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**‘The Nation Want’s to know’- How Prime Time News Hour is Being Stage
Managed to pander to the Ego of Big Names:
A Case Study on Arnab Goswami’s ‘Newshour’**

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Abstract

Public Relations in recent years has been given great importance as a tool of promotion. Celebrity PR is now considered an expedient way to achieve the requisite goal of managing the image of individuals. Media professionals to take recourse to public relations strategy in an attempt to either build a new image or improve an existing one. Arnab Goswami is a popular face/name amongst the sea of news anchors from the Indian media scene who has been using the ‘Newshour’ (Times Now’s 9 pm slot) to project a better image for himself. The present paper attempts to explore this phenomenon of news programmes used as a vehicle to showcase and strengthen celebrity status.

Keywords: Celebrity PR, Arnab Goswami, Public Relations, Self PR and PR Vehicles.

I. Introduction: Public relations has been playing a vital role in contemporary world for a longtime now. It has however taken some time for the common man to come to terms with the power and impact of public relations. Every time we read an article that is well researched about a particular topic, we hardly think about its origin. It may as well have originated from the hands of a good PR professional with marketing intentions. Public relations is a deliberate and sustained effort towards managing the spread of information between an individual/organization (such as a business, government agency, or a nonprofit organization) and the public (Romey, 2000). The power of public relations was actually realized by the American corporate world in the 1920’s and as a result of its success, public relations has grown enormously.

Public relations is no more a new word to the contemporary world. Almost all the sectors in this world use the power of public relations including politics (Gelb, 1996). One of the recent and popular branch of public relations is celebrity PR. When a celebrity becomes the subject of PR work, it is termed as celebrity PR (Leonardo, 2001).

Celebrity PR is an up-coming field, gaining in popularity amongst all other branches of PR. What makes a celebrity? The most suitable answer to this question is publicity. A good publicity move can create a celebrity. Over the years, people have been using different techniques to promote themselves using the tool of PR (Fatt, 1967). Participating in different public programmes, acting out for attention, pre-planned cases, paid news, well placed advertorials are the commonly used tools under celebrity PR (Florina & Andreea, 2015).

With the passage of time people have had to find novel ideas to use as part of celebrity PR. There is a constant hunger and search for innovative platforms and tools of PR. In recent times TV seems to have become everyone's favourite haunt, that readily affords one great exposure. TV is being seen as a tool of celebrity PR with television programmes becoming the favoured PR vehicle. The common man too is not immune to the wiles of TV, automatically becoming a part of a huge fan following. A natural progression of all this is, that it is very essential for celebrities to woo the audience and make themselves memorable to their audience. Celebrities have finally found a platform (in this case TV as a medium and TV programmes as well) to make their presence felt in front of the public. It has given an all new perspective to the PR industry. TV programmes are not only good tools of celebrity PR, but they work at other levels as well. For example, a TV programme while boosting the image of the celebrity will act as a PR vehicle for the programme producer and the TV channel too (Ridout, 2004). What it means is while the producer gets publicity through the show, the channel also gets the much needed TRPs. We have several examples of this phenomenon. In the Indian context we have Amir Khan's *Satyamev Jayate*, Amitabh Bachchan's *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, which are examples of celebrity PR, doubling up as image boosters for the producers and the channel. There are people who watch star plus to watch Amitabh Bachchan presenting *Kaun Banega Crorepati*. A good number of people consider Aamir Khan as a kind and empathetic figure only because of the show *Satyamev Jayate*. The same magic was woven by *Big Boss*, creating an excellent buzz for Salman Khan who from *bad boy* became *good boy* Khan. All these shows reveal a clear fact- TV programmes are good PR vehicles.

The research at this stage looks at TV programmes, with a clear indication of including not only entertainment programmes but news programmes as well. Though entertainment programmes are a good tool of celebrity PR, news programmes are beginning to garner higher scores in this category. The present research is exploring the unique facet of *Times Now's 'Newshour'* anchored by Mr. Arnab Goswami.

