

SPONSORED CONTENT AS A TWO-EDGED SWORD: DETERMINANTS OF ITS CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTABILITY

A Master's Thesis

by
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Ankara
December 2016

To all 21st century people who are somehow confused by excessive amount of information on the Internet...



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TRUSTABILITY

Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

of

İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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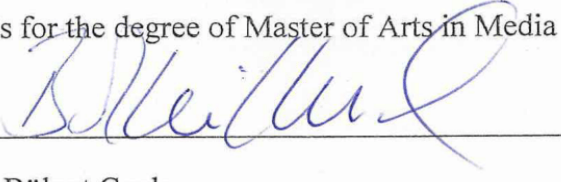
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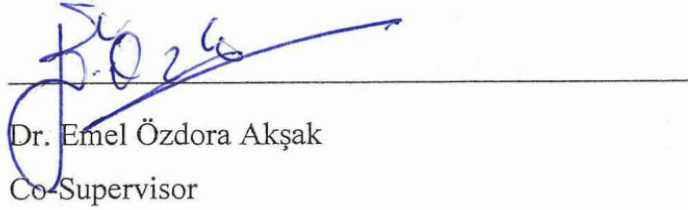
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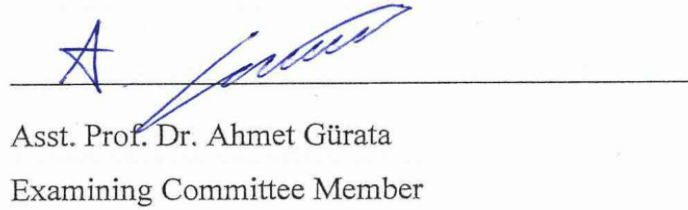
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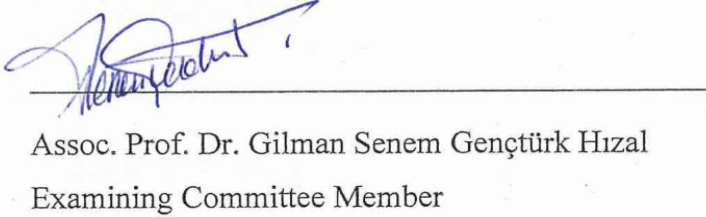
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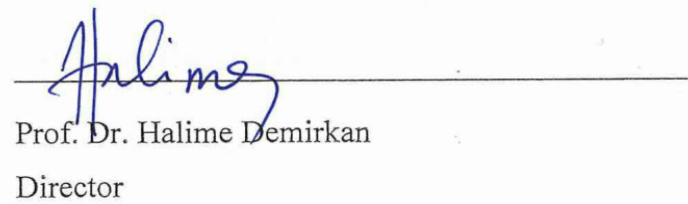
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ABSTRACT

SPONSORED CONTENT AS A TWO-EDGED SWORD: DETERMINANTS OF ITS CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTABILITY

Altun, Ipek

M.A., in Media and Visual Studies

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Bülent Çaplı

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December 2016

This thesis aims to examine the perceived credibility and trust assessments of sponsored content regarding the image of a sponsored brand. This examination consists of two-legged studies. By using a between-subjects experiment design, the first study compared the perceived credibility and trust assessments of an editorial content and a sponsored content. The findings show that Turkish participants find sponsored content as credible and trustable as editorial content. The second study explored perceived credibility and trust assessments of two sponsored contents, one belonging to a global technology brand and the other sponsored by a local telecommunications brand which recently experienced a reputation crisis. It also investigated image assessments of these brands. The results revealed that there is no difference between two brands in terms of perceived credibility assessments of their sponsored contents. The images of both brands are positively correlated with the perceived credibility of their sponsored contents. The impact of experiencing a reputation crisis only becomes evident when rating the image of the local brand in question. Those who had information about the reputation crisis rate the image of local brand lower compared to the ones who did not have

information about the reputation crisis. However, there is no difference between the images of two brands, and people tend to trust more the sponsored content of the local brand. Additionally, both studies briefly examined the ability of noticing sponsored content and the results displayed that majority of participants are able to notice what they read is a sponsored content.

Keywords: Brand Image, Credibility, Native Advertising, Sponsored Content, Trust



ÖZET

İKİ UCU KESKİN BİR KILIÇ OLARAK SPONSORLU İÇERİK: İTİBARINI VE GÜVENİLİRLİĞİNİ BELİRLEYEN ETKENLER

Altun, Ipek

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

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Bu tez, sponsorlu markanın imajını göz önünde bulundurarak sponsorlu içeriğin algılanan itibar ve güven değerlendirmelerini incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu inceleme iki ayaklı çalışmadan oluşmaktadır. İlk çalışma, denekler arası tasarım yöntemini kullanarak, editoryal içerikle sponsorlu içeriğin algılanan itibar ve güven değerlendirmelerini kıyaslamıştır. Buna göre Türkiye’deki katılımcılar sponsorlu içeriği editoryal içerik kadar itibarlı ve güvenilir bulmuştur. İkinci çalışma, biri küresel teknoloji markası diğeri de yakın zamanda bir itibar krizi yaşamış yerel telekomünikasyon markasına ait iki sponsorlu içeriğin algılanan itibar ve güven değerlendirmelerini araştırmıştır. Bunun yanında iki markanın imaj değerlendirmeleri de yapılmıştır. Buna göre iki markaya ait sponsorlu içeriklerin algılanan itibar değerlendirmeleri arasında bir fark bulunmamıştır. Her bir markanın imajıyla kendi sponsorlu içeriğinin algılanan itibarı arasında pozitif korelasyon saptanmıştır. İtibar krizinin etkisi ise sadece yerel markanın imaj değerlendirmesi söz konusuysen ortaya çıkmıştır. Yaşanılan krizden haberdar olanlar markanın imajını haberdar olmayanlara göre daha düşük seviyede oylamıştır. Yalnız, iki markanın imaj değerlendirmesi arasında bir farklılık olmadığı gibi katılımcıların

yerel markanın sponsorlu içeriğine daha çok güven duyduđu bulunmuştur. Ek olarak, iki çalışma da katılımcıların sponsorlu içerikleri fark edebilme becerisini incelemiş ve çođu katılımcının okuduklarının sponsorlu içerik olduğunu fark edebildiğini göstermiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Doğal Reklam, Güven, İtibar, Marka İmajı, Sponsorlu İçerik



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If people discover this thesis, it may not change their lives much. However, I am sure that, at some point of their lives, they have to know İlker elen, best known as Uzay p. His friendship and art have added quirky kind of joy to our everyday lives.

Ozan Kılı, Efsan Ouz, Ceren Balcı, Rodin Mazaheri, Ahou Mostowfi, Meri Tuncez, İclal Can, Sare Gne, Ouz Baran, Sinan Sonlu, Jason Nazarovsky, Gke zsu, Feridun Gnde, Hseyin Helvacı-olu... All is more than just a bunch of names. I am so lucky to know all these unique individuals.

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Long live COMD!



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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Online advertising has attracted the attention of advertisers as the number of Internet users has been on the rise lately. In 2016, 46 percent of the world population has an Internet connection and this fact proves that the Internet offers high numbers of audiences to advertisers. However, attitude of the audience toward online advertising is mostly negative, specifically more negative than traditional or offline advertising (Ha & McCann, 2008; Jo, 2004). A couple of studies have supported this tendency by revealing the phenomena of ad-avoidance in online advertising (Cho & Choen, 2004; Dreze & Hussherr, 2003; as cited in Howe & Teufel, 2014; Jo, 2004). The audience simply tries to avoid encountering advertisements due to their annoying, distracting and intrusive aspects and this fact is especially proven by declining click-through rates on banner advertising (Jo, 2004). Despite being one of the most common types of online advertising, the revenues of banner advertising have decreased dramatically in 2000 (Bayan 2001; as cited in Becker-Olsen, 2003) and the reasons such as lack of having strategic communications, flawed creative tactics and placement lead advertisers to question its efficiency (Dietz, 1998; Kennerdale, 2003; as cited in Becker-Olsen, 2003).

Besides the decline of interest toward banner advertising, advertisers have always been in search of finding the least annoying, distracting and intrusive advertising format. In recent years native advertising, in other words sponsored content, seems to be the new solution. Despite the disagreement on a common definition; like any other hybrid form such as content marketing or brand journalism, sponsored content fundamentally aims to create "value by offering relevant useful content for stakeholders" (Rejimersdal et al., 2005; as cited in Taiminen, Luoma-aho & Tolvanen, 2015) and "building credibility through brand and organizational identification" (Taiminen et al., 2015).

'Leary, 2000; Lamons, 2002; Neff, 2002; Fox & Geissler, 1994; as cited in Celebi, 2015). Before the rise of sponsored content, public relations professionals have pointed out the superiority of news editorials to advertising in media in terms of leading the audience to generate more trust for its message, and a considerable number of studies confirmed this superiority (Jo, 2004). This claimed superiority has been supported with some findings from the past like the audience looks out and is more motivated to read editorial content than advertising (Cameron, 1994; as cited in Howe & Teufel, 2014) or they are more skeptical toward advertising however they find editorial content more real and useful (Lamons, 2002; as cited in Celebi, 2015).

News organizations were more cautious to mix editorial content and advertising in the past (Soley & Craig, 1992; as cited in Howe & Teufel, 2014), but as digital technology has evolved and traditional brand-centered communication has become less useful in online environment (DuMars, Sithiewicz & Fogel, 2010; Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010; as cited in Celebi, 2015), both traditional and digital native news organizations have started to gain interest in integrating advertising into editorial content, in other words using sponsored content. In this way, sponsored content becomes an alternative to having additional funding for them (Wellbrock, Schnittka, 2014). A study by Online Publishers Association revealed that approximately 75 percent of its members use sponsored content (Levi, 2015).

Attitude of the audience toward sponsored contents seems more positive, especially compared to banner advertising. A couple of studies have demonstrated that the audience found sponsored content more informative, more amusing and less annoying (Tutaj & Reijmersdal, 2012; as cited in Howe & Teufel, 2014; Becker-Olsen, 2003; Tutaj, 2010). Therefore, using sponsored content comes to fore as the most effective advertising format for all advertisers, news organizations and even the audience.

Taking into consideration the integration of advertising and editorial content, sponsored content blurs the relationship between these two contents (Taiminen et al., 2015). For that reason, it has also raised some ethical issues, and professionals both from news organizations and advertising and PR agencies agreed on this aspect of sponsored content (Schauster, Ferrucci, & Neill, 2016). In this context, the main issue results from its transparency. Although some studies have showed the positive attitudes of the audience toward sponsored content, other studies have emphasized the incapability of the audience to distinguish sponsored content from editorial content (Lazauskas, 2014; Lazauskas, 2016; Levi, 2015). Even though it is assumed that they can distinguish the difference between the two, most cannot agree on a particular response especially about the creator of the content; including to what extent the brand had influence on the content (Lazauskas, 2014). When sponsored contents use non-disclosure language and do not provide enough cues, the audience naturally feels deceived by the content and this fact might even damage the credibility of the news organization (Levi, 2015), the brand (Taiminen et al., 2015) and even journalism practice since its fundamental norm is based on the separation of advertising and editorial (Schauster et al., 2016). Balasubramanian (1994; as cited in Taiminen et al., 2015) highlighted the fact that "... audiences are likely to be unaware of the commercial influence attempt and/or to process the content of such communications differently than they process commercial messages".

In accordance with all of the remarks provided above, sponsored content offers both promising and hazardous experience, especially in terms of trust and credibility, for the whole parties; news organizations, agencies and the audience. By conducting two surveys, the current thesis mainly aims to investigate the perceived credibility and trust of sponsored content among audiences in Turkey. Sponsored content practices in Turkey are not highly common compared to the United States, therefore central research questions such as "will the audience in Turkey be able to notice the sponsored content" and "to what extent will they find the content credible and trustable" may

provide distinctive findings to the literature from Turkey, as they signify a huge "unknown" right now.

The thesis consists of a two-legged study that aims to compare the perceived credibility and trust assessments of sponsored contents of a global technology company and a local telecommunications company which recently found itself in the spotlight. These two survey studies examine different aspects of sponsored contents. The first survey measures perceived credibility and trust assessment differences between a sponsored content by Samsung and an editorial content through a between group design. Perceived brand image of Samsung has been assessed as well.

On the other hand, the second survey measures the perceived credibility and trust of a sponsored content produced by a well-established local brand that recently suffered from a reputational crisis due to its support of the Ensar Foundation which was recently in the news about a child abuse scandal. The GSM service provider Turkcell has been used as the brand that provided the second sponsored content. In this second survey, the brand image of Turkcell has also been evaluated, looking at how a recent reputational crisis has impacted their company assessment. Any difference on the assessments of sponsored content of an established and global brand and another established but local brand with weakened reputation due to a crisis may provide fresh and useful insights and interesting comparative results.

Credibility and trust are the central variables for the assessments of sponsored content due to their strategic importance in advertising industry. Credibility has been regarded as one of the major elements to measure the effectiveness of advertising. Additionally, speaking specifically about sponsored content, the credibility of this type of advertising may result from the given impression of its structure due to being written by a journalist rather than a copy writer of an advertising agency. Therefore, the answer of to what extent people in Turkey find sponsored content credible

maps their tendencies while evaluating the sponsored content. Trust has carried importance for advertisers from the moment they shift from "product focus" and "sales focus" to "relationship-focus" conversation (Kumar & Gupta, 2016) and as one of the fundamental dimensions of any relationship; trust is positioned as a considerable variable for their conversations with the audience. Again, in the context of sponsored content, trust strengthens its importance by providing sufficient insights on to what extent the audience feels deceived by the content. Besides, the current thesis seems to be the first known attempt to study the perceived trust and credibility of sponsored content in Turkey.

Focusing on another missing variable in studies on sponsored content, the current thesis also attempts to study the impact of the brand image factor. As the term represents attitudes, beliefs, opinions and feelings linked to a particular brand (Cho, 2011), it may provide insights about the degree to which the audience is influenced by the brand while evaluating the perceived credibility and trust of the sponsored content. In fact, just like any other sponsorship activities, sponsored content forms an image which consists of the perception of content itself and the brand as an associated figure in the minds of the audience (Grohs & Reisinger, 2014). Therefore, the image of sponsored brand can transfer to the sponsored content. Additionally, previous studies (McKnight and Kacmar, 2006; Zha, Li & Yan, 2015) have demonstrated that credibility of a brand can affect the credibility assessment of branded product information. In connection with all of these findings, the image of a sponsored brand may reveal similar findings as well.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the definition and conceptual foundations of sponsored content. From the beginning, it underlines the complexity of its definition and portrays the development of this type of advertising along with offered models by scholars and professionals. While talking about its development, its similarity with the trend of shifting from advertising to publicity is also provided. Popularity of sponsored content mainly in Turkey and the United States is addressed. Afterwards,

the advantages and disadvantages of sponsored content are explained in detail by discussing the major findings from other studies.

Chapter 3 conceptualizes brand image and its impact as a persuasion factor. Starting with the concept of branding, this section also includes a brief history of brand image conceptualizations, dimensions of brand image, ways to measure brand image, importance of congruency factor for brand image and lastly the relationship between brand image and other related concepts.

Chapter 4 covers the conceptualizations of both credibility and trust and their relationship. Firstly, conceptualization of credibility is explained along with its primary dimensions. After signifying the distinction between credibility types which are source, message and medium; ways to study credibility are introduced. Due to the focus of this thesis on sponsored content, in this section, mainly previous studies on source and message credibility are mentioned. These studies include ones assessing the credibility of online information and advertising. Therefore, credibility of online information and advertising is elaborated in different sub-headings.

For the notion of trust, almost the same flow is used. While pointing out its various conceptualizations, preconditions, dimensions and levels of trust are explained. Process of generating trust, trust toward online information and advertising are also addressed. After mentioning the ways to measure trust in the context of advertising; the relationship between credibility and trust is explained based on previous studies as well.

Chapter 5 discusses the procedure, methodology, results and discussion of the first survey study. It also covers all hypotheses and research questions related to that study.

Chapter 6 focuses on the procedure, methodology, results and discussion of the second survey study. It consists of all hypotheses and research questions of this study along with brief information of reputation crisis experienced by Turkcell as a result of its sponsorship of the Ensar Foundation.

Lastly, Chapter 7 is devoted to the analysis of the major findings of the two studies. While functioning as overall discussion, it also mentions the limitations of two studies and offers some implications and recommendations for further research.



CHAPTER II: SPONSORED CONTENT (NATIVE ADVERTISING)

This chapter provides theoretical background on sponsored content, in other words native advertising. In fact, using sponsored content and native advertising synonymously is also controversial. Thus, this chapter not only explains this controversy but also introduces beneficial aspects of this advertising type. After mentioning the ambiguity in its definition, the chapter presents the models on sponsored content offered by scholars and professionals. Later on, the prevalence of sponsored content in Turkey and the United States along with examples from both countries is addressed. Eventually, positive and negative aspects of sponsored content are argued.

2.1. Ambiguity in the Definition

The term native advertising or sponsored content is mainly used to refer to various types of online advertising and, for now, there is no clear agreement between professionals from news organizations, advertisers and companies and also scholars on its meaning and description. The term was firstly used by investor Fred Wilson as "native monetization" in the Web at OMMA Global in 2012. Wilson aimed to define new kind of ads that are "unique and native to the experience" of a website, and subsequently CEO of Sharethrough, Dan Greenberg embraced the idea and named these types of advertising as native advertising (Wasserman, 2012; as cited in Manic, 2015).

As a global and non-profit interactive advertising and marketing organization, the definition of Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) is also worth noting here. According to this definition, native advertising is defined as "paid ads that are so cohesive with the page content, assimilated into the design, and consistent with the platform that the viewer simply feels that they belong". Yet, native advertising needs a unitary and clear definition (Levi, 2015). By having multiple types, native

advertising becomes hard to draw boundaries. Additionally, due to the classification of IAB, sponsored content is distinguished from native advertising as a sub-type of native advertising. Despite this distinction, the current thesis mainly focuses on sponsored content and mostly uses the same term for native advertising, similar to most referred academic articles. The most basic definition for sponsored content can be provided as "the integration of commercial content into editorial content" (Tutaj & van Reijmershdal, 2012; Murray, 2014) and its primary aim is to decrease the annoyance of branded content on social media in order to not irritate followers (Campbell & Marks, 2015).

Differences on the definition basically emerge from variations in production, character and placement issues. The brand, the ad agency of the brand, editors of the news organization at the request of the brands or the news organization due to their collaboration; all of them can produce sponsored content (Levi, 2015). Some news organizations, like The Guardian helped Unilever and other brands, even created "branded content studios" to "offer advertisers 'access to ... editorial assets' to help brands 'deliver compelling message' or give their content to advertisers for downstream commercial use (Levi, 2015). In traditional approach, news organizations basically reviewed and distributed commercial products given by the brand. In fact, Manic (2015) provided invaluable statistics on the creators of native advertising messages. Regarding this statistics, media agencies (76 percent) is the major creator for this type. Media owner/publisher (55 percent), creative agencies (47 percent), specialized digital agencies (27 percent), PR agencies (26 percent) and content marketing agencies (24 percent) are the other following creators of native advertising messages, but as the percentage difference may give the clue, these creators can make collaborations in some cases as well. Apart from having different meaning among different news organizations, sponsored content sometimes has different meaning within a single news organization (Lazauskas, 2014). For instance, one of the digital news organizations, Mashable,

provides two types of sponsored content. In one model, the brand has no contribution to the content but only endorses the content. Another model gives the right to create content by the brand.

Variation in character and placement issues differ due to the classifications of sponsored content. By citing Dean Moore, Murray (2014) listed the elements of sponsored content as follows; paid placement by a third party, content creation either by host publication's advertising or marketing staff or sometimes its editorial staff along with consulting the sponsor, appearance within the content/editorial stream of the host publication's site, and distinctly dissimilar form from traditional advertising. Some examples of sponsored content may include "video-content series on specific topics identified by the advertisers, content embedded into streaming material on microblogs such as Facebook and content placed in news articles that resembles products produced by the advertiser" (Murray, 2014). Still, it makes more sense to refer to these examples as native advertising as it provides a broader perspective.

2.2. Prevalence of Sponsored Content

In recent years, both traditional and noble news organizations including The Guardian, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Time, The Atlantic and Harpers have been using sponsored content just like digital news organizations such as BuzzFeed, the Huffington Post, Mashable and Gawker (Levi, 2015). Sponsored content has a considerable function for digital news organizations as playing a central part of their financial strategies (Levi, 2015), but traditional news organizations have slowly started to leave their steady politics for decades which was to build a wall between editorial departments and business-minded departments (Kaye & Quinn, 2010; as cited in Schauster et al., 2016) and adopted the idea of integration of advertising into editorial content. In this way, they create an alternative way to receive additional funding (Welbrock & Schnittka, 2014).

Yet, there are other reasons that caused sponsored content to become prevalent. A significant reason is the decline of banner advertising. Despite being one of the most common types of online advertising, the effectiveness of banner advertising has started to be questioned by both advertisers and media organizations. Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) revealed that banner advertising revenue decreased dramatically in 2000 (Bayan, 2001; as cited in Becker-Olsen, 2003). Due to mass of the banner ads exposed by the audience, flawed creative tactics and placement, and lack of having strategic communications; advertisers were convinced that banner advertising might not be the most suitable choice for them (Dietz, 1998; Kennerdale, 2003; as cited in Becker-Olsen, 2003). With its less annoying, more amusing and informative aspects, native advertising becomes a more pleasant and useful option for advertisers. Just like other hybrid forms such as brand journalism and content marketing; sponsored content also aims to create "value by offering relevant useful content for stakeholders" (Rejimersdal et al., 2005; as cited in Taiminen et al., 2015) and building credibility through brand and organizational identification" (Taiminen et al., 2015).

Debates and discussions on sponsored content were mostly prevalent in 2013. The following year was the time for advertisers to make investment to and adopt the type (Sebastian, 2014; Manic, 2015). It is predicted that firstly, New York Times launched its native-ad units or in their own words "paid posts" in January by covering an article series for Dell. The three-month campaign agreement covered placements on both native-ad units and traditional online banner ads. The page covered the sponsored post included a clear label as "Paid for and Posted by Dell" and there was another disclaimer at the bottom as "This page was produced by the Advertising Department of The New York Times in collaboration with Dell. The news and editorial staffs of The New York Times had no role in its preparation" (Sebastian, 2014). New York Times later created a brand new team for sponsored content under T Brand Studio and started to make more than 40 campaigns per year (Manic, 2015).

The Wall Street Journal was the second mainstream news organization that announced its native ads model in March. Netflix and Wired followed these two organizations in May. In the meantime, digital native media organization BuzzFeed, had already invested in editorial content starting in 2013 and it is considered the pioneer media organization for sponsored content with resting its entire business model on paid content (Weinberger, 2015; Vinderslev, 2015; Moses, 2014; as cited in Campbell & Marks, 2015). August was the year for BuzzFeed raising 50 million dollars from its native ad model (Manic, 2015). Consequently, players like Kraft and LinkedIn revealed their increased revenue as a result of their investment on sponsored content. More specifically, "The Guardian launched a "branded content and innovation agency" and a partnership with the company Unilever". A study by Online Publishers Association demonstrated that almost 75 percent of their members use sponsored content (Levi, 2015).

In a way, the very first attempts of sponsored content can be seen as the latest outcome of the propensity for "shift from ad to public relations, especially to publicity". Starting from mid-90's, several studies have witnessed this shift (Hausman, 2003; Watson, 1997; Sanders, 2002; Harris, 1994; Schrage, 2000; Kolah, 2001; Kitchen, 1993, 1996; O'Leary, 2000; Lamons, 2002; Neff, 2002; Fox & Geissler, 1994; as cited in Celebi, 2015) and, in the meantime, PR professionals have insisted on the preeminence of news editorial over advertising in media (Jo, 2004). This preeminence of news editorial over advertising was even supported by a couple of studies. Due to the findings of these studies, the audience looks out and is motivated to read editorial content more rather than advertising (Cameron, 1994; as cited in Howe & Teufel, 2014) or they are more skeptical on advertising but find editorial content more real and useful (Lamons, 2002; as cited in Celebi, 2015). A couple of earlier studies confirmed these findings by indicating that news editorial might provide a more positive attitude (Petty, Caccipo & Schumann, 1983; Salmon et al., 1985; Jo, 2004). In this regard, sponsored content benefits from such advantages that editorial content provides.

