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International Conference « Global interferences of knowledge society », November 16-17<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Targoviste, Romania

## Advertorial Use in Communicating with the Female Audience

Laura MARCU<sup>1\*</sup>, Mircea Constantin DUICĂ<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract*

*Advertorial is a common form of advertising in the media, due to its characteristics who recommend it as an effective alternative communication. Character fair, apparently objective provided by the wording and presentation gives it a greater credibility than if an ad. If periodical women press, advertorial borrow a set of specific features of traditional advertising (ad) such as, for example, the weight of the image in relation to the text. This study is an overview of the differences between the ad and the advertorial to highlight the advantages of the latter in the context of mutations in the advertising market. Also, it is analysed how advertorial is used in the specialized press, and precisely what are the differences dues to the dissimilitude of the target audience of each magazine. The study is applied to two Romanian women's magazines, different in profile readers, and is based on their monitoring in a given period, the content analysis of all advertisements and a quantitative analysis of recorded data. The results highlight how advertorial is adapted of reading public profile, especially what are the main criteria that distinguish the two magazines regarding the advertorial use. It is about the object promoted, areas promoted and format used for advertising.*

**Keywords:** *advertorial; communication; magazine; media; Romania.*

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## 1. Introduction

The development of online communication affected significantly the media market. Both for print media, as well as broadcasting, online format developed rapidly with increasing consumer preference for this method of information. But if the broadcasting online format coexists with the classic one, the change in printed media was much deeper so that many journals or magazines, some of them traditional and famous, gave up printed form definitely and continues to exist only in the online form.

However, it should be noted that the printed media has significant differences between daily press and periodicals. Thus, periodical printed media managed to stabilize its print run and represent a specific audience. The online format, undoubtedly necessary to meet market trends, is often supported by a printed form; printing and scoreboard conditions are an argument that periodical press aims to exploit in order to entice readers.

Periodical press has the advantage of readers' selectivity by several criteria such as age, sex, socio-professional category, residence, hobbies [1].

In Romania, periodical press managed to survive being represented in the areas of house/decoration/gardening (for example, magazines „Gradina mea de vis”, „Casa de vacanta”, „Casa Lux”, „Elle Decoration”...), press economic and financial („Biz”, „Money”), automotive-velo („Auto Bild”, „Auto Motor si Sport”), tourism and travel („Traveler”), health, as well as niche areas (history, geography, computer science, psychology, religion etc.). But the widest range of titles in periodical press is seen in women press, whose functions are multiple [2]: formative function (by practice sections), escape function (by fictions and stories disconnected from reality), seduction function (by sections devoted to fashion and beauty) and information function (through articles on cultural activities).

Women magazines can be grouped according to age readers (teenagers, young, adults), their economic status (those with good financial situation, educated and urban home – luxury magazines or up-market, such as „Cosmopolitan”, „Viva!”, „Elle”, „Marie Claire”, „Unica”, „Shape”, „Bazar”, those with low financial situation – low-market magazines such as „Libertatea pentru femei”, „Femeia de azi”, „Povesti de viata”, „Intamplari adevarate”, and also an intermediate category - middle-market magazines- „Ioana”, „Ok!”, „Femeia”, „Avantaje”) or preoccupations (magazines for brides, young motherhood - „Mami”, „Parents”, housewives – „Retete”, „Gospodine”, „Carticica practica”, „Retete”, „Practic in bucatarie”, „Click Pofta buna”, crafts – „Lucru de mana”). It should be noted that all these female press titles that we mentioned there are not only online but also in a printed form. According BRAT (Romanian Audit Bureau Transmedia), in

Romania there is still a significant percentage of people who read printed media (national or local newspapers, magazines) and 56% of these people are the female audience; also the proportion of women is growing in total readers of printed media [3].

Regarding advertising, printed media is one of the oldest means of communication. As the emergence of other forms of mass communication, printed specialized press kept its attractiveness to advertising sector due to advantages such as the ability to select and target the audience, readers' loyalty, the quality of graphics and the ability to develop the message, lifespan longer and, implicitly, the possibility to return to the message [4]. Moreover, besides classic ads, printed media increasingly use new forms of promotion, such as advertorial. This format can be adapted to any type of reader and has several advantages over classic ads [5, 6]. Our article studies how printed media chose to combine ads and advertorials in its efforts to better meet the profile and need of female readers.

