terms of audience participation (the number of users contributed or participated in project in some way). This leads to the concepts of *open-source branding* [Fournier, Avery, 2011] and *co-creation in branding* [Singha, Sonnenburg, 2012]. The branded content in social media (for instance, such solutions as networked online games) attracts users to platform for interaction with the brand.

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