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Media-Marketing Paradigm—An analytical study of Paid News in Indian Media

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ABSTRACT

Marketing has become the essence of contemporary business scene in the hurriedly corporatizing world. And the growth of media at pace with the corporate world, and as a corporate in itself, has presented both a viable option and a stiff challenge to the corporate houses for establishing their presence among the competing many. Traditional marketing pattern notwithstanding, the changing, media scenario has enforced transformation in the marketing policies. The corporate houses are engineering ways of using media to their benefit without involving the worn-out patterns of advertising. Paid news has recently become exposed as a tool-in-use for promoting and projecting, apart from the politicians, the business houses. And this media induced trend is fast becoming accepted by the corporate as well by the audiences that now seem to be consenting to the transformation in the working pattern of the media houses.

KEYWORDS : Marketing, corporate, media, news, advertising

Introduction:

Contemporary society is saturated with mass media. The definition of media and its role “as networks through which people come to understand the meaning of the world around them and play a key role in shaping their decisions” (Watson, 2001) is changing very fast. In the new world order, media is now corporatized with a handful of billionnaires controlling the industry almost the world over. “The 90’s have seen a tidal wave of commercialism overtake public broadcasting” (Ledbetter, 1997). News and advertisements have been jostling for time or space in traditional media; and the advertisements, it seems, have already outrun the principles and ethics of news reporting. The trend has encouraged a symbiotic business relation between the corporate world and the corporatized media. New instruments of marketing have come to fore and purposefully induced by the media into its list of commercialized principles to benefit itself. Market-driven journalism has impacted the way outlets choose stories as well as how they get covered.

Paid News:

Paid news may be defined as a news article published or broadcast by media against a payment from the subject it seeks to glorify. In simple terms it is an advertisement in the garb of news. Another form of paid news is in the form of “private treaties” between media companies and corporate entities and is a formal agreement between the media company and another non-media company.

The phenomenon of selling editorial or news space to individuals or political parties for advertisements surfaced in India after the 2009 general elections and the state assembly elections. It was highlighted that not only the print space in newspapers, but the news space on electronic media too was sold to politicians for self promotion. And all this was done under the garb of free and fair news claimed to be published by the media organizations in the news space about the candidates without specifying that the candidate had paid to that particular organization.

The serious matter prompted the Press Council of India (PCI) to constitute a two member sub-committee of Kalimekolan Sreenivas Reddy and Paranjay Guha Thakurta for a detailed enquiry into the matter. The sub-committee “put together a huge volume of circumstantial

evidence” (Thakurta, 2013) of blurring boundaries between news and advertisements and between news and the advertorials. It found and collected the identical articles with photographs and headlines that “have appeared in competing publications carrying bylines of different authors around the same time and on the same page of specific newspapers”.

The summary, carried by online news portal Realpolitik, revealed that investigators have found that “over the last few years and since 2009 in particular, the phenomenon of paid news has acquired a new and even more pernicious dimension by entering the sphere of political news about candidates contesting elections.” The report further said the newspapers and television channels “typically receive funds” for the paid news in cash. The committee identified a particular publication ‘Gujarat Guardian’, which had come into existence just a couple of months before the Assembly Polls in Gujarat.

In 2003, BCCL started paid content service called ‘Medianet’ under which it offers news space for advertisement to big corporate houses. The recommendation adopted as guidelines for the ‘private treaties’ between media houses and the business industries or houses more or less legalized the sale of news space for marketing or promotions. Interestingly, however, the direction for media is to specifically identify what is ‘News’ and what is ‘Advertisement’ in the content that is published or broadcast.

Conclusion:

The paid news phenomenon in India seems to have targeted only political circles of the country so far. But given that the purpose of this media induced publicity phenomenon is to make money—the association with power corridors may come as a useful but unintended byproduct, it saps the guarantee that big corporate houses would not want to avail of the opportunity. Seen in light of the corporatizing media industry, the possibilities of this media induced marketing pattern getting recognized as a better option for promotion are real and bigger. But paid news and private treaties are the newer tools that have emerged due to corporatization of the media industry. The corporate world now has an opportunity, or a better opportunity, to market and promote itself effectively.

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