This shift from advertising to public relations seems reasonable since the primary goal of public relations is building relationship and generating goodwill for the organization whereas for marketing, the goal is mainly selling products and services (Wilcox et al., 2003; as cited in Jo, 2004). However, as a type of advertising which mainly aims to "conceal the persuasive intent of the commercial message embedded in them.. by means developing pleasurable, flow-inducing and less intrusive formats" (Murray, 2014), it is hard to classify what sponsored content offers simply either as marketing or public relations practices. In fact, despite its similar approach by integrating advertising into editorial content, sponsored content seems to be more associable with marketing practice. Besides, most of the time sponsored content is described as paid content like advertising, but when media organizations write the content, it resembles publicity (Campbell, Cohen & Ma, 2014). Therefore, in the context of association with either advertising or publicity/public relations activity, sponsored content stays in between due to its relative nature. Eventually, the act of integration of advertising into editorial content is fundamentally derived from "the convergence of advertorial concepts and social media environment" (Campbell & Marks, 2015). Traditional brand-centered communication became less productive in social media environment (DuMars, Sithiewicz & Fogel, 2010; Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010; as cited in Celebi, 2015) when social media offered advertisers a new potential to reach a massive number of audiences at a minimal expense. After advertisers got used to an environment where the audience can prefer to follow or unfollow the brand easily, their approach to communication with the audience has evolved in news organizations. In this way, the audience has no privilege to run away from the message of the brand because, in theory, they are mostly ignorant about the content they read is either created or sponsored by a brand (Lazauskas, 2014; as cited in Campbell & Marks, 2015).

2.3. Offered Models for Sponsored Content

As disagreement on the definition of sponsored content is evident, different classifications can be easily made on the types as well. The most established classifications on the types of sponsored content belong to Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB). Under the name of native advertising, they offer six major types; in-feed units, paid search units, recommendation widgets, promoted listings and in-ad with native element units.

In-Feed Units represents "promoted articles in the normal feed section of the publication, with or without a guaranteed placement or surrounding context, written in standard editorial style" (Manic, 2015). They have disclosure language with labels such as "Advertisement/AD", "Promoted (by)", "Sponsored (Content)", "Presented by", "Suggested Post". Media organizations like Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Sharethrough, BuzzFeed, Gawker, Forbes BrandVoice, Mashable use this type. Paid Search Units refers to "special search results on the right column or in a different writing style (at the beginning of the result or inserted in the list) and designed to attract a little more attention and with a guaranteed placement" (Manic, 2015). They generally use disclosure language; for instance, label of "Ads related to...". This type mainly appeals to search engines. Recommendation Widgets stand for "sponsored ads in the column or cassette with the recommended articles" (Manic, 2015). They generally use disclosure language along with phrases like "You might like...", "Recommended by...", "Sponsored Content by...". Promoted Listings presents "special products in the list of results designed by the client specifications" (Manic, 2015). Their disclosure language is spotted by labels like "Ads", "Sponsored Products", "What's This?". Companies like Amazon, Google, Foursquare and AutoTrader benefit from this type. In-Ad with Native Element Units identifies "ads placed outside the editorial articles, containing relevant material and measured on brand metrics" (Manic, 2015).

Apart from having disclosure language, with cues like different borders and other elements, they have a distinctive style compared to the rest of the page. Regardless of these six types, custom elements that are specific to their platforms are also an indicator of native advertising.

In need of clarifying and understanding the new structures coming out with online advertising, Campbell and his colleagues (2014) attempted to define the brand-related content types by creating a typology. They developed this typology based on "collecting first-hand information from leading social media platforms, scouring articles and discussions in periodical and industry professionals". Typology in question built its structure mainly on answering the questions about creator of the content and payment type for the content creation and/or its placement. In marketing and advertising literature, sponsored content and native advertising represent the same phenomenon. However, Campbell and his colleagues (2014) separate these two notions based on creator of the content and payment case. Due to their typology, sponsored content represents paid content created by news media whereas the unpaid version of it is described as editorial content. This classification definitely shows that the line between sponsored content and editorial content is very fine. The paid content created by collaboration of the brand and news media is named as branded content. Native advertising, unlike the definition of Interactive Ad Bureau (IAB), is also defined as unpaid content created by the brand. They elaborated these classifications by proposing the following definitions for each;

"Native advertising: Permission-based brand or product-related communications originating from a brand that occur within a consumer's social network feed. No payment placement in time or space occurs as the content is organically propagated to a brand's social network followers." They gave example of "postings by Starbucks on their Facebook page".

"Branded content: Content produced by the news media but for which a brand has some degree of editorial control. Payment for placement in time or space is made. Editorial control is shared

between the brand and the news organization." The example for this content was "The Harper's Bazaar new #TheList editorial feature that will showcase emerging trends. In exchange for a sponsorship, brands are able to place some of their products on the list."

"Editorial content: Content wholly produced by the news media and over which a brand has no direct or indirect influence. No payment for placement is made. Full editorial control rests with the news organization. Any unbiased and unsponsored article can be an example."

"Sponsored content: Content wholly produced by the news media but whose creation is in exchange for display advertising placement by the sponsoring brand. Consideration of some kind is made by the brand. Full editorial control rests with the news organization." Example: "Mini sponsored a list of "25 Places That Look Not Normal, But Are Actually Real" on BuzzFeed. Automobiles were not featured in the list" (Campbell et al., 2014)

Following year, with another colleague Campbell (2015) made another distinction on sponsored content. While they referred to the type as native advertising, their new suggestions were based on the secrecy degree of the content. Due to this distinction, some native advertisements do not reveal their sources or reveal it in a very minimal way. The degree of this revelation affects the perspective of readers as the content is from another source or they are not aware that they come face to face with one form of paid advertising (Campbell & Marks, 2015). In that manner, native advertising is separated into two forms as secretive native advertisement and non-secretive native advertisement. Secretive native advertisements tend to be successful in the short term, but they may destroy the trust of readers in both the brand and the publisher. Non-secretive native advertisements provide benefits in the long term by satisfying the need to maintain an audience. Aside from being non-secretive, the best native advertisements are likely to be "invited" by readers. It means that advertisements have the readers' consent, either explicitly or implicitly, to get updates from a brand (Campbell & Marks, 2015). Some give their consent by becoming friends with or following the brand on social networks actively, others are exposed to the content with the functions of the social

network structure, for instance brand supported suggested contents or shares on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so forth.

Although, these kinds of typologies or classification provided detailed and fresh definitions, most of these forms in questions are not suitable to make that kind of precise distinctions by the audience. Most of the time, the audience is incapable of learning the information whether the content in question is prepared by the brand or news media or both, and they do not have any idea about any payment regulation required for the content they consumed. Also, news organizations can have different regulations for the payment and the creator factors. Therefore, instead of focusing on especially the detailed and renewed classifications of typology suggested by Campbell and his colleagues (2014), as aforementioned, the current thesis prefers to commit to general tendency to take sponsored content as the equivalent phrase for native advertising.

2.4. Sponsored Content in Turkey

Starting from 2014, the native advertising trend has spread to Turkey as well. Native advertising platforms and networks like EngageYa, Taboola, Ligatus, ReklamNative, Adrazzi provide service to offer relevant content for the target audience or make placements of "suggested contents" on the websites of publishers.

Onedio, the first and the biggest social content platform in Turkey, is the prominent media organization that uses native advertising as effectively as BuzzFeed. Like Onedio, other social content platforms like Listelist, Line.do are also known for using native advertising. Apart from these platforms which mainly publish content in "listicle" format, other digital media organizations also benefit from native advertising. Ekşi Şeyler, Webrazzi, Sosyalmedya.co, Bigumigu and Zaytung are blogs that offer both native advertising and specifically sponsored content. Mynet, as

the leader internet platform and digital news organization in Turkey, has created a content studio exclusively for native advertising campaigns.

For mainstream media organizations, sponsored content seems to be not a preferable type. Among mainstream media organizations under the conglomerates in Turkey, only Digital Advertising and Sales Group Vice President of Doğan Media Group, Haymi Behar highlighted the importance of native advertising (Behar, 2014). Nevertheless, as a representative of Hürriyet Newspapers, which also belongs to Doğan Media Group, Gupse Ozgur stated that especially sponsored content is not much common in Turkey (personal communication, 29 October 2016). As a news organization which primarily aims to provide the latest news, Hürriyet has used only a few sponsored articles and while using this model, they pay special attention to create informative and research based articles.

Some global platforms, like the community of story writers and readers Wattpad, have started to offer sponsored stories in Turkey as well. At the end of 2015, global Turkish jeans brand MAVI was the first advertiser to release story content after collaboration with the famous Brazilian blogger Vini Uehara on Wattpad (Erdemir, 2015). For promoting Galaxy A 2016 series, Samsung Turkey was the second brand to use Wattpad (Erkilic, 2016).

While considering these examples, it can be said that people in Turkey, especially young generation, due to being the target audience of most of these publishers, tends to be familiar with native advertising and sponsored content. However, it can be claimed that the perception of sponsored content may directly equal to listicle format since the most popular publisher using native advertising in Turkey is Onedio and its rivals. Despite being the prominent examples in their fields, blogs like Webrazzi, Zaytung and Bigumigu do not publish sponsored articles frequently and these blogs are still considered as "niche" in the media ecosystem. Therefore, a considerable part of

the population might be unfamiliar with sponsored content and the ones who are familiar with it might only be aware of content with "listicle" format. Two studies conducted for the current thesis, have used sponsored article formats which is more similar to journalistic content, but people in Turkey might be less familiar with this format compared to "listicles".

2.5. Global and Local Examples of Sponsored Content

In this section, global and local examples belonging to in-feed unit types of native advertising due to the classification of Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB), in other words sponsored content, are examined. As aforementioned, in-feed units cover promoted articles which are written in standard editorial style within the publication.



Figure 1. Top Page of the First Paid Post of New York Times Sponsored by Netflix's Original Series Orange Is The New Black

The content of the New York Times called "Women Inmates: Why the Male Model Doesn't Work" for the campaign of Netflix's original series Orange Is the New Black is considered as one of the first and prominent global examples of sponsored content. This content informed the audiences about the women workers in American prisons in a detailed way. As a sophisticated example, it did not only cover some factual information about these workers including expert opinion and statistical information textually, but also provided an exclusively produced short film for the content and audio recordings of ex-prisoners.

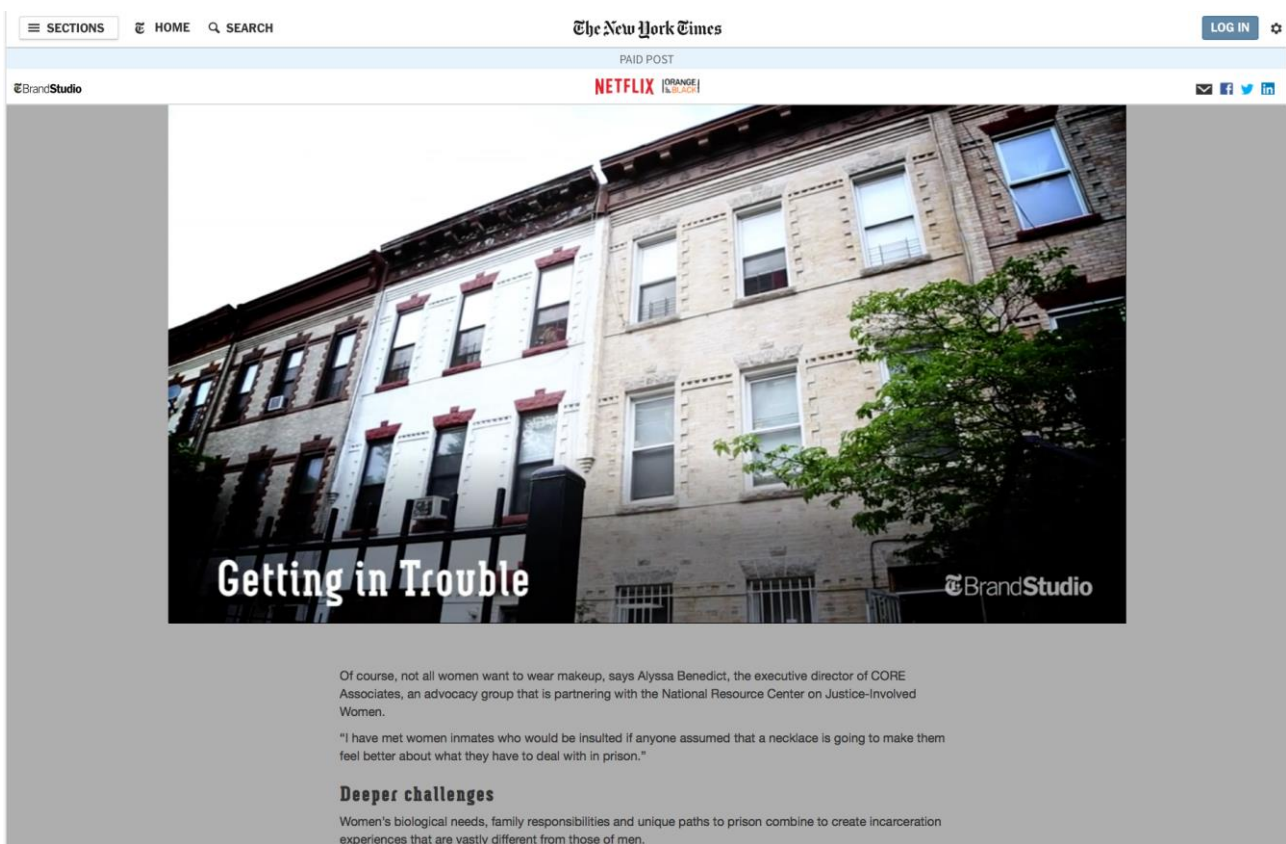


Figure 2. Page Design of the First Paid Post of New York Times Sponsored by Netflix's Original Series Orange Is The New Black

While informing about the environmental and social conditions women workers experienced in the prison, the content briefly mentioned the author of the prison memoir Orange Is The New Black which is the inspiration source of the Netflix's original series in question. Still, the whole purpose

of the content was to create awareness about the challenging lives of these women and offer solutions for their problems.

The page design of the content clearly indicated to the reader what they read is a sponsored content. The label of "paid post" and the logos of Netflix and Orange Is The New Black were positioned at the top of the page. The logo of the creator of the content T Brand Studio was apparent both in the left corner of the page and on the right corner of the videos. Additionally, at the bottom of the page, a banner informed about the streaming opportunity of the second season of Orange Is The New Black.

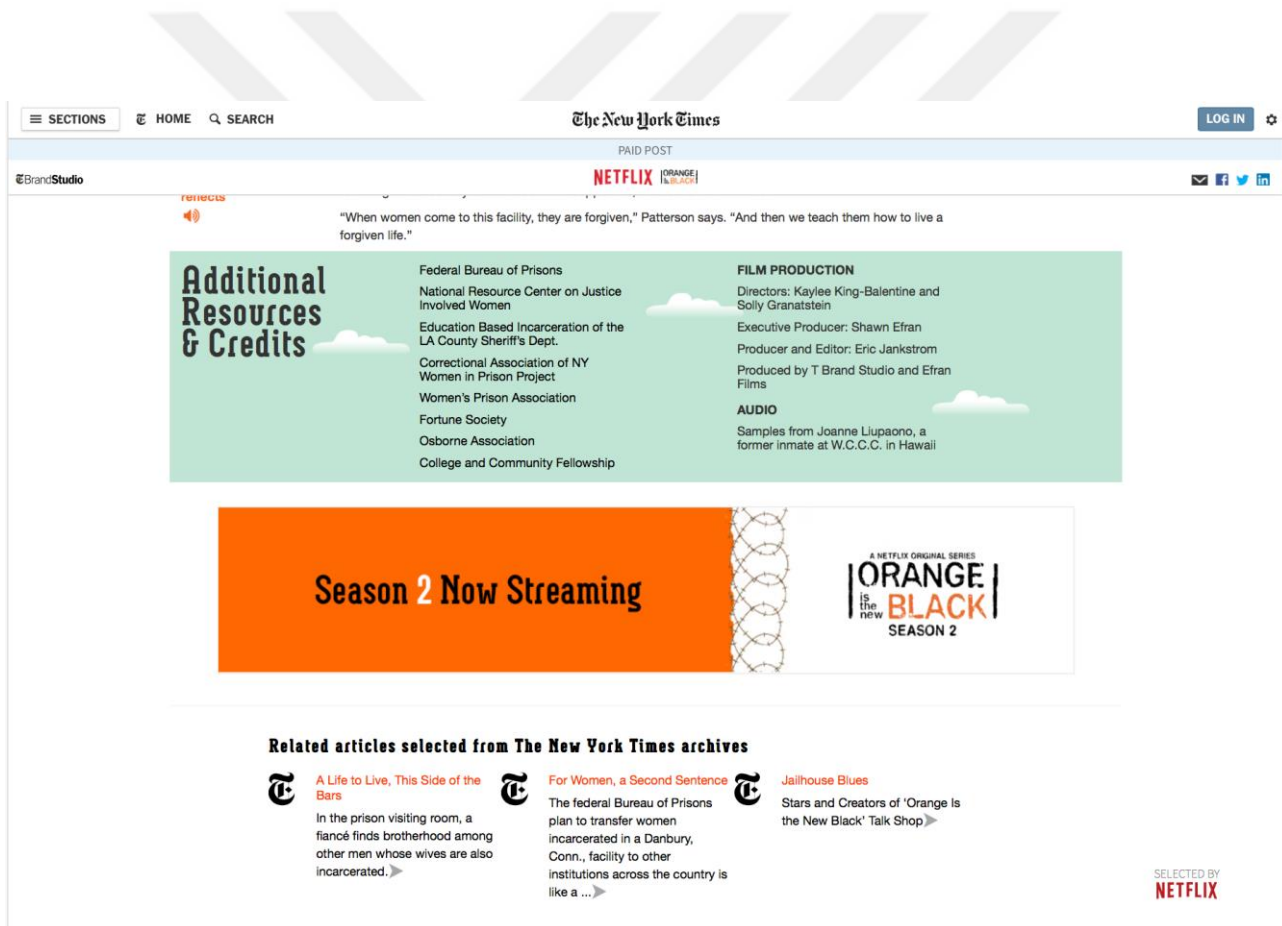


Figure 3. Bottom Page of the First Paid Post of New York Times Sponsored by Netflix's Original Series Orange Is The New Black

For local examples of sponsored contents, articles released on the website of Hürriyet and Zaytung can be given.



Figure 4. Top Page of the Content of Hürriyet Sponsored by ASÜD

Among few examples of sponsored content on Hürriyet, the content sponsored by ASÜD, Association of Dairy Milk and Dairy Products Traders, seems to be the most comprehensive piece in terms of informativeness. The content essentially aimed to provide information about the criteria for healthy milk and some frequently asked details about dairy milk consumption.



Figure 5. Page Design of the Content of Hürriyet Sponsored by ASÜD

Regarding the design of the content, big visuals embedded in the background were accompanied by an informative text. At the top and right corner of the page, there was a label "sponsored" and both under the headline and at the bottom of the page, the reader could see the logo of ASÜD with the note of "with the contributions of ASÜD". At the last part of the content, a webpage of ASÜD covering elaborated information about dairy milk and products was mentioned.

Figure 6. Bottom Page of the Content of Hürriyet Sponsored by ASÜD

For the common examples on blog-based websites, Zaytung is an ideal candidate. Hakan Bilginer, the founder of Zaytung, told that they offer sponsored content both in article and listicle formats (personal communication, 24 October 2016). With the purpose of creating satirical news, Zaytung mainly offers satirical or both satirical and informative contents.

For the content they created for the well-known insurance brand Anadolu Hayat Emeklilik, the story was about the tendency of a college freshman to make retirement insurance so early that he became a humor material due to his unexpected decision compared to his peers. The program offered by Anadolu Hayat Emeklilik and the brand were only mentioned in the first two paragraphs as insurance service preferred by the freshman in question.

REKLAM

Üniversite 1. Sınıfta Bireysel Emeklilik Yaptıran Burak Dinçok (18) Ayvalık'tan Yazlık Bakmaya Başladı

Anadolu Hayat Emeklilik'in 18-25 yaş arasına özel **Genç Emeklilik Planı** kapsamında ayda 70 liraya bireysel emeklilik yaptıran üniversite öğrencisi Burak Dinçok cephesinde yüzler gülüyor. Şimdiden emeklilik havasına giren gencin Ayvalık'tan yazlık bakmaya başladığı piyasasını araştırmaya başladığı öğrenilirken, el radyosundan 1. Lig maçı takip etmeye başladığı da gelen bilgiler arasında.

Okeye bekleyecekler...

Geçtiğimiz yıl ODTÜ Mimarlık bölümünü kazanan Burak Dinçok, genç yaşına rağmen uzun vadeli planlarıyla adından söz ettirmeye devam ediyor. Geçtiğimiz günlerde **Anadolu Hayat Emeklilik**'ten bireysel emeklilik yaptıran başarılı genç, arkadaşlarının 'Ya olm daha yaşı kaç, başın kaç?' şeklindeki takılmalarına aldırmadan Ayvalık'tan yazlık bakmaya başladı bile. Dinçok, en kısa zamanda emekliliğine, yazlığına ve öğleden sonra kendisini okeye bekleyen komşularına kavuşmak arzusunda.

Önce emeklilik sonra sevgili

Öğle yemeği için geldiği ODTÜ Çarşısı'nda basın mensuplarına konu hakkında kısa bir değerlendirme yapan genç mimar aday; öğrenim kredisi, burslar ve ailesinden aldığı paralarla önemli bir maddi güce ulaştığını belirterek şöyle devam etti:

"Herkesin gelecek planları, gelecekte beklentileri ayrı. Benimki Ayvalık'ta yazlığım olsa, sabahın kör vakti kalkıp denize giresem, dönüşte yolda gördüğüm herkese 'deniz çarşaf' gibiydi çocuklar kaçırdınız valla' desem, sonra torunlarım gelse, bahçeye hortum tutsam, akşam güzel bir mangal yapsam... Böyle şeyler? Tamam, henüz bir sevgilim bile yok ama şu yazlık işi hallolsun, sevgili-evlilik-çocuk ve torun işlerinin kendiliğinden çözüleceğini düşünüyorum. Bu konuda yüreğim çok ferah. Önce emeklilik gelir, sonra sevgili"

Ayvalık Emlakçılar Odası memnun

ODTÜ'lü genç mimar adayını en çok takdir eden kurum ise Ayvalık Emlakçılar Odası oldu. Oda Başkanı Nafiz İncesu (71), Ayvalık'ın Türkiye'de 'Emekliliğin Başkenti' olduğunu vurgularken, Burak Dinçok gibi gençlerin sayısının artmasını dilediklerini belirtti. İncesu "Bakin inanın yazlık satmak ikinci planda, mühim olan şu güzel ilçemizin yaş ortalamasını bir nebze olsun düşürebilmek. Yeter valla Nafiz, İbrahim, Hüseyin, Şadi... Biraz havamız değişsin. Yeni nesil emekliler görelim" diyerek genç emekli adayıyla birlikte ATM önünde maaş kuyruğu beklemeyi ipe çektiklerini kaydetti.

Son olarak Dinçok'tan Ayvalık'a gelirirken bol miktarda sıcak su torbası getirmesini isteyen İncesu, gencin bir de ilçedekileri dönüşümlü olarak sağlık ocağına götürmesi halinde

HALKIN SESİ

Erdoğan: "Ben Türkiye'nin tamamını kontrol eden başmuhtarım..."

"Bir gün 'Ben başpehlivanım' diyerek ortaya atlayacak ve hepimiz *Tosun Paşa* izler gibi alkışlayacağız. Hayal değil, çok yakında..."

SON DAKİKA! by radore

- > Yılın ilk karı Instagram'a yağdı...
- > Güvenlik endişesi taşıyan Napoli taraftarlarına Emniyet'ten rahatlatan uygulama: Kafiye Yozgat'a götürülecek, maç dev ekranda izletilecek...
- > Hürriyet.com.tr, başlığından haber içeriğini anlayan üç şanlı okuyucusunu o ülkeye tatile gönderiyor...
- > Çin'deki kömür madeninde meydana gelen grizu patlamasında sadece 13 kişinin ölmesi üzerine harekete geçen Çin hükümeti Türkiye modeli için düğmeye bastı...
- > Yeşilçam yıldızının cenazesi, yine bir sürü eski sevgiliyi bir araya getirdi...

FOTOHABER

Figure 7. Page Design of the Content of Zaytung Sponsored by Anadolu Hayat Emeklilik

In terms of the page design the background of the content, as being purple, was different than the other editorial contents on the website. Additionally, at the top and right corner of the content, there was a label as "advertorial". Zaytung then developed its page design for sponsored content as excluding the different background color and changing the label "advertorial" into "sponsored" (personal communication, 24 October 2016).

