
Innovative stealth marketing strategies and its ethical issues

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Abstract: People have been bombarded by advertising for decades; every TV channel watched in, every social media page posted, every magazine opened, the advertisements are there. Audiences have grown with this. We have learned to filter messages, prevent advertisements from our views and minds, and exercise selective attention and concentrate on only what we want. In fact, consumers now have the potential to 'protect' themselves from different marketing ads with technology such as remote control, ad blockers, web filtering, and many more. From an ethical perspective, this paper will address the issue of stealth marketing within the scope of its practises. Issues to be addressed include the impact of stealth marketing on audiences, the rationale for the practise, and some recommendations. Here this study involves a descriptive research method as research design and samples for the finding purpose were collected from 85 respondents along with the help of primary data. The research findings were analyzed using tools like frequency analysis, mean analysis, independent t test and ANOVA analysis.

Keywords: stealth marketing, ethical issues, product placements, deception, innovation

INTRODUCTION

Stealth marketing, also known as buzz marketing, is any marketing tactic that advertises a product to individuals without realizing they are being advertised. There are many stealth marketing strategies, with product placement and undercover marketing is perhaps the most common. (Kirby and Marsden, 2006) It is a marketing strategy that is used to attract publicity without appearing to be advertising for a new product, service, movie or book. Such marketing strategies are often referred to as buzz marketing as well. It is a general term that covers a broad variety of particular marketing strategies. Product placement, fake media and the use of actors are some of the most common tactics used by stealth marketers. Stealth marketing's main aim is not to generate immediate sales, but to generate curiosity and enthusiasm which will make customers more open to later direct advertisements. Product placement features a product outside of a marketing background, generally as part of some form of mass media or entertainment. (Martin and Smith, 2008) Companies put their products in films and TV shows and enter into celebrity endorsement deals to advertise products. Irrespective of what particular approach an organization takes, stealth marketing is most successful in enhancing awareness of a new product that has not yet been widely advertised. A variety of companies can use stealth marketing techniques to drum up buzz for a product. It is most commonly used by larger companies that can afford to use multiple marketing strategies for a single product; although, stealth marketing has also been used successfully by small companies to create interest in a new product. There is no controversy over these marketing tactics. Some experts think the act is too disappointing and requires "tricking" customers. In certain cases, however, the strategies are also undoubtedly successful. It takes creativity and the gift of knowledge of how to create buzz to use stealth marketing. When used properly, stealth marketing can be a low-cost way for a product to get a lot of exposure. The primary objective of these marketing strategies is not to produce immediate revenue, but to build individuals with business opportunities and brand awareness. It requires a lot of imagination. That you sell a product and don't let other individuals know they are being advertised. For example, if you are watching a movie and in a scene, you see a dell laptop or any other brand laptop in the background, this is then referred to as indirect marketing / buzz marketing / stealth marketing and furthermore the following factors have been framed by the researchers to measure the impact of stealth marketing on the consumers to find the level of impact with respect to the various identified factors.

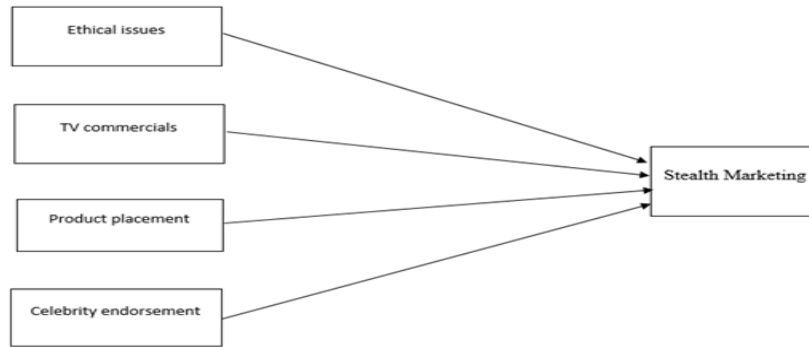


Fig.1:

LITERATURE REVIEW

(Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004) In this article the main factors for approaching undercover marketing are discussed. The increasing popularity of undercover marketing or stealth marketing drives from three factors that contributed to the dimension effectiveness of television advertising and other traditional techniques, the first factor is the growing criticism of the advertising industry. The second factor is about the cost effectiveness of stealth campaigns and recommendation to embrace non-traditional techniques. The third factor is about the need to explore different types of stealth marketing techniques which are effective alternatives to reach large customers or fragmented audiences.(Sabir et al., n.d.) In this article, the main key factors for marketers for approaching stealth techniques are discussed. The main reasons being that the young generations are not watching the TV because of the advent of other technologies such as television recorders and digital video recorders etc., which provides the consumers the facility of skipping or eliminating the ads, hence the marketers are diverted to stealth marketing.(Roy and Chattopadhyay, 2010) Marketing is commonly practiced in our capitalist society and is possible in many ways with so many options, and they are never forced to use any specific form of marketing, undoubtedly not stealth marketing and the options the marketers choose for advertising depends on various factors, such as financial reasons, business fits, target audiences, creative elements and some other commonly accepted practices include online and offline advertising in media like newspaper, websites and broadcasted channels and some advertisement. However companies tend to distinguish their advertisement from others in the expectations, the message reaches the consumers mind and in many situations decide that stealth marketing will be the best choice for them.(Goodman, 2006) In this research article many factors, such as specifications and characteristics which affect the individual and the customer in their choice of what they are processing, shopping habits, buying actions, the products he buys or the distributors he goes to. It says that, each and every one of these variables results in the purchasing decision. An individual and a customer are led by his society, subculture, social class, membership groups, family, personality, his mental influences, etc. , he is also influenced by the cultural patterns and societal trends. By recognizing the variables that impact their consumers, brands have the chance to build a plan, a Specific Value Proposition (marketing message) and advertisement campaigns that are more successful and more aligned with the needs and ways of thinking about their goal consumers, a tangible commodity to better satisfy and boost revenue to the needs of its customers.

(Moura, 2011)the generation that was born in the mid 1980’s decade, they are bombarded with a heavily increasing number of advertising messages which has turned to increase their level of irritation. Due to this they defended that these messages are trying to sell the products. This is the main factor which is faced by the marketers in approaching the generation Y so the marketers have started to pay attention to these messages which is the only way that the presentation of the messages should not be a traditional way. This need pressured the marketers to start boosting the unconventional way for marketing which is called undercover marketing (stealth marketing).(Milne et al., 2008) In this article, the main key reasons for marketers for approaching these techniques are discussed. The main reasons being that the young generations are not watching the TV because of the advent of other technologies such as television recorders and digital video recorders etc., Which provides the consumers the facility of skipping or eliminating the ads, hence the marketer is diverted to stealth marketing.(Katyal, 2010) in the coming age of the younger generations holds negative views on commercial messages and that has resulted in the need for special marketing approaches that are considered to be more alternative. Guerrilla marketing, being such a tool, is part of Undercover Marketing, which is another tool and has the potential to enter this generation. (Woolcock and Others, 2001)According to researcher in the buyer seller relationship media played a dominant role in the field of consumer marketing and this role is unspoken and it is used a positive way the marketing strategy for seller in promoting the positive changing in the consumer perceptions in opening of new research field are successful or unsuccessful marketing.(Pettersson and Svensson, 2010) research says that companies seeking to meet customers through the ocean of marketing clutter today regularly employ new business practices. While many non-traditional marketing messages are successful by insightful, entertaining, and ultimately

