This is the accepted version of a chapter published in *What is Sustainable Journalism?: Integrating the Environmental, Social and Economic Challenges of Journalism*.

Citation for the original published chapter:

Stiernstedt, F. (2017)
The Sustainability of Native Advertising: Organizational Perspectives on the Blurring of the Boundary Between Editorial and Commercial Content in Contemporary Media.
In: Peter Berglez, Ulrika Olausson & Mart Ots (ed.), *What is Sustainable Journalism?: Integrating the Environmental, Social and Economic Challenges of Journalism* (pp. 277-295).
New York: Peter Lang Publishing Group

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published chapter.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-33587
The sustainability of native advertising:
organizational perspectives on the blurring of the boundary between
editorial and commercial content in contemporary media.

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the sustainability (or lack thereof) of so-called native advertising. Native advertising is a term for describing promotional content that emulates the style and shape of editorial content. In the media and advertising industries, it is not only understood as the future; for many of its commentators, it seems to be an unavoidable and inescapable future for media and journalism. Both supporters and critics of native advertising are convinced of its future success; the transition to “native” is supposedly both smooth and unproblematic in terms of practical application. In this chapter, I will nuance such accounts through empirically analyzing organizational changes in relation to the instigation of native advertising in one media company. I ask the question of how native advertising was organized, in practice, when it was introduced at one of Sweden’s largest media companies, MTG. The empirical parts draw on ethnographic fieldwork and focus on the organizational, ideological and physical changes that were made at the company between 2009 and 2012. The analysis shows that there are several dilemmas, or barriers, for those who wish to “go native” or those who in other ways seek to maximize the influence of advertising upon editorial content. The organizational forms of the media industry in many ways work against native advertising, which makes the introduction of this new form of marketing a messy, contested and compromised endeavor. This also means that the organizational forms of media production are challenged and transformed by the introduction of native advertising. Drawing on these results, I argue, in the concluding parts of the chapter, that a sustainable way of handling native advertising needs to rest on the organizational forms specific to the media industries.

Introduction

Is there such a thing as economically sustainable journalism? The legacy media industries in general, and journalistic enterprise in particular, seem to be nothing but
unsustainable. The business model of gathering an audience through providing content and communication and giving advertisers access to that audience in exchange for money is still working. The problem, for journalism, is that it is no longer needed to gather and create the audience-resource sold to advertisers. Tech companies such as Google and Facebook are doing a much better job of providing advertisers with high-quality audiences and more precise target groups than any traditional journalistic product is. Furthermore, ad-blocking technologies (Birkemose, 2016), competition (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013) and new business models (Bolin, 2011) are all threats to the economic sustainability of traditional media companies (and perhaps to journalism itself). There is a desperate need for new ways to finance journalism, to make it economically sustainable.

One such attempt is so-called native advertising. Native advertising refers to the practices in which advertising mimics and is produced in order to be perceived as editorial content.¹ This practice is described as a way of making advertising more engaging and effective. The main point is thus to use the credibility of journalism for marketing purposes so that journalism can secure economic sustainability and continue to find revenues through partnership with advertisers.

However, this necessarily creates new tensions and problems that threaten the sustainability of journalism and also – in a wider perspective – endanger social sustainability, as the democratic role and function played by independent journalism and media can be at risk when journalism uses its credibility to push products.

¹ Native advertising, advertorials, content marketing, paid content, product placement, branded content and similar concepts are contemporary buzzwords within the media and advertising industries. They basically refer to the same thing and in this chapter I use “native advertising” to refer to the practice of producing advertising that is meant to look like and be perceived as editorial content.
For journalism, the immediate danger is that some of the core values of the journalistic enterprise are undermined when media companies engage in native advertising. These core values include truthfulness, trustworthiness, integrity, credibility and the like. If editorial and commercial interests become too intertwined, the risk is that the audience becomes disenchanted and indifferent toward the content. The attempt to create economic sustainability through native advertising may hence ultimately threaten the sustainability of journalism, in effect “killing the golden goose” of journalism in attempting to save it [Piety, 2016].