Mr. Arnab Goswami is an Indian journalist who presently works as the editor-in-chief of *Times Now*. He runs two shows in the channel, one is *Frankly speaking with Arnab Goswami* and the other one is '*Newshour*' which is aired in the evenings at nine on all weekdays. The unique news presenting style and aggressive nature of Arnab Goswami makes him noticeable among the journalists. Most professionals from the field of media feel that the viewers of his show watch the show exclusively for his sake and none other. In fact, according to most lay people too, it is Arnab Goswami who brings in the audience for *Times Now*. It is a matter of great interest that through this program he also gets a chance to showcase himself in front of India every day. "The nation wants to know" is the most popular and commonly used phrase by Arnab Goswami in his show. According to many critics, unlike other news shows this show focuses much on the presenter more than the people who are part of the panel. The usage of unusual camera angles, dramatic background score, mode of publicity, use of social network, the amount of controversy generated, indicate the presence of a skilled PR manager behind this show. *Times Now* is using this show as a PR tool to promote both the presenter and the channel. It seems to be an effective tool which has worked wonders for them. This in fact is the crux of the research paper emphasised by the researcher at the very outset. *Newshour* acts as a PR vehicle for Arnab Goswami while simultaneously building the brand and image of *Times Now*.

There have been many researches done in the field of PR in recent times. Most of them have dwelt on trends and latest styles of PR practices. As the public relations industry grows in stature

and power, so too the research in this field. We have seen tremendous spurt in the field of public relations in India. Many researchers have gone on to explore the link between PR and the political scene in the country. Arnab Goswami's reputation as a tough talker precedes him. He is at the centre of most media issues and controversies in India. He is a force to reckon with and a name that is widely recognized. His approach, style and manner in dealing with people and issues has led to the redefining of journalism and all that it encompasses. To many it seems a natural behaviour that sits well on the shoulders of a man known as enfant terrible of the Indian media industry. However to the practiced eye Arnab Goswami's every word, every gesture, every move is one of practiced ease-painstakingly planned and executed by the PR team.

'The Nation Want's To Know' is an attempt to understand this phenomenon called Arnab Goswami, who through his sheer magnetism and style quotient not to mention a good dose of carefully crafted PR technique, has taken the Indian TV audience by storm.

II. Review of Literature: Kristina Gregory's paper, (Eastern Michigan University) *How They Gain Popularity, and Why Society Is So Fascinated with Them and Their Court Cases-2008* is an interesting viewpoint on celebrity lives.

This research paper successfully puts forth a clear picture of celebrities and the factors that create these celebrities. It also goes on to discuss how they gain popularity and the strategies they use for this purpose. It is common knowledge that the average Joe in the street is curious and eager to know details about the celebrity of his/her choice. Be it individuals or the collective community, celebrities are followed and feted. This paper is an investigation of celebrity status in the world today. The paper tries to understand the mystique that represents celebrity lives. According to Kristina Gregory 'having celebrity status can be both constructive and damaging. It is understandable since many iconic figures have gone on to be both hounded and revered as celebrity figures' (Gregory, 2008).

Shannon A. Bowen, in her research paper *Ethics and Public Relations*, gives a clear idea about the relevance of ethics in public relation. In a society where public relations is highly used and on occasions abused, it is important to study the ethics of public relations. It reviews the evolution of public relations ethics, the current state of practice, and the thoughts of practitioners. Allegations regarding practitioners and their unethical ways are debated and discussed. The paper also shows how a strong sense of ethics and ethical decision making can enhance the career prospects of public relations professionals. Commendations for public relations practitioners are discussed in this paper, including topics such as gaining access to an organization's top decision makers and approaches to ethical analyses. This paper tries to find out the "what" and "why" of public relations.

Karl Nessmann's (Institute of Media and Communication Studies, University of Klagenfurt, karl.nessmann@uni-klu.ac)

Personal communication management: How to position people effectively, throws light on the issue of personal PR.

