

THE TELEGRAPH GOES NUDE

STARK CORRELATION BETWEEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PROPENSITY TOWARDS SEX-RELATED EDUTAINMENT – A CASE STUDY

Abstract

Newspaper industry is at crossroads today. While it offers news and entertainment in touch and feel format, its competition with web editions is getting stiffer by the day. The much celebrated position of serving the cause of education by creating informed-opinion and therefore producing socially-aware citizens has been hijacked by World Wide Web. The industry has retaliated in several ways one being spicing-up its content. While this strategy may have given the industry some relief, it has put it in an unenviable position of being on the verge of losing its vaunted position of being the sentinel of values of society and its culture. This article explores this issue with the case of a popular newspaper in India, The Telegraph.

Keywords: Sensationalization, Newspaper, Content, Advertisement, Media

Mr Abhijit Ghosh has a habit of reading at least five newspapers every day: at least two Bengali and 3 or 4 English newspapers. He likes to explore the minds of editors and business heads of various newspapers and ascertain what innovations they are contemplating to heighten the impact of their newspaper among readers and deliver greater value to advertisers. He has found this industry, the newspaper industry of immense interest and has dedicated his life to it. He feels great admiration for the numero uno newspaper, The Times of India (TOI). He has been watching their growth with respect and envy. When the advertisement marketing department of TOI was renamed as Response and circulation department as Results & Marketing Department (RMD), he was most enthused and felt that they are moving in the right direction as these names carried the essence and spirit of both the departments.

The staggering growth of TOI has staggered most players in the English newspaper market in India. TOI has achieved this growth, particularly growth in terms of advertisement revenue by

making its credibility, integrity and impartiality available for a price. Most newspapers begin with the grand vision of standing up for truth and of creating informed opinion among people. The advertisements that the circulation fetches covers the costs and helps the organization make a surplus to enable it to grow commercially. It may be said therefore that media industry is not just a commercial venture, no wonder it is called the fourth state. However it has not remained untouched by the generally prevailing atmosphere of commerce and business. TOI was a leader in this movement. Marketing strategies like brand building, diversification and delivering convergence, under-cutting etc took centre stage. The content or the approach towards content of the newspaper underwent a sea change. The content began being used to pull advertisement revenues.

Mr Abhijit Ghosh, the product head of The Telegraph is facing today, a dilemma that is unparalleled in the short history of twenty five years of the newspaper. Eastern India not being a very lucrative or a large market for companies have begun preferring TOI as rates are low and they get many freebies in national and other editions which TT cannot offer as it is limited to Eastern Region.

The Telegraph was born on July 7, 1982. Edwin Taylor, design director of Sunday Times, London designed the newspaper, setting fresh standards in design and editing that acquired many admirers and later, followers. It is today, eastern India's largest circulated and read English newspaper. The Telegraph's readership in Calcutta itself is greater than that of all its competitors combined.

With an editorial policy that supports, among others, secularism and a free state, The Telegraph today is widely regarded as an emblem of everything a modern newspaper should be. Coupled with a long tradition of talented journalists, The Telegraph has always been in the thick of things — be it breaking news, unearthing scoops or investigating news. It takes up issues, makes the reader think and puts them in touch with the best of minds.

The Telegraph, apart from being a thought leader is also an innovator. The Telegraph was the first to put sports news on the front page. It was the first newspaper in free India to dethrone the existing market leader — a feat that was accomplished within a mere 10 years.

It was the first sectionalized newspaper, the first modular designed daily, the first to have pull-outs every day (Metro, Careergraph and other sub brands), the first general interest daily with separate sections on sports and business, the first with a separate leisure section, with crosswords and comics, the first with a 32-page colour magazine on Sundays (much earlier than leading national English dailies), the first to use run-of-press colour and the first in India to win prestigious global print awards like the SNAP and IFRA.

The Telegraph is the first Indian newspaper to be available on WAP- enabled phones worldwide. The Telegraph is also available as an e-paper at <http://epaper.telegraphindia.com>. There's always something for everyone with The Telegraph supplements — city news in TT Metro on all days, career opportunities in Jobs on Tuesdays, children's entertainment in Telekids on Wednesdays, education and career guidance in Careergraph on Thursdays, lifestyle, travel and general interest features on weekends with Personal TT on Saturdays, Graphiti, the colour magazine on Sundays. The technology and knowledge section, Knowhow comes with the main paper.

The Telegraph has five editions: • Calcutta edition • South Bengal edition • North Bengal edition • Northeast edition (Guwahati split) • Jharkhand edition (Jamshedpur, Jharkhand and Ranchi splits). In addition to this, there are two weekly tabloids for Calcutta's neighboring areas – Salt Lake and Howrah. The Telegraph has recently launched a school edition – a sixteen-pager with a special section, Teen TT, to connect with young minds.

Mr Ghosh was darling of the media industry in India when he led his newspaper to upstage deeply entrenched market leader of Calcutta, The Statesman from No 1 slot. He had done the unthinkable, never before a market leader had been decimated so badly. The last 10 years have been a period of unchallenged supremacy so much so that when The Times of India launched its Calcutta edition, Mr Ghosh was almost dismissive of their presence. He believed in the bhadrak culture of Bengalis and was sure that The Times of India in Calcutta will not cut much ice among Bengalis. He was also sure that the values of ostentation, brashness of reporting, disrespect towards tradition,

sensationalization of news and overt use of sex will not be accepted by the people with deep-rooted beliefs and conservative outlook.

Mr Ghosh is approaching retirement. He has given more than 25 years to The Telegraph and its parent organization. He started his career with Bata India and after 3 years moved to The Telegraph. He has studied Economics from the prestigious St Xaviers College, Calcutta and is proud of his education and Bengali identity. He is blessed with two daughters, elder one is a b-school graduate from IIMA and the younger one is in school. His wife is a home maker. He has interests in classical music and is a good singer. He has enlivened several official outings with his accomplished singing. Raga Jaijaiwanti and raga bhairavi are his favorites. He still wears Bata shoes and is fond of his three-piece suit that he bought 15 years back.

Today he has lost a big advertising contract worth Rs 5 crores from a regular advertiser in TT to TOI. He is afraid that this may be an indication of things to come. TOI is diverting advertisements from its main paper to Calcutta Times where they can offer bigger discounts. Calcutta Times as a supplement is becoming popular by the day particularly among youth. It is the youth that most advertisers are trying to target. Calcutta Times is characterized by explicit content on dating habits, love and sex. Mr Ghosh is not able to decide whether he should hold on to the cultural platform that TT has historically occupied and continue as if nothing has happened or he should go the TOI way and include content appealing to the youth. Today as he opened TOI, he saw an article on bondage sex with an alluring photograph. He has been observing the news items closely that may appeal to youth and will tempt impressionable minds towards TOI and away from TT. He remembered the fulmination of Mr Samir Jain “I will decide what India will read every day morning” with dread. He feared that if he were not to read the writing on the wall and introduce spiced content, The Telegraph may go The Statesman way.

Exhibit I – Advertisement Rate (Rs per sq cm) – Kolkata TT(3090) & TOI

Exhibit – II – Circulation TT (January December 09 – 367487 ABC Certified), TOI (Claimed figure 1.20 lacs – Not ABC Certified)

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