## 2. Problem Statement

Develop advertising message must meet both requirements of creativity and economic efficiency regarding the target audience. In printed press, for example, the ad success is based on factors such as simplicity and harmony, presenting the advantages of the product, stars use, eroticism, contrast and colour. In terms of location and repetition, the ads show the most common form of an announcement of a page or two, including a second cover which incorporates the image of the front cover; advertising can be strengthened by BTL tools such as product samples or gift products. However, research on the use of ads in the printed media have highlighted the low possibility of storing advertising message due to the rapid consumption as well as a lack of message repetition [7].

On the other hand, the changes in the media were passed naturally on the advertising industry, in turn increasingly interested in online media at the expense of the classic. For example, digital ad spending growth in Romania was estimated at +12% in 2017 compared to 2016 (to reach the amount of 72 million euro) while spending on printed media advertising fell 5%. For 2018, the market shares of media according to advertising revenue estimated ranked first television with 67%, followed by Digital with 18%, OOH with 7%, radio with 6% and only the last printed media with 2% [8].

Advertising communication also register another trend, that of orientation to more subtle forms of persuasion, as the public becomes increasingly reluctant to ads. Unlike the ad, advertorial is a form of

advertising which is presented as a press article. Etymologically, advertorial comes from the combination of two English words: advertising and editorial. French equivalent term is *publi-reportage* and in specialized works we find it also as „editorial advertising”. Advertorial appears as an article with different journalistic genres (interview, reportage, news, chronic, editorial).

Advertorial is characterized by seemingly objective content of the message, emphasis on informing the public and not exaggerating the qualities of the brand, providing advice that meet public concerns without explicitly urge to purchase. Balanced and fair character of the advertorial message is reinforced by a number of factors such as pro and con statements, testimonies of people, technical details about the products, signing article avoid superlatives. By its features, advertorial is an alternative to the ad. Being a form of advertising, this article should be reported properly to be identified as such by readers, though this situation rarely happens in reality. Advertorial can be used both in print and in audiovisual or Internet. In the digital environment, using advertorial has the advantage of capturing attention, increasing the site’s visibility and ensures a better positioning in search and indexing pages [9].

Women periodical press is a media who combine advertising as ads with a lot of advertorials. M. Petcu noted in its analysis about Romanian press, taking also results of studies in others countries, in women press, more than in other types of media, there is an impregnation of editorial content with advertising elements. The combination of editorial and advertising occurs at both iconographic and textual images and the share advertising and image make these magazines to be „more for watching and less for reading” [10].

### **3. Aims of the research**

Based on the advantages of advertorial for promoting products or brands, our article aims to analyze how is harnessed this form of advertising in two magazines for women and whether there are differences that can be explained in terms of their readers. In this regard will be made a comparison between magazines regarding the subject of promotion (product, brand), the sector of the advertiser companies, the format use for communication, the message repetition, as well as other specific elements (mention of advertising character, brands promoted).

Advertising communication is based on respect for rules regarding the selection of advertising media. Thus, the most important selection

criteria of the media, when drawing up the media plan, include scale of coverage (i.e. audience media), scale of economy (costs of publication) and scale of affinity (i.e. correlation between audience support and target audience of advertiser) [11].

On the other hand, once established vehicle media to be used for advertising, decisions on advertorial format are needed. It concerns the message size and location, message repetition, but also the connection with editorial content of the magazine, the capacity to provide useful information to readers [4]. These issues will be analyzed on two Romanian women periodicals to see how advertorial is used as a form of advertising in printed media and to determine the main differences depending on the target readers.

#### 4. Research Methods

We choose to combine qualitative and quantitative analysis, based on regular monitoring of women printed media during two months. Qualitative analysis was made by studying the content of all information from magazines, to identify the elements to categorize information in “ads”, “advertorials” and “information without advertising”. The criteria used to distinguish between advertising and advertorial were those already mentioned: the share of image, the used journalistic style, the character predominantly subjective or objective, elements typically for advertising such as slogan, price, superlative, comparisons etc. Data obtained through qualitative analysis were then coded in order to measure and compare the two form of promotion (ads and advertorials).