In the wider perspective, social sustainability is threatened. Social sustainability has been very broadly defined as “a life-enhancing condition within communities, and a process within communities that can achieve that condition” (McKenzie, 2004). Some of the features that are often used as indicators of social sustainability are political participation, cultural understanding between different individuals and groups, social justice, and equal opportunity regarding quality of life and participation in society (Littig & Grießler, 2005). In the advanced late-capitalist societies that we live in it is impossible to imagine things such as political participation without well-functioning media and information systems. The general economic crises for journalism, as well as the recourse to native advertising, may hence be a threat to the goal of social sustainability as such. As noted by media scholars Nick Couldry and Joseph Turow (2014), native advertising risks creating a media landscape that is “cleared of one of the basic ingredients of democratic life: the reliable and regular exchange of common ideas, facts, and reference points about matters of common concern” (p. 1772).

How, then, to handle this opposition between economic and social sustainability inherent in the practice of native advertising? Can journalistic enterprises make any use of the benefits of native advertising, without risking “killing the golden goose”? It is
probably too early to give any definite answer to that question, but in order to find a
long-term sustainable use for native advertising it is important to gain a better
understanding of how it is produced and how it comes about in the everyday practices
of people working in the media industries. Many of the accounts of native advertising
overlook the messy and contested nature of media organizations. In the media and
advertising industries, for example, native advertising is not only understood as the
future; for many of its commentators, it seems to be an *unavoidable* and *inescapable*
future for media and journalism. Both supporters and critics of native advertising are
convinced of its future success; the transition to “native” is supposedly both smooth
and unproblematic in terms of practical application (Matteo & Dal Zotto, 2015).

In this chapter, I will nuance such accounts through empirically analyzing
organizational changes in relation to the instigation of native advertising at one of
Sweden’s largest media companies, Modern Times Group (MTG). The empirical parts
draw on ethnographic fieldwork and focus on the organizational, ideological and
physical changes that were made at the company between 2009 and 2012. The analysis
shows that there are several dilemmas, or barriers, for those who wish to “go native” or
those who in other ways seek to maximize the influence of advertising upon editorial
content. The organizational forms of the media industry in many ways work against
native advertising, making the introduction of this new form of marketing a messy,
contested and compromised endeavor. This also means that the organizational forms of
media production are challenged and transformed by the introduction of native
advertising. Drawing on these results I argue, in the concluding parts of the chapter,
that a sustainable way of handling native advertising needs to rest on the organizational
forms specific to the media industries. Only if the media companies manage to re-
negotiate a balance between journalistic autonomy and commercial pressures will it be
possible to create a journalistic enterprise that can make at least some use of the economic possibilities of native advertising without risking either short-term economic sustainability ("killing the golden goose") or the long-term goals of social sustainability.

Native advertising, media organizations and the corporate form of capitalist cultural production

The boundary between commercial and editorial content has traditionally been one of the steadfast principles of journalism, often referred to as the "wall" separating the two parts of the operation. The wall has mainly been an organizational, ideological and cultural barrier, but has in some instances also been given a physical and material form. It has, for example, been commonplace that editorial, marketing and sales have been spatially separated from each other in many media companies. The wall has, as Mark Coddington (2014) points out, been an important dimension of the socialization of new journalists (and many other media workers) into the profession. To accept the relevance and justness of the wall has been a crucial professional marker within the media industries.

Previous critical research on native advertising has often elaborated the normative conflict between journalism and other forms of editorial and/or artistic content on the one hand, and the crass commercial motives in advertising on the other. The gradual disappearance of the border between marketing communication and journalism has been regarded as a problem not only for journalism but also for democracy itself (Couldry & Turow, 2014). Within journalism studies, the changing norms and values in journalism due to the blurring of boundaries between advertising and editorial content have been an issue for debate (Carlson, 2015). Text-oriented studies highlight
the techniques, forms and genres that develop when promotional content and discourses are implemented into other forms of media content, as well as analyzing the consequences of this genre-mixing process (Jenkins, 2006; Nelson & McLeod, 2005). From the field of market communication the questions in relation to native advertising have been about efficiency and recognition and evaluation from the audience (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016).

