

# Hybrid Messages in postmodern marketing: a taxonomical proposal

## *Los Mensajes Híbridos en el marketing postmoderno: una propuesta de taxonomía*

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## Abstract

*Hybrid messages may be defined, according to Balasubramanian (1994), as any paid attempt of influencing an audience with a commercial goal, by using communications with non-commercial appearance. During the last two decades, hybrid messages have grown in both importance and presence. Some types of hybrid messages, as sponsorship or product placement, have been widely studied, which is not the case of more novel manifestations, as could be branded content, content marketing or branded entertainment. There is no a common agreement on the nature, reach, definition and classification of those new ways of communication. A comprehensive review of published works on the subject has been carried for this paper, from which a clarification of all three concepts has been made, as well as a proposal of classification, whose main differentiating factor is the intention in content creation.*

**Key Words:** *Hybrid messages - Marketing communications - Branded content - Content marketing - Branded entertainment - Engagement*

## Resumen

*Podemos entender un “mensaje híbrido” como todo intento pagado de influenciar a las audiencias para un objetivo comercial, utilizando comunicaciones que proyectan un carácter no-comercial (Balasubramanian, 1994). Durante las dos décadas transcurridas, los mensajes híbridos han crecido en importancia y presencia. Algunos de estos mensajes, como el patrocinio o el emplazamiento de producto, han sido ampliamente estudiados, no así formas más novedosas como el branded content, el content marketing o el branded entertainment. No existe consenso entre los diferentes autores sobre el alcance, naturaleza, definición y clasificación de estas nuevas formas de comunicación. En este trabajo se ha realizado una exhaustiva revisión de las publicaciones aparecidas en los últimos años, lo que ha permitido clarificar los tres conceptos aludidos, así como realizar una propuesta de clasificación de los mensajes híbridos, en la que el principal factor de diferenciación es la intencionalidad en la creación del contenido.*

**Palabras clave:** *Mensajes híbridos - Comunicaciones de marketing - Branded content - Content marketing - Branded entertainment - Engagement*

# 1. Introduction

Some of the most prominent scholars and marketing professionals agree that traditional marketing is dead (Zyman, 1999; Kotler, 2005; Keller, 2008). While it is true that changes have occurred in all areas (market, media ecosystem, consumer, sociocultural and economic), technological revolution and consumer learning expertise themselves have brought profound changes in the world of business and have provided the public with a power that has revolutionized the relationship between brands and their customers.

The new emerging paradigm of marketing (customer centric, relational, experiential, pull...), which aims to establish lasting relationships between the consumer and the brand, by adjusting the experiences proposed by the brand with those desired by the consumer, faces a consumer empowered as never before. A consumer looking to establish relationships with brands that generate positive experiences and provide value, who wants to play an active role in its creation. He wants to establish a transparent and open dialogue, where he won't be pressurized with messages.

In this new stage of marketing, consumer engagement plays a key role in consumer-focused marketing. He is seen as a major driving force behind the behavior and decisions of postmodern consumer (Gambetti and Graffigna, 2010).

This new way of marketing, along with new media consumer habits, inseparably involve a new way to communicate with consumers, in which the traditional tools lose their effectiveness and efficiency, driving new ones based on freedom of access, consumer dialogue and audiences.

The advertising industry is at a turning point, from the traditional model of interruption and repetition of mass media advertising to a family of models focused on relevance (Rappaport, 2007).

Consumers show an increasing lack of tolerance toward marketing messages that are irrelevant to their lives or who have not been requested. Therefore the

relevance of the message is the key factor to attract the attention of consumers (Martí, 2010). A message is relevant when it adds extra value in the form of information and / or entertainment.

The new model consists in systematic creation of content and messages that are unique, well executed and relevant, so that its resonance on consumers is more profound and significant than before. Instead of interrupting consumers with ads, it's about attracting them, by engaging them with utility, entertainment, relevant information or any other type of valuable content that will be truly welcomed by the consumer (Mayar and Ramsey, 2011) Versus traditional push type communication, another pull type communication imposes itself; attraction, mutual understanding and dialogue (Ramos, 2006).

These contents must be able to incorporate the commercial message without being intrusive. It is vital to find a balance between brand (identification) and the content (information or entertainment that provides the consumer with a positive experience).

The type of messages that best meet these requirements are known as hybrid messages.