We retained two different magazines with national audience in Romania: „Cosmopolitan” and „Libertatea pentru femei”. The choice of these magazines was due to the different audiences which addresses each one and that allows us a comparison between advertorials through the magazines reader’s profile.

Thus, the magazine *Cosmopolitan* (hereinafter abbreviated COSMO) defines its readers in terms of socio-demographic as being composed of young women, active, independent, with a high social status, mid/high education and income, living in large cities. In terms of psychological and behavioural criteria, magazine targets women who like being informed with the latest news in fashion, beauty and lifestyle, women who aspire to professional success and social recognition and cultivate self-confidence [12].

The magazine „Libertatea pentru femei” (Freedom for Women), abbreviated as FFM, is recommended as „the most sold and read weekly magazine for women”, being a mass-market publication with a very affordable price (1.9 RON to 8.9 RON – the Cosmopolitan price). FFW targets women concerned with the development of each member of his family, wanting to be a good friend, mother, wife and housewife.

According to the latest study of the print run audit, Cosmo had during April-June 2018 a print run of 14,500 copies of which 5,714 sold, while FFW had a print run of 47,818 copies and a sale of 31,733 copies [13].

Monitoring was done on the numbers printed during November-December 2017, i.e. number 11 (November) and 12 (December) of the montly magazine Cosmo and numbers 44 (November 3rd), 45 (10 November), 46 (17 November), 47 (24 November), 48 (December 1st) of the weekly magazine FFW, so be it the same period monitored.

Research corpus was composed of all information published in these journals in order to analyze forms of advertising used. For this purpose we use as research instrument a monitoring sheet with several categories, namely: the magazine name, release date, nature of advertising (product, brand, cause), the name of the product/brand promoted, name advertiser company (if identified), the sector of product/brand, advertising size and location, form of advertising, message repetition, advertising strategies (if they have been applied).

In a first stage we used content analysis of every page of each magazine, so we can identify the elements necessary to complete monitoring forms. Then, in a next step, the information gathered and centralized in a database operated by using MS Excel have been the subject of quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics.

Although our research has considered all forms of advertising carried out in two magazines, in this article will be revealed only use of advertorial as a form of promotion, whether it has been flagged as advertising information, whether the content fit in this category. Of the advertising information recorded in the monitored period, Cosmo had 51% ads and 47% advertorials while in FFW magazine the structure was 57% ads and 43% advertorials.

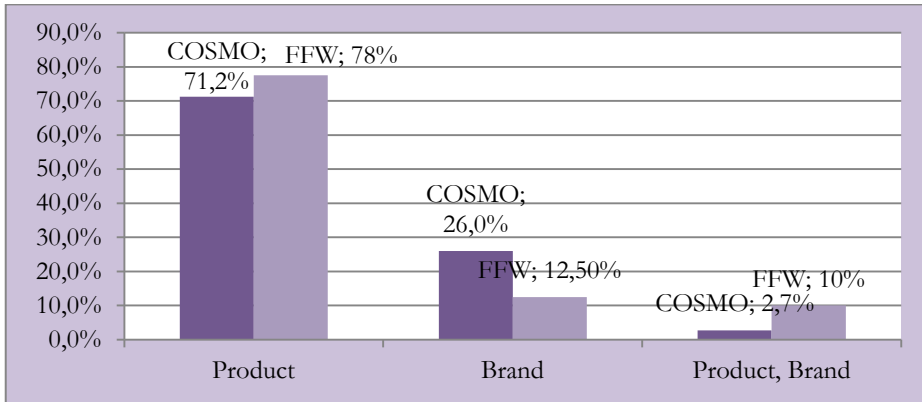
## 5. Findings

The analysis results indicate significant differences in all aspects considered for comparison. Thus, for the object of advertising, articles were grouped into three categories: those who have one or more products, those



presenting a company without putting emphasis on the products it offers and those associating products and brands of the companies in order to guarantee the product with the brand, or as a result of association between different products from different brands/companies.