This chapter adds to previous research and knowledge in this area by addressing native advertising from the vantage point of organizational practices. The theoretical starting point comes from the critical organizational theories of cultural sociology. My aim is to engage in the critical discussion and analysis of the corporate form of capitalist cultural production, in order to gain a better understanding of contemporary changes and developments in relation to native advertising. It is only within the very organization of journalism and other kinds of media production, and in the concrete practices of media workers, that native advertising can come about. To gain a better understanding of how this happens also creates the possibility not only for evaluating the problems and promises tied to native advertising, but also for understanding how – and if – this practice will be able to play a part in creating economically and socially sustainable forms of journalism.

The organization of media production

Media organizations organize creative, cultural, expressive and journalistic work. There are many differences between different forms of media and cultural production, but there are also important similarities. From a materialist perspective on cultural production, the commonalities and similarities in how cultural production is organized derive from the specificity of the commodity form of cultural and media products. As
pointed out by Bill Ryan (1992), capital is never realized concretely in its pure form, but always in the form of particular industries. This means that the contradictions of capital take “forms specific to [the media] industry and it is these which must be the centre of analysis” (Ryan, 1992, p. 5).

To put it simply, media and cultural commodities are not as equally open for standardization and rationalization as many other commodities are. There is a need for some sort of originality, even in the most standardized and banal forms of cultural and journalistic production, in order for them to attract audiences, and hence to create surplus value for the owners of media companies (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). The “name” or the “personality” or the “voice” of the creator is often of importance for maintaining the originality that is a precondition for the economic value of the product (Ryan, 1992). Media commodities are furthermore sensitive to changes in popular taste and hence they have short production cycles (news is extreme in this respect, but popular culture also falls out of fashion quickly) (Albarran, 2010). There are also problems of over-production and with the fact that most media are so-called “semi-public-goods”, difficult to enclose and hence capitalize (radio and television are extremes in this respect) and most media and cultural commodities are failures in the market place. These specific problems of media commodities lead to a large reliance on control over circulation in order to enclose the semi-public goods and to increase profitability, for example through successful PR. So while production is given rather loose reins in order to create “original” or “interesting” content, the control over circulation is equally strict.

These facts are the background to the industry-specific tensions between capital and labor that impel managers and workers in the media and cultural industries toward specific forms of organization. In the words of Mark Banks (2007):
[M]aintaining a balance between standardized, controlled accumulation and preserving the unruly creativity, art and autonomy that makes creation of new commodities possible is *the* distinctive feature of cultural production, one that must be considered in any analysis of the cultural labour process. (Banks, 2007, p. 30, italics in original).

Media production then, as formulated by Ryan (1992), is not simply capitalist production. It is cultural production organized along capitalist lines (p. 13). This means that communicative, expressive, cultural and other media-related activities (such as journalism) bear traits that are more typical within artisan forms of production (Adorno, 1976) and allow for a higher degree of autonomy than other forms of capitalist production normally do (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). These are crucial dimensions of the institutional form and organizational manifestations of media work in modern societies (Deuze, 2007; Ryan, 1992)

The structural conditions described above have formed the organizational structure that is specific for the media industry, which has traditionally been characterized by the following elements (following Ryan, 1992):

- Separation between advertising/marketing and editorial/creative departments.
  
  As previously mentioned, this organizational, physical and often also cultural divide has been of great importance in the media and cultural industries.

- Creative leadership. Managers responsible for the editorial/creative departments have in general been recruited from the editorial/creative teams. Authority rests on recognition from the community of professional peers.
• Team-based work. Creative/editorial labor has been organized through semi-autonomous teams that – together with the creative managers – have been given the responsibility of planning and executing their work, as well as judging quality and deciding on norms for production.

The introduction of native advertising must be understood against the background of this specific structure of the media industry. As we will see in the empirical analysis, the introduction of native advertising challenges these organizational forms. But these organizational forms also become a challenge to the very idea of native advertising itself. It is arguably here, within the tensions and negotiations about organizational forms, that we might find the path toward sustainable forms of journalism and journalistic practice.

**Entry points**

This chapter draws on results from a case study of one of the leading Swedish media companies, Modern Times Group (MTG). MTG is part of the larger Kinnevik Group, which has ownership in telecoms, radio, television, newspapers and production companies, among other things. MTG operates in television (free-to-air and pay-TV), digital distribution (video and audio streaming) and radio in 11 countries, mainly in northern and eastern Europe. The company is well known for its rebellious and entrepreneurial spirit. The key to its success was that MTG broke the Swedish broadcasting monopoly in 1987 when they started “pirate” transmissions of commercial television, from London via satellite, to Sweden. The company is also well known for its lack of conventional journalistic norms; it has always had a strong focus on entertainment and the sales and marketing departments have had considerable power within the company. The corporate culture of MTG is often described as rough and
somewhat authoritarian, but at the same time it is known as an experimental and non-traditional media company.