The basic idea of this paper is to find out the mysteries behind a branch of public relations which is enjoying great popularity at present- Personal Communication Management. The general consensus amongst industry experts is that personal communication management takes on a more pivotal role in PR discussions. This paper goes on to explore PR that is more personality driven, which the author sees as an emerging trend in the last few years, an approach where individuals are at the center of attention. The need of the hour according to the author, is personal communication

management. The public may change its perception at any time, with the result that today's celebrity may not be a celebrity the next day. It is crucial for a celebrity to be in front of the audience as much as he/she can. This book gives us a clear explanation for the need of personal communication management and its applications in the contemporary world today.

Ana Pejcinova's (Faculty of Communication and Media New York University Skopje) *Public Relations Strategy and Practice-2009*, explains the different strategies of public relations. It starts with the definition of public relations and moves on to a broader aspect of its way and scope. The author talks about the different types of PR tools and its different uses. The author also tries to explain the relationship between public relations and other marketing tools. Verily, this article explains the need of public relations in contemporary times.

III. Methodology: The research methods adopted by the researcher for the present research is exclusively qualitative. Public relations as a field is developing in a measured manner, the idea is to get an in-depth perception about this phenomenon, which is celebrity PR. Towards this, a qualitative approach is an ideal step to access the mind-set of the TV channel *Times Now* and the popular anchor Arnab Goswami. The primary data will be accessed through the expert interview and content analysis of the *Newshour* programme, providing valid and evidential proof regarding the issue at hand. Further a better understanding of the PR initiative will be arrived at through several secondary data, such as research papers, books, on-line articles and interviews.

As stated earlier the present study has utilized two qualitative methods to get the primary data. The methods are content analysis and expert interview, with a view to getting the expert voice to validate the researcher's stand. Further an analysis of the *Newshour* programme content will open-up our minds to several issues pertaining to the role of celebrity status and popularity of TV channels.

The researcher has analyzed the online responses of the support groups and fans of Arnab Goswami. A detailed observation of the TRP ratings of the channel has been studied in connection with the celebrity status of the news anchor. This has been done to find out whether there is a link between the celebrity status of the news anchor and the popularity of the programme/channel. Towards a clear understanding of the same, YouTube videos of the show, Facebook pages of the show and the celebrity (Arnab Goswami), other published materials on the said topic have been scrutinized.

To get the expert viewpoint an interview with Ms. Pooja Basnett, professor at T.John College of Journalism, Bangalore, was conducted. The expert shared her experiences and ideas about this particular phenomenon helping to clear the air pertaining to channel popularity and celebrity status of news anchors.

IV. Findings and Analysis:

Content Analysis: It is impossible to think about an organization functioning without public relations in the current scenario. Public relations plays a vital role in the image building of an organization. As a result of its vivid scope, individuals have started using public relations as a tool to build their image amongst the public. So, public relations has become an important factor in the process of gaining popularity or building a public image. As an industry, public relations professionals have experimented with different methods to connect with the public. Some have worked and some have not.

The market today is inundated with TV programmes-24/7 news, music, films, sit-coms, children's shows, Sci-fi, Travel shows- the list is endless. Some make it to the favorite list and some don't. TV programme producers/presenters are popular but not as much as film stars. In recent years, to capitalize on the popularity of film stars many shows have used them to host TV shows- *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, *Big Boss*, *Kya Aap Paanchvipaas Se Tez Hain*, *Khatron Ke Khiladi*. This trend led to questions of celebrity impact on TV programmes and their success. Amitabh Bachchan's "*Kaun Banega Crorepati*" (KBC) is a case in point. It has also led to several questions regarding such a trend. Who gets the benefit out of this practice of having celebrity presenters? Does the TV channel get mileage or just the celebrity presenter? Why is it that non-celebrity entities are not preferred as hosts?

