

Communication and Marketing Strategies of the Leading Indian Newspapers

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Introduction

A newspaper is one of the most important reading materials in the life of a literate people. In the modern age, without a newspaper a person cannot think of his/her daily routine life. The need for a proper marketing of the newspaper marketing has arisen because of the rapid change in the communication process. An effective marketing strategy is required to retain the current customers as well as to attract potential ones. As a product newspaper can satisfy the need for getting the information that helps in decision-making process of the social and family life.

Newspaper began circulating in the 17th century. The first newspaper was printed in England in 1665. Since its inception, newspaper has established an identity of its own which has made the profession noblest of the noble. It demands extraordinary courage besides knowledge par excellence. Truth is its religion and sacrifice is considered ad its foundation.

Running the newspaper is a business but not a tool of making money .Today, from that dignified beginning it is reduced to being a big business intention which creates new realities and manages perception, stooping low to the extent of a phenomenon that has lately emerged - the paid news. At present, circulation is the life line of a newspaper. Circulation has now reached new heights, technology is unprecedented. What has declined is human concern and sensitivity. The state of affairs has come to the point where newspaper itself becomes a businessman. The price war between two massive media house in Delhi and other claims by Hindi language newspapers, the question is about how they manage their circulation arises. This study is on the marketing strategies of the newspapers.

Significance of the study

In recent decades, the significant technological advances have affected the Newspaper Industry. Newspapers in India are seeing the most chaotic times in their history. The challenge for survival though unprecedented, was not of such magnitude when the advent of television confronts print.

Today, media forms have diversified with its use and by its own special attraction. The challenge for survival is on the competition and fighting back or collaborating with newer media forms that with latest techniques which are ready to enter the turf that comfortably belonged to traditional media.

Objectives

The objective of this research is to study how media manage communication to enhance its reach.

Objectives:

1. To study marketing strategies and publicity efforts.
2. To study the communication strategy of the four popular newspapers by analyzing their editorial strategies.
3. To study the perceptions of the audience about their respective newspapers.

Methodology

Two methods are used:

1. Survey
2. Interview

Interview: The requirement is to know the idea of communication managers of the respective newspapers content, marketing efforts and campaign. So interviews with brand managers, business heads and editors were conducted. Interviews showed clear view of their perceptions, their marketing strategies and a measure of their estimated readers' responses.

Survey: The marketing efforts as well as the content are aimed at the reader. The main concern for the newspaper is the target audience which creates more advertisements and sponsorship. Likewise, advertisement revenue also turns out to be larger for a newspaper with a wider base of target audience. With the use of new technology and changing media environment it was important to figure out how the readers responded to changing content and marketing strategies in a continually changing media environment. The effectiveness of communication well decides the connected message taken at the receiver's end. A survey was conducted to find out the readers' perception on different genres of the newspaper and to cross check whether marketing of content was as successful as the brand managers claimed. For this purpose, four leading newspapers in terms of circulation were selected. These were the Times of India (TOI) and Tribune the leading print media players in a modern, city like Chandigarh and two highest circulated Hindi language dailies, the Dainik Jagran (DJ) and the Dainik Bhaskar (DB) of a tradition bound city like Patiala, Punjab.

The questionnaires were pre tested on 25 respondents in each of the two cities and certain amendments were made based on its observations. The final questionnaires were administered on a randomly selected sample of 600 respondents; a sample of 150 was drawn for each Newspaper.

Inter Media and Intra Media Competition

All the newspapers, both English and Hindi are trying to capture the market of others. As hindi is the language which need to target upon English readers to increase the readership from housewives and layman to other sector of society. According to Basant Rathore VP (Strategy and Brand Development) Dainik Jagran the cost of newsprint is rising and the price of newspaper cannot be increased, that is why the dependence on ad revenue increases. It is not possible to run newspaper in loss of circulation is the main concern. The price of the newspaper cannot be lowered beyond a point. The number of supplements is increased by these newspapers on different days in the week instead. For example, the Dainik Bhaskar offered a magazine 'Aha Zindagi' in Rajasthan as a combo offer. TOI also has combo offers like a copy of TOI and Tribune together to cost Rs. 3.75 on a weekday while TOI together with NBT costs Rs.4.50.