Ethnographic fieldwork consisting of 36 in-depth interviews and numerous observations of meetings and production was conducted in the radio division of the media company between 2006 and 2010. During this period, and especially toward the end of it, the company was in a state of rapid and profound change. The change was to a large degree instigated by technological and economic challenges. New competition from digital media, less advertising money, global financial crisis and the rise of new distribution platforms, new actors and new forms of content (for example, in social network media) challenged the media company to develop new ideas and new organizational forms. The main focus of my study concerned these processes; the development of native advertising as a more established part of company operations was one of them. I combined the ethnographic approach with analysis of internal production documents, external texts about the company (e.g. newspaper articles, government investigations and official reports) and the media texts produced at MTG Radio. From these materials I assembled a narrative about the organizational events, conflicts, negotiations and consequences thereof that took place within the company during these years.

“Easier, funnier and more effective business”

In 2010 the media organization MTG reorganized their operations. Radio, television, print and digital media moved to a new building, a “media house” in the central part of Stockholm. New departments bridging previously existing organizational boundaries were created. The physical facilities were organized to stimulate and foster new forms of collaboration and increase flexibility within the organization. New experiments in
cross-media formats and collaborations were tested. All of these efforts were part of and related to the strategy for creating new forms of advertising – native advertising – that received more focus and attention in production. All of these organizational changes, according to managers at least, would lead to “easier, funnier and more effective business” [Aronsson 2011].

The “media house” was introduced and promoted in different ways. In general, it is possible to talk about the media house at three levels: as a new organizational form, as an idea (or an ideology) and as a building. Naturally, it is only possible to separate these three analytically; in practice they are intertwined, as will become evident in the analysis.

*The media house as an organizational form*

In reality, the organizational changes at the company started before the large reorganization in 2010. As early as 2000 a new subdivision, MTG New Media, was launched with the purpose of working across different media and creating new possibilities for “revenue streams from new media” ([Annual report, 2000, pp. 3, 25]). The different parts of the media company were coordinated for the purpose of cross-promotion and an important strategic goal was to use different “media windows” (platforms) to distribute content ([Annual report, 2001, p. 6]).

The so-called “media house strategy” was first given a name and more clear shape, however, in 2007 ([Annual report, 2007]). The company motivated the new strategy by pointing at the ongoing “digital media revolution” (ibid., p. 24). The CEO of the company, Hans-Holger Albrecht, stated that the “construction of integrated media houses is no longer just a good idea. Today it is a necessity.” ([Annual report, 2008]).
The organizational innovations and changes that took place within the company in this period (most of them happening around 2010) had an overarching goal to remove traditional barriers between different parts of the media company and develop new ways of capitalizing on media production. Similar changes took place in many parts of the media industry at the time (Usher, 2012). In the case of MTG this meant, firstly, that the sales departments were integrated. Previously there had been separate departments tied to the different media. They were now all integrated into one, large “super sales” organization. Second, the departments for digital platforms were reorganized. Third, a new department called “creative sales” was formed. This department was a hybrid between sales and editorial departments and the most important organizational change from the perspective of this chapter. The head of MTG’s operation at the time called this new department an “amphibian battalion” – a department that was supposed to move across borders and boundaries within the organization. The new department had the purpose of combining editorial and commercial interests, for example in developing (in general together with advertisers) content and formats that included native advertising. As part of this new subdivision of the company, a new production company with the name Creative Productions was formed, in order to give practical form to native advertising in television, radio and digital media.

Besides the formation of new subdivisions and parts of the company, the staff were also instructed or ordered to work in new ways. New types of editorial meetings – between representatives from different media – and staff from the creative sales department taking part in editorial meetings became the new routine. To a greater extent movement and flexibility within and between departments was a goal of the reorganization, a point that I will return to below.
These new divisions and the reorganization of old ones were a central part in “tearing down barriers”, as described in one of the internal newsletters:

The precondition for growth in our new media house is that we take down walls between different media and products. [Opportunities for growth happen] when the barriers are torn down and we form ourselves around our customers instead of only around our media and products. We need to stick together and help each other. [Internal newsletter, 2011-09-16].