## 2. Methods

### Goals

The overall objective of this work is to clarify the situation of hybrid messages in which there is currently a lot of confusion due to the variety of techniques and types of messages integrated into this category. To achieve this we establish the following specific objectives:

- Identify the nature and scope of different techniques that are integrated into what is known as hybrid messages.
- Define some of the most innovative techniques –those techniques being of relevance on current times (remarkably branded content), according to

the growth of their marketing communications share of spending, against those which, by opposition, are seen as traditional techniques (mainly intrusive advertising or, amongst hybrid messages, product placement and sponsoring)- among hybrid messages, about which there is great confusion: Advergaming, advertainment, branded content, branded entertainment and content marketing.

- Establish a classification of hybrid messages according to objective criteria; being the most important the intention of content creation. Main criteria for the classification of different branded content techniques are both content subject and content distribution platforms; in what refers to the remaining hybrid messages, level of integration is the most relevant one.

## Methodology

As said, main reviewed hybrid messages are, in most cases, innovative techniques, with the remarkable exceptions of both product placement and sponsoring.

Some of them –such as advertainment and advergaming, first references to the combination of an advertising message with, respectively, entertainment or videogames- have an older presence in the market, but in their more advanced types –branded content, content marketing and branded entertainment- they have only obtained enormous importance during recent times, mainly since Internet universalization.

It is, for example, the launch by BMW motor company of “The Hire” webisodes what is seen as the birth of modern branded entertainment. The newness of these techniques implies the fact that they are not yet thoroughly studied and that, consequently, some both conceptual and taxonomic confusion exists.

To obtain and analyze existing documentary and bibliographical sources on branded content, content marketing and branded entertainment, we thoroughly explored two database aggregators:

1. Instituto de Empresa Business School virtual library, through the following academic databases:

- ABI/INFORM Global
- Business Source Complete
- Ebrary
- Emerald Group Publishing Limited
- IEEE Publications Database
- JSTOR Arts & Sciences I Collection
- JSTOR Arts & Sciences II Collection
- JSTOR Business I Collection
- JSTOR Mathematics & Statistics Collection
- SAGE Knowledge
- ScienceDirect
- Taylor and Francis Journals
- WorldCat.org

2. Google Academic

In both cases search was done on all sources published between January 1st 2008 and December 31st 2013, containing in the title “branded content”, “content marketing” and/or “branded entertainment”.

Because of the newness of reviewed phenomena and consequent scarcity of published works about them, books containing above said words in their title were searched through online bookshop [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), with meager result.

Finally, a search through Google of branded content, content marketing and branded entertainment related activities professional organizations was done. Some festivals and events related to those techniques, as the Cannes Lions Branded Content & Entertainment section, were also reviewed.

But for an accurate and comprehensive taxonomic exercise on hybrid messages a thorough analysis of existing sources for its most modern types is not enough; it is also necessary to analyze the nature and to review definitions of more traditional hybrid messages types, as product placement and sponsoring, widely studied. To this goal, more classical sources were reviewed as well as above said search engine/aggregators were used to look for more contemporary sources.

Differentiating elements of different types of hybrid messages have been identified, allowing us to develop a classification of them as well as to produce a definition of several hybrid messages types, such as branded content, content marketing and branded entertainment, which were not precisely defined.

## 3. Development

### 3.1. Hybrid messages

The concept of hybrid message was developed by Balasubramanian 1994, is today accepted by the vast majority of authors consulted (Baños and Rodriguez, 2003; Hudson and Hudson, 2006; Ramos, 2006; Russell, 2007; Lehu, 2009; Tuomi, 2010 ; Martí, 2010; Walton, 2010; Regueira, 2012) and is commonly used in literature on marketing communications to designate a type of messages that covers a wide range of varieties.

According to Balasubramanian (1994), when organizations seek to expose audiences to information related to a product they frequently use two communication tools: advertising and publicity. The first refers to communications which distribution is paid for, and clearly identify who does so, while the second refers to the messages that are not paid for and whose emitter is not identified.

There are two basic elements of communication that Balasubramanian considers essential in his theory:

- The message.
- The perceived source.

The ideal is to find a type of message that allows, at the same time, the sender to control the message and the audience to perceive it as credible. Hybrid messages are those that combine both virtues. Balasubramanian (1994) defines them as any paid attempt to influence the audience for a commercial purpose, using communications that project a non-commercial nature; under these circumstances it is likely that audiences are not aware of the attempt to influence them commercially and therefore they will process these communications differently than they would a commercial message.

A postmodern interpretation of the concept allows us to identify hybrid messages as those that, in one way or another, combine a commercial message (favorable to a brand) with non-commercial content (not focused on a purchase proposal and providing the audience with a positive experience.)