Managing Circulation

Newspaper fulfil maximum information to readers in all aspects whether news, sports, entertainment, end of season sale, hygiene, cosmetics and dressing for occasions, the

makeup to be worn, and maintain social relationships, Vaastu and FengShui and interior designing – everything under the sun that the reader may want to know. The use of aggressive marketing strategies in today's media business involves innovative techniques of enticing the audience to book the readership. This strategy works for both English and hindi newspapers. The different schemes were launched to increase the market of newspaper. For Example some time back there was a scheme of getting the Navbharat Times free with the Times of India. HT Media's the Hindustan Times ran a scheme that anybody who showed a copy of the paper at a petrol pump would get petrol at Rs. 1/- less than the original cost. "Readers gradually get a habit of schemes. When you start a scheme; the circulation goes up by 15,000. You stop it, it goes down by 13,000," stated Sharda. Dainik Bhaskar was launched in Punjab in 2006 and it started with reduced rate of bookings. The subscription of Dainik Bhaskar for a year was offered at a rate of Rs. 199/- and the subscriber got a bag as a free gift.

Explaining the incentives offered to the readers by the DainikJagran, Rathore said, We give away gifts to people through schemes. We book a certain number of copies per year at a concessional rate. There are many such drives." Their marketing efforts also centre on pricing, product research (what kind of content people want) and packaging.

Strategy for Editorial

For gratifying the consumer's need, no media marketer undermines the importance of content and the target market is studied before designing the content. According to Deputy Manager, Times of India – Brand, "Audience looks for brand experience. Where a product ends and a brand begins is the confusion." According to him, the Times of India targets local and Social Economic class 'A' people. It provides value to the advertiser while being valuable to the reader.

"The Times of India is read by modern readers that look for information not news. This time starved community is coveted by advertisers," he stressed. "A brand operates at different levels. Content is important in Times of India which pertains to readers' lives. TOI always gets hooked to the wave. The effort in the print media is to know what the common man comes across, the whole day. It provides information on that. So, for its target audience, it becomes crucial." In editorial strategy, editorial guidelines are not fixed. "Editorial guidelines are selected on a daily basis according to the need of the time.

The Tribune which is a close rival of the Times of India also targets a similar audience segment. While the former targets SEC 'A' class majorly, SEC 'B' are also its consumers. Marketing Manager of the The Tribune mainly sees his audience as those having modern outlook, nuclear families, and a much broader interest spectrum with large proportion of middle age and young readers. He also looks at the great influx of people from smaller cities to bigger ones. The main target of newspapers is to target young minds as a modern brand. We improve each day. Our sub brands like HT City are also improving. It is also seen that there is a makeover change in the front page of the newspaper once in a while.

Same is in the case of the Hindi language newspapers who feel no differently about content marketing and need gratification. But the use of language has noticeably turned informal. These days the trend of using the specific language, words and spellings has dispensed where in the past, people used to refer a newspaper for correct use of language. The editorial strategy of these two Hindi language dailies stems from localized approach and micro segmentation of the audience. Designing content to suit the taste of the niche audience is important to the marketers. Designing content accordingly is important, and need of the time.

Earlier, Punjab had just one newspaper, the Punjab Kesari. Then Dainik Jagran was launched a decade ago. Dainik Bhaskar which was a recent launch in the state had to design its editorial strategy meticulously. When the Dainik Bhaskar was launched, it came with the strategy to do independent reporting. It gave a neutral platform. Secondly, people used to confirm the news from The Tribune earlier. The Dainik Bhaskar established its credibility equal to this English newspaper.

Th language decency is maintained somehow. Also attention is paid to kind of language people want to read. Punjab had less people who liked literary language. Dainik Bhaskar was launched in Punjab in 2006. 150 people in each town were questioned to know what they liked in English and Hindi language newspapers.

To hold readers attention and interest Dainik Jagran on the other hand agreed to using everyday Punjabi and to recognize the taste of the reader. To cater according to the need of the readers leads to low level reporting. Catering only to readers' needs may sometimes lead to low level of reporting, believes Rajat. They try to cater to the real needs of the consumers. According to the database received newspaper publish the news and other items according to the needs of the reader. This is the Brand department's job. Need gratification is required. Because of the stress involved in people's life, light items are needed. It is difficult to tie them down.