**Graph 1.** Advertorials structure according to the object of advertising (%)

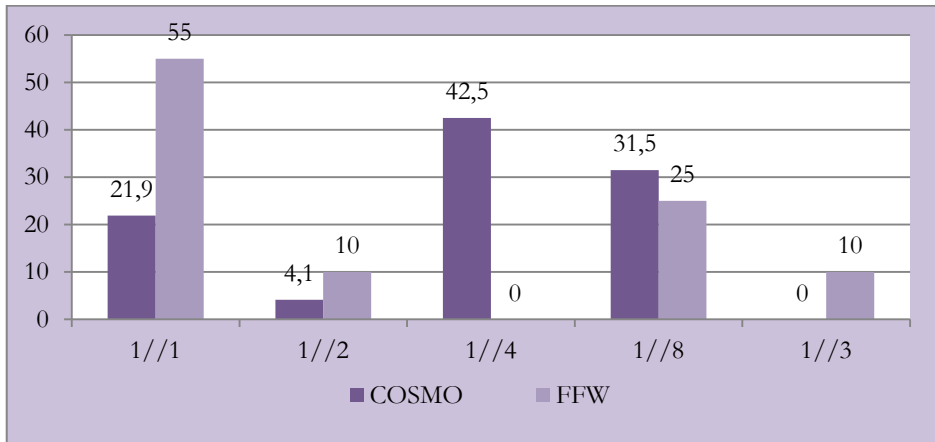


Source: authors study.

Graph 1 indicates that most of advertorials concern products, in both magazines, even if in Cosmo the share of advertorials promoting brands is higher than in FFW. Regarding the main brands promoted, in Cosmo magazine these are: Chanel, Dior, Oriflame, Douglas, Guess, Splend'or, Pandora, Deichmann, Armani Exchange, Avon, Panasonic. In FFW magazine, among the brands promoted we mention Catena, Sensiblu, Dona, Visislim, Zdrovit, Nivea, Deichmann, Alevia.

In terms of advertorials size, in Cosmo magazine is preferred format of fourth page (1/4), which was found in 42.5% of cases (graph 2) and the eighth 1/8 (31,5% of cases), one page format issued only in 21.9% of cases, and the half-page in 4.1% cases. Instead, in the magazine FFW, the most common format for advertorials is a page (1/1), in 55% cases, followed by the eighth 1/8 (25%) and the third 1/3 (10%).

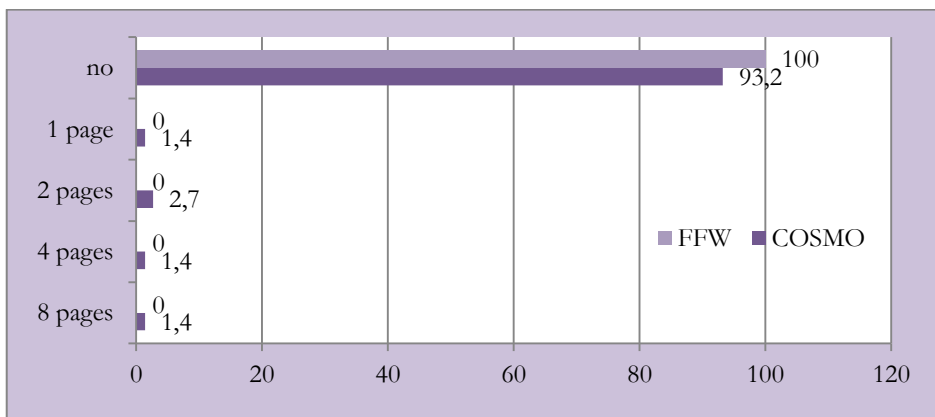
**Graph 2.** Advertorials size (%)



Source: authors study.

Repetition plays a very important role in memorizing the message, being one of the factors that ensure the success of advertising [14]. The capacity to repeat the message varies from one media to another and from one vehicle to another. In printed media periodic, repetition is limited by the frequency of the magazine and the editorial content. In addition, advertorial, by its nature, does not allow an identical repetition of the message but a display of the message on multiple pages, as a way to increase the chances of exposure to the message.