2.6. Advantages and Disadvantages of Sponsored Content

Some of the advantages of sponsored content are related to the reasons of its prevalence. First of all, declining interest toward banner advertising can be mentioned. As aforementioned, due to the drastic revenue decline in 2000 (Bayan, 2001; as cited in Becker-Olsen, 2003) and some facts like flawed creative tactics and placement and lack of having strategic communications (Dietz, 1998; Kennerdale, 2003; as cited in Becker-Olsen, 2003), banner advertising has started to lose its effectiveness in the eyes of both advertisers and audiences. Banner advertising is sometimes found as the proof of negative attitude toward online advertising compared to offline advertising (Ha & McCann, 2008; Howe & Teufel, 2014). This fact is supported by declining click-through rates of banner advertising (Howe & Teufel, 2014).

Sponsored content is a promising type of advertisement to prevent increased avoidance of online advertising which is proved by many studies (Cho & Choen, 2004; Dreze & Hussherr, 2003; as cited in Howe & Teufel, 2014; Levi, 2015). Some studies confirmed this potential of sponsored advertising. Firstly, Becker-Olsen (2003) indicated the effectiveness of sponsored content for web communities and advertisers. Her findings suggested that sponsored content is more preferable in terms of its power of increasing feelings of customer responsiveness, product quality, category leadership and purchase intention. With a sample age ranging from 18 to 31, Tutaj and Reijmersdal

(2012) also pointed out that the audience is less skeptical toward sponsored content rather than banner advertising. This sample from the Netherlands also found subtle sponsored content more informative, more amusing and less annoying. Tutaj confirmed these findings in her previous study as well (2010). These studies affirmed that sponsored content can be an ideal candidate for the search of the advertiser's the least annoying, distracting and intrusive advertising type.

Just like other hybrid forms such as brand journalism, content marketing; sponsored content also aims to create "value by offering relevant useful content for stakeholders" (Rejimersdal et al., 2005; as cited in Taiminen et al., 2015) and building credibility through brand and organizational identification" (Taiminen et al., 2015). Besides, producing content which looks like it was created by journalists can transfer the credibility deserved by journalists (Carlson, 2015b; as cited in Schauster et al., 2016). As part of the study of Schauster and her colleagues (2016), 56 participants including journalists, advertising and marketing communications executives with having different years of experience stated their opinions on sponsored content. Marketing communications executives found sponsored content as a "beneficial storytelling tool" especially if it is created well (Schauster et al., 2016). According to comments in this study, an advertising executive confessed that apart from the news organization, sponsored content also helps to generate revenue for both the agency and advertiser. Therefore, this type of advertising becomes a kind of "cash cow" for all parties.

The same study with journalists, ad and marketing communications executives also revealed the dark side of sponsored content. Before this study, transparency has been showed as its most hazardous side (Murray, 2014; Lazauskas, 2014; Sebastian, 2014; Levi, 2015; Campbell & Marks, 2015; Taiminen et al., 2015). Aside from journalist, considerable number of advertising and marketing communications executives also agreed when transparency is lacking, the type creates a significant ethical problem (Schauster et al., 2016). Most participants of the study regarded

sponsored content as unethical due to two inclusive reasons. The first is the deceptive nature of sponsored content and the second is the fact that most of the audience is incapable of figuring out the distinction between editorial content and sponsored content. Literature on sponsored content also highlighted these types of criticisms and their central idea stems from "masking source attribution and deceiving consumers" (Joel, 2013; Vega, 2013; Wasserman, 2013; as cited in Campbell & Marks, 2015). Executives from the brand side admitted that the practices of sponsored content can be quite tricky and its best examples are the ones that look like created by journalists. According to this, the ideal examples can be thought as the ones which can easily make the audience feel deceived as a result of their unawareness. Actually, some claimed that lack of awareness of the audience strengthens the performance of sponsored content compared to banner advertising. (Campbell & Marks, 2015). Still, some executives also believed that cues on placement and creator should be explicit since the audience is unable to detect the difference (Schauster et al., 2016).

Actually, a recent study done by IAB showed that most participants do not understand what ads constituted sponsored content while looking at the mock sponsored content. Another finding from the Blurred Lines workshop reflected that readers do not totally understand the type of disclosure language and cues used in native advertising (Levi, 2015). Another survey done with 542 US internet users aged 18-25 demonstrated that even the audience does not have a clear and mutual answer on sponsored contents. Majority of them (52 percent) thought sponsored content is different than the content paid by advertiser to be created and had an effect on it (Lazauskas, 2014). The main view on feeling deception supported aforementioned concerns as two-thirds of them told sponsored content makes them feel deceived. When they became aware of the content has sponsor, they started to feel deceived and this situation brought confusion and anger to the audience (Lazauskas, 2014; Sebastian, 2014; Campbell & Marks, 2015) and worst outcomes mainly for the advertiser and news organizations in the long term. Therefore, it is better to put in this way that the

best examples are invited by the audience, use disclosure language and are explicit on the source (Campbell & Marks, 2015).

Deception resulting from the structure of sponsored content can also have a negative impact on the credibility of news organizations, the brand and even the practice of journalism (Taiminen et al., 2015; Schauster et al., 2016). It is even taken as a threat for the democratic role of news organizations and independent journalistic decision of editors on agenda coverage (Levi, 2015). Apart from deception potential due to the blurry line between editorial content and sponsored content, sponsored content brings out other issues specifically for the brand and news organizations. Taking into consideration of survey report by Association of National Advertisers in January 2015, main concerns raised on native advertising are unfamiliarity of the model for the audience (55 percent), budget concerns (32 percent), transparency concerns (27 percent), limited reach (18 percent) and lack of creative resources (18 percent) (Manic, 2015).

The current thesis only focuses on the perceived credibility and trust assessment of sponsored content among young people in Turkey. In this way, the findings of a sample which are expected less familiar to sponsored content compared to the population of the United States, may give interesting insights to reveal the advantages and disadvantages of sponsored content. Out of their perceived credibility and trust assessments, the effectiveness of used sponsored contents for the two studies can be evaluated as well or reversely these studies can give new insights or support previous findings about the best sponsored content examples.

CHAPTER III: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF BRAND IMAGE

Brand image is one of the central variables of the two studies included in this thesis. During perceived credibility and trust assessments of sponsored content, brand image might have a potential to function as a source element. Therefore, this chapter is dedicated to the concept of brand image. After providing brief information about branding, the concept of brand image is addressed with sub-headings such as conceptualization of brand image, dimensions of brand image, ways to measure brand image, importance of congruency factor evaluating brand image and eventually the link between brand image and other related concepts.

3.1. Branding

Branding is basically creating a name, symbol or both to distinguish the goods or services of vendor(s) from its/their rivals (Aaker, 1996; Kotler, 2000; as cited in Wijaya, 2013). It functions as a promise for the consumers to maintain a relationship with them, ideally based on trust (Morel, 2013; as cited in Wijaya, 2013). In order to develop that kind of relationship, branding covers several steps which either start with product or concept development. When product development is taken as the starting point, development of intangible factors like brand personality, brand mission and values is made around the properties, benefits and elements of the product. If starting point is concept development, then tangible factors like elements and functional benefits of the product derive from intangible factors that symbolize the elements addressing psychological needs of the consumers (Wijaya, 2013). Either way, branding is not made to solely make profit out of the product or service but address wished values and needs of consumers as well. At this point, wished values and needs signify the combination of functional, affective benefits of consumers. Consumers can experience these offers through direct experience or several communication activities of the brand like advertising and/or public relations campaigns, the attitude of employees or total

performance of the brand (Wijaya, 2013). In terms of brand communication, branding has particular levels under the term of "hierarchy of branding". These levels are brand awareness, brand knowledge, brand experience, brand loyalty and brand spirituality. Almost all these levels can be investigated considering brand image factor, but the current thesis does not have such an aim.

3.2. Brief Conceptualization of Brand Image

Starting from 1950s, brand image has become a matter that needs to be conceptualized. Before mentioning the definitions provided by scholars in 1950s, it can be interesting to start with the conceptualization of one of the legendary advertising executives David Ogilvy. In 1955, in a speech made for the American Marketing Association, he defined brand image as "the picture people carry around in their heads of a brand, it is the intangible sum of a product's attributes: its name, packaging and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it's advertised" (Biel, 1991; as cited in Wijaya, 2013). In parallel with this speech, scholars had begun to realize that a brand can cover several associations (Newman, 1957; as cited in Lee, James & Kim, 2014). Therefore, they mentioned psychological and social aspects of the products (Gardner & Levy, 1955) like attitudes, opinions and feelings represented by them and even the potential of brands as an indicator of the personality of consumers (Martineau, 1957). Aside from defining brand image as the sum of impressions consumers have, the emphasis on "being a symbol" started in 1960s. Nevertheless, scholars did not pay attention to use different conceptualizations for brand and product image in terms of their benefits. At that time, they also used the words product and good synonymously. (Pohlman & Mudd, 1973). As of 1980s, conceptualizations were still mostly made on product qualities but the popularity of symbolic aspect of brand image raised attention to details like meanings (Durgee & Stuart, 1987; as cited in Lee et al., 2014; Reynolds & Gutman, 1984; Friedmann & Lessig, 1987), messages (Swartz, 1983) and personality (Hendon & Williams, 1985; as cited in Lee et al., 2014) of the brand. The separation of product image and brand image was

made in 1990s by handling product or service image as a part of brand image. The most approved conceptualization of brand image both in 1990s and general belongs to Keller (1993). Keller conceptualized brand image as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" within the framework of associative network model. This model suggested that information about concepts, objects and relationships in our memory is symbolized by links and nodes. According to the model, concepts and objects are indicated by nodes whereas links refer to relationships (Park, 2009; Salinas & Perez, 2009). In this context, positivity or negativity of the relationship between consumers and the brand can be evaluated based on the brands and its associations in the memory of consumers. Despite the long history of the conceptualization of brand image, definitions of the concept are still found conflicting (Lee, James & Kim, 2014). Nevertheless, contemplating the previous conceptualizations with contemporary definitions may provide a better vision for brand image. In this regard, one of the most contemporary definitions provided by Lee her colleagues (2014) offer a substantial ground for the understanding of brand image as "the sum of a customer's perceptions about a brand generated by the interaction of the cognitive, affective and evaluative processes in a customer's mind".

While talking about brand image, it is beneficial to mention the conceptualization of corporate image as well. Just like product or service image, the separation between brand image and corporate image was firstly made in 1990s. At that time, Haedrich (1993; as cited in Francoeur, 2004) roughly defined brand image as the experienced image of the products of a company and corporate image as the experienced total image of a company. In addition, he offered that the relationship between brand image and corporate image is compatible. Aaker (1996; Lee et al, 2014) counted corporate image as part of brand identity which is one of the dimensions of brand image. Keller (2000; as cited in Power & Whelan 2005) specifically classified corporate image as a strong position for a company to express itself without the impact of its particular products or services. In 2000s, the tendency to consider corporations as brand came out. It was thought that development of sales

channels, miscellaneous communication tools, changing dynamics of product marketing and raised global activism are some of the reasons (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004; as cited in Power & Whelan, 2005). This tendency brought up the fundamental approach of managing corporate and product branding together. In connection with the two studies examining the impact of brand image on the assessment of sponsored contents, the current thesis prefers to use brand image with its comprehensive aspect as symbolizing the overall perception of the brand including corporate and product images.

3.3. Dimensions of Brand Image

Brand image is shaped according to various factors such as brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand attitude and behavior and lastly brand benefit and competence (Wijaya, 2013). Brand identity represents tangible factors of the brand or its product; including logo, slogan, color, packaging, corporate identities and so forth. Brand personality essentially takes the brand as human in terms of characterizing it. Several studies have offered some personality traits for the brand that can be used for humans as well. For instance, Plummer (1985) indicated some adjectives like colorful, gentle, and youthful to characterize the brand as human. Competence, excitement, sincerity, sophistication are some of the terms suggested by Aaker (1997). Wijaya (2013) multiplied these adjectives by proposing examples like creative, dignified, dynamic, friendly, independent, noble, sociable and warm. Brand association covers distinguishing matters which are always relatable to a brand. These matters include particular symbols, messages or meanings of a brand, exclusive products of a brand and/or any regular activities that are highly associated with a particular brand. Brand attitude and behavior refer to the attitude and behavior of a brand during its communication with potential and existing consumers. Being ethical, honest, sympathetic, offering great service and achieving the compatibility of its words and actions are some of the attitudes that can be considered as positive.

All these dimensions are effective while assessing the image of a brand either as positive, negative or both. Lastly, brand benefit and competence stands for the prominent capabilities and superior aspects of a brand. This dimension especially concerns the solutions a brand can offer to a problem experienced by consumers, and in this way, consumers may benefit from them. In this context, due to the model offered by Keller (1993), brand benefit and competence can be classified as experiential, functional and symbolic. Among these classifications, functional and symbolic benefits are mentioned the most (Dohbi & Zinkhan, 1990; Bhat & Reddy, 1998; Sirgy & Samli, 1985; as cited in Park, 2009; Parl, Jaworski, & Macinnis, 1986; as cited in He & Lai, 2014). Functional benefit represents the physiological needs that are fulfilled by tangible characteristics of a brand, in other words product-related attributes like providing solution or safety, whereas symbolic benefit identifies itself with intangible characteristics of a brand. Intangible characteristics, as indicating non-product-related attributes, are more likely connected with the psychological needs of people like being approved, expressing themselves or being able to increase their self-esteem (He & Lai, 2014). In this context, brand image can be functioned as a relatable figure which makes people to cultivate their individual images and provides a psychological fulfilment. Experiential benefit represents the feeling of consumers while using the brand. Later, Wijaya (2013) added emotional and social benefits to literature. Similar with experiential benefit, emotional benefit depicts the affectional needs of consumers. Social benefit symbolizes the intangible needs of consumers that have positive offerings to the society or environment like empowerment projects on education, entrepreneurship, environment and health.

Brand benefit classification of Keller (1993) has brought the tendency to categorize the dimensions of brand image as cognitive, affective and sensory as well. Indeed, Keller (1993) categorized associations belonging to non-product related attributes, functional and symbolic benefits as cognitive dimension. Experiential benefits were classified both as affective and sensory dimensions

considering its link with emotional and sensory enjoyment provided by the brand and its product-related attributes. Some alternative models like the one offered by Roberts (2005) suggested cognitive, affective and sensory dimensions by using different labels as mystery, intimacy and sensuality. Due to its comprehensive structure, the current thesis prefers to consider brand image in terms of the benefit classifications of Keller (1993) and Sondoh and his colleagues (2012).

3.4. Ways to Measure Brand Image

Brand image has been measured with several techniques due to a lack of agreement (Cho, Fiore & Russell, 2014) but among them three techniques are used the most. These techniques include using "Likert-type rating scales", "ranking measures" and "pick-any brand-attribute association measures" (Driesener & Romaniuk, 2006). In Likert-type rating scales, participants give their comments on the image of a brand by rating it on 5 or 7-point scale which ranges from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The overall score of the participant estimates the attribute that the participant perceives from the brand. Ranking measures refer to assessing the image of a brand regarding its rivals. Due to this technique, participants rank the brands in connection with an attribute and each brand is positioned differently. Likert-type rating scales and ranking measures can be grouped as scaling. However, "pick-any" measures differ in terms of studying only the potential association(s) between the brand and the attribute. As sorting technique with its "free choice" nature, participants just respond the attribute and the brands they find compatible with each other. Thus, several brands can share the same attributes. Nevertheless, academic studies commonly use techniques related to scaling. Scaling techniques are more comprehensive by also studying the strength of the association(s). The current thesis also uses Likert-type rating scales for brand image measurement.

Measurement scales for brand image are constructed either as single structure (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Kwun & Oh, 2007; Ryu et al., 2008; as cited in Park, 2009) or multi-dimensional structures

(Park et al., 1986, Hsieh, 2002; as cited in Park, 2009; Sondoh, Omar, Wahid, Ismail & Harun, 2007). While measuring brand image, some of its dimensions also function as a foundation for the scales. In this regard, brand attitude (Koo, 2003; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; as cited in Sondoh et al., 2007) and brand benefit (Hsieh et al., 2004; Roth, 1995; Bhat & Reddy, 1998; as cited in Sondoh et al., 2007) can be given as example. By containing dimensions like experiential, functional and symbolic benefits, scales based on brand benefit can be counted as multi-dimensional. The current thesis also measures the image of sponsored brands based on benefit dimension of brand image with multi-dimensional structure. This preference is a result of the importance of measuring the perceived value and benefits of brand image. It was argued that measuring only the attributes on brand image does not give enough data (Na, Marshall & Keller, 1999; as cited in Sondoh et al., 2007). The original scale items used for both studies (Sondoh et al., 2007) are categorized as experiential benefit, symbolic benefit, social benefit, functional benefit and additionally appearance enhances based on the scales of Tsai (2005), Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Del Rio, Vazquez, and Iglesias (2001).

Most scales are developed considering cognitive aspects of brand image (Ismail & Spinelli, 2012; Kim, Kim & An, 2003; Lassar, Mittal & Sharma, 1995; Park & Rabolt, 2009; as cited in Cho et al., 2014), just a few scales (Chang & Chieng, 2006; Esch et al., 2006; Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001; Low & Lamb, 2000; as cited in Cho et al., 2014) contain items related to affective and sensory aspects of brand image. Items related to affective aspects include factors like excitement and fun, satisfaction of desire and overall affect. Colorfulness, freshness and sensory enjoyment are a couple of items for scales measuring sensory aspect of brand image (Cho et al., 2014). However, sensory aspects of brand image are not a necessary factor for all brand categories. The current thesis excludes scales containing sensory aspects since its main concern is to examine the potential relationship between the brand image and the assessment of sponsored content. Additionally, the brands that are mentioned in sponsored content assessments are in technology and

telecommunications categories which make them not very suitable for image assessments based on sensory aspect.

3.5. Importance of Congruency Factor Evaluating Brand Image

Apart from being one of the central topics for consumer research, image congruency has been studied to enhance perspectives on brand image. Congruity theory essentially defends that consumers pay attention to the congruence of at least two objects while making a preference of a particular brand (Lien, Wen, Huang & Wu, 2015). In the context of brand image, this theory has mostly been tested regarding the image of the brand and self-image of the consumer. However, there were a few attempts to test congruity theory between brand image and its product category (Batra & Homer, 2004), retail stores and websites as well (Lien et al., 2015). The main outcome of testing this theory is that consumers tend to choose brands which have compatible images. This compatibility can happen either between the product or service and brand or image of the consumer and the brand.

In fact, congruency of the brand image and advertising has been a crucial issue to understand the tendency to shift from advertising to publicity as well. Previous research assumed that greater congruence between the brand and the theme of advertising message influences the effectiveness of advertising positively (Dahlen, 2005; Dahlen et al., 2008; Moorman et al., 2002; as cited in Jo, 2004). Perhaps regarding this common assumption, when advertisers prefer to embed their advertising message into editorial content, they pay attention to the congruency between the image of brand and the theme of editorial content (Jo, 2004). With respect to this preference, the congruency between the image of sponsored brand and the topic of the sponsored content may also give clues for the perceived credibility and trust assessments of the sponsored content. In fact, a study which examined the congruence between brand image and website image, offered that the

congruence between these factors can be positively associated with the trust of the audience in the website (Lien et al., 2015). Therefore, the congruency between the images of sponsored brands and the topics of sponsored contents is asked to participants in order to contemplate on the results of brand image assessments.

3.6. Link between Brand Image and Other Related Concepts

Favorability, uniqueness and strength are notable matters that identify the image of a particular brand (Keller, 1993). Finding the image of a brand as favorable, unique and strong can be so vital that this judgment points out the positive impact of brand image on other factors like brand credibility (Wang & Yang, 2010), brand loyalty (Rindell & Iglesias, 2014), brand equity (Keller, 1993; Lee et al., 2014; Rindell & Iglesias, 2014), positive word of mouth (Cho & Fiore, 2015), willingness to purchase (Esch et al., 2006; as cited in Wang & Yang, 2010) or pay premium prices (Faircloth, Capella, & Alford, 2001; Lassar, Mittal & Sharma, 1995; as cited in Wang & Yang, 2010) and even satisfaction (Rindell & Iglesias, 2014).

The favorable and positive attitudes toward the image of a brand may increase brand credibility, positive word of mouth, purchase intentions, satisfaction, willingness to pay premium price, brand loyalty and accordingly enhance the level of brand equity (Lee et al., 2014; Cho et al., 2014) which represents the real value of a brand and capability to make profits as a result of its (well-deserved) recognition. In turn, brands with a high level of brand equity hold greater amount of associations (Krishnan, 1996; as cited in Schittka, Sattler & Farsky, 2013). This relationship also demonstrated that brands with high level of brand equity also have more complex knowledge framework based on stronger brand association connections (Schittka et al., 2013).

Brands exposing these kinds of attitudes, at the same time, generate permanence, distinction and trust in their market (Rindell & Iglesias, 2014). Speaking specifically for trust generation, a study found that this causation is valid for both the brand and its related activities (Carlson & O’Cass, 2009). All these points considered, maintaining favorable, positive, strong and/or unique brand image takes precedence for several companies. In this regard, the assessment of sponsored content can be influenced by the positivity, favorability, and strength level of the sponsored brand.



CHAPTER IV: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CREDIBILITY AND TRUST

While credibility and trust are positioned as factors central to persuasion process and both are crucial in terms of evaluating sponsored content whether as a promising or hazardous advertising, this chapter includes the conceptualizations of credibility and trust separately. Apart from their dimensions and types, the chapter mainly aims to highlight the tendency of people evaluating the credibility and trust of information, including online environments and information types like advertising. Ways to measure credibility and trust is also addressed. Lastly, the relationship between credibility and trust is elaborated.

4.1. Credibility

4.1.1. Brief Conceptualization of Credibility

Credibility can be introduced as either the essential component of the first step of persuasion process or "extramessage cue" for criticizing the persuasiveness of information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; as cited in Wathen & Burkell, 2002). When information is evaluated in terms of its quality, credibility is counted as a principal component (Rieh & Danielson, 2007; as cited in Savolainen, 2011). It is basically defined as believability (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). However, credibility should not be taken as an absolute component; rather it is more convenient to assess the notion as something derived from cognitive and motivational processes of people while they seek information (Guido, Prete & Sammarco, 2010). It has been studied by different disciplines like psychology, communication, philosophy and information science.

In terms of philosophy, the notion was firstly examined by Aristotle. He evaluated the meaning of credibility by the following notions separately; ethos, pathos and logos. These three notions

represent the appeal people feel based on the character of a speaker (ethos), emotion (pathos) or logic and/or reason (logos). Scholars in psychology and communication describe credibility by centering upon source credibility, in other words, the reliability of the speaker. In a way, their approach for describing credibility carries similarity with what Aristotle has meant by his notion of ethos. On the other hand, researchers in information science explain credibility in relation to the credibility of information. Regarding their way of explaining credibility, this conceptualization is similar to what Aristotle has meant by his notion of logos. (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013).

4.1.2. Types of Credibility

The literature on credibility divides it into three main types; message credibility, source credibility and medium credibility. Discussing whether a message is well-organized or unorganized is part of what message structure refers to. For instance, well-organized messages are found more credible than unorganized ones. Message content reflects the extent of a message has discrepancy within itself. Metzger and her colleagues (2003; as cited in Savolainen, 2011) described message content as "the distance between the perceived position of the source and the premessage position of the receiver". Message features also consist of factors like plausibility, internal consistency and quality of information. Additionally, cultural background and previous beliefs of the audience can affect the assessment of message credibility. Studies on the evaluation of message credibility have been notably common among media scholars as they prefer to manipulate components of a message to analyze the impact of those message components on perceived credibility (Borah, 2013; Cole & Greer, 2013; as cited in Appelman & Sundar, 2015). Speaking for the general tendencies on studying message credibility, it can be tested as a state instead of a structure or a course. Majority of studies tested message credibility at a specific occasion and took the unit of analysis as individual. Rather than as a mediator or a cause, it was offered that message credibility can be examined as an effect (Appelman & Sundar, 2015). Still measuring this effect might have unexpected results like

people can assess the credibility of the message they saw before differently (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; as cited in Appelman & Sundar, 2015). While creating an extensive scale for message credibility, Appelman and Sundar (2015) separated descriptive adjectives into two factors as formative indicators, symbolizing factors that provide message credibility, and reflective indicators, referring factors that reflect message credibility. Their model for the scale suggested that adjectives like *complete, concise, consistent, well-presented, objective, representative, no spin, expert, will have impact* and *professional* are formative indicators. For reflective indicators they proposed the adjectives *accurate, authentic* and *believable*.