Publicity Efforts and Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategy is critical in designing the space that a product carves for itself. Marketing strategy of the Times of India not only includes regional and national level campaigns, it also includes participation of the readers in them and in its content by means of writing letters to editor, mobile technology (SMS service) and web (interactive) technologies. It is all considered to be a part of brand communication, aiming at broadening the scope of readers' involvement. The main focus is the right marketing mix. The matter is the main factors which differentiate the product from other products. To reflex modernity Times of India and The Tribune focus more on the change of content and look to create focus of more youngsters. The game is that who has better marketing mix wins the game. It all depends on right promotions, campaign, thought, platform and product.

The publicity efforts of the newspaper are aimed at two kinds of audience – the reader and the advertiser. The ones that are aimed at the advertisers focus on the visibility of media platforms. For example, the group carried out a research with Ernst and Young called “Dhoni’s effect”. This was done at the time India won T20 World Cup. The purpose was to bring out the real potential of tier 2 and tier 3 towns in India.

In the form of campaigns it is aimed at readers for example “Pani Bachao Aandolan” was carried out in Rajasthan with waterman and Megsay say award winner Rajendra Singh. A campaign was also designed to encourage people to play dry Holi (the festival of colours in North India). To increase the readership of Hindi newspaper “Hindi ko hum gauravdenge” was another campaign to make Hindi the largest read language in the world. The strategy is when newspaper allow advertiser to do certain kind of advertisement campaign it increases the product sales as well as newspaper readership. The Garba dance during Navratras in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chandigarh also create an impact. People first get enrolled with us to learn from Mallika Sarabhai and then there are Dandiya nights and competitions.

The strategy of the Dainik Bhaskar is to reach the niche audience by penetrating the hyper local market. Also there has been a 70% increase in newsprint cost. And beyond a certain point we can't compromise on quality and price. So we increased the supplements. The consumer had an option to buy Dainik Bhaskar with magazines and supplements at a reduced cost or to buy the paper without them. Without them, the paper costs Rs.2/-. There was a gain of 50000-60000 copies as the number of subscribers increased.”

Chetan Sharda highlighted the importance of public participation in marketing campaigns. The brand marketing can effect the market a lot. Explaining one such campaign

he said, “The campaign was called ‘KudionkiLohri’.Lohri is a festival celebrated in Punjab for sons. It is celebrated on the birth and marriage of a son. We focused on births and marriages of girls. The first year when we started this campaign, we took 4-5 cases of families who celebrated the birth of girls in their families. By the second year, all the other newspapers took it up and sold it.”

For local advertisers, besides the main paper, communication is directed particularly at them. Marketing team manage one to one meetings and seminars and workshops for them. The third category of advertisers has nothing to do with content. They do not know what Dainik Jagran as a product is like. They want the platform.”

The marketing strategy of Dainik Jagran according to Rathore is to offer media platforms with below the line solutions. The newspaper has platforms to offer the marketer at various levels. Like Dainik Bhaskar, the newspaper’s approach is also to involve readers by having campaigns that encourage public participation. For example, the campaign ‘Jagran Aap Ke Dwar’ was aimed at finding people’s problems and to debate on the issues. A part of it comprised ‘Samachar par vichar’ in which group discussions were conducted with readers on what was published.

Audience Perception

How audience gather the information is the main concern. A newspaper’s most valuable asset is customer acceptance .Newspaper publishers spend millions of dollars annually to ensure that the newspaper arrives at the newspaper stand or the subscriber’s doorstep every day. Reporters track down stories and editors carefully maintain the editorial integrity of the newspaper. It was important to test how successful the communications of the newspapers were and whether what the brand managers thought was also how the audience received it. In order to get a feel of the pulse of the audience and its receptivity towards the messages communicated to them by various media platforms, this survey was conducted. A sample of 150 readers was drawn on each of the four newspapers. The following are the findings:

1. Newspaper plays a major role in today's life. The food habits and the newspaper reading habits stand hand in hand. It is rare that a person changes his newspaper once she /he gets used to it. However, it is not uncommon. To a straight question, ‘*Why did you switch over to this newspaper?*’ Times of India (TOI) respondents offered more than one responses which are: better presentation (75 or 37.50%) and better content (69 or 34.50%) while 61 respondents or 30.50% preferred it for easy language. For the Tribune, its rival newspaper, ‘Better content’ emerged as the most important factor (81 respondents or

41.12%) that made the respondents switch to this newspaper. 'Better presentation' and 'easy language' were the other two factors which made 64 respondents (32.49%) each settle with this newspaper. 52 or 26.40% other respondents who felt that The Tribune catered to information needs better also shifted to Tribune.

When the Dainik Jagran (DJ) respondents were asked about their reasons for switching over to it, while 70 respondents (35%) cited better content as their reason. When asked about their reasons for shifting to the Dainik Bhaskar (DB), the highest no. respondents (82 or 38.50%) cited lesser price to be their reason, 66 (30.99%) shifted because they thought Dainik Bhaskar's content was better than the one they were reading before. 38 respondents (17.84%) switched to this newspaper as they thought it had easy language, same number of respondents found its presentation better while 31 respondents (14.55%) felt that Dainik Bhaskar catered to their information needs better.

2. Today's newspaper carries news columns like news, editorials, features, articles etc. and non news need gratification columns like entertainment, glamour, shopping, food, weekend planner etc. The prospect of news is so wide; the gap between information and news has faded away.
 - a. The Times of India readers were very sure of their choice. When they read Times of India, they mean it. For both, news and non news needs columns the TOI got appreciation from its readers. A statement on which their opinion was sought was, "*The news is by and large objective.*" For 86 respondents (43%) the news of Times of India is by and large objective (20 strongly agreed). Only 29 respondents were found to disagree (14 strongly disagreed to this). 67 were found to be neutral. Among the Tribune readers, 103 respondents out of 150 agreed (21 strongly) to the statement that the news is objective. 21 respondents disagreed to this whereas a sizable no. of respondents stayed neutral. The trend was similar for the DJ readers - 95 disagreed, 25 respondents agreed and 25 respondents chose to stay neutral. 85 DB respondents felt that the news was objective whereas 30 respondents felt otherwise, 35 respondents remained neutral.
 - b. For the statement, "*The non news need specific columns take care of diverse needs of the audience*", the agreement of the TOI respondents was divided 95:33, 80 said that the columns took care of the diverse needs of the audience whereas 28 felt otherwise. 62 preferred to stay neutral. 115 respondents of Tribune were found to agree to this strongly against only 12 who refused to do so. Still 23 respondents preferred to stay neutral. For the DJ readers, it was a different trend as 90 respondents agreed to it, 45 chose to stay

- neutral and 15 disagreed. The statement was true, felt 3/4th of the DB respondents (114). Only 15 respondents disagreed to this strongly while 19 remained neutral.
- c. Interestingly, for the statement, "*The non news need specific columns create a desire for goods and services which are otherwise not necessary for the readers,*" 88 TOI respondents were found agreeing (21 of them strongly) that the non news need gratification columns created a desire for goods and services which are otherwise not necessary for the readers. 74 respondents preferred not to join either of the camp. For 68 Tribune respondents this was true whereas 28 respondents didn't feel so. A sizeable number of respondents 54 preferred to stay neutral. For the DJ readers, this statement saw 98 respondents agreeing while 31 stayed neutral and 29 chose to disagree. Among the DB respondents, 61 agreed to the statement against 53 who disagreed, 36 were found to be neutral.
- d. In TOI "*People who read this paper will never shift to other newspaper,*" 30 respondents strongly agreed while those who strongly disagreed were only six. 71 respondents agreed that The Tribune readers will never shift their loyalty whereas 29 respondents disagreed to this. 39 preferred the option 'neutral'. Among the DJ readers this statement drew a surprising response as 71 respondents chose to disagree with it and 41 agreed. 30 respondents chose to stay neutral. If we look for brand loyalty surprisingly, the majority of respondents (97) didn't agree with the statement that people who read Dainik Bhaskar will never shift to other newspapers. While 44 respondents agreed with the statement, 36 chose to stay neutral.
3. The respondents were asked on how informative the news and non news items were. It was seen that the options of eating out in Patiala were limited and the readers did not seek information on eating outlets from their newspaper. Also weekend planning was prevalent in Chandigarh but was a lesser known concept in Patiala. Hence, the two were replaced with 'Religion and Career respectively, which were the subjects of greater interest to the people there. All the categories of non news items on which the readers' opinion were sought (like shopping, entertainment, fashion, health, etc) emerged after content analysis of the four newspapers (not within the scope of this paper). As for the English language newspapers, it was found that besides news, there were two kinds of information being provided by the newspapers: conventional one like health, career, entertainment, etc. and the second category were of fashion, spiritualism, food, weekend planner, etc. Respondents of Chandigarh preferred 'no

