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STEALTH MARKETING: APPARIATIONS AND THE VARIOUS CONTROVERSIAL STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Stealth marketing – also known as undercover marketing – has received a great deal of attention in recent years, but it is hardly a new phenomenon. Basically, stealth marketing refers to advertising a product or service to someone without disclosing that you are a representative of its company. A classic example of online stealth company is when the representatives of a product or service post glowing reviews and comments for that product on public boards.

This can boost the product's rating, while not actually reflecting what actual, unbiased users of the product think. The strategies and methods are used in this form of marketing are in such a way that the viewers are greatly affected and talking about the product in public becomes entertaining, fascinating and news worthy. The concept is based on the fact that interpersonal communications is more effective than conventional forms of marketing. Some of these strategies centre around the usage of tactics like humor, taboos, scandals, unusual rumors, mystery elements and selective revelation. This paper briefly talks about the most popular and effective stealth market strategies and companies that successfully adapted and implemented them.

Keywords-Stealth Marketing, Forms of Stealth Marketing, Strategies and Implementations, Controversies, Word of Mouth (WOM), Ethical Issues.

Introduction

Firms striving to reach consumers through today's swell of marketing clutter frequently are employing novel marketing practices. Although many nontraditional marketing messages are effective through clever, entertaining, and, ultimately, benign means, others rely on deception to reach consumers.

In particular, one form of covert marketing, known as stealth marketing, uses surreptitious practices that fail to disclose or reveal the true relationship with the company producing or

sponsoring the marketing message. In addition to deception, stealth marketing can involve intrusion and exploitation of social relationships as means of achieving effectiveness.

Stealth Marketing is a strategy used by companies, which target customers surreptitiously without their knowledge to deliver the hidden message. Stealth promoting lies on two premises.

- 1) Verbal (WOM) is successfully the most promising limited time device and
- 2) Individual suggestions from reference groups have a significant part in advertising achievement. In fact, stealth advertising includes plan and spread of deliberately created message regularly through buzz strategies, to an intended interest group surreptitiously. This paper talks about the various controversial strategies along with the manifestations of stealth marketing.

Literature Review

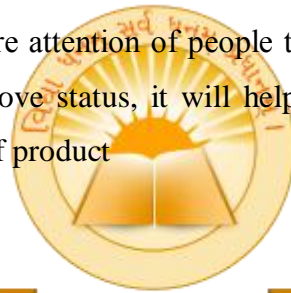
Tsai, Liang, Liu in 2007 in Taiwan studied about characters representing the product placement. In their study they found that actors don't put much affect on product placement and consumer mind set. The reason was they are not actually persuading much on product use.

Afef, eddine, & Claude, 2010 gave a new term to this form "Incidental advertising" in their research paper they applied Meta analysis but on same time they have motioned it as limitation, reason given is limited data available. They mentioned firms have turned to this advertising method because it's stealth in nature and allows it to be more than traditional advertising forms, and can thus potentially influence perceivers without their attempts to avoid or counter argue the message in advertising. They also had shown the path of future research in form of duration of advertising exposure, according to them duration plays a crucial role for the magnitude and valence of brand memories. They have also displayed a conceptual model of incidental advertising

Williams, Petrosky, Hernandez, Page in 2010 said PPL has received much popularity as a tool to reach potential customers which have tried to omit the traditional commercials. Advertisers have used PPL as clever instrument, because an average consumer goes through 3000 brands in a day. But the ideal placement should be like win-win. Marketer gets a relatively cheaper vehicle of branding and they can reduce the production budget for the same and consumer gets to know about the functionality of brand in better way and agencies to be paid for their wise decision.

Dua and Samal, 2012 Stealth advertising is very recent in reality show within India. Also this handful studies are been conducted related to it. The present study conducted showed the result that viewers believe they get a feeling of high status by consuming those products. Overall people believe that stealth advertising is ethical source for advertising. When cross compared with gender on ethical issues differences can be seen. Most of the people agreed to the statements like “It attracts more attention of people towards promoted, it helps to create brand awareness, it helps to improve status, it will help the feeling of people towards the product, it indicated high quality of product”

The Forms of Stealth Marketing



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The technique of Stealth marketing is used by companies for a wide range of products varying from an energy drink to a new launched phone to a global supermarket brand. According to the product to be advertised, stealth marketing can take up various manifestations. Some of the most common ones are

- Undercover Celebrity endorsers-Celebrities have for a long time been utilized as symbol of showing up as part of various type of media with target audience. Audience are usually very much aware that celebrity endorsers are being paid for taking part in an advertisement, however every now and again they talk about the brands they endorse all the time without openly demonstrating that they are in reality, endorsing that particular brand. The most common and famous example taken for this case is a stealth marketing strategy adopted by Sony Ericsson in 2002. The company hired high

end celebrities and on –screen characters to showcase their T68i cell phone by putting on a show to be tourist at different destination like the Empire State building in New York. The fake tourist and they would request the bystanders to take their photos, in the meantime, attempting to exhibit the elements of the new phone.