On analyzing the on-line content regarding TV shows it is apparent that benefits are accrued by both the celebrity presenter and the TV channel that broadcasts the show. For Amitabh Bachchan it has been an opportunity to showcase himself on TV regularly and it has paid rich dividends. Compared to his contemporaries like actors Dharmendra, Jeetendra and Vinod Khanna, Amitabh Bachchan seems to be doing really well for himself and he owes it all to the coverage given to him by KBC. As a film star it is highly important for him to be in front of the public and what better platform for an actor like him than KBC. The channel too benefits from such an undertaking. The channel is able to bask on the reflected glory of the amazing brand of Amitabh. From the public responses to KBC it is clear that people are more interested in watching film stars like Amitabh Bachchan than watching an ordinary TV presenter. When Amitabh Bachchan comes on air there is a palpable tension and energy in the television studio which translates to a great programme, enjoyed by millions.

In the course of sifting through on-line material on the topic of celebrity image, we frequently come across viewers who post their opinions on famous actors. There are enough and more people putting up positive comments on the character and nature of actor Aamir Khan, even though the said comments are based on the actor's behavior on his TV programme *Satyameva Jayate*- a reality show that covered a gamut of topics such as child abuse, substance abuse, relationships, security of women. The programme was formatted in a manner reflecting the actor in the best possible way. Aamir Khan was seen as a messiah, a do-gooder, a good Samaritan who has the best interest of all. The show which ran for two seasons established his image as a bleeding heart activist and enjoyed great TRPs for the channel as well. This is a clear case of a symbiotic relationship that works very well for both.

This is a clear indication of the kind of impact and power that TV shows have on the public. One can safely say that the show helped Amir Khan get publicity and media coverage when he needed it most- before the release of his films. This led to increased curiosity about him and his films which translated to excellent box-office performance of his films. The same or similar results have been seen with regard to actor Salman Khan. Salman Khan has been anchoring and hosting two shows- *Dus ka Dum* and *Bigg Boss*. There has been a transformation of his image. From bad boy Khan to good boy Khan-the change has been gradual but steady. TV has afforded him a platform in order to connect with his audience like never before. Cinema is a medium that merely presents a glamorous, larger-than-life representation, un-like the ubiquitous television that brings the actor closer home-right into the viewer's living room and in some cases the bedroom. He is seen not as a brattish film star acting out our fantasies, rather he is seen as an everyday guy who bleeds and breathes like any of us. TV managed to do what cinema failed to do- make the viewer see the man with his flaws and

weaknesses and thereby made him that much more engaging to the viewer. The actor does reveal a lot about himself in the course of the programme; he appears at once more compelling and endearing to all of us. The result is obvious for all to see. The actor manages to get away from legal wrangles with his image not only intact but at times enhanced. His films are the biggest grossers. His programme *Big Boss* gets a renewed contract year after year despite facing criticism for obscene content, impropriety and insensitivity. Such is the effect of reaching out to the viewer through the TV. It is clear that the TV programme can act a successful PR vehicle and help build the brand of the actor. TV programmes such as these not only build the brand of the actor but also the channel. In other words the benefit of the PR activity works in favour of the channel, the show, the presenter and the sponsor—we can thus see the manner in which contemporary practices of public relations works, un-like an in-house PR department or a PR agency that works mostly for the parent company and the client. In the latter's case the agent gets the money and the client gets publicity, in the former's case every-one's happy. In contemporary times, the TV programmes are feted and celebrated since they showcase the channel and also lend support to the TV anchor/presenter. Such programmes are considered a goldmine and are welcomed by the PR agents. Marketing professionals are of the opinion that such an exercise by the concerned TV channel benefits everyone. They opine that such programmes are better than advertisements, they provide greater exposure to the celebrity figure as the air-time granted by a programme is far more effective than a 30 second advertisement. Arnab Goswami's '*Newshour*' provides a bigger canvas to the news anchor, the TV channel and the official sponsors. With the sponsors happy the channel can expect bigger funding into the channel. This comes as a welcome change since news channels are fighting the constant battle of near bankruptcy. Keeping the sponsors happy is a very important function which Arnab Goswami's '*Newshour*' carries out faithfully. On his part Arnab Goswami lends all the support he can by taking on the role of judge and jury and pontificates on everything under the sun. Love him or hate him we cannot ignore him. The image of a lone crusader taking on the mighty establishment, fighting the cause of justice, demanding answers from the corrupt political class and reluctant bureaucracy, is something that has been carefully planned and crafted. Arnab Goswami the TV personality often takes on a stronger role than Arnab Goswami the journalist. In his role as a TV presenter/ news-anchor Arnab fulfills the requirement of a marketer. Through meticulous usage of visuals, music, hyperbolic language, the stentorian voice, agitated body language, Arnab Goswami the journalist ceases to exist. What we get to see every evening at 9 o'clock as part of '*Newshour*' is a saviour of the down-trodden, a helper of the have-nots, a messiah, out to relieve us of our pain and problems with his questioning of the powers that be.