This quote from the newsletter – a newsletter that had the name “Reports from the Media House” – also takes us to the next level of the organizational change. The media house was also, to a large degree, a set of ideas, visions and hopes for new kinds of togetherness.

The media house as an idea

An important dimension of the organizational transformations documented in the ethnographic study at MTG was the increasing importance of what could be labeled “organizational ideology” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1988). As part of moving to a new building and reorganizing the operations, at least two different newsletters were started by the senior management and distributed among the staff at the company. Consultants and speakers were invited to give “inspirational lectures” and some of the senior staff themselves wrote books about organization, communication and media production that they distributed among all employees. Furthermore, “motivational inventory”, such as billboards with company “missions” and “visions”, television screens displaying company policy in various matters, and other similar objects were installed in the new...
media house. Put simply: the media house was an idea, and the management acted as eager missionaries for this idea.

The most important aspects, for my purpose here, concern the redefinition of the notions of creativity and community that were central parts of the new organizational ideologies of the media house. There were strategic and commercial reasons for embracing creativity in new ways, as it was an attempt to handle new competition, to develop new content and production practices in relation to interactive and social media technologies and to form a new “multi-platform organization” at the company, and most importantly to motivate the launch of “native advertising”. In this process, the very concept of creativity and the practices connected to the notion of “being creative” gradually changed. Creativity has for a long time been a celebrated value among media workers throughout the media and cultural industries. The so-called creatives (i.e. staff producing content) have also, as analyzed by Keith Negus (1999), defined themselves in relation and opposition to the so-called “suits” of the media industry (management, marketing, sales, etc.).

Creativity became a buzzword and an object of discourse within the media organization, in which the creative subject or personality, the creative performance and how to be (and who is) creative, was elaborated on. Interestingly, the people who were singled out as creative in the organization very seldom belonged to the “creative” parts of the company in the traditional sense. It was not the content producers who were said to be creative but rather the management, marketing and sales staff. They were, for example, repeatedly described in the weekly newsletter distributed to all employees as “creative gods” who “delivered creative solutions” and “come up with creative ideas”.

During the period of my fieldwork, one of the top managers of the company wrote a book entitled Two years of magic thinking (Två magiska år av tankar), which he
distributed to all employees at the company (as well as to clients and customers). The book can be described as a mix of pop-philosophy, management ideology and communication theory. One of his general themes in the book is that “Just a few years ago commercials and commercialism were seen to be something very different from culture and aesthetics. Just a few years ago it was unthinkable for most artists and creatives to do commercials or work with PR. It was looked down on. That’s not the case anymore” (Bacoccoli, 2011, p. 36).

Throughout the book the author elaborates on the consequences of this alleged shift. Administrative and economic processes in cultural and media production, he argues, are the truly creative elements of this work and are described in terms of “sharing” and “collective meaning making” – or in other words as cultural processes. Marketers, sales people, etc. are compared to “poets”, “artists” and “oracles”; their job is to create the “new and unexpected” that is more interesting than the “so-called editorial content” and that “opens doors to new worlds of experience”. This view of media production and this self-understanding from management were heavily propagated within the company. This was the type of creativity that was enhanced and embraced within production and it was arguably an ideological move to co-opt the positive and celebrated values of creativity in order to be able to use it as a tool for increased dominance of the commercial parts of the media company. The new and updated version of “creativity” paved the way for native advertising by propagating the notion that advertising was “art” and that people from sales and marketing were the “creative gods” who should be included in cultural production at the company.

At the same time, there was another and parallel idea of creativity fostered and propagated within production – the idea of creativity as collaboration. In the history of the idea of creativity, the creative subject has often been interpreted (and branded) as
the “lonely genius” and in economic terms this notion, originally stemming from
Romanticist thought, has been inscribed in copyright law as the individual rights holder
(Woodmansee, 1984). In the context of media production at MTG Radio, collaborations
and acts of “sharing” were seen as the essence of creative behavior.