harmless means, others rely on misinformation to reach customers. In addition to manipulation, as a means of achieving productivity, stealth marketing may require involvement and manipulation of social relationships. In this paper, using three stealth marketing case studies, the authors discuss the ethical consequences. By using research on scepticism and experience of persuasion to help explain the utility of these activities, they placed the topic into the sense of customer protection mechanisms. (Serra-Cantalops et al., 2018) in this research paper, the researcher explains about how these banned brands are running a covert marketing campaign in Turkey. Three brands running a strong stealth marketing campaign from the alcoholic beverage sector are selected and their campaign and its social media site (Instagram) is evaluated over a six-month span using content analysis tools. It is also clear that all the names made up of which brands use have very similar corporate identities to the original brand. Storytelling shines out as a big brand framework used in their Instagram posts, and building a connection is also highlighting out as the main tactic marketers use in their stealth marketing campaigns, according to social media studies. (Pehlivan et al., 2015) marketers have to rethink new and special measures for attracting the younger generations, it makes the commercial messages will reach them, therefore it is very necessary for the companies to reshape their techniques and also increase the quality of their services in order to avoid negative word of mouth and also states that young generations are more approachable through the word of mouth and this is considered as one of the best alternative way for promoting which leads companies to an alternative marketing and promotional approach hence, the marketers are aiming for word of mouth, that is planned and executed by people itself in order to spread the "Buzz".(Peighambari et al., 2016) In this article the researcher, In an attempt to make the marketing process seamless and more effective, marketers are collecting and marketing information surreptitiously and inseparably bundled. This article expands the conceptualization of hidden marketing to include both knowledge collection and marketing communications to better understand the health consequences of these activities. The authors present a multi-stage framework for the trade that helps define factors that impact marketer and consumer welfare by utilizing covert practices. They use the context to address the advantages and harms and customer responses to those same activities related to these types of hidden marketing practices. (Swanepoel et al., 2009) researcher says that since during the last decade, stealth marketing has been experiencing rising awareness. The outcomes from its implementation, however, remain a complicated challenge for advertisers, since they cannot be accurately measured given that these promotions are very rarely disclosed. The purpose of this report is to present the contemporary manifestations of the techniques of stealth marketing by comparing them with its predecessor – viral marketing. The paper introduces and describes the original author's model of stealth marketing from other types of surreptitious marketing strategies. Our research idea is based on the rich knowledge acquired by our peer teams across the university.(A.C.Gomathi, S.R.Xavier Rajarathinam, A.Mohammed Sadiq, Rajeshkumar, 2020; Danda et al., 2009; Danda and Ravi, 2011; Dua et al., 2019; Ezhilarasan et al., 2019; Krishnan and Chary, 2015; Manivannan, I., Ranganathan, S., Gopalakannan, S. et al., 2018; Narayanan et al., 2012, 2009; Neelakantan et al., 2013, 2011; Neelakantan and Sharma, 2015; Panchal et al., 2019; Prasanna et al., 2011; Priya S et al., 2009; Rajeshkumar et al., 2019; Ramadurai et al., 2019; Ramakrishnan et al., 2019; Ramesh et al., 2016; Venugopalan et al., 2014)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the research is to find out the influence of stealth marketing and its ethical issues, choosing an appropriate research methodology whether it is quantitative or qualitative research method will improve the value of the study and contributes for the quality of the research through validity and reliability context. So, in this study the quantitative methodology was followed and employed to study the perceived factors of stealth marketing and its ethical issues. A questionnaire was created; it was issued to various consumers. The questionnaire consisted of various types of questions related to the practices of stealth marketing. From the survey conducted, the majority of respondents felt neutral about stealth marketing as they accepted the practise as a common act, where no serious harm is done, and that they could filter the message on their own. Yet stealth marketing strategies will be developed in such a way that even educated audiences will find it difficult to detect and For instance, even though they know of the concept, most audiences would not realise fake blogging and disinformation. In addition, there are other groups of individuals who are even more vulnerable or could be impacted more adversely like when it comes to children and less educated people or people who are less exposed to media who are from rural areas or underdeveloped countries will not be able to distinguish the product placements in televisions and at times even adults may fail to recognise the facts of these stealthy adverts mainly the fake blogs ,product placements and tv commercials

The following are the Demographic profile of the respondents:

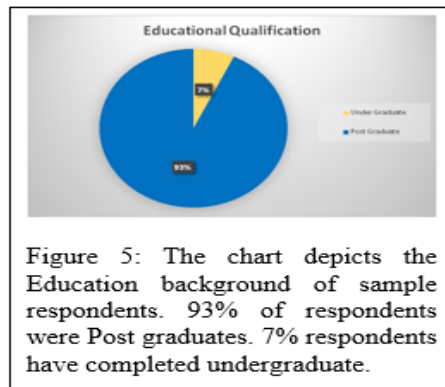
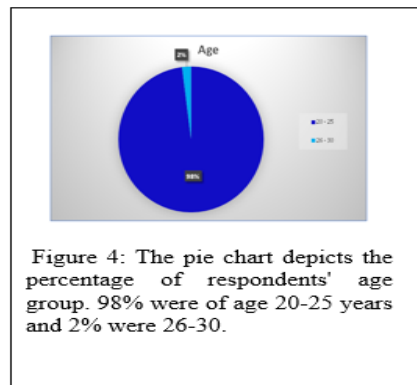
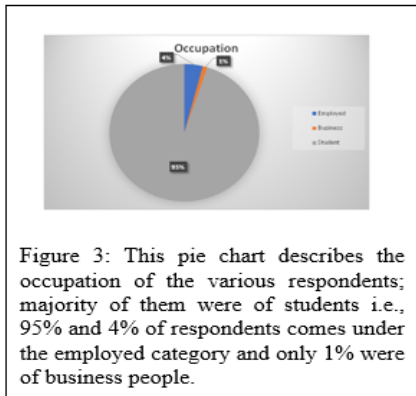
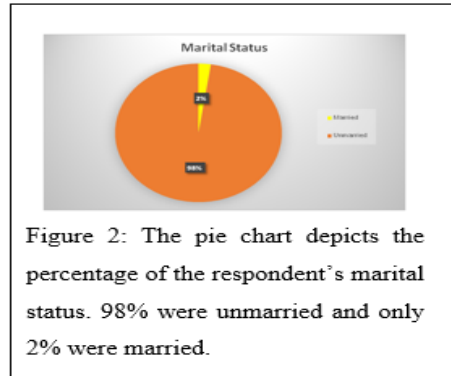
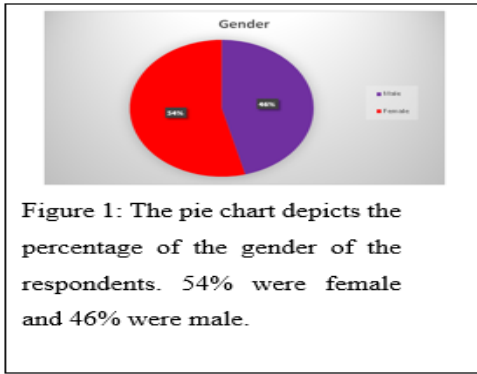