**Graph 3.** Message repetition in advertorials case (%)

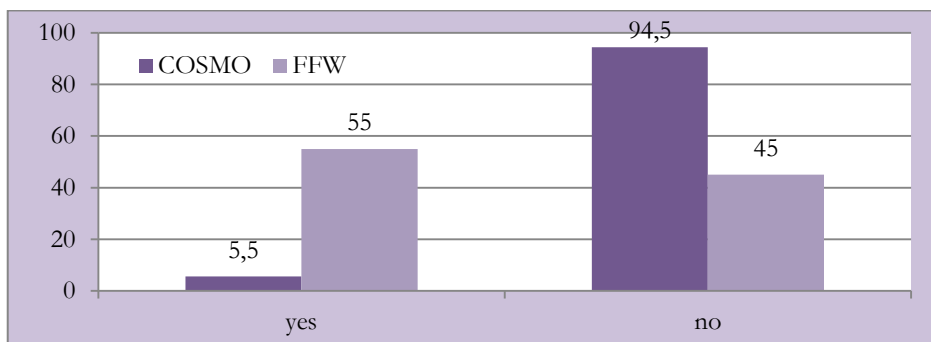


Source: authors study.

Following the considerations mentioned above, we observe in case of magazines analyzed that message repetition is rarely used in Cosmo and is absent in FFW. In Cosmo magazine we recorded two advertorial developed on two pages (corresponding to a frequency of 2,7%), an advertorial who covers 4 pages (1,4% of cases), one who covers 8 pages (1,4% of cases) and an advertorial whose message is also found in a advertisement of the same magazine, on the inside cover behind it.

In total advertorials recorded, the percentage of flagged as paid (mentions being different: „advertorial”, „P-publicity”, „Promo”) is 5.5% in Cosmo and 55% in FFM (graph 4).

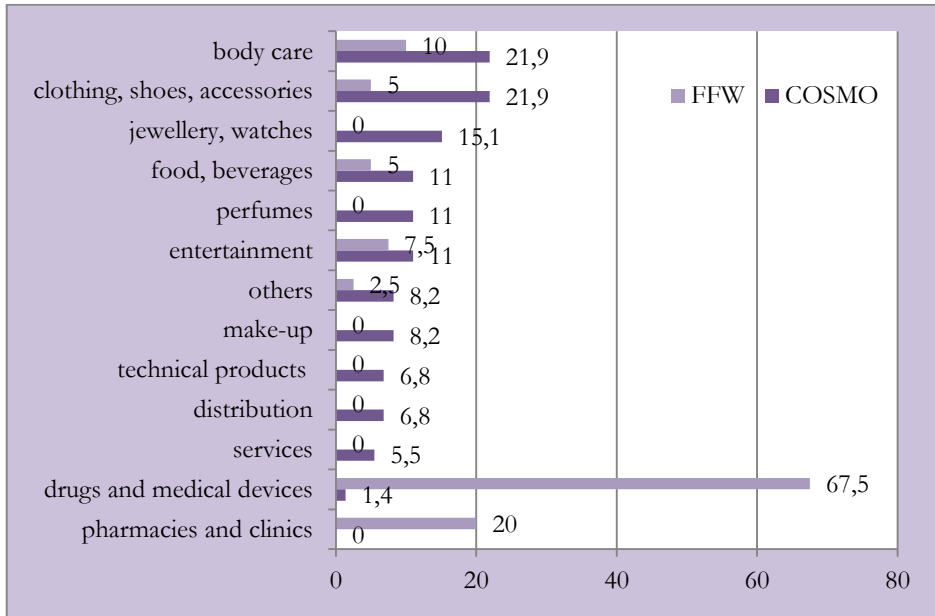
**Graph 4.** Signalling advertorial character (%)



Source: authors study.

Notable differences are noticeable for the activity areas of the advertisers. If Cosmo, main sectors are body care (21.9%), clothing, shoes, accessories (21.9%), jewellery and watches (15,1%), perfumes (11%), food and beverages (11%), entertainment (i.e. movies, magazines, books, events) (11%), make-up (8%). In FFW magazine, the overwhelming share of advertorials belongs to drugs and medical devices field (67.5%), followed by pharmacies and clinics (20), the medical sector holding in fact 87.5% of total advertorials. Others areas present in the advertorial of FFW magazine are body care (10%), entertainment (7.5%), clothing, shoes and accessories as well as food and beverages (both with 5%). In percentages, the total areas of each magazine exceed 100% because frequencies were calculated by reference to the number of magazine advertorials and in many advertorials were promoted products/brands from several sectors.

**Graph 5.** Activity fields of advertisers (%)



Note: relative to the total of each magazine advertorials.

Source: authors study.

Journalistic genre used in advertorial is the news; in addition others genres were employed such as interview, reportage, editorial, personal journals, presenting culinary recipes.