One of the management texts used in production states that “We have to build a culture
that encourages and finally demands from the employees that they engage in the
practice of giving, to share everything, with everyone, all the time.” (Farber, 2009, p.
126).

Those who do not “connect and share with everyone else” are in the same text labeled
as “empty”, “dead” and “selfish” (ibid.). In theory, to emphasize the collective efforts
of creative work can be a good thing, and to enhance and stimulate sharing of ideas and
knowledge is important and valuable in organizations of all kinds. In practice, however,
the idea of collaboration turned out to be rather one-sided. In the words of the sales
director, to “collaborate and create new connections and networks” (Bacoccoli, 2011,
p. 53) meant that the creative parts of the company (content production) should be
increasingly open to including the administrative parts (sales and marketing) in
developing new ideas for content and in planning broadcasts based on native
advertising.

*The media house as a building

The most striking part of the reorganization of the company was the construction of a
new building in the central part of Stockholm. In many ways this house in itself was a
technology for governing, managing and steering work and production. The internal
and external design and architecture were very consciously and actively created to
fulfill this purpose.
According to the architect, one of main ideas behind the design was to maximize the possibility for “creative connections” within the building. To foster new constellations for collaboration over previous borders were prioritized and hence there were almost no private offices; the few rooms that existed had transparent glass walls, and all social spaces (such as break rooms) were located so as to serve several departments and gather people from different parts of the company. Furthermore, there was an intensive use of media devices, most notably screens of different sorts that were used to disseminate information and create a feeling of togetherness within the house.

The aim of the office design was to enhance flexibility. The office designer responsible for the interior design stated that:

> It was important for us to create an office in which the people working there not should be able to ‘nest’ or to feel at home. People should move around, people should work for shorter periods of time and in new groups. It was important that the interior design supported such organizational turbulence.

(Informant A).

Several parts of the house had no individual office spaces at all. And the flexibility that the house was supposed to facilitate was further underlined by the architect, who emphasized the temporary character of employment in the building:

> The building resembles a ship. It was my vision that it should look like a big boat that had anchored in this place. And this metaphor became important for me in creating this building. Just as on a ship this is a flexible organization: people are coming and going – enrolling on this ship, following the journey for a while and then
leaving the ship. The structure and the internal organization of this building had to be able to support this kind of work culture.
(Informant B).

All of these changes in the new media house worked against the traditional organization that had operated with small and stable creative teams. The house was used to support and strengthen the new organizational ideals, and not least support new collaborations between sales and editorial departments necessary for facilitating native advertising.

**Summary: challenging established forms for creative production within the media**

The analysis above shows that the organizational forms typical and dominant within media and cultural production, such as those described by, for example, Bill Ryan (1992), had to be revised in order to facilitate the introduction of native advertising. The reorganization destabilized the organizational forms that had been the norm within MTG. The system with small and experienced “project teams” and the “creative managers” was challenged through increasing mobility, flexibility and cooperation between different parts of the media organization. The wall between commercial and editorial content was brought down, or at least perforated, by the new “amphibian battalion”, the so-called creative sales. Autonomy within media production and in the creation of media was decreasing, while the creativity and status of sales and marketing were upgraded, not least through new discourses about creativity that were propagated within production.

**Apathy, resistance, dissidence**

The new organizational schemes were laid out with a considerable amount of enthusiasm from the managing staff. It was, however, not met with an equal amount of enthusiasm from the staff at MTG. The ideas for how sales and editorial departments
were supposed to work together was visionary, but native advertising turned out to not to be easy to roll out in production. Native advertising, and the economic sustainability it would help to create, ran into practical and organizational barriers. Nevertheless, the negotiations that took place did not so much put an end to the plans for “going native” at the company in question, but rather made these attempts somewhat more realistic, and perhaps more sustainable.

First, there was apathy. Reorganization has arguably become increasingly common, up to the point where constant reorganization is an organizational form of its own in contemporary, post-industrial enterprise. Reorganizations are, however, seldom applauded by those that are supposed to be reorganized, and accordingly the first and most widespread stance toward the new changes among the employees was disinterestedness or even apathy. Several of my informants showed little or no interest in the grand visions of their managers: “I think we will basically go on as usual” was a common statement from my interviewees at the time when the organizational changes were instigated.

There was, however, also a more articulated resistance toward the new organization and more specifically toward native advertising, and this resistance had three distinct dimensions.