Balasubramanian identifies some of the key factors in this matter:

- The degree of control over the message and format.
- The explicit or implicit brand presence.
- The resulting degree of integration of the brand into the plot.

Although by using the media to convey messages, organizations must give up some control over the message, it is commonly accepted that the message is perceived as more credible by being spread by the media rather than by the organizations themselves (advertising) (Walton, 2010 ).

As Tuomi (2010) points out, based on the model of Nebenzahl and Jaffe 1998, there are two other elements to consider in marketing communications:

- Disguise: extent to which the sender can be identified and / or the ability to perceive if the message is paid advertising or not.
- Prominence: the degree to which the message is more or less secondary to an outstanding communication.



From the point of view of marketing communications, the ideal message would be one that had high levels of both disguise and prominence; however, traditional advertising has low levels of both.

### ***3.1.1. Distinguishing features in the structure***

We can make a first approach to classification of hybrid messages from a series of differentiating elements in its structure.

#### ***Implicit versus explicit***

According to D'Astous and Séguin (1999), in a work done focusing on television sponsorship applicable to other types of hybrid message (Hudson and Hudson, 2006; Tuomi, 2010) the main differentiating factor is the nature of the implicit or the explicit.

In an implicit message brands play a contextual passive role, the presence of the brand is not formally expressed and product benefits are not clearly stated. In the explicit messages brands play an active role, being formally expressed in the program and their attributes are clearly exposed.

Within explicit messages D'Astous and Séguin (1999) distinguish between integrated (they are included within the content) and non-integrated (the brand is formally expressed but is not included in the program). The TV sponsorship would be a clear case of explicit non-integrated: the brand is explicit, not listed in the program content, but immediately before or after.

#### ***Level of control and integration***

The level of control refers to the ability of the advertiser to influence the context in which the brand will appear; while the level of integration denotes the level of connection with the plot. Generally speaking, the higher the level of integration, the greater the level of control.

Sheehan and Guo (2005) divide these messages into four types, based on two dimensions:

1. Traditional: products or services usually used as props; the level of integration in the narrative is low and plays a minor role, the level of control is also low. The brand message is hidden and is secondary to the plot.
2. Expanded: brands gain a greater connection with the plot. The level of integration remains low (can be replaced by similar products), but hearing and visual resources can be used.
3. Integrated: are integral to the plot, in a long-term connection.
4. Assimilated: cases where the brand becomes the axis of the plot or the program.

Some authors consider the integration of product as a message type in itself, unlike other types, for example, product placement; for Russell (2007) product integration refers to a larger site where the product actually plays a role in the plot of an episode.

### ***3.1.2. Hybrid types of messages***

Balasubramanian identifies several types of established hybrid messages:

1. Product placement: paid messages aimed at influencing audiences through planned but not very prominent introduction of a product in a film (or TV program).
2. Program agreement (tie in): a paid for message because it is an exchange agreement between a program and a brand. Usually this agreement involves the purchase of advertising space in the program.
3. Advertisements with the duration of a program: a paid product message issued to television audiences, using a format that resembles a real program both in content and duration.

Also another group of messages, those described as emerging:

1. Masked Art: any work of art (painting, sculpture, music, theater, literature) that presents branded products with a deliberate business purpose, though not always obvious.
2. Masked News: hybrid message inserted between news content.
3. Masked Spokesperson: two possible types:
  - masked expert: a person playing the role of expert, to emphasize credibility.
  - masked celebrity: concealed his role as spokesman paid to promote brands during his public appearances.

With the digital revolution new formulas arise, such as the “influencers” , credible bloggers, who are sometimes paid (in cash or in kind) to recommend a particular brand in his area of influence (masked expert).

Over the years, several other types of hybrid messages have joined the ones listed by Balasubramanina in his original work: advergaming

- Advertainment
- Branded content
- Branded entertainment
- Content marketing
- Custom publishing

Although some of these hybrid message techniques have been present for years and have been widely studied, others have reached its peak in more recent times, especially after the rise of the Internet and new modes of audiovisual and digital communication.

There is no clear distinction, either in the academic or professional fields between the different concepts, and there is not therefore a largely accepted taxonomy.