Source credibility investigates the influence of personal or organizational features, more specifically communicator or author, on the believability of the information (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Many scholars have defined credibility assessment by dividing it into two main dimensions as perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis and Kelley 1953; as cited in Chung, Nam & Stefanone, 2012; Metzger, Flanagin & Zwarun; 2003). The origin of these dimensions went back to the first study on credibility by Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1953; as cited in Chung et al., 2012). If one has to explain these dimensions regarding source credibility, perceived expertise represents speaker's qualifications, and perceived trustworthiness explains the perception of speaker's motivation either to be truthful about the topic or to manipulate information for self-serving motives (Walther, Wang and Loh 2004). Perceived expertise has two main components as technical competence and practical competence (Farr, 2007; as cited in Dou, Walden, Lee & Lee, 2012). Technical competence is about the capability of having special knowledge. It is based on formal education, training, reading and academic pursuits. As for practical competence, it is achieved mainly by trial and error, including participation in activities or events. Most of the time, studies on source credibility tested its overall effects rather than manipulating source expertise and source trustworthiness separately (O'Keefe, 2002; as cited in Nan, 2013). Although both components of source credibility have positive impact on persuasion process (Ohanian, 1991;

Braunsberger, 1996; McGinnies and Ward, 1980; as cited in Nan, 2013), the effect of source expertise and source trustworthiness might differ in various situations. In fact, ever-increasing researches with more sophisticated models indicate that source credibility on persuasion process is dependent on a series of individual and circumstantial factors (Moore, Hausknecht, and Thamodaran, 1986; DeBono & Klein, 1993; Pornpitakepan, 2004; as cited in Nan, 2013). A meta-analysis by Wilson and Sherrell (1993; as cited in Wathen & Burkell, 2002) focused on factors affecting credibility perceptions and showed that when source features have an effect on credibility judgment, expertise turns out as the most crucial sub-category.

Studies related with medium credibility have handled this issue by comparing the information across media. These studies revealed outcomes like when people count on one medium compared to others, they consider the medium in question more credible than the rest (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kioussis, 2001; as cited in Kang, 2010). Separation between online and offline, in other words between new and traditional media, has been a promising topic in this context. Especially, comparisons of a particular information across different media sources is a common way to measure any credibility differences, but these studies generally lack details on how credibility judgment across media arise. Nevertheless, the current thesis does not attempt to investigate effects derived from medium differences. The results of the two studies may only be evaluated in terms of tendencies of people when consuming online information without focusing on a specific media differences.

Some studies reviewed credibility judgment based on the interaction of message, source and medium credibility types (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). The current thesis handles the credibility of sponsored content by mainly focusing on its message credibility. Still, the existence of "sponsored by" label in sponsored content also gives a chance to investigate the brand as a component of source

credibility. Therefore, this thesis also addresses the credibility assessment in terms of source partially.

4.1.3. Ways to Study Credibility

Studies on credibility have used three different ways to explore the notion. Asking people to evaluate the believability of either information or the source of information is the first and the most direct way of exploring credibility assessment. Other two ways are more implicit and are assumed by proximity measures. Knowledge change and behavior or attitude change are the elements of these proximity measures. Knowledge change suggests that only recalled information is credible, whereas behavior or attitude change means that only credible information is believable and therefore can have an impact on behavior or attitudes (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). The studies conducted for this thesis use the first approach.

4.1.4. Credibility Evaluation of Online Information

While evaluating the concept of credibility, the literature sometimes separates it as online and offline. Despite the fact that digital media do not alter the required cognitive skills and capabilities for credibility evaluation, some new criteria may be in effect. Overall, there is a dominating view of credibility on the Internet which is defined by Sundar (2008) as "multiplicity of sources embedded in the numerous layers of online dissemination of context" makes the Internet more complicated. Accuracy, authority, objectivity are the prominent criteria that become apparent as a result of studies focused on either the credibility of Internet-based information or websites (Metzger, 2007).

Accuracy signifies to what extent a website is without errors, the information on a website can be verified and reliable. Authority represents details like who is the creator/founder of website, what

are the creator/responsible's qualifications, credentials and affiliations, is contact information provided for the creator/responsible and is website suggested by a trusted source. Objectivity is associated with first identifying the purpose of a website and classifying the information either as fact or opinion, taking into account conflicts of interest on the part of the source or commercial intent, and the essentiality of relationships among linked information sources, for instance the significance of "sponsored links" on a Google search outcome. (Metzger, 2007). Other studies in the same field added other criteria such as currency, comprehensiveness, coverage or scope (Alexander & Tate, 1999; Brandt, 1996; Kapoun, 1998; Meola, 2004; Scholz-Crane, 1998; Smith, 1997; as cited in Metzger, 2007; Fritch & Cromwell, 2001).

Still it can be said that evaluation process for credibility of online information carries mutual properties with the evaluation of information credibility in general. In processing information itself, heuristic cues and interaction shape the essential part of evaluation. Heuristic cues represent signals which can be seen as "shortcuts" to make a judgment, for instance source credibility can be mentioned in that manner (Lederman, Fan, Smith, & Chang, 2013).

While mainly focusing on the credibility of online information, Walthen and Burkell (2002) suggested that credibility evaluation process works in three stages. At first, people have a first impression from the overall website credibility based on its surface characteristics such as presentation, appearance, usability, organization of information, and interface design. Secondly, they evaluate the content of a website by paying attention to features like expertise, trustworthiness, credentials related to source and other features of message such as currency, relevance, accuracy. Lastly, their evaluation depends on their cognitive state at the time; for instance, their need to seek information, having prior knowledge about the content combined with their speed of information processing influence the process. Fritch and Cromwell (2001) offered a complementary model for evaluating credibility of online information. According to this model, people are continually cycling

through these four stages of information; format and presentation, identity of the author and credentials, institution and affiliation. After using these stages as an initial filter to categorize the information, then they continue to assess it (Hargittai, Fullerton, Menchen-Trevino & Thomas, 2010).

In fact, factors like gender, age, personal attitudes and cognitive styles can be influential while assessing the credibility of online information (Lederman et al., 2013). Still if one disregards the change in criteria due to medium or context, it is also valid to suggest that each criterion is not fixed for certain medium or context all the time. Essentially, credibility assessment should not be taken as a single evaluative process for neither medium nor context. The model formed by Fritch and Cromwell (2001) supported the idea that final judgment is formed by the combination of different levels of credibility assessment. The model also defended importance of the individual in the evaluation process. In that manner, individual differences should be counted as a crucial factor which influences the process of credibility assessment as well. In other words, various people may experience various processes at various times while evaluating credibility (Metzger, 2007).

Therefore, the evaluation process can be situational and related with individual based circumstances including their culture, experiences and competency.

Nevertheless, research still attempts to shed light on blurred tendencies about this evaluation process. So far, psychology theories on information processing have been helpful to understand the tendencies of people better. For instance, as a theory used especially to explain the assessment of online information credibility, prominence-interpretation theory predicted that assessment contains two stages. Firstly, the audience notices the information and for this at least five factors play a role. These factors include involvement of the audience (e.g. their motivation level to find and/or read the content), topic of the information (being informative or entertaining), task of the audience (looking for information, wanting to be entertained), experience of the audience (being

inexperienced or expert on the matter in question), and lastly individual differences (cognition style, literacy level). Among them, the most prevailing factor is involvement of the audience. When they are motivated to look for information, their level of noticing the information will be higher.

Secondly, the audience decides upon the things they notice. At this phase, factors like assumptions the audience has (due to their culture, past experiences, heuristics), skill or knowledge of the audience (level of expertise on the matter in question), and context (environment of the audience, expectations of the audience, circumstantial norms) are influential (Fogg, 2013). If one of those stages does not occur, then credibility assessment cannot be done. However, there are some empirical studies which showed that despite the audience claims about their full participation in credibility assessment; practically they tend to complete the assessment by using minimized cognitive effort and time (Lederman et al., 2013). In that manner, apart from the source of information, other heuristic cues like the design of the source, the organization of information, the length of information, the name of mentioned brand involve as minimizers of cognitive effort and time.

Another theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) indicated the role of having high or low motivation and ability on making credibility judgments. When they have a high motivation and ability to process information, they are prone to go over all details coming from the message, source, context, and themselves (for instance their emotions) in other words use central route to decide accurately. In reverse case, having either low motivation (less personal relevance) or low process ability (less knowledge), their judgment is shaped by low effort processes like peripheral route or heuristic (Wathen, Burkell, 2002; Lederman et al., 2013). Some studies accepted the impact of this theory on credibility judgments (Gunther, 1988; 1992; O'Keefe, 1990; as cited in Westerwick, 2013). In fact, the model of Lucassen and Schraagen (2011), while determining a classification for all types of credibility as 3S-Model (representing source, semantic and surface features for credibility evaluation), offered the same understanding with the aforementioned model

by Walther and Burkell (2002) for online information. Supporting the logic of the ELM, the study suggested that people tend to pay attention to certain criteria and do their evaluation based on three stages. The first stage focuses on semantic characteristics of information such as accuracy, neutrality and scope. If they have expertise on the domain, firstly they follow this stage. Lack of domain expertise makes it impossible for people to apply this stage in their evaluation process. Therefore, they directly tend to give importance to the second stage which covers surface features of information, in other words, the way the information is served. The last stage, as more passive strategy, covers the characteristics of source, namely authority (Lucassen, Muilwijk, Noordzij & Schraagen, 2013). Wilson and Sherrell (1993; as cited in Wathen & Burkell, 2002) supported the fact that people's tendency to give more value to source features when they are not completely involved in the issue by suggesting their acts in cases of experiencing high discrepancy and low incongruity of the message. In these cases, especially if the source is recognized initially, people are more prone to be influenced by high credibility sources compared to low credibility ones.

So far, making judgments about advertising has not been attempted before to evaluate the validity of these theories. The findings of the current thesis might benefit from one of these theories while explaining the tendencies of people in evaluating perceived credibility of sponsored contents.

4.1.5. Advertising and Credibility

While discussing perceived credibility assessment of information, it is important to focus on advertising. The audience either responds in positive or negative ways to advertising messages or evaluates them through a combination of their emotions and cognitive skills (Teo, 2002; Lee & Hsieh, 2009; as cited in Zha et al., 2015). Credibility is crucial in terms of leading consumers to give a positive reaction to the message of advertising. In this regard, advertising credibility signifies the extent to which the audience considers advertising messages to be believable and truthful (Lutz,

1985; as cited in Prendergast, Liu, & Poon, 2009). The convictions on the integrity of advertising are another way to describe advertising credibility. As a primal element of attitude toward the advertisement, advertising credibility consists of a substructure of three concepts like advertisement itself, conflicted claims of advertisement, and the advertiser. These concepts symbolize the integrity evaluation of an advertisement, for instance its honesty, truthfulness and so forth (Soh, Reid & Whitehill King, 2009). Speaking particularly on online context, advertising credibility solely concentrates on the product-related information rather than source credibility or author behind the source (McKnight & Kacmar, 2006; Zha et al., 2015). Advertising credibility is mostly studied by using a non-diagnostic single item, multiple items or within the general advertising assessments.

Within the last 50 years, credibility has become one of the most attractive topics in marketing and advertising fields. Within the perspective of marketing, considerable number of studies on credibility has focused on source credibility as being the one of the fundamental factors stating the effectiveness of advertising (Li, Wang & Yang, 2011; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Newell & Goldsmith, 2001; Tse, 1999; as cited in Kim & Choi, 2012; Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990). In this context, credibility of the spokesperson and perceived reputation of the company or brand shape the root of these credibility studies in marketing field. Speaking of perceived reputation of the company or brand, these studies have covered impressions of the audience about a product or a brand, in other words corporate image (Myers & Reynolds, 1967; as cited in Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990) or some of them directly examined the credibility of the advertiser, the level of their perceived truthfulness as being the sponsor of an advertisement. Overall, the main aim of these studies was to assess the impact of the credibility of advertisers on the behavioral and attitudinal responses of the audience toward advertising (Kim & Choi, 2012).

The credibility of the advertiser has been identified as a crucial factor to influence advertising credibility (Azeem & Haq, 2012), including the one on the effectiveness of banner advertisements

as well (Kim & Choi, 2012). While assessing the credibility of an advertisement, the audience tends to be concerned about both the advertising and the brand (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; as cited in Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990). The perceived advertising credibility including other components of advertising, in turn, has an impact on individual attitudes toward both the advertisement itself and the advertiser. (Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990). When the advertiser receives positive attitudes from the audience, this effect even is reflected on generating intent to purchase the product of the advertiser in question (MacKenzie et al.; as cited in Prendergast et al., 2009).

As an ideal example for the aforementioned dependence of source credibility assessment on individual and circumstantial factors, Goldberg and Hartwick (1990) revealed the significant positive influence of perceived advertiser reputation on brand attitudes, however this impact decreased when advertising message had an extreme claim (for instance, "the best product in its category on the market"). Indeed, the model of Lutz (1985; Lutz, MacKenzie, & Belch, 1983; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; as cited in Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990) mentioned advertising claim extremity as another variable. Overall, the model defended the same idea as advertiser credibility and advertising claim extremity have an impact on advertising credibility. In this context, it is productive to study perceived credibility assessment of advertising by combining the elements of source and message credibility.

Exposure order of the advertiser as source was thought as another variable that can influence the evaluation of advertising credibility. The study conducted to analyze the persuasiveness of advertisements due to the appearance order (whether before or after) of the source hypothesized that the impact of source credibility on persuasion process will be more powerful when the source appeared before the message of advertising (Nan, 2013). According to the findings, as the study which handled the effect of the Elaboration Likelihood Model partially, the consequence of this hypothesis was dependent on the level of need to evaluate the advertisement. When the message of

the source was shown before the message exposure and people had low interest to evaluate the advertisement, then the impact of source credibility became more powerful. All this considered, the credibility evaluation of advertising is highly complex in terms of including several elements like the advertisement itself, the credibility of advertised brand as source, the need of people to evaluate (low or high) the advertisement and so forth. Although it is not the focus of the current thesis, the medium or the person who shows the advertisement has also substantial effect on its credibility evaluation just like the credibility of advertiser (Goldsmith, Lafferty and Newell, 2000; as cited in Azeem & Haq, 2012). For instance, it was demonstrated that a message of a less powerful brand is perceived less credible on the Internet compared to its print version (as cited in Azeem & Haq, 2012)

Out of the findings related with advertising types and their credibility, only disruptive ads seem to have a potential to affect credibility assessment negatively. Disruptive ads are known as pop-up and/or embedded ads which can interrupt the task of the audience, therefore are perceived as annoying and as a violator. They damage the credibility of websites just like ambiguity between commercial and editorial content as Fogg and his colleagues mentioned (2002; as cited in Zha & Wu, 2014). Yet, if the context of disruptive ads and goals of the audience is compatible, then they are not found annoying (Kalyanaraman & Sundar, 2003; as cited in Zha et al., 2015). Zha and his colleague (2014) also did not find a generalized cause-effect relationship between disruptive ads and negative credibility. If the audience gets suspicious that disruptive ads are blended with the news they are reading, they tend to distrust the news source.

Advertising credibility is also influenced by the level of skepticism the audience has toward the advertising. If the audience is skeptical toward the advertising, this signifies that they have a tendency to have doubts about its claims (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; as cited in Prendergast, et al., 2009). Latest studies demonstrated that when the audience is more skeptical, then they tend to

believe the claim of the advertisement less compared to a less skeptical audience (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Hardesty et al., 2002; as cited in Prendergast et al., 2009). Studies also found the link between being skeptical and disliking and paying less attention to an advertisement as well. Shortly, advertising skepticism can be seen as an element which represents the other side of advertising credibility.



4.2. Trust

4.2.1. Brief Conceptualization of Trust

The concept of trust has been studied by several fields; including anthropology, economics, marketing and management, but conceivably was firstly studied in psychology and sociology (Jevons and Gabbott, 2000). Studies in these diverse fields have provided outcomes like showing trust are significant in any type of relationship. Definitions of trust are highly diverse like as noun, verb, belief, attitude, personality trait, expectation, behavioral intention and social structure. However, agreeing on a particular conceptualization of trust is quite difficult for scholars in the same or different fields. This difficulty generally derives from being an abstract concept, the struggle of distinguishing trust from other concepts like cooperation, confidence and predictability, (Mayer et al., 1995; Jevons and Gabbott, 2000), and also having complex nature and multi-layered structure of showing trust (Kuzheleva-Sagan and Suchkova, 2015). This complexity also is a result of composite world views of different fields and massiveness of the meanings it covers (McKnight, Chervany, 2001).

Still, the most commonly cited definition on trust can help us to perceive it roughly. This definition presents trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party" (Mayer et al., 1995). The definition also represents two crucial preconditions of trust that are expectations under uncertainty and vulnerability. Coping with uncertainty has been seen as the initial purpose of trust by several studies such as done by Heimer (2001; as cited in Kelton, Fleischmann, & Wallace, 2008) and Luhmann (1979; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008). What is meant by uncertainty here is some conditions such as having lack of information on any topic (Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 1979; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008) and of

skills to confirm the capacity or proficiency of another (Bloomqvist, 1997; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008; Mayer et al., 1995). Vulnerability is mostly taken as the second precondition. This precondition represents the circumstance when the trustor lives a betrayal. It leads a person to put themselves in someone else's shoes who is in a vulnerable position (Bloomqvist, 1997; Rousseau et al., 1998; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008).

When people are vulnerable or come across an uncertainty with their expectations, this kind of situation leads them to develop trust toward a person, group, service or an organization.

Few studies took dependence as the third precondition for forming trust. Dependence signifies the roles of the trustor and the trustee. In order to develop trust in both parties, the trustor has to have a specific need to accomplish and the trustee has to have certain potential to answer this need. A couple of studies claimed that effort of the trustee is mandatory for the trustor to satisfy one's need (Heimer, 2001; Rousseau et al., 1998; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008) however it was also discussed that accepting the effort of the trustee is not the single choice for the trustor in order to reach satisfaction (Kelton et al., 2008). Research on the relationship between dependence and reliability, and also dependence and dependability supported the importance of this precondition (Kelton et al., 2008). Many studies (Mayer et al., 1995; Jevons and Gabbott, 2000; Kelton et al., 2008) on trust counted risk as another precondition to let trust arise. Acceptance of risk and utility for risks are the primary means of defining trust in this precondition (Kelton et al., 2008). Trust can be seen as an answer for precise problems of risk (Jevons and Gabbott, 2000).

When assessing the level of trust toward sponsored content, preconditions like uncertainty, vulnerability and dependence seem more relevant with the content of the thesis. Uncertainty represents the need of the audience to trust a content because they have to cope with the confusion resulting from lacking information or knowledge on the topic. In this kind of situation, the audience needs to avoid this confusion. To trust the content they read, the content has to clear their mind

and/or help them gain knowledge about the topic. In that manner, dependence plays a role on their need to generate trust in sponsored content. Vulnerability is also crucial for the audience due to their need to not be deceived by any false information. Regarding these points, a good example of sponsored content should prevent uncertainty and avoid putting the audience in a vulnerable situation by deceiving them.

4.2.2. Dimensions of Trust

While determining the conditions for existence of trust, research on trust also has investigated the qualities making a person trustee. Confidence, reliability, honesty, fairness, caring, altruism, goodwill intention, integrity (Gefen, Benbasat & Pavlou, 2008) are some terms used when discussing those qualities. Yet, all these terms can be united under two essential dimensions which are benevolence and competence (Cho, 2006). Benevolence represents the degree to which a person is certainly attentive to the other's welfare (Garbarino and Lee, 2003; as cited in Cho, 2006). Benevolent person is expected to care about the interests and needs of the other and will endorse the other's best interest by having values like altruism, goodwill intention and so forth. Competence displays ability, suitability, reliability or confidence of a person in a task related with the other based on necessity and expectation (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al, 2002; as cited in Cho, 2006). A study on consumers' evaluations in the context of business-to-consumer (B2C) Internet exchange relationships indicated benevolence as motivational aspect and competence as instrumental aspect, additionally suggested that benevolence incites trusts whereas competence decreases distrust (Cho, 2006). To what extent this person has the ability, knowledge, skill, ethics (Gefen et al., 2008), positive intentions (Lewicki et al. 1998; as cited in Gefen et al., 2008) on the related task also influence the foundation of a relationship with the other. Considerable amount of studies implied honesty as the third dimension. Honesty believes that the other will be trustworthy and keep one's promise(s) (Doney & Cannon, 1997; as cited in Seckler, Heinz, Forde, Tuch &

Opwis, 2014). It demonstrates the sincerity and trustworthiness of the other. If these three dimensions are provided by the trustee, then the trustee will be found trustworthy. (Gefen et al., 2008).

In the context of the advertiser, dimensions like benevolence, competence and honesty can be taken into consideration. Despite its main purpose of persuading the audience to purchase its product, activities of the advertiser might not be considered in terms of benevolence. Still it can be said that the entity of corporate social responsibility has emerged from the need of the advertisers to generate a benevolent image. Competence can be taken as the representative dimension of the perceived image of the advertiser. Lastly, language of the brand can be a factor to generate the honesty dimension. These dimensions clearly indicated that advertisers are aware of these dimensions in order to receive the trust of the audiences. Taking sponsored contents into consideration, these efforts can be valid as well.

4.2.3. Levels of Trust

Before evaluating trust based on trustee-trustor perspective, it is essential to point out the levels of trust. These levels are varied based on different theories on trust types. Process-based, characteristics-based and institutional-based trust of Zucker (1986; as cited in Kim, Xu & Koh, 2004), calculus-based, knowledge-based and institutional-based or identification-based trust of (Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin (1992; Lewicki & Bunker, 1995; as cited in McKnight & Chervany 2001), interpersonal or personal, structural, dispositional trust of McKnight and Chervany (2001) are some of the exemplary models of trust.

It can be claimed that the most comprehensive model of trust levels belongs to Kelton and her colleagues (2008). This model consists of four levels; individual, societal, interpersonal and

relational. Individual level handles the notion in terms of a personal trait. This level is simply taken as a psychological attribute. It is found as a fixed personality characteristic in several research. The term simply represents people's expectations toward others grounded on their own collective experience (Rotter, 1971; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008). Psychological attribute of the term represents tendency to trust which affects the potential of trust shown by an individual in a particular situation rather than trust solely (Mayer et al., 1995; Kelton et al., 2008). Societal level approaches the notion as property of a whole community. It can be seen as a regulator of the function of society and named as social capital (Uslaner, 2007; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008) or system trust (Giddens, 1990; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Luhmann, 1979; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008). Models developed for societal level function as problem solver for the complicated nature of society. However, these two levels are out of the focus of the current thesis. Since the main purpose of the current thesis is to investigate the perceived credibility and trust of sponsored content and potential influence of the image of sponsored brand, interpersonal and relational levels of trust are more relevant.

Interpersonal level examines the notion as a social bond between two parties. It has been mostly studied as a social link among a particular trustee and trustor. Attitude held by the trustor toward the trustee including expectations related with the trustee's goodwill, ethics, competence and future actions is the primary component for defining the link. Some research handled the term in terms of the foundation of trust in organizations or automated systems. The relationship of the audience and the source of content, in this context sponsored brand, can be an example of interpersonal level.

Relational level of trust is interested in the notion as a developing component of a mutual relationship. It handles the relationship between two parties as a developing characteristic all together, in other words seeing the notion of trust as a "mutual" component. This view claims that trust develops through the interactions of both parties in time, rather than as a flow from the trustor

to the trustee. It also disagrees with the idea that trust equals expectation or confidence. Reversely, it defends that when expectations are not involved, trust emerges in real terms. Ideas of Seligman (1997; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008) can be an ideal representation of relational level of trust. He discussed trust by taking it as a link of social role. He found a relation between trust and the ambiguity derived from conflict between multiple roles. Therefore, his ideas are based on the fact that trust is a "must" component for social relations when both parties have some role expectations and cannot foresee each other's behavior. This level of trust might explain the relationship between the loyal consumer and the advertiser.

4.2.4. Process of Generating Trust

Most of these levels of trust can be classified as a part of the taxonomy of generating processes for trust. Kelton and her colleagues (2008) framed these processes into five concepts as prediction, attribution, bonding, reputation and identification. Prediction, same with relational trust or Shapiro and her colleagues' knowledge-based trust (1992; as cited in McKnight & Chervany 2001), refers to stability of the trustee based on his or her previous actions. Attribution, in other words dependability, intentionality or Shapiro and her colleagues' calculus-based trust (1992; as cited in McKnight & Chervany 2001), characterizes motivations and properties to the trustee out of observations of the trustor. Words and actions of the trustee or any other valid details about him or her act as measurement for this process. As a cognitive process of evaluating the trustee, it distinguishes itself from prediction process by taking observation method to its core in order to come up with solid characteristic about the trustee. Bonding, which can be taken as emotive or affective trust as well, signifies the progress of trustor-trustee relationship from its emotional side. Reciprocation of trust is also counted under this process in terms of matter of fact that improves the relationship between two parties. Reputation, similar with Zucker's institution-based trust (1986; as cited in Kim et al., 2004), Shapiro and her colleagues' institutional-based trust or transference

(1992; as cited in McKnight & Chervany 2001), describes the gained trust based on guidance or endorsements of other parties. In that way, it functions as a reinforcer for cognitive trust. Lastly, identification, involves concepts like relational trust or goal congruence, is also an indicator for reinforcing cognitive trust as representing common goals, values and characteristics between the trustor and the trustee. All these concepts seem to have a complimentary role while evaluating the effects resulting from the image of sponsored brand.