Regarding the manner in which the message within advertorials were realized, we noticed some elements that reinforce the advertising character of the message, such as the share of photos (most often about half of the area occupied by the advertorial), logo or product image in the bottom right corner of advertorial, mentions about price (price available at a particular store, price recommended by the manufacturer, promotional offer), insertion of testimonials of users (for drugs, medical devices) or mini-ads, no signature (basically, with 2-3 exceptions by magazine number, any advertorial is not signed). One such exception is the interview with the general manager of the company Alevia in the advertorial who present the tea with the same name.

## 6. Discussions

Research can be enhanced by extending the monitoring period, so we observe the message repetition along several numbers of magazines or by including in monitoring several magazines of each category already

considered in order to strengthen results. It will be also interesting to note how the format of the printed press is adapted to the online version of these publications.

Another direction of deepening the research is to add more magazines in monitoring, such as a magazine addressed to middle market, allowing comparison with already analyzed magazines (Cosmo-up market and FFW-low market). On the other hand, research can be oriented to the readers' analysis to understand its preference for advertorial in relation with ads or to evaluate the impact of advertorials already used.

## 7. Conclusions

In a time when online information increase, Romanian printed media manages to keep a large number of readers, especially regarding female audience. Interest for printed media is manifested mainly by people in urban areas (where access to that media is easier), higher education and adulthood (teenagers and youth are the least interested, their preference going to the online environment since they grew up with new digital technologies) [3] advertising information are different in online media and printed media and our analysis focused on advertising in the classic media (printed) in order to observe, on the one hand, how to adapt advertising to the readers profile and, on the other hand, how media combine the two forms of advertising: ads and advertorials.

Our research has revealed differences in usability of advertorial as a form of advertising for the following items: object of promotion, advertorials format, message repetition, fields of advertisers, and method of signalling advertorial.

A relatively similar situation is observed between the two magazines on the object of promotion: in both magazines is promoted primarily „product” (71.2% in Cosmo and 77.5% in FFW). However, Cosmopolitan has a higher percentage of brands promoted (26% versus 12.5% in FFW magazine) and brands promoted by advertorials are different between the two magazines, as well as areas of which they are part, differences expressing the position declared by magazines: for young women who want social status and professional level, concerned with fashion, beauty and lifestyle, Cosmopolitan offers advertorials on body care (21,9%), clothing and footwear (16,4%), jewellery (12,3%), perfumes (11%); on the other hand, the magazine FFW addressing a much wider female audience has advertorials overwhelmingly in the healthcare fields (62,5%) and pharmacies (17,5%). Health problems can affect any family members and readers of FFW

magazine are defined as women of all ages, interest to be feminine but also concerned with their status as wives and mothers. Differences between object of promotion, domains and brands promoted confirm the adaptation of advertorial to the readers' profile.

Regarding advertorial format, *Cosmopolitan* use primarily the small advertorials (1/4 page – 42.5% of cases and 1/8 – 31.5% of cases), the all page is met only in 21.9% of cases. In other magazine, one page format (1/1) is present in 55% of cases, followed by 1/8 (25% of cases), plus half page format (1/2) – 10% of cases and the third page – 10% of cases. These differences are determined by the magazine format itself and also by products/brands promoted. In *Cosmopolitan*, the advertising character of advertorial is reinforced by the message repetition in the same number of magazine, in 7% of cases, while „*Libertatea pentru femei*” (FFW) never used a repetition of advertorial message in the same number of magazine.

The results highlight the main aspects that must take into account a company when they use printed media to promote its brands. Beyond serving costs, the choice of printed media depend on relation that media has with the company's target audience. Secondly, should not be neglected the format that printed media could provide to the company (ads size, position in the magazine, repetition) and also the possibility of association with complementary products. Finally, if the company wants to use advertorial rather than ad, this desire can influence the selection of magazine since the publication of advertorials is different (regarding writing and presentation form, location, size).

As magazines in printed format, BRAT forecast indicate a stabilization of sales and keeping of a significant number of readers [3]. Maintain this market position depend on the printed media ability to provide information attractive, credible, with a special graphical form. From this point of view, combining classical ads with advertorials could be an adequate response to media need of keeping the trust and loyalty of female readers.

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