Some authors, for example, consider product placement virtually synonymous with hybrid message. Thus, for Lehu (2009) product placement and brand placement have the same meaning and he understands Branded Entertainment as a more sophisticated version of product placement, when it occurs in the world of entertainment. Williams, Petrosky, Hernandez and Page (2011), consider product placement as synonymous for brand placement, sponsorship within a program, branded entertainment and product integration. Hudson and Hudson (2006), Tuomi (2010) and Soares (2011) consider both Branded Entertainment and advertainment as improved extended versions, more mature and sophisticated, of product placement.

Other authors, however, consider product placement as a form of advertainment, just as would be Branded Entertainment and Branded Content, which, for Russell (2007) would both have the same meaning.

A third group of authors clearly distinguish between product placement and advertainment, Branded Content and Branded Entertainment, which they consider synonymous, understanding the first as integration, in a greater or lesser degree, of a brand / product within a non commercial content and the last three as the development of proprietary content from the brand (Pino and Olivares, 2006; Ramos, 2006; Regueira, 2012, Canter, Asmussen, Michels, Butler and Thomson, 2013; Valiquette, 2013; Neurads, 2013) .

A group of authors encompasses all those commercial messages on television, that are different from those used in traditional spots, within the concept of “new forms of advertising” (Reinares and Reinares, 2013).

A final group of authors gives preeminence to Content Marketing as a main concept, from which all the other types emanate (Rose and Pulizzi, 2011; Pulizzi, 2012, Rahim and Clemens, 2012; Duncan, 2013; Ramos, 2013).

As shown, the level of confusion between the stated concepts is obvious.

The different professional associations do not provide clear definitions of these concepts either: Branded Content Marketing Association, The Content Council, the Content Marketing Association or the Entertainment and Resources Marketing Association.

This situation calls for both a clarification and classification of hybrid messages, for which we start off from a number of premises:

- To consider product placement and brand placement as the same technique: the inclusion of a brand within a content not focused on the brand.
- To consider advertainment and Branded Entertainment as the same technique: brand proprietary entertainment content creation.
- To consider advergaming as a type of Branded Entertainment: brand proprietary content in videogames.
- To consider custom publishing as a type of Content Marketing: publications around a brand.

### 3.2. Branded content

We have seen the enormous confusion between the different concepts, but even among those who argue that the Branded Content is the most sophisticated and modern product placement expression, there is a conception of it that coincides with that of other authors: Branded Content / Entertainment involves the creation of their own brand contents. Therefore to Lehu (2010) Branded Entertainment should represent for the brand an opportunity to develop true stories, integrating its identity and personality (...) embarked on the production of their own programs to perfectly control the integration. Tuomi (2010) states that “(...) content can be completely produced, funded and controlled by a brand”. Martí (2010) sees branded content and branded entertainment as equivalent terms: Branded Content

and Branded Entertainment can be basically defined as all entertainment content generated around a brand in order to achieve certain marketing objectives.

The same is true in the professional sector, where Branded Content is perceived as a tool which purpose is to provide relevant content, for it being useful or entertaining, that attracts and holds the attention of its target audiences, overcoming their natural resistance to advertising; under the premise that a positive content experience will generate positive feelings toward the brand that has made it possible (Duncan, 2013).

The online Neurads (2013) platform has developed a list of differences between branded content and product placement (table 1), which can be very useful for our purposes:

Branded Content	Product Placement
IT IS CONTENT	It is a brand communication technique within another content
Reflects the brands values	It is integrated in content that may have nothing to do with the brands values
Active element	The brand is another element of independent content. Passive element
The brand has the control over how the message is disseminated	The brand control is limited
It usually includes brand placement	In some occasions it is naturally integrated, whilst in others it is imposed

**Table 1:** Differences between branded content and product placement (Neurads, 2013)

Canter et al (2013) illustrate the perspective of Branded Content from what they call Trade Mark Owner, TMO, as follows:

1. Branded Content is initiated by the TMO, digitally or not digitally
2. The control level of the TMO goes from high (television) to low (tweet)
3. It is usually funded by the TMO

4. Its main objectives are:

- Create positive meaning or brand demonstrations among stakeholders
- Connect and engage with certain stakeholders

5. The strategy may be:

- Entertaining
- Informative
- Educative
- Useful (to fulfill a given function)

6. More pull than push

7. Predominantly engagement versus interruption

8. Potentially omnichannel

The conclusion that clearly emerges from all the previous definitions and reflections is that the Branded Content is content generated from a brand.