The first dimension was the legal and juridical issues that the editorial managing staff – in Ryan’s (1992) terminology, the “creative leaders” – had clear knowledge of, but that were not that known to the overall management of the company. This sometimes resulted in other departments having unrealistic expectations on what could be done in the area of native advertising. As legal scholar Eva-Maria Svensson (2016) points out, the Swedish authorities are quite strict on the distinction between commercial and non-
commercial messages in the media. To a large extent, policymakers and politicians accept and embrace the necessity of a “wall” between commercial and editorial departments and forms of media output. The reorganization of the company meant that practices were developed, or at least pursued, that would break these rules and regulations. Therefore, creative leaders took it as their responsibility to inform the sales departments and other managers in the new “media house” about these legal barriers to native advertising. This was an issue of debate and took a considerable amount of energy during this transitional period.

There are a lot of meetings now; it takes up a lot of my time. Sometimes it is difficult to explain to the sales department and the creative sales why we cannot do everything that they want us to, all the cool stuff that they have thought up. They don’t have the knowledge about rules, about publishing and the norms we have to live by. But they’ll learn. Eventually. (Informant D).

In general, this form of resistance was not critical of native advertising as such, and perhaps it was not even a form of resistance. The consequences, however, of the creative leaders taking it as their role to inform about existing policies were that processes of change were slowed down and ambitions for what could be done in native advertising, especially in radio and television, were a little more restrained. Here, the relative autonomy and influence of the so-called creative leaders in media production becomes clear.

The second aspect of resistance, toward the new organization and the practices of native advertising, was more grounded in practical issues, and hence closer to the organizational forms of media and cultural production. Practically, to create native
campaigns demands collaboration and coordination between different groups of employees and different departments. Such collaborations take time and energy, and coordination increases the complexity of the operation. The organizational demands that were created by the vision of native advertising were not always met with the necessary resources (for example staff) and hence collaboration and coordination was difficult to accomplish.

We don’t have time for these new collaborations at the moment. It takes too much energy. We need to focus. And we really cannot compromise when it comes to our time: we need to put our time into our product, to do our thing […] In the media house I’m supposed to work both with television and radio, to do digital content and elegant collaborations with advertisers. But… I think that something is lost. We lose our focus. (Informant E).

This approach was not unique to the informant quoted above. Rather, it was widespread among the staff, and it affected the possibilities for turning the grand visions of the “media house” and of native advertising into reality.

A third dimension of the resistance against native advertising was the more outspoken critique that was formulated on ethical and normative grounds. This dimension incorporates both the professional ideology of journalists and media professionals more widely, and a more general critical stance toward overly intense commercialization. Native advertising was, by some of my informants, interpreted as invasive. They talked about it, in critical terms, as an expression of an internal power struggle within the media company, in which the marketing and sales departments were becoming
increasingly powerful at the expense of the other departments. For example, when staff from the creative sales department began to attend editorial staff meetings it was something that was disliked within the organization. The strengthened role for advertising and marketing departments threatened, in their opinion, the ability to create “good” entertainment products and good journalism. As one of the creative managers in the organization stated:

They [marketing, sales, upper management] are NOT supposed to tell us what we are going to do and how we should do it. We are not sell-outs. It’s a question of mentality; it’s a question of attitude. We have to protect our ground (Informant F).

At the heart of this resistance was the question of quality. The majority of my informants described too much commercialization as a threat to creativity, quality and to the integrity of the content.

There is of course a battle of different ideas and interests. My primary goal [as a creative director] is to create good radio. Their [sales, creative sales] role is to sell it. Sometimes this works, sometimes not. They tend to think that if we earn money from it, why not lose our editorial principles, why not let go of our criteria for quality. Our goals are different; our missions are different. In essence, what we think is good radio is fundamentally different. (Informant D).
This led managers to openly resist attempts by sales and creative sales to dictate editorial decisions or to colonize what they perceived as editorial areas. It also led staff in different positions to less openly undermine the development of native advertising by, for example, ignoring or reinterpreting instructions from the sales or creative sales departments. In this third aspect of organizational resistance, the professional ideology of autonomy and self-determination becomes clearly visible and it hampers the development of native advertising.