4.2.5. Trust Evaluation of Online Information

Trust toward online information can be analyzed with the help of sociological theories which separated trust toward "abstract systems" (the Internet in general), trust toward institutions (for instance publisher) and lastly trust toward people (users who provide online information) just like this model works for media and communication field (Rittenhofer & Povlsen 2015). Due to this variety, the definition of trust toward online information sometimes can be found highly complex (Beatty, Reay, Dick & Miller, 2011) and the literature contains several studies focusing on information seeking on the Internet (Gefen et al., 2008; Kelton et al., 2008; Pan & Chiou, 2011; Beatty et al., 2011; Seckler et al., 2014; Kuzheleva-Sagan & Suchkova, 2015). The Internet, as the context of examining trust toward information, is highly productive since it contains vast amounts of information with its decentralized, transparent and at the same time complex structure. Hence, when looking for information on the Internet, people are pulled into a space which most of the time welcomes more uncertainty and confusion. This leads people to trust information on the Internet either too easily or too reluctantly (Fritch & Cromwell, 2001; Kelton et al., 2008). Consequently, people seriously need to manage the amount of information they are exposed to (Rieh & Belkin, 1998; as cited in Kelton et al. 2008). Generating trust toward information on the Internet is dependent on various factors from social relationship among Internet users (Pan & Chiou, 2011), especially on web-based opinion platforms like discussion forums, social media and so forth, or

informative customer services (Seckler et al., 2014) to attributions of the source, including its visual perception (Kuzheleva-Sagan & Suchkova, 2015).

All preconditions, dimensions and generating processes of trust can be applicable for the evaluation process of information. People especially need to rely on information they find due to experiencing uncertainty and vulnerability while seeking accurate information. Accurate information is fundamental in terms of making the right decision, supporting one's argument or enhancing one's knowledge on any kind of topic or issue (Kelton et al., 2008). Otherwise, people experience confusion on the quality of information or they are damaged because of false information, or feel paralyzed as a result of the necessity of information for decision-making and knowledge formation. At that point, preconditions of trust such as uncertainty, vulnerability and dependence become explanatory points for the need of trust in information.

When seeking the right information, dimensions of trust like benevolence and other relevant notions such as ethics and predictability are valid. People give importance to accuracy, believability and presentation of the information, in other words, its competence. Objectivity as a symbol of positive intentions, validity as representing ethics and stability as it refers to predictability, are dimensions expected from information to generate trust. Each part of generating processes of trust, also, carries descriptive qualities for seeking information. People tend to decide which information is trustworthy based on their experience with the source of that information. This tendency is an example of prediction process. They need to confirm the trustworthiness of the information by looking at multiple sources that is the case of attribution. Bonding can play a significant role when people develop an emotional reaction toward the information. Reputation as symbolizing certification, references, opinions and authority in general is another process that can influence the trust of people since they pay attention to these details. Lastly, people can identify themselves with

function, style, or points of the information; in that manner choosing the closest to their view is represented by identification process.

Still, if one discusses particularly trust toward digital information, at that point, it should be noted that making a decent explanation of information use is critical (Kelton et al., 2008). In addition to this, actual use of information and its quality is mainly regulated by attitudes of people toward information (Klobas, 1995; as cited in Kelton et al. 2008). Attitudes of people are still influenced by trust generating processes (such as prediction, attribution, bonding, reputation and identification) while making sense of the vast amount of information and trying to find the most trustworthy ones (Kelton et al., 2008).

Sztompka (2012; as cited in Kuzheleva-Sagan & Suchkova, 2015) offered a structure which has three levels as original impulse out of visual and reputational factors, contextual conditions and sustainable assessment of facts. Visual factor symbolizes the external features of a person, object or phenomenon that functions as the trustee. These features contain style, aesthetic, positivity, interaction, social role and other functions of the trustee. Reference potential and reputation can be added to these features. Contextual conditions can be defined in terms of Internet communication. For instance, people tend to trust more information that is transparent. These two levels can be associated with emotions. However, sustainable assessment of facts as a third level represents the objective analysis of the actions of the trustee. Therefore, at this level, reliability and objectivity become crucial (Kuzheleva-Sagan & Suchkova, 2015).

Although out of the scope of this thesis, studies focusing on the relationship between websites and trust have made some classifications of the criteria determining this relationship. Just like Sztompka offered, they highlighted the importance of visual or graphic design as the essential criterion for shaping people's trust (Sillence; as cited in Kuzheleva-Sagan & Suchkova, 2015).

Structure design, as the accessibility of information and the general organization of a website, content design, as the graphical or textual elements of a website, and social-cue design, referring to chat function, photographs and names related to the source, were counted as other criteria (Wang & Emurian, 2005; as cited in Seckler et al., 2014). As an endnote, under the structure design criterion, this classification counted advertisements as an indicator of bad design that also functions as a prohibitor to trust toward websites.

4.2.6. Trust in Advertising

Trust is quite an important matter for brands and consumers. As a result of this fact, marketing research handles the concept of trust in various topics including relationship marketing, brand trust, and general marketplace trust. In the context of marketing, the concept is generally positioned as either trust in a "transactional partner" (e.g., a brand, a dealer) or trust in the "general marketplace" (Starr-Glass, 2011; as cited in Minton, 2015). Indeed, these two positions represent different types of trust. While trust in a brand can be considered an example of relational trust, trust in the general marketplace is referred to as marketplace trust. Among two of them, the current thesis focuses on trust toward a brand, since the effect of brand image on perceived trust assessment of sponsored content is measured.

Trust is a crucial factor especially for advertising studies, not only as a fundamental factor of human relations, but the general tendency of the audience to distrust advertising (Soh, Reid, Whitehill King, 2007). Although the most basic intent of advertising is providing information to consumers about products in the market to guide them on their purchase decisions, trust becomes a "must" for advertising to accomplish its mission. However, only some advertising types become successful on earning the trust of audiences. Nielsen's 2015 Global Trust In Advertising report indicated that the most trusted advertising formats are, especially among online formats, recommendations taken from

the people they know (83 percent), "branded websites" (70 percent), "consumer opinions posted online" (66 percent) and editorial content like newspaper articles (66 percent), "brand sponsorships" (61 percent), and lastly emails they signed up for (56 percent). These percentages slightly changed when taking action on advertising format was considered. While the percent of recommendations taken from the people they know (83 percent) and "branded websites" (70 percent) remained same, the percent "consumer opinions posted online" (69 percent), emails they signed up for (63 percent), "brand sponsorships" (62 percent) were somewhat higher. The tendency of people to take action as a result of editorial content like newspaper articles was somewhat lower (63 percent) than their trust level (63 percent) (Nielsen, 2015). When an advertisement is found trustworthy as an information source by the audience, then this advertisement becomes an effective tool for informing them as the audience will attend it more. Contrarily, if audiences do not trust advertising, they develop negative attitudes toward it and this fact leads to an increase in avoiding advertising (Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Eisend & Knoll, 2012; Prendergast et al. 2010; Smit & Neijens, 2000; as cited in Ketelaar, Konig, Smit & Thorbjørnsen, 2015).

4.2.7. Ways to Measure Trust in the context of Advertising

Although the concept of trust has been studied in an interdisciplinary way, there is not enough research done to assess the concept mainly in terms of advertising (Soh et al., 2009). Still, investigations both in academic and industrial environments have been done to measure trust toward advertising (Soh et al., 2009). Some items of measurements of general attitude toward advertising and trust toward advertising can sometimes overlap but these items do not represent trust completely or its cognitive, emotional or behavioral aspects. Research particularly on advertising trust lacks empirical confirmation and testing, rather they mostly use single item measures (Menon et al, 2002; as cited in Soh et al., 2009) or ad hoc multiple-item scales (Huh, DeLorme, Reid, 2005; as cited in Soh et al., 2009). Besides, the reflection of multidimensional

aspect of trust to advertising trust research is quite ambiguous in terms of the determination of number of items or dimensionality of the construct.

The complex relationship between credibility and trust has also played a role on this ambiguity by reflecting its undecided side to trust assessment of advertising as well. Research on advertising credibility generally regards advertising trust as a dimension of credibility. Trust is mainly put on par with the concept of accuracy, which refers to reliability and verifiability of advertising, or used as a part of integrity of advertising, under concepts like manipulation, falsity and deception (Soh et al., 2009). Due to this view, advertising trust is positioned equally with concepts like trustworthiness, trustworthy, truthfulness, believability and so forth.

Thus, measurements on advertising credibility and general attitudes toward advertisements mostly handle the trust aspect in this manner. However, majority of studies on behavioral and social science accept the extensiveness of trust over credibility. This extensiveness is justified with its relation to other factors such as "confidence, competence, benevolence, reliability, mutual emotional investment and willingness to rely on" (Doney & Cannon, 1997; McAllister, 1995; as cited in Soh et al., 2009). Without considering this extensive side of trust and eliminating the affective processes and behavioral intention of trust from the assessment process of advertising trust, these narrow-scoped scales can fail to be a reliable and valid trust scale. To prevent unreliable and weak results, Soh and her colleagues (2009) constructed a more sufficient trust scale specifically for advertising assessment by defining advertising trust as "confidence that advertising is a reliable source of product or service information and willingness to act on the basis of information conveyed by advertising". Their scale factors such as "affect" toward advertising and "willingness to rely on" advertising are factors to represent the affective and behavioral aspects of trust generation.

To assess the cognitive aspects of trust formation, the scale covers elements like "reliability" and "usefulness" of advertising. Integrity (used as not lying) and reliability (meant keeping its promise) are two concepts handled in reliability factor. Usefulness factor refers to the effectiveness of advertising as an information source for purchase decision making, in other words its competence.

Speaking of competence, as another fundamental dimension, benevolence is not included in the scale as a factor. The reason is that advertising is not perceived as having an altruistic purpose. The common perception of advertising highlights the aim of persuading consumers to purchase the advertised product. Therefore, the audience can have a tendency to view advertising as a source fundamentally not giving benevolent and objective information (Soh et al., 2009).

Two studies covered in the current thesis use the scale developed by Soh et al (2009) as mentioned above. Perceived trust of sponsored contents is measured by using adjectives under reliability factor of the scale. These items are honest, truthful, credible, reliable, dependable, accurate, factual, complete and clear. Items related to usefulness, affect and willingness to rely on are excluded in order to focus on basic adjectives which signify the concept of trust directly.

4.3. Relationship between Credibility and Trust

In the context of persuasion process, it is fair to claim that credibility and trust work highly parallel to each other. Although it seems that the literature did not contain extensive research on it, several studies, either directly or indirectly, have confirmed that they are related to each other (Jevons & Gabbott, 2000; Kelton et al., 2008; Lucassen et al., 2013; Zha et al., 2014; Go, You, Jung & Shim 2016). In fact, the notions of trust and credibility are sometimes even used synonymously (Nilsson et al., 2004; as cited in Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015).

Initially, the parallelism between dimensions of both notions is worth examining. While people assess the credibility or trustworthiness of some sources, person or information, the common factor they pay attention to is expertise or competence. Expertise as one of the main dimensions of credibility and competence as one of the main dimensions of trust, both represents the qualifications, skills and abilities of the source, person or information in question. Apart from sharing a common dimension; what makes a person, source or information trustworthy depends on being benevolent, competent and honest, in other words, fulfilling the dimensions of trust. To be evaluated as credible, trustworthiness is also found by one of the required dimensions. As a matter of fact, some studies found trustworthiness as a core dimension of credibility since it regards goodness and morality of the source (Rieh, 2010; as cited in Savolainen, 2011). In this regard, connectivity of these dimensions fosters the relationship of these two notions.

The connection between trust and credibility can be interpreted differently, but most agree that they are closely related. For instance, trusting an information might carry a risk factor, so in those cases, credibility assessment can knock this factor out. In order to knock this risk factor out, people develop their own way of credibility assessment. Due to their assessments, they determine some indicators as low credibility or high credibility and through this process, they mainly benefit from their own trust model. In this regard, Hilligoss and Rieh (2008; as cited in Lucassen et al., 2013) brought out the idea that credibility and trust do not only have a parallel relationship but also one that nurtures each other.

Based on the interpretations of each notion, apparently they can overlap but the most salient part is which one comes first and lets the other emerge. Tseng and Fogg (1999; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008) developed a framework on credibility that carries considerably similar to the theory of trust. Due to this framework, trust is taken as a subcomponent of credibility as they mainly focus on the development of credibility. Some studies support this framework by taking trust as the direct func-

tion of credibility (Perrini et al, 2010; as cited in Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015). However, it can easily be argued that trust is a concept bigger than the way they handled it. In fact, Go and her colleagues (2016) interpreted credibility as a fundamental component of trust. They highlighted longevity of building trust by making reference to the well-known proverb "it takes years to build up trust, and only seconds to destroy it" and classified credibility as "an immediate perception of reliability and relevance of information" (Go et al., 2016). In this manner, credibility can be positioned as a kind of antecedent of trust (Hovland et al., 1953; as cited in Go et al., 2016). Indeed, this function was put into words while describing credibility as "the starting point of negotiation processes that may potentially lead to cultivating a feeling of trust" (Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015). A study that investigated trust in marketing (Jevons & Gabbott, 2000), supported this inference by regarding objective credibility as one of the major dimensions to develop trust in business relationships. Another research done in advertising confirmed the same idea (Lee & Hsieh, 2009; as cited in Zha et al., 2014). Due to advertisers' main aim, which is influencing audiences to become a consumer of a product, audiences react toward the advertising message based on their mental perception and this reaction is related with whether they trust or distrust that message. Therefore, the topic of advertising message can easily explain the relation between credibility and trust, because if people believe a particular brand is credible, then they can trust its product information (McKnight & Kacmar, 2006; as cited in Zha et al., 2014).

Relation of trust and credibility is significant for the evaluation of sponsored content due to their significant impact on the persuasion process. When people trust, they do not need to have complete information about the thing they trust including all of its positive and negative aspects (Simmel, 1990; 2008; Luhmann, 1999; Bildtgard, 2008; Zachmann & Ostby, 2011; as cited in Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015). They are prone to avoiding contradictory messages on what they trusted (Lazarsfeld et al, 1944; Zagata & Lostak, 2012; as cited in Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015). In that manner, it is

important to measure to what extent people find sponsored content worth trusting. As one of the crucial indicators of trust formation, the perceived credibility becomes essential to examine.



CHAPTER V: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY AND TRUST ASSESSMENTS OF EDITORIAL VERSUS SPONSORED CONTENT (STUDY 1)

5.1. Hypotheses & Research Questions

As it was mentioned before, practices of sponsored content exist in Turkey but not as common as in the United States. Hence, the current study raises a couple of fundamental research questions regarding sponsored contents. These are related with the ability of people in Turkey to notice sponsored content and the cues they use; for instance, quality of content and indicators of identifying sponsored content. The proposed research questions are;

RQ1: Do people in Turkey recognize content they read is sponsored by a brand?

RQ2: What are the main indicators for people in Turkey to notice that an editorial content is sponsored by a brand?

In Chapter 2, it was pointed out that credibility and trust are closely related to each other. Both notions are occasionally used interchangeably (Prusak & Cohen, 2001; Massey & Kyriazis, 2007; Yilmaz & Atalay, 2009; as cited in Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015). Additionally, they share a common dimension which is expertise and/or competence. It means qualifications of the source or the message matter for both credibility and trust assessments. Besides, while seeking information or assessing a website, the cues to evaluate their credibility and trustworthiness seem to complement each other. Surface characteristics (which symbolize factors like site presentation, visual representation), semantic characteristics (which represent factors like accuracy, neutrality, scope, objectivity, currency) and lastly source characteristics (which refer to authority, reputation and motives of the source) are some basic cues for assessing credibility (Walthen & Burkell, 2002; Lucassen & Schraagen, 2011, Metzger, 2007). Similarly, website quality including graphic,

structure, content and social designs (Wang and Emurian 2005; as cited in Seckler et al., 2014), and information quality (Cabezudo, Izquierdo & Pinto, 2013) matter for gaining trust.

While both notions are conceptualized independently, as aforementioned, it was argued that credibility can function as an antecedent for trust. In relation to credibility, trust represents the outcome of a path between communicator, message and audience while taking the audience as a decision maker. This relation is recognized especially in media and communication fields, correspondingly, the perceived credibility of a content reinforces trust (Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015). These findings lead to suggesting the following hypothesis;

H1: There is a positive correlation between perceived credibility and trustworthiness of the content.

Regardless of sponsored content, earlier research studied perception differences between (news) editorial content and advertising. As aforementioned, a couple of experimental studies demonstrated the preeminence of editorial content over advertising. Cameron (1994; as cited in Howe & Teufel, 2014), also, revealed that the audience is more motivated to read editorial content rather than commercial messages and pay less attention to these messages. From the view of public relations professionals, credibility of editorial content is greater than credibility of advertising. The findings of an extensive experimental study by Hallahan (1999; as cited in Jo, 2004) are a bit contradictory to these findings since they pointed out that there is no significant difference between advertising and news editorials. Yet, they also indicated that news editorials have higher scores in terms of message credibility than advertising. These findings are beneficial for making assumptions for the relationship between sponsored content and editorial content. As an in-between form but looks more similar to editorial content, it was viewed that sponsored content can benefit from the credibility transferred from journalists (Carlson, 2015b; as cited in Schauster et al., 2016). In this context, it can be hypothesized that;

H2: Sponsored content is found as credible as editorial content.

H3: Sponsored content is found as trustable as editorial content.

In order to offer hypotheses about the impact of brand image on the perceived credibility and trust assessments of sponsored content, literature on favorability of brand image and online-offline brand image transfer is helpful. As aforesaid, favorability of brand image has numerous positive influences on factors including brand credibility, brand loyalty, brand equity, positive word of mouth, satisfaction and willingness to purchase (Wang & Yang, 2010; Rindell & Iglesias, 2014; Keller, 1993; Lee et al., 2014; Cho & Fiore, 2015). Apart from its impact on these factors, favorable brand image also signifies a route of being a successful brand (Keller, 1993). Indeed, having a favorable brand image presents cues on credibility, performance, prestige and reputation of the company and leads companies to generate trust easier with their public relations activities (Salinas & Perez, 2009). Therefore, these kinds of brands increase positive assessments and decrease risk perception of the audience. Similarly, being a familiar or well-known brand provides comfort and reliability to the audience (Wijaya, 2013).

As the selected brand for the current sponsored content assessment, Samsung is a multinational conglomerate company which is divided into four notable subsidiaries as Samsung Electronics, Samsung Heavy Industries, Samsung Engineering and Samsung C&T. As a South Korean company founded in 1938, it is mostly well-known with its products like smartphones, television, tablets, home theatre and refrigerator on consumer electronics category. Nevertheless, the company also offers products in various categories like medical equipment, semiconductors, telecommunications equipment, apparel, chemicals and ships. Along with its "cutting-edge technology and world class design" Samsung has turned its low-end brand image into a hip brand image (Kumar, 2008). It was suggested that the company is especially known with its smartphones as a mark of quality and

reliability and its one of the fastest product services (White, 2015). The company has been distinguished from its rivals by offering best service in terms of hardware (Mahmud, 2015). Samsung also has provided innovative services like mobile payment service Samsung and produced continuous series for smartphone mobile market (Samsung Ranks 7th in Interbrand's Best Global Brands 2015, 2015). Lastly, the company has gained substantial recognition by being the official Worldwide Olympic Partner of Rio 2016 Olympic Games (#DoWhatYouCant, 2016).

Apart from being known as one of the biggest electronics manufacturers in the world and proven its strength by being rated as an extremely strong brand (AAA), Samsung has received top scores in several brand rankings. According to the rankings of Interbrand, Samsung was the seventh best global brand in 2016 (Best Global Brands 2016 Rankings, 2016). It was positioned as the third most valuable brand in the Global 500 2016 rankings of BrandFinance (Global 500 2016, 2016). It was the only South Korean company that is placed in the top ten of these rankings as well.

All these points considered, it can be assumed that Samsung has a favorable, strong and/or positive brand image. While considering its impact on the perceived credibility and trust assessment of its sponsored content, regarding the offline and online aspect of brand image is also useful. Previous studies showed that physical appearance and positive image of a brand can transfer to the Internet environment and be a mediator for generating trust toward a web page (Carlson & O'Cass, 2009). Another study revealed the strength of brand association with the web page is a crucial element of online trust (Bart et al., 2005; as cited in Carlson & O'Cass, 2009). It was also suggested that brand image transfer more likely happens when the image of a brand is stronger in regards to its favorability. (Smith, 2004). In accordance with these findings, the perceived image of Samsung by participants may transfer to their perceived credibility and trust assessments of the sponsored content of Samsung. Therefore, it is hypothesized that;

H4: If participants find the image of the sponsored brand positive, they will find the content more credible.

H5: If participants find the image of the sponsored brand positive, they will find the content more trustable.



5.2. Methodology

5.2.1. Participants

Participants of the study (N= 201) consisted mostly of students of Communication and Design department in Bilkent University in Turkey. Some of them were just taking courses from Communication and Design department. Their age information was categorized into age intervals as 18-23, 24-29, 30-35 and 35+.

First and third year undergraduate students (N= 53) were assigned to the control group.

Approximately, the age of 90 percent of participants ranged from 18 to 23. The rest were between 24 and 29. 66 percent of participants were female and the rest were male.

Second and fourth year undergraduate (N=110) and graduate students (N= 38) were assigned to the experimental group. 62 percent of participants belonged to 18-23 age interval and it was followed by 24-29 interval with 35 percent. 52 percent of them were male and the rest were female.

Almost all participants from both groups were Turkish. Few of them were international students currently studying at Bilkent University.

5.2.2. Apparatus and Materials

As both editorial and sponsored content, the edited version of the original sponsored content of Samsung was used (Connected Healthcare, 2015). The original content was featured on The Washington Post and was prepared by BrandStudio of The Washington Post. Basically, it was about the next technology that is claimed to be used for healthcare industry. It mentioned the role of Internet of Things and big data on carrying the patient-doctor relationship to a new level along with

giving expert opinions and partnerships. Samsung was only mentioned as a company that can have a potential to develop the technology in question. The original content was too comprehensive and long, so in the survey, only a short part of the content was given to participants. The original indicators of sponsored content on the webpage were excluded as well. The only indicator the survey used in experiment group was the sentence of "this content is sponsored by Samsung" along with brief information about Samsung. Before using the edited version of the original content on the study, related permission was taken from Jennifer Lee, Communications Manager of Washington Post (5 May 2016).

Three Likert-type scales, one with 5 point and two with 7 point, were used in the survey. Credibility assessment of the content was made by using some items taken from the message credibility measures listed by Appelman and Sundar (2015). In their study, Appelman and Sundar (2015) indicated the most significant adjectives for message credibility assessment and these were accurate, authentic and believable. There were 10 adjectives which are significant as symbolizing important aspects of message credibility. Out of these findings, adjectives used in the current study were *accurate, authentic, believable, consistent, well-presented, expert, complete* and *objective*. The answers for these adjectives were taken in the range from 1("describes very poorly") to 7 ("describes very well"). The scale for both control (Cronbach's $\alpha=.86$) and experiment groups (Cronbach's $\alpha=.83$) was highly reliable.

For assessing the trust of the content, ADTRUST scale with 20 items was partially used. The scale was originally taken from Soh, Reid and King's study (2007; as cited in Sæmundsson, 2012) and it had items classified under four factors; reliability, usefulness, affect and willingness to rely on. The current study only used the adjectives of reliability factor. These adjectives were *accurate, honest, truthful, credible, reliable, dependable, factual, complete* and *clear*. Answer opinions for these

adjectives ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Reliability of the scale was high for both control (Cronbach's $\alpha=.86$) and experiment groups (Cronbach's $\alpha=.83$).

Brand image scale for Samsung was adopted from a brand image benefits scale used for a cosmetic brand (Sondoh et al., 2007). The original scale had 15 items within five factors (experiential benefit, symbolic benefit, social benefit, functional benefit and appearance enhances) was used but only an item "makes me feel beautiful" was changed as "makes my life easier" due to the different functions of a cosmetic and a technology brand. Some items of the scale were *"Samsung makes me feel good"*, *"Samsung helps me to better fit into my social group"*, *"Samsung helps me feel accepted"*, *"Samsung performs as it promises"*, *"Samsung makes a good impression of me on other people"*. The items were answered in the range from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The reliability of scale was very high for experiment group (Cronbach's $\alpha=.95$)

5.2.3. Procedure

This study was conducted as a between-subjects experiment. Both participants of the control and experiment group were asked to read a brief article about the future of the healthcare system. The article was the same for both groups but the only difference between the groups was the presence or absence of the "sponsored by" label at the bottom of the content. In the control group, the article looked like a typical editorial article whereas, in the experimental group, the article included "This article is sponsored by Samsung" label along with a brief description of Samsung. Before reading the article, participants of both groups gave their consent to participate in the study. After reading the article, both participants responded questions testing their knowledge level on the topic of the article and later rated the article based on adjectives that describe its credibility and trust. They were also asked to comment on the details they paid attention to while assessing the credibility and trustworthiness of the article. In the experimental group, participants additionally answered about

their ability to notice whether the article is a sponsored content and cues for noticing the sponsored content. Later, they were asked to what extent they are familiar with and user of the Samsung brand. After providing their opinions about relevancy of the article topic and Samsung, they assessed the brand image of Samsung by rating the related items. Participants who need points for their required course were rewarded with participation points as a result of their participation to the survey.