- Product Placement-This is the most common and prevalent type of stealth marketing that we are all subjected to on a daily basis. Prominently displaying products is standard practice in film and TV production. Conspicuously showing products have become standard practice in film and TV production. Some of the most common examples are mini cooper in the Italian job, FedEx in cast away, and white castle in Harold and Kumar go to the white castle. In such movies the brand and the products themselves are the stars o the movie.
- Fake media/flogs- Flogs are fake blogs designed to create an impression that a regular blogger is providing genuine information while in reality a company is Commercially sponsoring the site. They attempt to spread and promote a positive brand image that may not be possible as potentially through the conventional methods. A prominent example for this is the case “THE WAL-MARTING across America” campaign in 2006 where Jim and Lora made a fake blog showcasing there exaggerated positive experiences that they had come across as they went to various wall mart in different states. The public hugely influenced by this until they discovered that the couple was actually sponsored by Wall Mart.
- Fake Controversies- This is a risky and almost an unethical form of marketing in which the company creates falls, controversies around its products too publicizes them on a large scale that would not be possible by so conventional methods. In 2015, Starbucks famous Christmas mug collection was an only simple solid rep cup. The collection stirred emotions as words and photographs spread through online networking and news channels turned out, no one really loathed the cup. The controversy transformed into a free PR campaign for the witty coffee brand.



- **Live Buzz Marketing-** A buzz is created about a brand, item, administration, or message in a way that makes the public discuss about it .But in this case, it is made so that nobody knows where it actually took birth. This strategy makes the consumer unaware that they have been influenced by a marketing tactic .Entertainers frequently make the echo's ; it can be performing artists and on –screen characters and also purchasers who are willing to discuss about the items ,brands or administration. The given messages made from an organization through these entertainers with the expectations of being spread by any individual who hears the message. Even in the case of Sony Ericsson , it anticipated the tourists to spread the information about the product to their friends and in that way create a positive buzz about the phone .
- **Video news releases-** video news releases blur the boundaries between journalism and marketing because the hired people who appear in them are taken to be traditional broadcast reporters. Though they are styled like news reports , VNRs actually focus on selling a product . Local TV stations often improvise by inserting their own graphics , or hiring their own reporter to dub the script in their voice. This method disguises a news stations connect with its client,all the while making the finished product seem like one of its own reports.
- **Music Marketing-**This method is well disguised and many companies exploit advantage of people's favorite music tracks to promote their brands in the “UMARMED”eye of the public .The emotional touch of the music tracks combined with the use of enigmatic imaginary works well for the marketers to demonstrate their brands in a surreptitious way. The latter has changed dramatically the visual presentation of different songs available from multiple streaming channels. Music is specially a good tactic for advertising life style products. For example, the famous Hindi music track mentions ‘ZANDU BAM” in its music track.



Conclusion

There is always the existing dilemma of what is ethical but illegal and also between what is legal but unethical in stealth marketing. Most of the times, there may not be any strict rules restricting the marketers from adapting the subtle tactics that are involved in stealth marketing. Though these acts may seem harmless, many customers feel deceived and misled after coming to know the actual scenario. Another issue revolving around stealth marketing is the fact that, in many situations like that of Sony, Ericsson, the activity is so granular and it works in such a personal and intimate level that it is not possible for it to be closely monitored by the regulators. Though many people may say that they are neutral towards stealth marketing and that they are perfectly capable of processing information rationally. There are other groups of people who are more vulnerable like women, children and the less educated audience.

Discussion: the future of Stealth Marketing

Companies have to learn to incorporate content in their stealth marketing strategies and not just advertise themselves. Media coverage of high profile companies and failure of corporate governance has led to increased levels of transparency in today's business world. As a result, stealth marketing is becoming more and more difficult to implement. Stealth Marketing strategies are increasingly perceived and unethical as they become less explicit especially while targeting the above mentioned vulnerable audience. In such cases it is seen as exploitation rather than promotion. Marketers should watchfully monitor social connections between stealth marketing target audience to maintain a strategic distance from a conceivable backfire impact. That can be accomplished by the design of a proper plan pertaining to the implementation of the stealth marketing mix. Only by closely investigating the phases through which the product reaches the intended target group unpretentiously can companies achieve stealth marketing success.



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