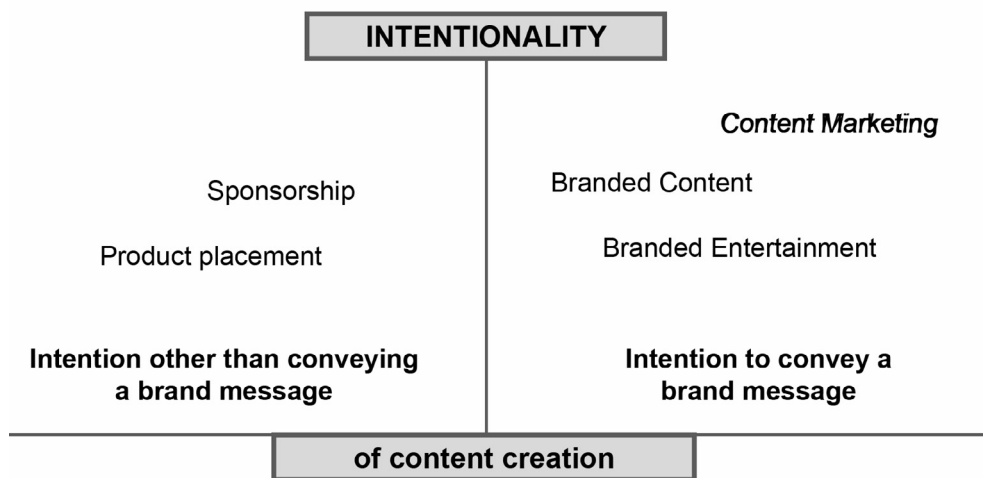
It is equally obvious that one of the main features of sponsorship and product placement is not to be an essential part of the content, but something alien to it and in which it is inserted, with varying degrees of integration.

In short, what essentially distinguishes Branded Content from sponsorship and product placement is the intention in the creation of content that conveys the brand message.

In the latter case, the content has an absolutely different intention to that of conveying a brand message. The intention of the creator / producer is that the content is the end in itself.

While in Branded Content, the intention when creating content is precisely to convey a brand message, more or less explicitly; the intention of the creator / producer in this case is that the content is a means to convey the brand message.

Therefore, we argue that it is the intention of creating the content the first and principal factor of differentiating hybrid messages and classifying them into two groups: those in which the brand message is not part of the original content, but that is inserted into it; and those in which the brand message is the essence of the original content.



**Figure 1:** Classification according to the intention of content creation (J. Aguilera, 2014)

Our next proposal is that Branded Entertainment (and its synonym advertainment) and Content Marketing are two sub-forms of Branded Content.

### 3.2.1. Content Marketing

Unlike what happens with other types of hybrid messages, there seems to be broad consensus on the meaning of Content Marketing.

It should be noted that most of the authors who have dealt with this concept come from the professional field, yet there are still very few who have done so from the academic one.



The Content Marketing Institute (2012), the main promoter of Content Marketing, defines it as a marketing technique that involves creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and studied target audience in order to promote a profitable action by the client.

Pulizzi (2012), creator of the Institute, reinforces the previous idea, but underlines the fact that it is the brand itself that creates the content.

Most of the sources manifest themselves in the same line, although several of them add some detail to the definition of value. So, Duncan (2013) remarks that Content Marketing scope goes up to the previous step for a sale or call to action proposal. Zmuda (2013) recalls that it is transmitted via owned and earned media, never through paid ones, otherwise it would be considered advertising, a view fully shared by Lieb (2013); Nosrati et al (2013) who circumscribe it to the media and other publications; and Ramos (2013), finally, includes a new goal, that of educating, alongside the already cited, to engage and acquire a customer or a prospect.

Therefore, we could write the following definition of “consensus”: a marketing technique that involves the creation and distribution by a brand of relevant, valuable and compelling content through owned and / or earned media, to attract, acquire, and engage customers and prospects; content can be informative and / or educational and, although it does not make any sales proposal or call to action, it aims to promote a beneficial action by the customer and / or prospect for the brand.

Content Marketing is focused on creating valuable experiences. These are valuable pieces of information that enrich the community and position the brand as a leader in its field; content that can be shared immediately and, above all, it is focused on helping customers discover (for themselves) that the product or service is the one that meets his needs.

It seems generally accepted that the first case of Content Marketing as a technique dates back to the launch, in 1895, of the magazine *The Furrow*, published by

the tractor manufacturer John Deere, which still remains in circulation. Their goal was not to directly sell John Deere products, but to provide farmers information about new farming techniques and training to make their exploitation more profitable. So, John Deere becomes leader and expert in the field, and when readers of the magazine need agricultural equipment they naturally turn to who is positioned as an expert in the field, John Deere.