5.3. Results

5.3.1. Relation of Trust and Credibility

To indicate the relationship between perceived trust and credibility of the content, the Pearson's correlation was run for both groups.

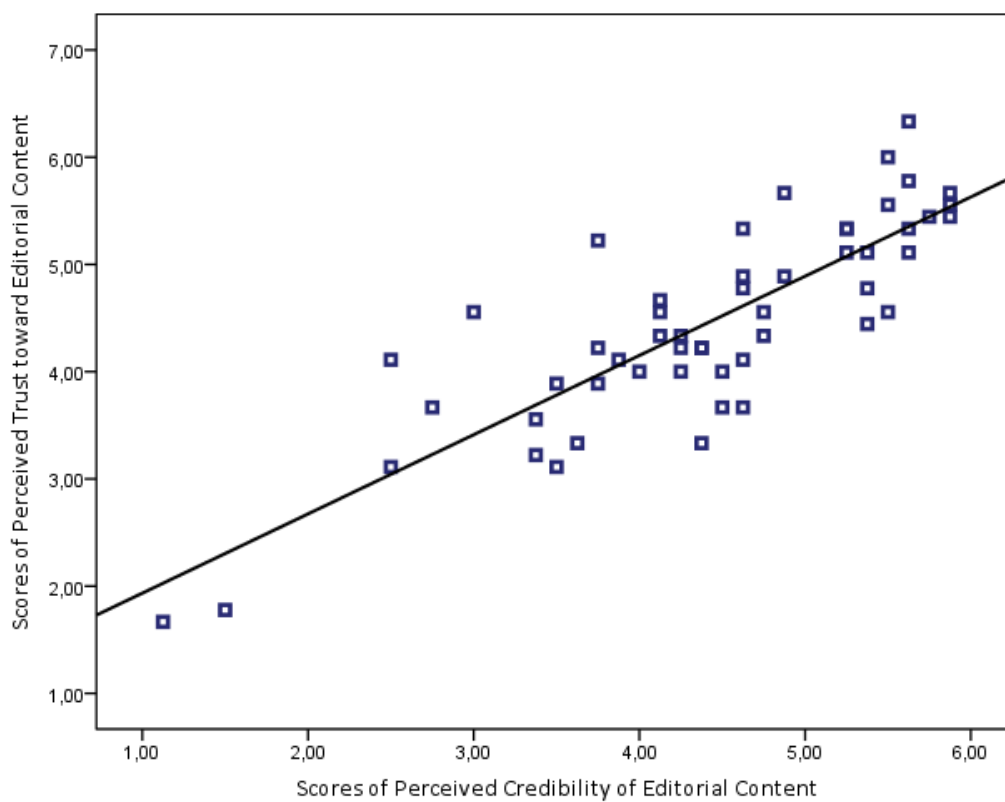


Figure 8: Correlation between Perceived Credibility and Trust toward Editorial Content

Figure 8 shows the correlation between perceived credibility and trust toward editorial content whereas Figure 9 demonstrates the correlation between perceived credibility and trust toward sponsored content.

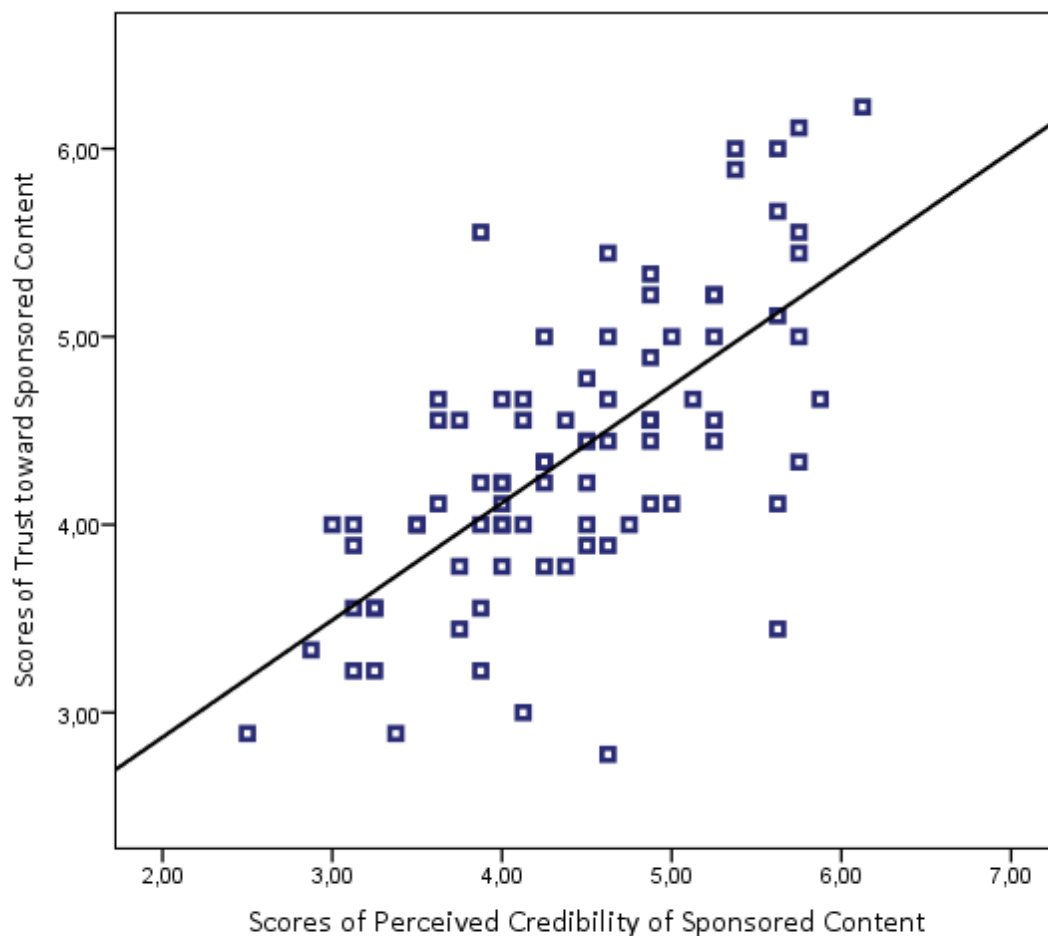


Figure 9. Correlation between Perceived Credibility and Trust toward Sponsored Content

For both the content read by control group (content without sponsored brand label), $r(51) = .837$, $p = 0.000$, and experiment group (content with sponsored brand label), $r(146) = .628$, $p = 0.000$, there was a strong positive correlation between credibility and trust. Therefore, these two findings confirmed that when participants rated perceived credibility of both contents positively, they also rated perceived trust of both contents positively.

5.3.2. Perceived Credibility and Trust Assessments of Editorial and Sponsored Contents

To examine perceived credibility and trust assessments of the control and experiment group, an independent-samples t-test was used. The findings showed that there was no difference between perceived credibility assessment of control group and experiment group, $t(73.3) = 0.109, p > 0.05$. This implied that sponsored content was found as credible as the content without the sponsored brand label, in other words, editorial content.

For perceived trust assessment of control and experiment group, again, there was no difference between two groups, $t(199) = -0.266, p > 0.05$. Meaning, sponsored content was found as trustable as editorial content. On the whole, these findings supported that sponsored content was found as credible and trustable as editorial content.

5.3.3. Brand Image of Samsung & Perceived Credibility and Trust of Its Sponsored Content

As expected from a global brand, in the experiment group, majority (88 percent) was familiar with Samsung but only 32 percent was Samsung users. Almost all those users (96 percent) had only 1-3 Samsung product(s).

Half of participants (44 percent) found the content topic relevant with the image of Samsung and 5 percent of the total participants highly agreed with this argument. 30 percent was indecisive about the relevancy of the topic and the image of Samsung. 18 percent found the topic irrelevant with the image of Samsung, especially 3 percent of the total participants found it very irrelevant.

Apart from taking descriptive information on the participants' relationship with Samsung, to analyze the link between the image of Samsung and perceived credibility and trust assessments of its sponsored content the Pearson's correlation was run.

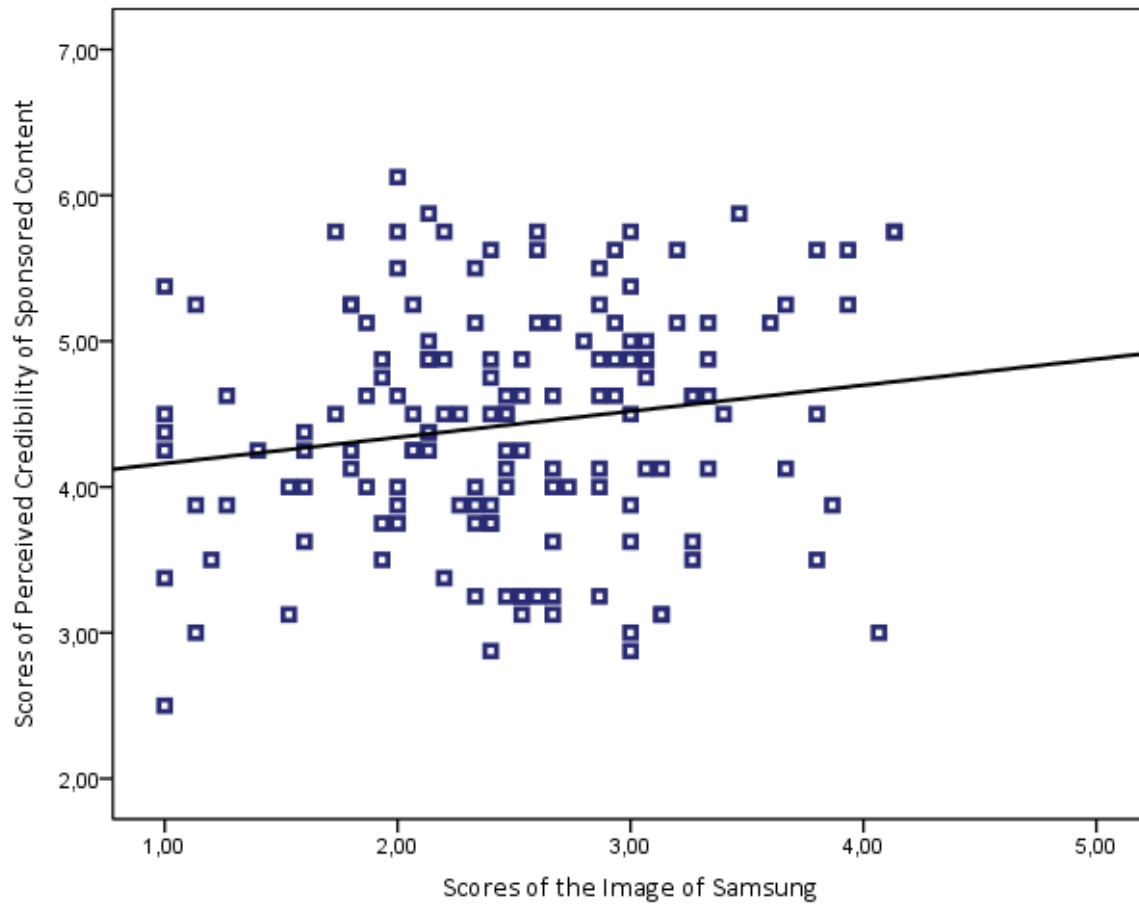


Figure 10: Correlation between the Image of Samsung and Perceived Credibility of Its Sponsored Content

Figure 10 shows the correlation between the image of Samsung and perceived credibility of its sponsored content. The correlation between the image of Samsung and perceived credibility assessment of its sponsored content was statistically significant, $r(146) = 0.162$, $p = 0.049$.

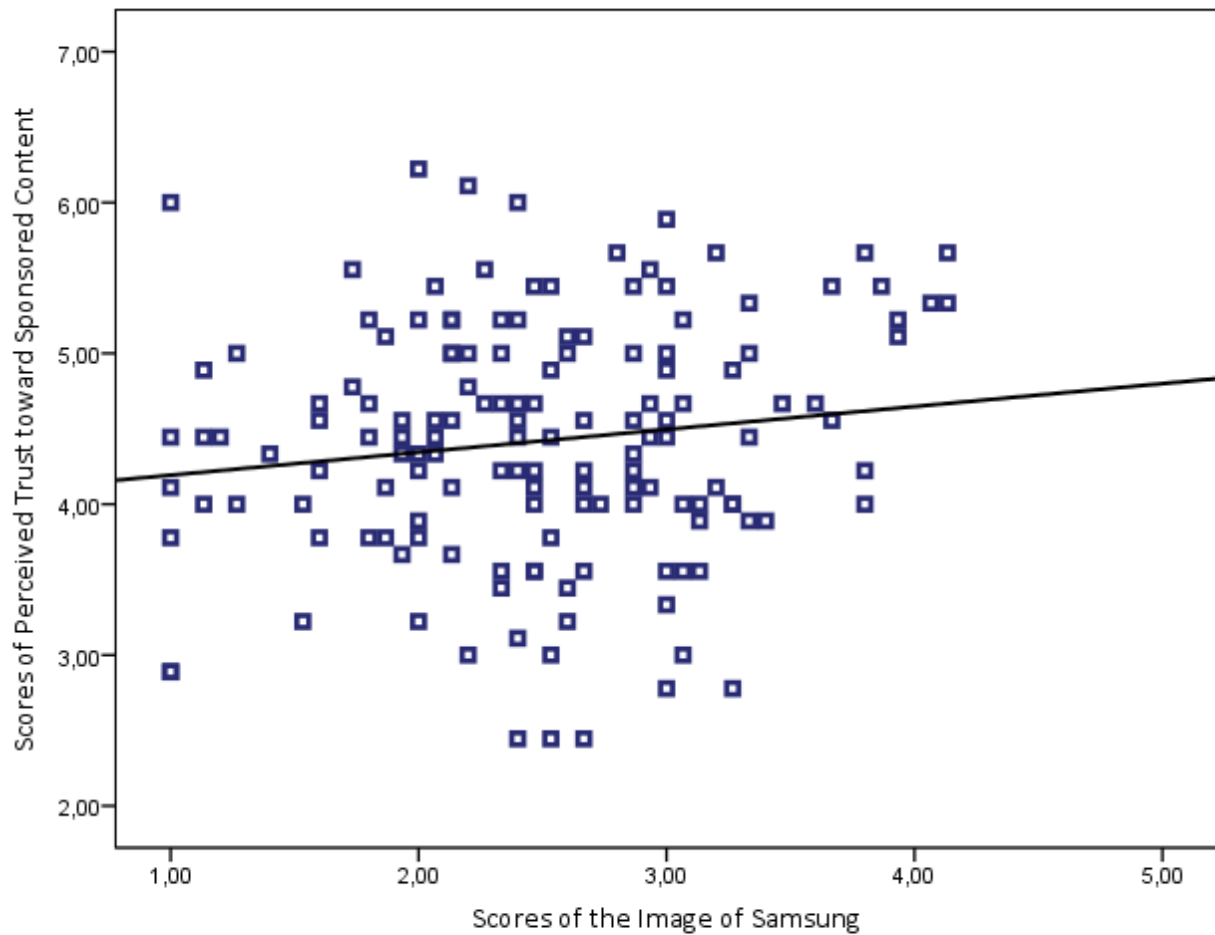


Figure 11: Correlation between the Image of Samsung and Perceived Trust toward Its Sponsored Content

Then, the image of Samsung and perceived trust assessment of its sponsored content was examined. Figure 11 shows the correlation between the image of Samsung and perceived trust toward its sponsored content. However, as it is shown in the figure, there was no significant correlation between these variables, $r(146) = 0.137$, $p > 0.05$. These findings revealed that when participants rated image of Samsung positively, they also rated perceived credibility of its sponsored content higher. However, there was no such correlation between the image of Samsung and perceived trust assessment of its sponsored content.

5.3.4. Additional Findings

Under this section, additional answers provided by participants of the experiment group are explained. These answers were mainly related to noticing sponsored content and having prior information about the content topic.

Majority of participants (79 percent) noticed that the content they read is a sponsored content and, among that majority, almost all (95 percent) noticed the support of Samsung. 11 percent was unsure whether the content is sponsored or not, and only 10 percent of the total participants failed to notice that the content is sponsored. For the indicators of sponsored content, among those who noticed the sponsored content of Samsung, 53 percent signaled the label at the bottom of the content. Another 40 percent said that both, the label at the bottom and too commercial-feel of the content were indicators. However, only 6 percent found the content too commercial and therefore noticed it was a sponsored content.

More than half (37 percent) agreed that they have prior information on the relationship between technology and healthcare systems, specifically 32 percent responded that they definitely heard this information before. 20 percent was unsure about whether they heard any information on the topic or not. Minority of participants (11 percent) were ignorant about the content topic.

5.4. Discussion

The current study provides some confirmatory findings both on the relationship between credibility and trust and comparison between editorial content and sponsored content.

Positive significant correlations between perceived credibility and trust assessments on both editorial content and sponsored content supported the idea that these notions are not related but also nurture each other (Hilligos & Rieh, 2008; as cited in Lucassen et al, 2013). Whether reading an editorial content or sponsored content, when participants rated perceived credibility of both contents positively, they also rated perceived trust of both contents positively. In this regard, these correlations support the idea that credibility is a kind of antecedent and fundamental component of trust (Hovland et al., 1953; as cited in Go et al., 2016). These correlations were predicted especially due to the existence of this relation in media and communication fields (Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015).

These correlations may be explained by the fact that credibility and trust have common dimension which is expertise and/or competence of the source or message. However, to be sure about its impact on these correlations, the study can only offer the comments of participants on details they paid attention while assessing perceived credibility and trust of the content they read. In both groups (control and experiment), participants mostly mentioned the importance of references to real and prestigious institutions like Princeton University, Samsung as famous and reliable or competent brand and expert opinions and these factors seemed to be influential in their assessments as they told. These comments reflect the tendencies of just a part of participants while making perceived credibility and trust assessments. By looking at two correlations again, it can also be inferred that these correlations also declare the similarity of basic cues used to cope with online information in terms of credibility and trust, like paying attention to surface characteristics, semantic

characteristics and source characteristics (Walthen & Burkell, 2002, Lucasen & Schraagen, 2011, Metzger, 2007). Nevertheless, these findings are not sufficient to justify this similarity.

As another confirmatory finding, taking sponsored content as credible and trustable as editorial content can be explained by the tendency to embed advertising message(s) into editorial content as also a way to shift from advertising to public relations or publicity (Jo, 2004; Celebi, 2015).

Persistency of PR professionals on making news editorial superior over advertising in years (Jo, 2004) may have an impact on shaping the perception of people that they eventually treated editorial content and advertising types like sponsored content equal in terms of their credibility and trustability. Although sponsored content is more associable with marketing practice, this finding particularly shows that sponsored content is really a promising advertising type. At this point, it can be said that the transfer of journalism credibility to sponsored content can also happen (Carlson, 2015b; as cited in Schauster et al., 2016). It is also important to note that most participants (79 percent) in the experiment group were able to notice what they read is sponsored content. As the main indicator they (52 percent) mostly stated the "sponsored" note at the bottom of the content. The second indicator was the combination of the "sponsored" note and finding the content too commercial.

Regarding the impact of brand image, this study particularly hypothesized a positive relationship between the image of Samsung and perceived credibility and trust assessment of its sponsored content basically based on strong and favorable brand image of Samsung with its top positions at brand rankings and classification as extremely strong brand. Extremely strong brand is the highest ranking that a brand can have with the label of AAA. As it was mentioned earlier, positive favorable and/or strong brand can transfer its image to other platforms or environments (Carlson & O'Cass, 2009; Smith, 2004). It was even suggested that with its positive image brand can be mediator for generating trust toward the platforms it is related to in the context of online

environment (Carlson & O’Cass, 2009). Therefore, it was expected that both perceived credibility and trust of its sponsored content will be positively correlated with its brand image. Nevertheless, the results demonstrated that its brand image could only be positively correlated with perceived credibility of its sponsored content. To interpret these findings, one can give several explanations based on conceptualization of trust, topic of the sponsored content, having information on the topic of sponsored content and even being a Samsung user.

Starting with conceptualization of trust, despite finding a positive significant correlation between credibility and trust, this correlation might not give the guarantee of observing the same correlation every time. It can be seen that the image of Samsung used its impact on perceived credibility assessment of its sponsored content just like previous studies suggested that credibility of a brand can affect the credibility of branded product information (McKnight & Kacmar, 2006, Zha et al., 2015). The more positive participants rated the image of Samsung, the more positive rating they also provided for perceived credibility of its sponsored content. One reason for not finding such correlation for perceived trust of its sponsored content can be the complex and broader structure of trust (McKnight, Chervany, 2001). As aforementioned, the extensiveness of trust over credibility has been accepted by the studies on behavioral and social science. In this sense, again, credibility can be seen as an antecedent of trust that sometimes fails to cultivate the feeling of trust.

Nevertheless, finding no correlation between the image of Samsung and perceived trust of its sponsored content might also result from the fact that only 35 percent of participants were Samsung users.

Although Samsung proved its strength by its reliable smartphones, hardware solutions and top positions at distinguished brand rankings, majority of non-users might refrain from giving high points on the trust scale. Besides this possibility, the topic of its sponsored content and having information on the topic can matter. The topic of sponsored content was the future of healthcare

system. The sponsored content made the audience envision a future where big data and IoT (Internet of Things) change the patient-doctor relationship and gave some predictions like "over the next five years, 80 percent of consumer service interaction will make use of these services". Majority of participants (69 percent) said that they have information on the topic either moderately or definitely. At this point, they might either focus on the message of the content without regarding the image of Samsung or they might not need to trust the content because of the drawn future scenario. When looking at the comments of participants about their stand on perceived credibility and trust of the content, actually they considered the scenario either realistic or fictional and their judgments were shaped by these attitudes as well. Some of them took negative attitudes because the central issue was healthcare system which seemed to create controversy among participants. When again thinking these details with the fact that the majority was not Samsung users, it might be fair to conclude that their lack of experience with Samsung might prevent them to assess the capabilities of the brand in the context of future scenario drawn for the healthcare system.

As a limitation of this study, it can be said that there was a lack of balance between the sample sizes of control group (N= 53) and experiment group (N= 148). Thus, comparison of perceived credibility and trust assessment between editorial content and sponsored content can be made with more balanced sample size in future studies.

CHAPTER VI: DOES SPONSORED CONTENT COMPENSATE THE DAMAGED IMAGE OF A BRAND? (STUDY 2)

6.1. Hypotheses & Research Questions

As the importance of brand image is mentioned in Chapter 2, the current study investigates whether a content supported by a brand with a damaged image has a different perception among the audience or not. The first study gave insights about the impact of brand image of Samsung as an established, strong and global technology company on the perceived credibility and trust assessment of its sponsored content. The current study investigates the influence of reputation management on brand image and its potential relationship with the perceived credibility and trust assessment of a sponsored content.

Reputation represents the success of a brand without taking into consideration its performance or quality (Power & Whelan, 2005). In the marketing field, reputation and brand image can be used synonymously. Still, it was also claimed that reputation is more comprehensive and fixed concept compared to brand image. Perception of reputation is influenced by values like credibility, reliability, responsibility and trustworthiness (Fombrun, 1996; as cited in Power & Whelan, 2005). To create and maintain a positive reputation, companies mostly execute strategies for reputation management. These strategies control both direct and indirect experiences of the audience, in this way companies publicize their positive image as well. A study suggested that when companies do not have positive or favorable image, then their PR activities are not found as having altruistic motivations. Contrarily, for companies with positive or favorable image, the audience tends to presume that their PR activities carry altruistic motivations (Hanzaee & Farsani, 2011). Additionally, if companies have favorable reputation before they experience a reputation crisis, their favorable image can protect the company from the severe effects of the crisis (Coombs &

Holladay, 2006). This fact is explained by the phrase, firstly coined in psychology field, "halo effect". Halo effect can be considered as the explanation of brand image transfer phenomenon mentioned in the Study 1 since it mainly suggests that attitudes of people toward a particular feature or aspect of an entity can be influenced by the overall impression of that entity. To measure the impact of reputation management on brand image and its potential relationship with sponsored content assessment, a brand which recently experienced a reputation crisis has been used. In order to explore its influence profoundly, it was best to use a local brand. Hence, Turkcell was the ideal candidate as a pioneer in its category to evaluate the sponsored content based on these factors.