Table 1: Mean analysis

PERCEPTION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	MEAN	RANK
Ethical issues	13.95	1
TV commercials	7.24	2
Product placement	3.87	3
Celebrity endorsement	3.57	4

Mean analysis is done on the basis of factors computation and it is ranked as rank 1 for the highest mean in the ascending order. From the mean analysis it has been found that the highest impact factor was ethical issues and it is ranked as rank 1 with the mean value of 13.95 TV commercials is ranked as 2 with mean value of 7.24 as it is the next major factor which impacts the consumers. Product placement is ranked as 3 as this factor influences the people through the movies and celebrity endorsement is ranked as 4 and it is the least impacted factor.

Table 2: Demographic profile and the factors in independent t-test

	Gender	T-value	Significance
1	Perception towards ethical issues related to stealth marketing	0.979	0.403
2	Product Placements	1.255	0.520
3	Celebrity Endorsements	0.539	0.418
4	TV commercials	0.621	0.264

The table shows the T values of the demographic profile along with the factors that have been analysed. From the analysed part it is found that there are no significant differences with respect to gender and the impacting factors.

Table 3: Demographic profile and the factors in ANOVA analysis

S.NO	Age	F-value	Significance
1	Ethical issues of stealth marketing	8.924	0.004
2	Product placements	6.601	0.012
3	Celebrity endorsements	0.952	0.332
4	TV commercials	0.013	0.908

The table shows the ANOVA analysis and the F values of the demographic profile in comparison with the factors. Here it is evident that out of the four factors, it was found that the celebrity endorsement factor has a significant value with respect to age.

DISCUSSIONS

Stealth marketing strategies aim at a narrower audience, to which the product is presented, expecting that the latter will recommend it to other people through WOM, product placements, TV commercials, celebrity endorsements to whom it may also seem interesting and attractive. From the research it is understood that stealth marketing is like a double-edged sword. Be as beneficial and perceived as creative as it is, there are people who feel that stealth marketing is dishonest and harmful. Stealth marketing usually works only if the audiences do not realize that it is there, or do not feel intruded by it, like in the case of Sony Ericsson T68i, few customers may enjoy being able to experience the phones first hand, but others may feel like they are misled as they were sold to in their weakened state of not realizing that they were being advertised. In this way, the effect can be reversed until the viewer finds out about the practise. This effect is the same for fake blogging and other kinds of stealth marketing. In conclusion, compared to some other types of marketing, the practise of stealth marketing has proved to be effective in both producing results and being less expensive. Strategies need to be carefully applied, however, as the implications of a wrong decision could lead to the brand being heavily tarnished.

CONCLUSION

As technology and our society evolve, the way we communicate the messages must also evolve but without harming others in any form, marketers must be innovative and at the same time they must know the boundaries of their stealthy innovative acts. Stealth marketing activities can create more business to all brands. Nowadays companies are finding many ways in which they can market their products in less costly ways. And hence many unethical ways are also found to be used by companies to promote their brands by using celebrities, product placements in movies and other innovative ways. Newspaper reports of high-profile corporate governance issues in companies across the globe has raised the attention on integrity in today's world. In this case, it is important to try to understand stealth marketing activities and forecast which ways of stealth marketing are being used and expected to survive in the future. This research needed to find out the significant effect of stealth marketing activities on ethical practices and to create an understanding for the importance of ethical considerations when using stealth marketing. From the research it is clear that stealth marketing can influence consumer behavior. Marketers have tried to delude the consumers by not giving them the correct information. Now, marketers used stealth marketing very frequently via all the different modes of communication to create the awareness of their brand. Stealth marketing can be legally accepted, but at the same time marketers should also follow the ethically accepted adverts in order to sustain in the market.

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