Other relevant cases of the beginnings of this marketing technique are:

- The publication of the Michelin Guide in 1900 in France, offering information on car maintenance, as well as accommodation, restaurants...
- In 1904, the American food company Jell-O distributed a free book of recipes, in which their dessert is treated as a versatile food product.

This background of Content Marketing is a clear example of custom publishing. Therefore it seems possible to infer that Content Marketing is the digital era version of custom publishing, as it can be presented in a great variety of forms such as publications, news, videos, e-books, computer graphics, case studies, manuals, photographs ... (Nosrati et al, 2013).

This new form of digital content distribution, removes the barriers to publishing content in traditional, printed media, which is complex and expensive; anyone, including brands, can now publish digital content in minutes at minimum cost.

This ease of publication is allowing brands to become “media companies,” editors, because they have a wide network of owned media at their disposal.

The difference between these new media companies and traditional ones, is that, in the latter, the content is created to generate revenue directly from its sale and / or its advertising sales; while the first creates content to indirectly generate revenue by attracting and retaining customers (Pulizzi, 2012). Both are competing for getting and holding audiences attention.

In addition, brands are seeking distribution of their contents on third-party media, earned media, among which are social networks, aggregators, other communities and the mentions in the media (this last task, traditional of public relations).

Content Marketing is educational by nature (Rahim and Clemens, 2012) and it is about what makes a brand unique, and its context; and can be used both as a tool to generate sales, and as a long-term tool to build trust. It helps consumers resolve problems and encourages them to engage with a brand. In this way consumers exchange loyalty for knowledge, especially if the brands are consolidated as true experts in their field.

Rahim and Clemens (2012) conducted a study among marketing professionals, in 2012, in Europe and the United States, where it shows that the first objective of Content Marketing is, for both groups, generating qualified leads.

Rose and Pulizzi (2011) point out the following objectives, according to the purchase funnel, as the main ones that can be achieved through the use of Content Marketing:

- Brand knowledge or reinforcement
- Generation of leads
- Conversion
- Customer service
- Other products sales

They add four dimensions beyond attracting customers: satisfaction, retention, upsell and evangelism.

Ramos (2013) highlights the following types of Content Marketing:

- Teaching about the product or service.
- Entertainment understood as informing, educating and selling in an entertaining way, using videos, photos, sound...
- Tools and applications.
- Content aggregation

About the channels, they point out the following:

- Corporate web site incorporating owned media.
- Social Networks: earned media.

Rebecca Lieb (2013) develops a classification of Content Marketing formats: text, graphics, audio and applications and games.

We can conclude that the characteristics defining Content Marketing are:

1. It is content created/produced by a brand (it is, therefore, a type of branded content)
2. It is informative and educational content (not entertainment but, in some cases, entertaining content)
3. Content subject is about the product / service, brand / company or category / sector
4. It is mainly digital
5. It is distributed exclusively through owned and earned media

### **3.2.2. Branded Entertainment**

It is the form that Branded Content adopts when it is entertainment, as opposed to Content Marketing, which is informative / educational; with which it also presents other differences:

1. Branded Entertainment subject is not the product, brand / company or category / sector; it is entertainment that transmits the brand values, its identity and personality, and meets marketing and/or communication objectives.
2. There may be no brand manifestations of any kind (brand free) and it can

also be a product placement vehicle.

3. It doesn't need to be predominantly online, it can take many forms: visual, audio, music, graphics, theater, sports, fine arts, culture ... and it can be distributed through multiple channels and platforms.

Some companies have chosen entertainment production as a vehicle for transmitting their brand messages, applying entertainment industry know how to create their own content, where the plot or script are at the service of brand values (Ramos, 2006).

The brand must be integrated into the entertainment world in the most natural possible way, awakening desires and emotions by itself (Lehu, 2009), so that the combination of entertainment and attractive stories become an essential element for consumers to perceive the brand positively (Pino and Olivares, 2007).

It is the brand who creates the content, tailored to its needs, but with the condition of being competitive as an entertainment product (Regueira, 2012); it must have sufficient quality and interest, and to have a strong personality for its target audience so as to choose Branded Entertainment against any other entertainment product (Ramos, 2006).