Turkcell is the first GSM service provider in Turkey and evolved into being both national and regional market leader in its industry. After being the first and only Turkish company to be traded on New York Stock Exchange in July 2000 and starting to make investments abroad, it has become one of the top global players in its industry (Ozdora-Aksak, 2015). Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Georgia are some of the countries that Turkcell maintains its mobile services abroad. The company operates under the name of Turkcell Europe in Germany and holds a 100% stake of a Ukraine based company (Turkcell, 2016a). Turkcell has been considered as one of the top valuable brands in Turkey. One of the recent rankings on valuable brands revealed by BrandFinance showed that Turkcell is the sixth valuable brand in Turkey. Within the telecommunications industry in Turkey, it ranked as the second valuable brand (Turkey100, 2016). In these rankings, the company has proven its strength by being rated as a very strong brand. Very strong brand is the second highest ranking that a brand can have with the label of AA.

Turkcell has been known for its corporate social responsibility projects in diverse fields like education, entrepreneurship, art and culture and sports as well (Turkcell, 2016b). In this direction, the company has supported various scholarship programs, for instance, the "Kardelenler" project to increase the educated female population especially in the eastern provinces of Turkey. Apart from

this, Turkcell has had other social responsibility projects in education like giving scholarships to graduate students (A.A, 2008) or raising new candidates for informatics industry under the "Geleceği Yazanlar" project. Along with these kinds of responsibility acts, the company maintains various sponsorship projects by supporting certain foundations as well. One of the foundations supported by Turkcell is the Ensar Foundation. The Ensar Foundation is mainly known as an organization which intends to enhance the organizational and academic practices on religious culture and moral knowledge on both the local and global scale (Ensar Vakfı, 2016). Turkcell was one of the sponsors of the award ceremony named "Türkiye Değer Ödülleri" which is organized by the Ensar Foundation. After the Ensar Foundation was in the news due to a case of child abuse in March 2016 (Mansuroğlu, 2016), Turkcell has received many reactions due to being a sponsor of this foundation. Some of these reactions, especially those were expressed on Twitter, were so damaging for the image of the brand, Turkcell requested an access ban for these reactions (Semercioglu, 2016).

By launching a statement on the issue, Turkcell declared that it maintained its support to the foundation without mentioning its name for the sake of supporting the youth (Turkcell'den 'Ensar'a destek' eleştirilerine yanıt, 2016). Following these consequences, Turkcell lost 600 thousand customers in the first quarter of 2016. Due to this dramatic decrease, it was stated that the total customer number of Turkcell became equivalent with its total customer number in 2012 (Ensar, Turkcell'e 3 ayda 600 bin abone kaybettirdi, 2016). Very recently, it became evident that third quarter net profits of Turkcell decreased by 71.2 percent (Turkcell'in 3. çeyrek net karı %71.2 düştü, 2016). While the estimated net profit by analysts was around 472 million Turkish Liras, which is still low compared to net profits of last year, actual net is 181.7 million Turkish Liras. This signifies that whether resulted from the reputation crisis or not, the brand has been going through very tough times.

In order to study the effects of experiencing a reputation crisis as a brand, some findings on sponsorship studies especially fit the case Turkcell experienced and offer productive insights to formulate research questions on this issue. Schittka and his colleagues (2013) emphasized the influence of negative sponsorship stimuli like negative information about the sponsee or its reputation crisis on the image of sponsee. By addressing previous studies, they indicated that reflections of reputation crisis in other words negative spillover effects can vary. Most studies implied that negative information about a case (in the issue of Turkcell being sponsor to an association which became a current issue with a child abuse incident) can negatively influence the image of sponsored brand. Nevertheless, some studies did not find relationship between these variables or found one just within limited conditions (Till & Shimp, 1998; as cited in Schittka et al., 2013). As mentioned before, by referring to the halo effect, favorable image can protect companies from the negative effects of a reputation crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). Therefore, the current study offers the following research question;

RQ1: Do perceived credibility and trust evaluations of the sponsored content of a brand that recently suffered from a reputation crisis give the same results with the Study 1?

6.2. Methodology

6.2.1. Participants

Participants of the study (N= 146) were both undergraduate and graduate students from the different departments in Bilkent University. Their age information was categorized into age intervals as 18-23, 24-29, 30-35 and 35+.

Consisting of undergraduate (N= 110) and graduate students (N= 36), most of them (77 percent) belonged to 18-23 age interval and it was followed by 24-29 with 20 percent. 62 percent of them were female and the rest were male.

For this study, international students did not be counted as participants due to not being able to evaluate the effect of reputation crisis Turkcell experienced as a local brand.

6.2.2. Apparatus and Materials

This time, as sponsored content of Turkcell, one of its original publicity contents was used (Özyeğin Üniversitesi ve Turkcell Girişim Fabrikası ile girişimci yetiştirecek, 2011). The original content was featured on the official website of Turkcell. It was about the empowerment program that supports the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Turkey. It gave information about the distinctive qualities of this program such as offering target-specific strategies both theoretically and practically by academics and experienced entrepreneurs. Turkcell was positioned in the article as the initiator of this program which collaborates with academics from a distinguished university and other established government-owned companies. The original content was in Turkish. It was translated into

English for the current survey. Additionally, the content was shortened to make it more engaging and reader-friendly for participants.

The three Likert-type scales used in the Study 1 survey were again used for this study.

Credibility assessment of the content was made by using some items taken from the message credibility measures listed by Appelman and Sundar (2015). In their study, Appelman and Sundar (2015) indicated the most significant adjectives for message credibility assessment and these were accurate, authentic and believable. There were 10 adjectives which are significant as symbolizing important aspects of message credibility. Out of these findings, the adjectives used in the current study were *accurate, authentic, believable, consistent, well-presented, expert, complete* and *objective*. The answers for these adjectives were taken in the range from 1 ("describes very poorly") to 7 ("describes very well"). The scale was highly reliable just like in Study 1 (Cronbach's $\alpha=.82$).

For assessing the trust of the content, ADTRUST scale with 20 items was partially used. The scale, originally taken from Soh, Reid and King's study (2007; as cited in Sæmundsson, 2012), had items classified under four factors; reliability, usefulness, affect and willingness to rely on. The current study only used the adjectives of reliability factor. These adjectives were *accurate, honest, truthful, credible, reliable, dependable, factual, complete* and *clear*. The answer opinions for these adjectives ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The reliability of scale was high again (Cronbach's $\alpha=.85$).

Brand image scale for Turkcell was adopted by a brand image benefits scale used for a cosmetic brand (Sondoh et al., 2007). 15 items within five factors (experiential benefit, symbolic benefit, social benefit, functional benefit and appearance enhances) was used but only an item "makes me feel beautiful" was changed as "makes my life easier" due to the different functions of a cosmetic and a telecommunications brand. Some items of the scale were "*Turkcell makes me feel good*",

Turkcell helps me to better fit into my social group", "Turkcell helps me feel accepted", "Turkcell performs as it promises", "Turkcell makes a good impression of me on other people". The items were answered in the range from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The reliability of scale was really high similar to Study 1 (Cronbach's $\alpha=.94$).

6.2.3. Procedure

This study was not conducted as a between-subjects experiment. It had only one survey group and participants completed the survey just once. Participants were asked to read a brief article about empowering entrepreneurship ecosystem in Turkey. The article included "This article is sponsored by Turkcell" label along with a brief description of Turkcell. Before reading the article, participants of both groups gave their consent to participate in the study. After reading the article, just like in Study 1, participants responded to the questions based on their knowledge level on the topic of the article and later rated the article based on adjectives that describe its credibility and trust. They were also asked to comment on the important details they paid attention to while assessing the perceived credibility and trust of the article. Similar with the experimental group in Study 1, participants answered about their ability to notice whether the article is a sponsored content and cues for noticing the sponsored content. Then, they were asked to what extent they are familiar with and a user of Turkcell brand. After giving opinion about relevancy of the article topic and Turkcell, they assessed the brand image of Turkcell by rating the related items. Unlike the survey questions in Study 1, participants additionally responded whether they had heard of the reputation crisis Turkcell experienced as a result of its support of the Ensar Foundation or not. They also gave their opinions about the statement of Turkcell on the issue and lastly indicated the impact of this issue on their preference to continue to use the services of Turkcell. Participants who need points for their required course were rewarded with participation points as a result of their participation to the survey.

6.3. Results

6.3.1. Relation of Trust and Credibility

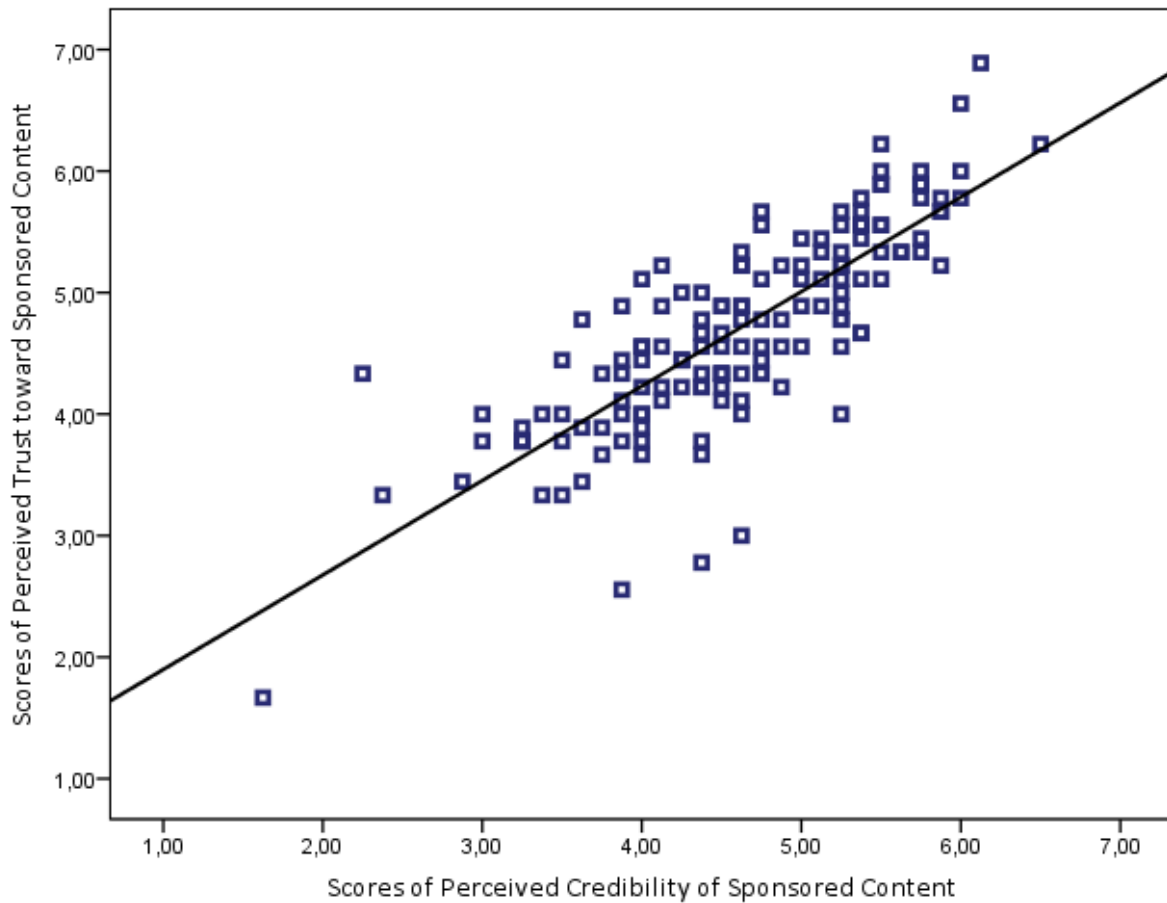


Figure 12: Correlation between Perceived Credibility and Trust toward Sponsored Content

Once again to justify the positive correlation between perceived trust and credibility of the content, the Pearson's correlation was run. Figure 12 shows the correlation between perceived credibility and trust toward the sponsored content of Turkcell. As expected, the correlation between two concepts was significantly positive, $r(144) = 0.805$, $p=0.000$. This finding also demonstrated that when participants rated perceived credibility of both contents positively, they also rated perceived trust of both contents positively.

6.3.2. Brand Image of Turkcell & Perceived Credibility and Trust of Its Sponsored Content

Majority of participants (99 percent) were familiar with Turkcell, but only 45 percent of them were still Turkcell users. 27 percent dropped their services and the other 27 percent never used Turkcell.

36 percent of participants found the content topic relevant with the image of Turkcell and 5 percent of the total participants highly agreed with this argument. 34 percent was indecisive about the relevancy of the topic and the image of Turkcell. 23 percent found the topic irrelevant with the image of Turkcell, especially 2 percent of the total participants found it very irrelevant.

To find out whether there is any relationship between the image of Turkcell and perceived credibility and trust assessments of its sponsored content, Pearson's correlation was used.

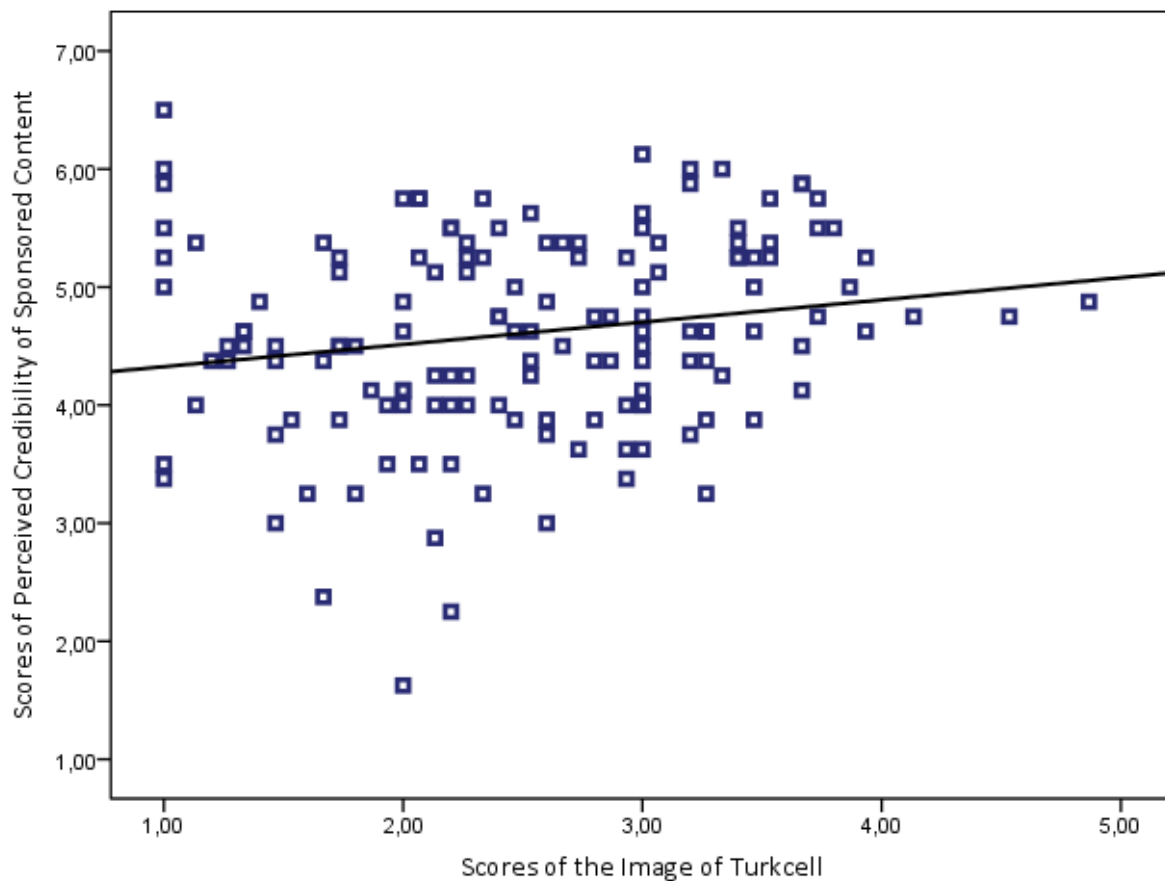


Figure 13: Correlation between the Image of Turkcell and Perceived Credibility of Its Sponsored Content

Figure 13 shows the correlation between the image of Turkcell and perceived credibility of its sponsored content whereas Figure 14 demonstrates the correlation between the image of Turkcell and perceived trust toward its sponsored content. The correlation between the image of Turkcell and perceived credibility assessment of its sponsored content was statistically significant, $r(144) = 0.185, p < 0.05$.

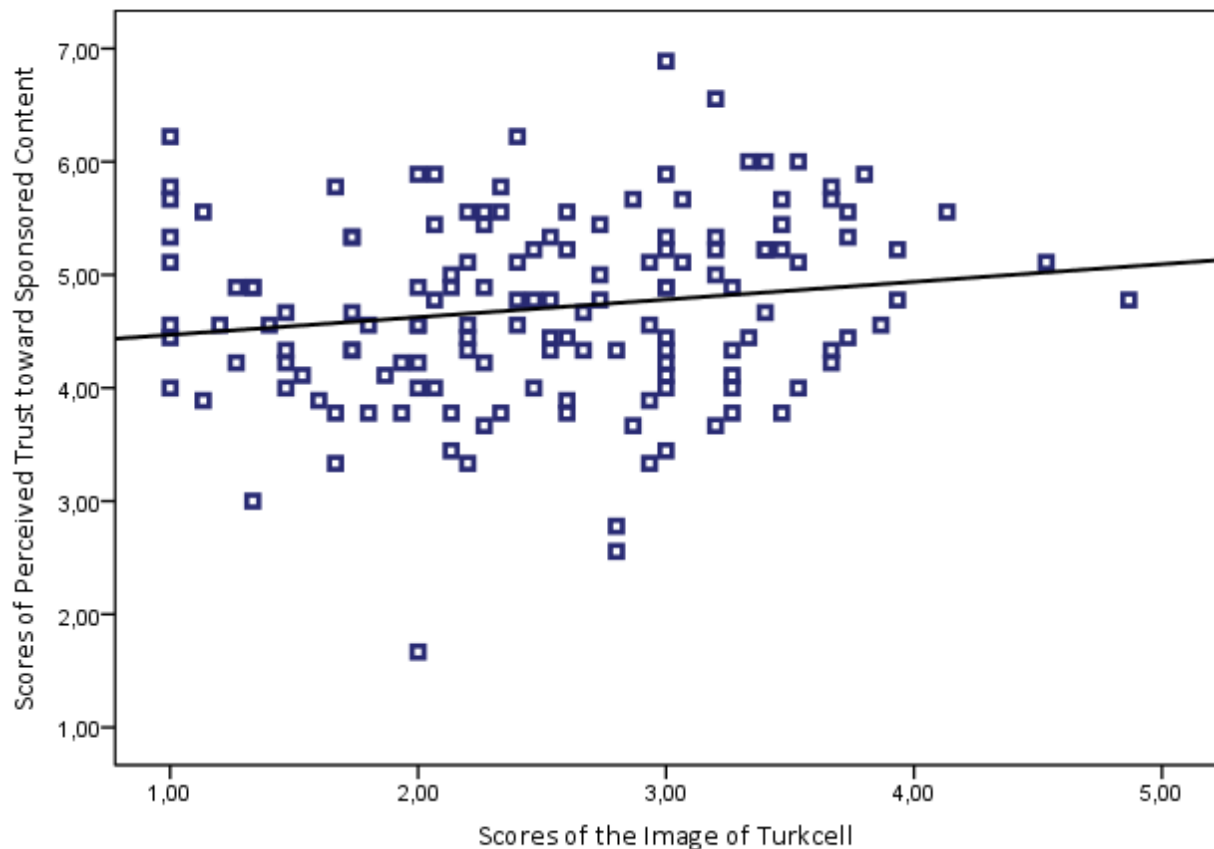


Figure 14: Correlation between the Image of Turkcell and Perceived Trust toward Its Sponsored Content

Although, for the image of Samsung and trust assessment of its sponsored content, the correlation was not statistically significant, $r(144) = 0.159$, $p = 0.056$. These findings revealed that the image of Turkcell had only a positive correlation with perceived credibility of its sponsored content rather than perceived trust of its sponsored content. Meaning, when people rated the image of Turkcell more positively, they also assessed perceived credibility of its sponsored content more positively. There was no such correlation between the image of Turkcell and perceived trust assessment of its sponsored content.

6.3.3. Reflection of the Crisis Experienced by Turkcell on Its Content and Image Assessments

Considerable amount of participants (65 percent) had information about the crisis Turkcell has experienced as a result of its sponsorship of the Ensar Foundation. Only 35 percent did not have information about the incident. Among those who knew about the crisis, 70 percent came across with the statement of Turkcell on the occasion and most of them (89 percent) were unsatisfied with the statement. Only 7 percent changed their operator as a result of the crisis. 24 percent of them considered to change their GSM regarding the crisis but still use Turkcell. 20 percent also changed their operator but their preference is not related with the crisis. 37 percent still use Turkcell without considering the crisis. The rest (12 percent) never used Turkcell.

An independent t-test was run to discover any impact of knowing the crisis experienced by Turkcell and satisfying with the statement of Turkcell on perceived credibility and trust of its sponsored content and the brand image of Turkcell. There was no difference between having information about the crisis and perceived credibility, $t(144) = -1.337$, $p > 0.05$, and perceived trust, $t(144) = -1.426$, $p > 0.05$, of the sponsored content of Turkcell. Yet, there was a difference between having information about the crisis and the brand image of Turkcell, $t(144) = -2.899$, $p < 0.05$. Those who have information about the crisis experienced by Turkcell gave fewer score for the brand image of Turkcell in comparison with the ones having no information about the crisis. None of the assessments (perceived credibility, $t(65) = 0.015$, $p > 0.05$, perceived trust, $t(65) = 0.183$, $p > 0.05$, and brand image, $t(65) = 0.198$, $p > 0.05$) differed in terms of satisfying with the statement of Turkcell about their sponsorship of the Ensar Foundation.

6.3.4. Comparison between the Content and Image Assessments of Samsung and Turkcell

To reveal whether there are any differences between sponsored contents of Samsung and Turkcell in accordance with perceived credibility and trust assessments of their contents and images, an independent-samples t-test was run.

The findings showed that there was no difference between perceived credibility assessment of sponsored contents of Samsung and Turkcell, $t(292) = -1.904$, $p > 0.05$. This implied that the sponsored content of Turkcell was found as credible as the sponsored content of Samsung.

For perceived trust assessment of control and experiment group, however, there was a difference between two groups, $t(292) = -3.040$, $p < 0.05$. In fact, the sponsored content of Turkcell was found more trustable than sponsored content of Samsung.

In terms of comparing the brand images of Samsung and Turkcell, there was no significant difference between them $t(292) = -0.298$, $p > 0.05$. This finding signified that the image of Samsung had similar score with the image score of Turkcell.

6.3.5. Additional Findings

Under this section, additional answers provided by participants are explained in detail. These answers were mainly related to noticing sponsored content and having prior information about the content topic.

Majority of participants (73 percent) noticed that the content they read is a sponsored content and, among that majority, almost all (89 percent) noticed the support of Turkcell. 14 percent was unsure whether the content is sponsored or not, and only 14 percent of the total participants failed to notice that the content is sponsored. For the indicators of sponsored content, among those who noticed the sponsored content, 33 percent signaled the label at the bottom of the content. Another 31 percent

said that both, the label at the bottom and too commercial-feel of the content were indicators. However, only 10 percent found the content too commercial and therefore noticed it was a sponsored content.

One in four participants (24 percent) agreed that they have prior information on empowerment programs for entrepreneurship, specifically 12 percent responded that they definitely heard this information before. 28 percent was unsure about whether they heard any information on the topic or not. Majority of participants (31 percent) did not hear any information about the topic and 6 percent was completely ignorant.



6.4. Discussion

Main concerns of this study were comparing two sponsored contents belonging to two different brands, Samsung as an established and global technology company and Turkcell as an established and local telecommunications company which lately experienced a reputation crisis. Firstly, by analyzing the participant responses of Study 2, similar findings with Study 1 were detected in terms of the image effect of Turkcell on perceived credibility and trust assessment of its sponsored content. As one of the top valuable brands in Turkey, it succeeded to transfer its image to perceived credibility of its sponsored content just like Samsung did.

