



THE VARIOUS APPARITIONS AND CONTROVERSIAL STRATEGIES ADOPTED IN STEALTH MARKETING

MANASWINI REDDY¹ | AKSHARA ARAVIND² | PROF. SRIDHARAN³

ABSTRACT

“Humans like to see patterns even when there are none.”

Stealth Marketing or undercover marketing is perhaps the most effective and also the most deceptive form of marketing that companies adapt to become viral in a short span of time. 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 humour, taboos, scandals, unusual rumours, 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 Implementation, Controversies, Word Of Mouth (WOM), Ethical Issues.

Introduction:

Stealth marketing is a type of marketing strategy used to market products to consumers without them knowing that they are being marketed to. It is also called buzz marketing. Stealth marketing is alluded to as covert, undercover, veiled, e.t.c marketing. Stealth marketing is always mixed up with viral advertising and covert marketing. Firstly, a few experts consider stealth marketing as an enhanced adaptation of viral promoting (the last being considered fairly expansive, than successful). Not just does stealth marketing use more individual methods, however it likewise gets the best possible individuals to advertise to others about items without uncovering relationship with specific organization. To sum up, both stealth also, viral marketing are type of WOM(word of mouth). The distinction, in any case, lies in the way that the first depends on the pre selection process expecting high viability of data transmission, while the latter accentuates on mass correspondence to more extensive crowd trusting the message will produce a buzz and achieve the correct blend of individuals to purchase the actual product.

Secondly, covert means something that is not expressly showed, be that as it may, not really deliberately covered up. Moreover, in secret promoting the brand endorser is shown, while by utilizing a stealth advertising procedure advertisers are intentionally going around the show of the brand owner. Thirdly, stealth and covert advertising are likewise most of the time connected with one and a similar kind of activities – advancement of items by tools that clients are unconscious of. There is absence of hypothetical foundation as to the interconnectedness or distinction between the two terms.

Stealth marketing is a strategy utilized 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

Viktor Pettersson and Markus Svensson(2010) in their study titled” Stealth Marketing The art of deceiving consumers” talked about Creating an understanding for the significance of ethical considerations while using stealth marketing, also about determining if that could affect the brand image. The study focused on the ethical aspect of stealth marketing” They conducted a quantitative research on 249 respondents. They used **spss** to analyse the results. They identified that consumers ethics in business to be important although it did not have enough make the consumers boycott the product. Stealth marketing is identified to have a negative impact on the brand image.

Veronica Liljander and Johanna Gummerus and Magnus Söderlund(2014) in their study titled “Young consumers’ responses to suspected covert and overt blog marketing” studied the response of the reactions of young customers to suspected covert and overt product-brand recommendations in a blog. Experimental design was connected to examine the impact of covert and overt advertising on young customer’s impression of blogger credibility and their behavioural aims.They found that overt marketing did have an affect on behavioural intentions like future interests in the blogger, any interests to engage in word of mouth and purchase decisions. Both overt and covert marketing have not influenced the credibility of the blogger.

Kelly D. Martin(2008) in her study titled” Commercializing Social Interaction: The Ethics of Stealth Marketing” discussed about firms

that are endeavouring to achieve customers through today's swell of promoting clutter most of the time are utilizing novel showcasing rehearses. Although numerous non traditional advertising messages are effective through clever, entertaining, and, at last, kind means, others depend on duplicity to achieve shoppers. She specifically talks about one type of undercover promoting, known as stealth marketing, which utilizes surreptitious practices that neglect to disclose or uncover the genuine association with the organization creating or supporting the advertising message. The article also discussed the context of consumer defense mechanisms by employing literature on skepticism and persuasion knowledge to help explain the effectiveness of stealth marketing. The author identified the ethical problems inherent to stealth marketing and conclude their analysis with recommendations for marketers and public policy makers.

Ellen P. Goodman(2011) in her study titled "Stealth Marketing and Editorial Integrity" is the first article in the legal literature to talk about normative implications of covert marketing in mass media. For business, mechanical, and social reasons, advertisers and propagandists have been increasingly using editors to pass off promotional messages as editorial content. This integration of sponsorship has allowed marketers to cutthrough communications clutter and onlookers resistance to marketing.

Andrew M. Kaikati and Jack G. Kaikati(2004)in their study titled "Stealth Marketing: How to Reach Consumers Surreptitiously" in their study examine six stealth marketing procedures and shows how stealth promoting is a reasonable other option to prominent routine publicizing. Some stealth efforts are subtle to the point that shoppers don't know they are being pitched to. There are rising moral and legitimate issues raised by critics of these methods. While some stealth promoting effort are setting off alerts with shopper guard dog gathers, these strategies will unavoidably grow more normal. They have an effective part to play when they are elegantly implement and respect customer's intelligence. Brand administrators are betting that the advantages of stealth advertising will exceed the objections of its critics.

The Forms of Stealth Marketing

- The technique of stealth marketing is used by companies for a wide range of products varying from a energy drink to a newly 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 symbols showing up as a part of various types 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 also famous example taken for this case is the 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 tourists at different tourist destinations like the Empire State Building in New York. The Fake Tourists 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 has become a 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 White Castle. In such movies the brands and the products themselves are the stars of the movies.
- 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 of "The Wal-Marting Across America" campaign in 2006 where Jim and Laura made a fake blog showcasing their exaggerated positive experiences that they had come across as they went to various Walmarts in different states. The public hugely influenced by this until they discovered that the couple were actually sponsored by Walmart itself.
- Fake Controversies- This is a risky and almost an unethical form of marketing in which the company creates false controversies around it's products to publicize 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 red 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 echoes; it can be performing artists and on-screen characters and also purchasers who are willing to discuss about the items, brands, or administrations. The given message is 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 station's connection 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 the advantage of people's favourite music tracks to promote their brands in the "unarmed" eye of the public. The emotional touch of the music tracks combined with the use of enigmatic imagery works well for the marketers to demonstrate their brands in a surreptitious way. The latter has changed dramatically the visual presentation of different song available from multiple streaming channels. Music is especially a good tactic for advertising lifestyle products. For example, the famous American Rap singer Rick Ross mentions and displays the ultra premium French vodka Ciroc.

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 coverages 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.

REFERENCES

- [1] Liljander, V., Gummerus, J., & Söderlund, M. (2015). Young consumers' responses to suspected covert and overt blog marketing. *Internet Research*, 25(4), 610-632. doi:10.1108/intr-02-2014-0041
- [2] Martin, K. D., & Smith, N. C. (n.d.). Commercializing Social Interaction: The Ethics of Stealth Marketing. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1111976
- [3] Kaikati, A. M., & Kaikati, J. G. (2004). Stealth Marketing: How to Reach Consumers Surreptitiously. *California Management Review*, 46(4), 6-22. doi:10.2307/41166272
- [4] Zhechev, V. S. (n.d.). Stealth Marketing Strategy Origins, Manifestations and Practical Application. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2618365
- [5] Grazian, D. (2015). Stealth Marketing. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Consumption and Consumer Studies*, 1-2. doi:10.1002/9781118989463.wbeccs219