The analysis of the ethnographic fieldwork shows that the employees of MTG Radio, much as a consequence of the organizational forms of cultural production, were able to effect at least some resistance toward the new managerial ideas and ideals, and toward native advertising as such. The fact that several of the changes brought about by management were later rolled back and cancelled attests to the success of such resistance. Organizational resistance did not, however, put an end to native advertising as such. If anything this resistance helped the media company avoid going too far in its enthusiasm for native advertising and hence risking credibility. In the long run, the organizational deliberations that came about as a consequence of the of the organizational form of the media industries helped native advertising become more sustainable. The analysis furthermore shows that the organizational form theorized by Ryan (1992) still holds some sway in a media industry that is increasingly marked by commercialization and deprofessionalization. This might be good news with regard to the possibilities for a socially sustainable journalism that requires at least some sort of editorial independence and integrity.

Conclusion
In this chapter I have given an account of some processes concerning the practical production of and organizational responses to native advertising in one Swedish media company. There is of course a need to be somewhat careful in generalizing these results. The analysis concerns only one company at one specific moment in time. However, the notion of generalizability through a “case-to-case transfer” (Firestone, 1993) is applicable in this study. The case analyzed here is not untypical, and the objective conditions of the media industries as well as of the labor market are similar in other parts of the world and in other parts of the media industries. Lessons learned from this case might therefore be transferred to other cases. Even though the material is a small and unique sample, the analysis at hand can help to form a general understanding of organizational concerns and dilemmas in relation to native advertising.

What does this suggest for the question of sustainable journalism? The study clearly reveals that the organizational form of the media, with separation between advertising and editorial parts, and with creative leadership and team-based work, still holds a strong position. The established forms for creative production within the media are a challenge for native advertising. The ways that production is organized works against the intentions of the media companies that want to instigate native advertising. The relative autonomy of creative leaders, the traditional barriers (physical, mental, habitual) between different parts of production, and the professional ideology in media work still remain as issues to overcome for those who wish to facilitate native advertising. Sometimes native advertising is also openly resisted; negotiations take place and dissidence within media organizations is not uncommon. This results in a messy and compromised development of native advertising, far from the seamless and automatic processes sometimes imagined by both its critics and proponents. The move to native advertising surely contested many features of the media’s organizational form,
but in the end it turned out to be a lot harder than expected to create good structures for completing the destruction of the so-called wall between advertising and editorial content. This attests to the fact that the specific organizational form of the media as theorized by Ryan (1992) still holds some leverage in the negotiations about journalistic practice.

In the short term, the organizational form of the media might then be yet another threat to the economic sustainability of the media industries. It is of course difficult to assess the relative importance of native advertising in the industries as such; not even in this very limited case study is it possible to provide any definitive answer to whether or not the attempts at native advertising undertaken by MTG were profitable. Even though profits from advertising increased slightly during this period in the company, other things, such as administrative costs and costs for sales, increased very rapidly due to the new organizational structure. Yet other signs of unsustainability were visible in the company during this time, including, for example, a rapid increase in costs for staff taking sick leave.

In the longer term, however, the organizational form of the media, and the negotiations and conflicts it creates, might be the most important safeguard against the temptation of “killing the golden goose” (Piety 2016) and over-exploiting the credibility of editorial content for the purpose of advertisement. To defend this organizational model, a model that awards media workers a reasonable amount of professional autonomy, would also be valuable from a societal perspective and in relation to social sustainability. The total colonization of journalism by commercial and advertiser interest is in the interest of no-one, and a way to save the media industries from themselves would be to defend the organizational form of the media. If there is such a thing as sustainable journalism, the best way of creating it might be through the internal
organizational forces and by the (tolerated) “dissidence” that it creates in individuals within the organization.
References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Role/Position</th>
<th>Gender, Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Office Designer responsible for interior design at MTG’s facilities.</td>
<td>Female, mid 40s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Radio host 1 at MTG Radio’s largest station, Rix FM.</td>
<td>Male, mid 30s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Program director at MTG Radio’s largest station, Rix FM.</td>
<td>Female, mid 40s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Radio host 2 at MTG Radio’s largest station, Rix FM.</td>
<td>Male, mid 30s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Program director at Bandit Rock.</td>
<td>Male, 40s.</td>
</tr>
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