We do not share the taxonomic point of view of certain authors who equate Branded Entertainment with Branded Content or who include in the concept product placement or brand funded content; even less that of those who consider it a form of product placement (Hudson and Hudson, 2006). In the first case, because we have already established that branded content can be informative / educational (Content Marketing) or entertainment (Branded Entertainment), which are discriminatory concepts (although an informational content can be entertaining and entertainment content can transmit information). Moreover, we have established that the main feature of Branded Content is to be content created / produced by a brand, so that product integration, no matter how well made it is, is still a brand inserted in a context alien to it (and therefore generally substitutable with another product of the same category).

These considerations lead us to equate the advertainment with the Branded Entertainment since any of the studied definitions of advertainment fully fits with Branded Entertainment one.

Branded Entertainment is essentially an action to convey the brand values, its DNA, and to give an emotional dimension to the brand (Lehu, 2009). It is about the creation of entertainment vehicles in which the brand remains true to its values and lives in harmony with the contents (Tuomi, 2010).

Even the piece of entertainment can become totally devoid of the presence of the brand or its products, limiting itself to reflect brand or products personality; in this case, it is likely to have to resort to other actions of communication, notably in owned and earned media, but occasionally also paid, to ensure the link between the piece of entertainment and the brand. As Tuomi (2010) points out, the non repetitive and non intrusive nature of Branded Entertainment, may need the support of advertising to stimulate interest on it, as any other entertainment product.

Branded Entertainment actions not only allow to meet short-term objectives (awareness, brand preference, purchase intention,...), but contribute greatly to brand building, medium and long-term (Lehu, 2009 ; Regueira, 2012).

Therefore, as a result of the above analysis, we can identify the following characteristics of Branded Entertainment:

1. It is a category of Branded Content, which refers to entertainment content created and produced by a brand
2. It is entertainment content created “from” the brand, from its DNA, in order to reflect its values, identity, personality and / or positioning
3. Content must be of high quality so that it is interesting and attractive to the audience

4. The audience should see that the content is more an entertainment product than a brand message
5. It is a tool for medium and long term brand building
6. It can also meet short-term brand objectives
7. It can take multiple forms and to use any vehicle entertainment
8. An important enough type so as to give it its own identity is advergaming, or videogames created and produced by a brand, with both brand building or product objectives (demonstration)
9. Content may be absolutely devoid of presence, visual and / or audio, of the brand
10. There may be brand placement
11. There may also be brand and/or products/services placement different to the proprietary brand
12. Sometimes it is convenient to have further complimentary actions to strengthen and ensure the linking between the brand and the content

As a result, the following definition of Branded Entertainment is proposed: It is entertainment content, of any kind, created and produced by a brand, which must be sufficiently interesting and attractive for the target audience to decide to consume it rather than other entertainment products of the same type or its substitutes. Content has been created in order to meet brand building objectives, as well as short-term possible ones, and it can be absolutely devoid of brand presence as well as incorporating it with different levels of integration.

### 3.3. Proposed classification of hybrid messages

#### 3.3.1. *The intention of content creation*

As already mentioned, the main differentiating factor is the intention with which content that serves as a vehicle to the brand message has been created.

The content is created with intention to convey a brand message or not created with that intention, there are no intermediate options.

Thus we have, on one hand, those hybrid messages , result of incorporating or inserting, with greater or lesser level of integration, a brand within a content that has been created for purposes other than to convey a brand message. Here we have sponsorship and product/brand placement.

On the other hand we have hybrid messages which content is intended to convey a brand message, providing it with sufficient interest and relevance so as to attract the target audience. In this area are located the Branded Content, the Content Marketing and Branded Entertainment.

It is more complex to situate the new forms of television advertising (NFA) in either category. Internal telepromotions and sponsorship credits clearly fall into the first category, in which sponsoring and placement are found.

The mini-programs, in our opinion, fall into the second category because it is supposedly interesting content for the audience created for the sole purpose of meeting brand objectives. The difference with Content Marketing lies in its push strategy (included in intrusive advertising blocks) as well as using paid media, rather than owned or earned ones.

External telepromotions are contents clearly created with brand/product objectives, using characters from a real program, within this context, to pretend they are spokespersons. This has, as before, common features with Content Marketing and also the differential characteristics of being push in paid media.



Therefore, sponsorship and internal telepromotions fall within the category of messages created with an objective alien to the brand; while mini-programs and external telepromotions would enter in the category of contents created with brand objectives.

### **3.3.2. Level of integration**

It is the main factor of differentiation within the category of hybrid messages inserted into content created with other objectives than to convey a brand message.

