



Free Media in the presence of Advertising

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 2 September 2013;

Received in revised form:

29 September 2013;

Accepted: 11 October 2013;

Keywords

Media,
News paper,
Controversy.

ABSTRACT

The study has been conducted to see if Advertising in News papers influence the news content of newspaper and if newspapers can publish content against thier advertisers, incase of them being involved in any controversy. The research included respondents in the form of a focus group of 20 media practitioners from Islamabad. The ages of the respondants were between 25 to 35. The data was collected through an open ended questionnaire and decoded manully to learn about the topic. The data interpreted proved the assumptions positive which said that the newspaper has to compromise its credibilty to keep the advertisers happy. It also learnt that the newspapers will not publish any content against thier advertisers.

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Introduction

It is a common perception that advertising is the back bone of any media outlet. If this perception holds any truth, then the advertisers certainly have tendency to exploit the newspapers as per their need. The modern definition of advertising is, according to Webster (2010), "Advertising is paid persuasive communication that uses non personal mass media as well as other forms of interactive communication to reach broad audience to connect an identified sponsor with a target audience."

The past decade has witnessed the development of information and communication technologies that enable easy and rapid interaction between customer and advertiser and this rapid interaction is possible only due to the communication channels that are being used by the advertisers. The current profit maximizing culture in the world has driven the advertisers to utilize all available communication mediums to reach audience however the importance of the mass communication channels remains constant. The major mass communication channels i.e. television, newspaper and radio are still the most influential tools used by the advertisers.

As far as the advertisement in newspapers is concerned, the paid placement of the advertisement plays an important role in the successful running of a newspaper. It is well believed that the newspapers need advertisement to fulfill its financial needs, therefore, the newspaper will never take any step which would loose it the intended or potential customer.

The advertisers, on the other hand side, are very well aware of the importance of advertising in newspaper. Knowing that they have certain degree of influence over the content of the newspaper, advertisers can be influential in gate-keeping process of the news. Moreover, the organizations, which have little or no acceptance in the society can, make their way through advertisement. Now the question arises, how would a newspaper keep up its credibility in the presence of these advertisers? The advertisers have the best medium to convince their customers, what they cannot achieve from two way communication models. Therefore, they can use this medium to best convince their

customers while exploiting their customer needs in the favor of the advertiser.

Advertisement in South Asian countries, especially in Pakistan is more of a game of words, rather than being a straight message. Sometimes the advertisement would carry exaggerated messages as to a degree, where they can be classified under false information. However, would the newspaper administration question such an advertisement, provided that it may loose such advertiser in the process of scrutiny?

Collins (1992) states that media biasness not only exists in the form of direct stories from advertisers but in the form of self censorship on the behalf of reporter (as the reporters are dissuaded by the fear of advertisers' reaction while suggesting any story) and fake news stories (sometimes advertisers create stories).

Altschull (1984) proposed a framework to study the variations involved in 'control of media'. One type of media control exists in the form of political economists. Astchull assumes that media reflects the ideology of its financiers since most of the media support comes from these financiers. He outlines four major sources of media support:

- 1) Media controlled by state (as in case of communist countries)
- 2) Control by commercial partners (advertisers and their media-owning allies)
- 3) Financing groups (which may be political party or religious group)
- 4) Media practitioners

In the same way Shoemaker and Reese(1994) think that it is the primary goal of every media organization to make profit. The other goals are additionally built on these basic goals which may be producing quality content or serve the public or strengthen the democracy etc. It would be rarely seen that the economic goal of the organization has set to be secondary.

Problem Statement:

As the economic goal seems to be the primary objective for the Media owners, the research aimed at studying if the newspaper administrations would ever loose any of its

advertisers to save its credibility or if they would compromise with the advertisers and ignores the credibility factor?

Objectives of study:

- To study the influence of advertisement on news content?
- To see if the editorial policy of newspaper compromises for advertisement or not?
- If the newspapers would publish any story against their advertisers.

Research question:

- What is the influence of advertisement on news content?
- Does the editorial policy of newspaper compromises for advertisement or not?
- Would the newspaper ever publish a story against their advertisers, in case of advertiser being involved in any issue?

Hypotheses:

H₁: Advertising in News papers influence the news content of newspapers.

H_{1.1}: Editorial policy of newspapers compromises for advertising revenue.

H₂: The newspaper will not publish any story against their advertisers, in case of them being involved. .

Methodology:

A qualitative research had been conducted to study the hypothesis. A focus group of 20 media practitioners from different media organizations working in Islamabad had been chosen.

Research Instrument:

For the above study an open-ended questionnaire had been designed to extract information from media practitioners from the field of news.

Procedure

Permission from Media organization authorities was solicited and letters of acceptance were sent to people of target group. After getting Permission, young media practitioners aging from 25 to 35 had been selected and given questionnaires. The data from the questionnaire then had been manually extracted.

Results:

The responses received were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted in the light of study.

Out of the 20 media practitioners, only 2 of the professionals said they have reported a story against an advertiser, which hasn't been published in the newspaper. Rest of the professionals said that they could not report it because they already presumed that it would not be published. While discussing the same question, mostly of the practitioners said that One of the reasons was that these type of stories are against the marketing interest and hence they cannot go against the marketing strategies of the company, if they wish to stay in the organization they are working with. Another reason of not reporting amongst these individuals was that they fear what they

report would not be published and they do not wish to burn resources for what would not end accordingly.

One of the media professional stated that the bigger the sponsors are, the stronger they are and so media organizations would not like to annoy them through any means.

All the respondents think that advertisement is the biggest obstacle in reporting many stories yet no action has ever been taken against them.

Another important thing here is that the respondents were asked if the perception that reporting against the advertisers would make newspapers' loose all advertisement is correct or not. All of the reporters stated that this perception was correct and not a single professional stated if the policy of the newspaper could stop it from doing so. No one even out of the respondents think that the policy and marketing have no connection.

This shows that the policy of the newspaper is not strong enough to bear any kind of pressure from the advertisers, which means that the advertisers can use the newspapers as tool to communicate their agenda.

Discussion:

Therefore, it is clear that the advertising in newspaper has the tendency to influence the gate-keeping process of the news. It also proves the hypothesis that the editorial policy or credibility of newspapers is compromised for advertising revenue and the newspaper will not publish any story against the advertisers.

DeLorme and Fedler (2005) say that advertisers have already attempted to influence content from long ago; however, they have not fully succeeded in this but partially. They definitely are in a strong position to influence the content of the news.

Soley and Craig (1992) found in their study that ninety percent of the editors of newspapers have been pressurized by the advertisers by withdrawing advertising due to conflicts over the content.

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