response' to the queries of second category of information where as this figure was very less for the respondents of Patiala.

4. The next question was to test whether the respondents were aware of campaigns and whether they liked them. Among the campaigns of the four newspapers, the TOI scored better than others. Its campaigns like Lead India were seen by 109 respondents whereas The Tribune Leadership Summit was seen by 94 respondents.
5. To find out what the respondents think of such campaigns carried out by newspaper, the question "Why do you think the newspaper has carried out these campaigns?" was asked and six options were offered. Only 65 TOI respondents answered this question and all of them felt the campaigns were to create goodwill among the readers and 31 respondents felt it was to boost its circulation. 23 respondents said it was to serve the society and 31 said it was to create awareness, 38 understood it as for self publicity.

'To create awareness' was the reason cited by maximum (86) Tribune respondents. 70 respondents were categorical when they said it was to boost the circulation. 67 respondents were found to be a little sober when they said the campaigns were aimed at creating goodwill among readers. However, for 58 respondents, it was for self publicity. Where the Tribune scored was 40 respondents branding it as 'to serve the society'. Among DJ respondents, 22 respondents thought that it was to create goodwill, 29 felt it was to boost circulation, 'to serve the society' believed 17 respondents; 'to create awareness' opined 22; 'for self publicity' agreed 56 respondents. As for the DB respondents, 20 respondents said these campaigns were to create goodwill among readers, 12 thought it was to boost circulation, according to 23 respondents they were meant to serve the society, for 26 respondents they created awareness and a majority (49) said these campaign were for self publicity.

There is a clear difference between Chandigarh and Patiala respondents when asked why the newspapers carried out these campaigns. 10 respondents of TOI and 15 respondents of Tribune preferred not to respond to this question. The same figures for DJ and DB were 70 and 68 respectively. Though there were subscribers of all the options offered, like goodwill, circulation, service of the society, creating awareness and self publicity. Creating awareness topped the list with 80 respondents from TOI and 76 from Tribune. Patiala respondents were very clear when the majority, 56 of DJ respondents and 48 of DB respondents were categorical calling this effort as self publicity. Here there is a clear shift of newspaper loyalty among the respondents of two different sets up – Chandigarh

and Patiala. This could also be attributed to another reason, i.e. the campaigns of TOI and Tribune were planned more meticulously and pushed more vigorously.

CONCLUSION

Marketing is the most critical factor of today's market-oriented newspaper industry. That's why today's entrepreneurs of this industry have to think for various marketing variables. And they have to do all these things keeping the needs, wants and demands of their consumers in their minds. Newspaper in a very short span of time has become a business where it has transformed the noble profession to a lowest paid news. In the race for circulation primacy the newspapers leave no stone unturned. The newspaper today is trying its hand at everything. By the increase in number of newspapers the competition is on the top. Through their need gratifying columns of all kinds, they try to belong to the people.

Starting from organizing events to please the audience, encouraging public participation in the content of the newspaper, providing gifts and getting new schemes to increase circulation and in the process, trying to make to running campaigns they try greater profits than only increasing circulation which continues to be their primary aim. The main focus is to be the part of everyday life of the readers and increase the circulation by giving the news of interest according to the target audience. They try to be a part of everyday life of the readers. Besides catering to the fantasy of the people, their focus is on making their readers feel proud of their newspapers. That is the reason why Indian newspapers stay much and that precisely is the ahead of their counterparts the world over.

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