Despite the minor content difference, this result again seemed to confirm the findings that credibility of a brand can affect the credibility of branded product information (McKnight & Kacmar, 2006, Zha et al., 2015). Yet, once again, its image and perceived trust toward its sponsored content had no significant correlation. For the interpretation, again the complex and broader structure of trust compared to credibility can be given (McKnight, Chervany, 2001). As another factor, experiencing a reputation crisis can be considered. However, its impact was only clearly seen in the assessment of its brand image. As compatible with previous findings on negative spillover effects experienced by sponsored brands (Bailey, 2007; as cited in Schittka et al, 2013), those who had information on the crisis rated the image of Turkcell lower than those who did not have information about the crisis. Other than that the assessments of its sponsored content seemed to be not influenced by the crisis. It should be noted that 35 percent did not have information about the crisis and only 7 percent of participants changed their operator due to the crisis. Majority of them (37 percent) did not consider the crisis and continued to use the service of Turkcell. This finding confirmed the understanding that the relationship between consumer and brand essentially functioned based on perceived goal compatibility (Fournier, 1998).

One of the most exceptional findings of this study is about the comparison of sponsored contents of Samsung and Turkcell in terms of perceived trust assessments. First of all, the images of both brands did not differ. This outcome is understandable regarding their common features like being a familiar brand which specializes in technology and/or telecommunications industry and proving its strength by positioning prestigious brand rankings. Therefore, their experiential, functional, social, symbolic and appearance enhancer benefits can be similar. However, participants who read the sponsored content of Turkcell gave higher scores on its perceived trust compared to participants who read the sponsored content of Samsung. At this point, it might be sensible to refer to the differences between their topics of their contents. Although both contents revealed their potential to provide services to solve some (potential) problems, the content of Turkcell offered a more concrete scenario which was designed to empower the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Turkey along with academics, experienced entrepreneurs and government-owned companies compared to the visionary scenario of Samsung on healthcare systems.

As a local and established brand leading that kind of program which includes striking collaborations with all key actors related to entrepreneurship ecosystem in Turkey for empowerment, the content of Turkcell might give the impression that its intention is valuable and seem to be successful to fill a huge gap for entrepreneurs in Turkey. This impression may be especially crucial for undergraduate and graduate students as being potential entrepreneurship candidates in the future or even if they did not find themselves as candidates, they might be aware that these kinds of efforts are targeted for their generation. In that manner, they might find the content of Turkcell as trustable. Similar with the comments of participants who read the content of Samsung either as editorial content or sponsored content, participants who read the sponsored content of Turkcell also mentioned referenced companies and institutions, expert opinions, factual data made them to count the content more credible and/or trustable.

Another explanatory point can be having information about the topic. Unlike participants who read the sponsored content of Samsung, majority of participants who read the sponsored content of Turkcell did not have information about the topic. Having no information about the matter they trusted (Simmel, 1990; 2008; Luhmann, 1999; Bildtgard, 2008; Zachmann & Ostby, 2011; as cited in Rittenhofer & Povlsen, 2015, might be explained with the fact that lacking information about a topic made people vulnerable or to face with uncertainty which are preconditions of trust generation (Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 1979; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008; Mayer et al., 1995). Lastly, participants of this study also were able to notice what they read is sponsored content in general. However, the percent of participants in question (72 percent) was slightly lower compared to the percent of participants noticed the content of Samsung as sponsored content (79 percent). In this regard, it can be said that the content of Turkcell might give the impression of editorial content as publicity material as well.

Indeed, the most apparent limitation of this study is being unable to find a content sponsored by Turkcell literally in terms of native advertising. In order to find an existing material of Turkcell which could be classified as similar with the edited version of original sponsored content of Samsung, the study used one of the publicity materials of Turkcell. Selected material was very similar with the content of Samsung by providing expert opinions, mentioning prestigious institutions in their field and factual data. Despite of comparing the impact of local and global brand perceptions on the assessment of sponsored content was possible; the current study did not use any questionnaire to examine this impact. Out of the findings, one can only make some inferences about it or can question appropriate methods for the investigation of the impact in question.

CHAPTER VII: OVERALL DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

7.1. Theoretical Contribution

The current thesis specifically investigated the perceived credibility and trust assessments of two sponsored contents, in other words, in-feed units as one of the types of native advertising. Firstly, it was crucial to explore any differences between the perception of editorial content and sponsored content. As expected and mentioned before, the results showed that people treated sponsored content similar to editorial content. The only difference between the examples of editorial content and sponsored content was the label of "sponsored" information, it is important to remind the ability of participants to notice the sponsored content. In both sponsored contents, majority of participants (79 percent for Samsung / 72 percent for Turkcell) were able to notice what they read is sponsored content. Among them almost all participants (95 percent for Samsung / 89 percent for Turkcell) were able to notice the sponsored brands as well. These findings shed light on the ability of recognizing sponsored content among Turkish people as this issue was not studied before. It is especially crucial since the ability to recognize sponsored content has been a critical element in terms of shaping attitudes of the audience toward sponsored content (Campbell & Marks, 2015; Levi, 2015). Recent studies on this issue (Lazauskas, 2016; Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning, 2016) mostly showed that audiences could not distinguish sponsored content from editorial content. Due to another study by the content marketing firm Contently and the Tow-Knight Center at CUNY and Radius Global Market Research (Lazauskas, 2016), majority of the audience thought the content they read was hybrid content. The research of Stanford History Education Group (Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning, 2016) demonstrated the confusion in question among middle school students. Just like these studies, the current thesis with its contrary findings provides significant contribution not only to the advertising field but also to substantial topics like new media literacy. Since sponsored

content is only placed online, the perceptions and attitudes of the audience toward the advertising type are related to their new media literacy skills as well.

Despite noticing what they read as sponsored content, in both sponsored contents, it was revealed that their perceived credibility assessments of sponsored contents were positively correlated with the images of sponsored brands. This finding confirmed the transfer of positive or favorable brand image to another environment related with the brand (Carlson & O'Cass, 2009) in terms of perceived credibility assessment of the sponsored contents of two brands. Finding the topic of content they read relevant with the sponsored brand may also justify this outcome. Yet, their brand images were not strong enough to be a mediator for generating trust toward their sponsored contents. While comparing the scores of perceived trust assessments of two brands, at first it was surprising to find differences between them. Though, superiority of the content sponsored by Turkcell over the content sponsored by Samsung can be easily explained by the topic differences. It was assumed that more concrete scenario drawn on a topic that most participants had no information (the content sponsored by Turkcell) might cause the difference compared to more futuristic or visionary scenario drawn on a topic that most participants had information in a certain level (the content sponsored by Samsung). Besides, lacking information about the topic might make people vulnerable or to face with uncertainty which are preconditions of trust generation (Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 1979; as cited in Kelton et al., 2008; Mayer et al., 1995). Lastly, having slightly lower percent of participants (72 percent) on the ability to notice sponsored content might give the impression of editorial content and therefore the content sponsored by Turkcell gained more trust than the content sponsored by Samsung.

Speaking of the difference of the content sponsored by Turkcell, the impact of experiencing a reputation crisis seemed to not influence the assessments of its content. Due to the findings, experiencing a reputation crisis seems to only influence the assessment of brand image and this

outcome justifies the need of companies to execute strategies for reputation management with the aim of maintaining positive reputation. In that manner, having favorable prior reputation as a protector of companies from the negative effects of reputation crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2006) may explain the sponsored content assessment of Turkcell as well. Lastly, the current thesis preferred to use the combination of perceived credibility and trust assessments for both editorial and sponsored contents. Positive correlation between credibility and trust concepts in both studies affirmed the correctness of using them in combination. In this way, this finding also contributes value to the scarce study area which explores the relationship between credibility and trust.

7.2. Managerial Contributions

Assessments of participants also provide some insights for media agencies, media publishers, creative agencies, specialized digital agencies, PR agencies and content marketing agencies. Regardless of sponsored brand difference, both studies revealed the importance of sources, expert opinions, factual and numerical data, writing style and consistency. By putting aside findings of brand image effect on the assessments of sponsored contents, it can be said that the brand can work as both credible element and an element raising doubts. Regarding the comments of participants, referencing real and famous companies and institutions can create an efficient shortcut for people to evaluate the content as either credible or trustable. Relevancy of the brands with content topic is another emphasized element. At that point, people seem to evaluate the competency of brand and its relevancy with content topic all together.

Type of content topic also matters. As aforementioned, the findings of the second study inferred that drawing a concrete scenario might cause different attitudes compared to drawing a futuristic or visionary scenario in terms of perceived trust assessment of the contents. Contents with a futuristic or visionary scenario also have their audience. Regarding the comments on the content sponsored

by Samsung, a few participants believed the scenario drawn in the content. Finding the scenario realistic and welcoming predictable ideas also lead people to give credits to the contents with a futuristic or visionary scenario.

Another demand of participants from the content they read as a condition to be trustable or credible is covering all perspectives about the topic. While considering this demand, education level of participants should also be considered. Additionally, the most credible and trustable sponsored content can cover all perspectives and be clear at the same time.

The current thesis overcame the potential confusion of participants on deciding the content type by putting the note of "this article is sponsored by X brand" at the bottom of the page along with a brief definition about the brand. This approach worked for both sponsored contents as a result of high scores on identifying their types. The recent study of Contently and the Tow-Knight Center at CUNY and Radius Global Market Research (Lazauskas, 2016) supported the functionality of the term "sponsored" as being the least confusing label to identify the sponsored contents. If the current thesis preferred to choose labels like "advertising", "presented by", "brought to you by", "promoted", "paid post" in its both studies, the ability of participants to notice the content type would differ as well.

Apart from the potential perception differences of various labels for sponsored contents, the findings of the two studies confirmed that sponsored contents can really be regarded as a hybrid format combining advertising and PR activities. Despite being counted as an advertising type, sponsored content gives the similar amount of credibility and trust with editorial content or publicity activities of PR. In this way, sponsored content proves its power by decreasing the annoying side of advertising and, additionally, deserves the label of "in-between format".

7.3. Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Both studies have a few limitations. Despite the invaluable contributions of both studies on showing the ability of Turkish people to notice the sponsored content, their understanding of sponsored content could be asked in more detail. Although the relationship between the image of sponsored brand and perceived credibility and trust assessment of sponsored content in both studies gave some idea about attitudes of Turkish people toward sponsored content, still questions like to what extent they find the content deceitful, amusing or annoying could be asked. Another limitation of both studies is excluding the medium impact in terms of perceived credibility assessment of the contents. This factor was excluded deliberately due to being able to clearly measure the impact of message and brand as a source on perceived credibility assessments. Also, in the context of sponsored content, it was not meaningful to study medium differences since this advertising type is only common in online environment. However, to study the impact of medium difference, a comparison between a sponsored content and an advertorial in print form could be made.

While examining outcomes of the two studies, the factor of having information on the content topic was addressed. This factor is quite crucial to interpret the results in terms of theories like Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the model basically emphasized the role of having high or low motivation or ability on making judgments. Due to this model, when people have a high motivation and ability to process the information, they are prone to go over all details coming from the message, source, content and themselves (for instance their emotions). Otherwise, by having low motivation or low ability, their judgment is shaped by low effort processes like only paying attention to the source as a shortcut. Regarding this model, the current study could be done by providing participants another scale which measures their "need to evaluate" the content. In this way, their perceived credibility and trust assessment could be examined more elaborately by regarding this factor as well. As another limitation, the design of

both studies can be mentioned. It was observed that a few participants thought the source of content they read is the researcher. In this context, these participants probably assessed the content based on this schema. Therefore, making research about the effect of sponsored content can be overshadowed by the survey design. Lastly, more advanced statistical analyses could be run to show the relation between main variables and additional findings.

Apart from these study limitations, the current thesis also offers some suggestions for future research. Using relatively small sample sizes which only consisted of students should be considered as one of the apparent limitations of the thesis. Both studies provided an initial insight about attitudes of Turkish people toward sponsored content, but future research can study the same issue with larger samples, for instance non-students. Alternatively, they can explore the potential impact of education level among Turkish people as the survey of Lazauskas (2014) revealed differences between high school, undergraduate and graduate students in the US sample. The results of survey indicated that people with higher education levels (e.g. with graduate degrees) felt more deceived by sponsored content compared to people with lower education levels (e.g. with high school diplomas).

Another variation can be made while selecting the category of sponsored brand. The current study investigated the attitude of participants toward sponsored content by using brands that belong to technology industry. Using the sponsored content of brands from other industries may give interesting results in terms of perceived credibility and trust assessment. While studying the brand image, both studies used the scale that was developed for a cosmetic brand. This preference was made as a result of absence of a scale measuring the image of brands in technology and/or telecommunications industry. Yet, its five factors (experiential benefit, symbolic benefit, social benefit, functional benefit and appearance enhances) satisfactorily complied with the image assessments of Samsung and Turkcell. Among the items, only the item of "Brand X makes me feel

beautiful" was incompatible with the function of Samsung and Turkcell, therefore, both studies used this item as "Brand X makes my life easier". Speaking of the measurement of brand image, scales formed by other dimensions of brand image like brand attitude, brand association or brand personality can be used in another experiment. Additionally, the impact of the brand can be studied also within the context of other brand-related concepts like brand trust, brand credibility and willingness to purchase the products of brand. As another suggestion, perceived credibility and trust assessments of two sponsored contents can be made by using within-subjects design. Without looking at their ability to notice sponsored content, assessments of the same participants on the content of two different brands may provide different insights. Lastly, while studying sponsored contents, its sophisticated examples like the ones including exclusive video or audio recordings can be used as well.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Survey 1

Experiment Group

Please read the following article.

Powering connected care

Imagine you're walking down the street and you start to have chest pains. Rather than panic, you use your smartphone to call your healthcare provider, who immediately dispatches a driverless car outfitted with medical equipment to your location. You get in, and you are instructed via your smartphone how to use the blood pressure monitor to check your blood pressure.

Although the above scenario may sound far-fetched, healthcare pioneers like Innovation Labs at Kaiser Permanente IT are actually working to bring that idea as well as others to fruition - sooner rather than later, said Susan Dentzer, a senior health policy adviser to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a Princeton, New Jersey nonprofit.

"The electronic health record has transformed healthcare delivery, but at the same time it has had unintended consequences on the patient-doctor relationship," said David Rhew, MD, chief medical officer and head of healthcare, Samsung Electronics America, based in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey.

"Over the next five years, 80 percent of consumer service interactions will make use of IoT (Internet of Things) and big data to improve quality, value and timeliness."

This year, millions of people in the United States will probably have their first video consultations, be prescribed their first health apps and start using their smartphones as their own diagnostic tools, according to the "Top Health Industry Issues of 2016" report from New York City-based PwC.

"The opportunities are there for vendors such as Samsung to work with the big healthcare systems to develop these models and test them," Dentzer said.

This article is sponsored by Samsung. Samsung is a multinational conglomerate company which is divided into four notable subsidiaries as Samsung Electronics, Samsung Heavy Industries, Samsung Engineering and Samsung C&T. Products offered by South Korean company vary as consumer electronics, medical equipment, semiconductors, telecommunications equipment, apparel, chemicals and ships. The company, founded in 1938, has more than 10000 employees around the world.

Q1: Have you heard any information on the relationship between technology and healthcare systems before?

- Definitely yes
- Heard it before
- Not sure
- Not heard it before
- Have no idea

Q2: Indicate to what extent you agree on the following adjectives that define the article you just read. (1: Strongly disagree - 7: Strongly agree)

- Honest
- Truthful
- Credible
- Reliable
- Dependable
- Factual
- Complete
- Clear

Q3: Indicate how well the following adjectives represent the article you just read. (1: Strongly disagree - 7: Strongly agree)

- Accurate
- Authentic
- Believable
- Consistent
- Well-presented
- Expert
- Objective

Q4: What is/are the important detail(s) you paid attention to while evaluating credibility and trustworthiness of the article you read? (e.g. I find it credible and/or trustworthy in general because...)
[Optional Question]

Q5: After reading the article, did you notice that it is a sponsored article?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q6: Did you notice that the article is sponsored by Samsung?

- Yes
- No

Q7: How did you realize the article is sponsored by Samsung?

- From the note at bottom of the article
- Content is too commercial
- Both

- Other

Q8: Are you familiar with Samsung?

- Yes
- No

Q9: Are you a Samsung user?

- Yes
- No

Q10: How many Samsung products do you have?

- 1-3
- 3-5
- 5+

Q11: Do you find the subject of article relevant with the brand of Samsung? Please answer this question based on your perception on the brand.

- Very irrelevant
- Irrelevant
- Neither irrelevant nor relevant
- Relevant
- Very relevant

Q12: Evaluate the brand of Samsung according to the following statements. (1: Strongly disagree - 5: Strongly agree)

- Samsung makes me feel good.
- Samsung makes me feel delighted.
- Samsung increases my frequency of use.
- Samsung gives me pleasure.
- Usage of Samsung prevents me from looking cheap.
- Samsung enhances the perceptions that I have a desirable lifestyle.
- Samsung helps me to better fit into my social group.
- Samsung helps me feel accepted.
- Samsung improves the way I am perceived by others.
- Samsung performs as it promises.
- Samsung makes my life easier.
- Samsung can be dependable for use.
- Samsung provides a solution to my expectations.
- Samsung makes a good impression of me on other people.
- Usage of Samsung is effective to my needs than other brands.

Q13: Please choose the country you live.

- Turkey
- United States
- Other

Q14: Please choose your education level.

- Undergraduate student
- Graduate student
- Other

Q15: Please choose the interval you age belongs to.

- 18-23
- 24-29
- 30-35
- 35+

Q16: Please choose your gender.

- Male
- Female



Control group

Please read the following article.

Powering connected care

Imagine you're walking down the street and you start to have chest pains. Rather than panic, you use your smartphone to call your healthcare provider, who immediately dispatches a driverless car outfitted with medical equipment to your location. You get in, and you are instructed via your smartphone how to use the blood pressure monitor to check your blood pressure.

Although the above scenario may sound far-fetched, healthcare pioneers like Innovation Labs at Kaiser Permanente IT are actually working to bring that idea as well as others to fruition - sooner rather than later, said Susan Dentzer, a senior health policy adviser to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a Princeton, New Jersey nonprofit.

"The electronic health record has transformed healthcare delivery, but at the same time it has had unintended consequences on the patient-doctor relationship," said David Rhew, MD, chief medical officer and head of healthcare, Samsung Electronics America, based in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey.

"Over the next five years, 80 percent of consumer service interactions will make use of IoT (Internet of Things) and big data to improve quality, value and timeliness."

This year, millions of people in the United States will probably have their first video consultations, be prescribed their first health apps and start using their smartphones as their own diagnostic tools, according to the "Top Health Industry Issues of 2016" report from New York City-based PwC.

"The opportunities are there for vendors such as Samsung to work with the big healthcare systems to develop these models and test them," Dentzer said.

Q1: Have you heard any information on the relationship between technology and healthcare systems before?

- Definitely yes
- Heard it before
- Not sure
- Not heard it before
- Have no idea

Q2: Indicate to what extent you agree on the following adjectives that define the article you just read. (1: Strongly disagree - 7: Strongly agree)

- Honest
- Truthful
- Credible
- Reliable
- Dependable
- Factual

- Complete
- Clear

Q3: Indicate how well the following adjectives represent the article you just read. (1: Strongly disagree - 7: Strongly agree)

- Accurate
- Authentic
- Believable
- Consistent
- Well-presented
- Expert
- Objective

Q4: What is/are the important detail(s) you paid attention to while evaluating credibility and trustworthiness of the article you read? (e.g. I find it credible and/or trustworthy in general because...)
[Optional Question]

Q5: Are you familiar with Samsung?

- Yes
- No

Q6: Are you a Samsung user?

- Yes
- No

Q7: How many Samsung products do you have?

- 1-3
- 3-5
- 5+

Q8: Please choose the country you live.

- Turkey
- United States
- Other

Q9: Please choose your education level.

- Undergraduate student
- Graduate student
- Other

Q10: Please choose the interval you age belongs to.

- 18-23
- 24-29
- 30-35
- 35+

Q11: Please choose your gender.

- Male
- Female



APPENDIX B

Survey 2

Please read the following article.

Empowering the Entrepreneurship Culture in Turkey

Entrepreneurs in countries like Turkey where entrepreneurship has made a recent yet quick start suffer mostly from a lack of mentorship and professional services. Most are left to their own destiny.

Girişim Fabrikası, founded in “business accelerator” format, differs largely from the other business incubators with an important feature; in that, target-specific strategies are developed with the mentorship/theoretical or practical coaching provided by academics in Özyeğin University and experienced entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are assisted to find the business angel networks in Turkey and are provided with professional services. The objective is to provide entrepreneurship support for 12-months and then “graduate” them. Those mobile-tech-focused entrepreneurs who successfully complete the program are also granted the opportunity to sign up for “Turkcell Partner Program” which is the biggest business network in Turkey.

Özyeğin University Chancellor Prof. Dr. Erhan Erkut said that the universities share the greatest responsibility for the entrepreneurship ecosystem to gain traction and added:

“As in the rest of the world, the universities in Turkey also should bring the creative people together and pioneer in the founding of the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. I think that the partnership between Özyeğin University and Turkcell as well as Girişim Fabrikası provides Turkey a new vision and an exemplary model.”

Girişim Fabrikası will be working in collaboration with the important members of the entrepreneurship ecosystem such as the government-owned companies like TÜBİTAK, KOSGEB; NGOs such as Endeavor, Etohum and TOBB Young Entrepreneurs Chamber; and entrepreneur networks such as Galata Business Angels, LabX, 212 VC, Young Turk Ventures, Inventram and Inovent.

This article is sponsored by Turkcell. Turkcell is the first GSM service provider in Turkey and very quickly grew into both national and regional market leader. Turkcell proves its success as being one of the top global brands in the industry by having 3G agreements in 110 countries and GPRS roaming agreements in 165 countries. The company is founded in 1994.

(This manuscript has been edited and adapted for the purposes of this study.)

Q1: Have you heard any information on the empowerment programs for entrepreneurship before?

- Definitely yes
- Heard it before
- Not sure
- Not heard it before
- Have no idea

Q2: Indicate to what extent you agree on the following adjectives that define the article you just read. (1: Strongly disagree - 7: Strongly agree)

- Honest
- Truthful
- Credible
- Reliable
- Dependable
- Factual
- Complete
- Clear

Q3: Indicate how well the following adjectives represent the article you just read. (1: Strongly disagree - 7: Strongly agree)

- Accurate
- Authentic
- Believable
- Consistent
- Well-presented
- Expert
- Objective

Q4: What is/are the important detail(s) you paid attention to while evaluating credibility and trustworthiness of the article you read? (e.g. I find it credible and/or trustworthy in general because...)
[Optional Question]

Q5: After reading the article, did you notice that it is a sponsored article?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q6: Did you notice that the article is sponsored by Turkcell?

- Yes
- No

Q7: How did you realize the article is sponsored by Turkcell?

- From the note at bottom of the article
- Content is too commercial
- Both
- Other

Q8: Are you familiar with Turkcell?

- Yes
- No

Q9: Are you a Turkcell user?

- Yes
- No

Q10: Do you find the subject of article relevant with the brand of Turkcell? Please answer this question based on your perception on the brand.

- Very irrelevant
- Irrelevant
- Neither irrelevant nor relevant
- Relevant
- Very relevant

Q11: Evaluate the brand of Turkcell according to the following statements. (1: Strongly disagree - 5: Strongly agree)

- Turkcell makes me feel good.
- Turkcell makes me feel delighted.
- Turkcell increases my frequency of use.
- Turkcell gives me pleasure.
- Usage of Turkcell prevents me from looking cheap.
- Turkcell enhances the perceptions that I have a desirable lifestyle.
- Turkcell helps me to better fit into my social group.
- Turkcell helps me feel accepted.
- Turkcell improves the way I am perceived by others.
- Turkcell performs as it promises.
- Turkcell makes my life easier.
- Turkcell can be dependable for use.
- Turkcell provides a solution to my expectations.
- Turkcell makes a good impression of me on other people.
- Usage of Turkcell is effective to my needs than other brands.

Q12: Have you heard about the crisis experienced by Turkcell as a result from its support to Ensar Foundation?

- Yes
- No

Q13: Have you heard about Turkcell's statement on supporting Ensar Foundation?

- Yes
- No

Q14: Were you satisfied with Turkcell's statement?

- Yes
- No

Q15: Did you change your GSM Operator (Turkcell) after this crisis happened?

- Yes, I changed.
- Yes, I changed but the reason was not relevant with the crisis.
- The crisis made me consider to change, but I still use their service.
- The crisis did not influence my preference, so I still use their service.
- I never use their service. I have used another service(s).

Q16: Please choose the country you live.

- Turkey
- United States
- Other

Q17: Please choose your education level.

- Undergraduate student
- Graduate student
- Other

Q18: Please choose the interval you age belongs to.

- 18-23
- 24-29
- 30-35
- 35+

Q19: Please choose your gender.

- Male
- Female