They may have a minimum level of integration, such as program sponsorships, which merely note, just before starting and immediately after completion of the program, the fact of sponsorship by the brand. And it can reach very high levels of integration, such as being part of the story or script in which the placement will be made, which is rewritten so that the brand interprets a relevant role and the context is consistent with the message the brand wishes to convey. Some authors describe this level of integration as a different, more evolved form of placement, which they call precisely “brand integration” (Russell, 2007; Lehu, 2009; Tuomi, 2010).

Modalities such as brand placement can be found in between, consisting of the mere presence of the brand / product on the screen and / or text.

Therefore, the level of integration would draw an upward trend, with sponsorship at the lowest level, and brand integration at the highest, leaving brand placement in the center.

A higher level of integration also produces a higher level of control over the context in which the brand / product appears.

### **3.3.3. Information versus entertainment**

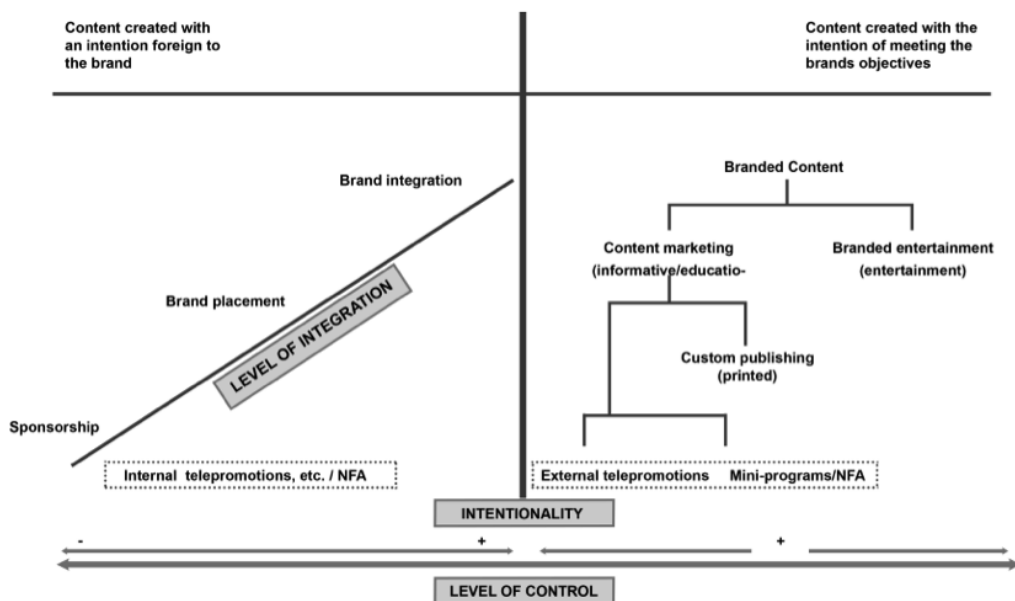
With regard to the concepts located within the category of contents created in order to meet a brand objective, we identified branded content as denominator of all the category; that is, one in which the brand creates and produces its own content.

When analyzing the concepts of Content Marketing and Branded Entertainment, we have seen that the main difference between the two is the type of content, which in the first case is information and in the second entertainment.

This distinguishing feature means that, in the case of Content Marketing, the content is “on or around” the brand; while in the case of Branded Entertainment it is “from” the brand, without it being necessary present.

### 3.3.4. Classification

The following graphic (Fig. 2) summarizes the proposed classification of hybrid messages, where the main criteria for differentiation is the intention of creating the content.



**Figure 2:** Classification of hybrid messages (Aguilera J., 2014)

## 4. Conclusions

Hybrid messages combine a commercial message with non-commercial content. Since Balasubramanian identified these types of messages and established the first classification, the variety of hybrid messages has increased, especially with the digital revolution, causing great confusion both in definition and classification of such messages.

In a first approach to a classification of hybrid messages several differentiating elements may be identified: the implicit and the explicit brand presence, the control level and the level of integration.

However, we argue that the most important differentiating criterion in this category of messages is emitter's intention in content creation, which divides them into two groups:

- Hybrid messages resulting from incorporating a brand within a content created for purposes other than brand message. Within this category, messages would differ by the level of integration.
- Hybrid messages aimed to convey a brand message, giving it enough interest to attract its target audience. Within this category, the main difference is the type of content: entertainment or information.

Our proposal also considers that Branded Entertainment and Marketing Content are two sub-forms of Branded Content. The first is the form that the Branded Content adopts when it is entertainment, while the Content Marketing is informative / educational.

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