The act has been so well crafted that the average TV news watcher in India cannot think beyond Arnab Goswami. So successful is this brand of news dissemination/discussion that most TV channels want a similar style or format for themselves. So popular is the approach/style of this kind of news debate and discussion that this style has become a rage among young journalists, giving rise to copy-cat versions of the same in other channels as well. Over the years Arnab Goswami has become an indispensable part of *Times Now* through the '*Newshour*'. It is an accepted fact that without Arnab Goswami there is no '*Newshour*' and without '*Newshour*' there can be no *Times Now*.

Recently when the news anchor was away on leave the audience reception of '*NewsHour*' was abysmal, leaving no doubt in the minds of people about Arnab Goswami's charisma and drawing power. The viewers kept a constant demand for the return of Arnab Goswami, demanding that he return and take control of his show. His presence is inimical to the existence of the programme and

there-by the channel. It is on record that the news channel depends heavily on the 'Newshour' for keeping it out of the red. Where we see the imminent closure or change of ownership of so many established channels (News X, CNN-IBN), *Times Now* succeeds in being an exception. Much of the credit for this goes to Arnab Goswami. His rigour, his zeal and passion, as exemplified by the well-crafted persona, makes him the most watched news anchor. Most viewers when questioned are of the opinion that they cannot think beyond Arnab Goswami and that their evening is not complete without watching him on TV? We can safely say that the effort taken by *Times Now's* public relations team for having created a persona like Arnab Goswami has paid huge dividends to both the channel and the individual. His shows are one hour of sheer adrenalin driven, rhetoric powered shows that entertain the common man. Not only do they watch him every-day, they come back for more.

As part of the research a small survey was conducted among 50 college students. The results did not come as a surprise. Of the total students questioned, 84 percent of them know or watch 'Newshour' only because of Arnab Goswami. This clearly establishes the premise of TV programmes working towards building the brand of not only the channel but also the personality concerned. Arnab Goswami's Facebook page gets lakhs of likes, un-like other Indian journalists who do not have this kind of support. All of Arnab Goswami's videos are viral in YouTube and are avidly watched repeatedly. A carefully planned PR strategy towards building the image of a TV personality works wonders for the personality and the channel.

Expert Interview: According to Professor Pooja Basnett, using TV programmes as a PR vehicle is quite an accepted strategy which has worked famously for actors, politicians and other celebrities. This wave started in the beginning of 2000's. Amitabh Bachchan's "Kaun Banega Crorepati" was a breakthrough of sorts, creating a vital space for this trend. With that show people in the PR industry realized the power of using TV programmes as a PR vehicle. Popular in the west, this has been mainly used in the area of celebrity PR or personal PR in India. With Arnab Goswami's success, with this image of a messiah created by his PR team, many are sure to follow the same route to image building.

Kristina Gregory, in her research paper "*Celebrities, Who they are? How they Gain Popularity?*", clearly mentions the importance of personal PR and celebrity PR. How people have to invest in their image, take extra effort to bond with their audience to build a rapport. Ms.Pooja opined that, in the current scenario, personal PR has a strong future. Increasingly personalities like Arnab Goswami will create a character or a persona that will help them inveigle themselves into the hearts and minds of the prospective viewer and thus successfully set the agenda for the news channels.

V. Conclusion: Public relations strategies have changed remarkably over the years. We are a witness to innumerable tactics and techniques that have redefined our understanding of public relations. For all accounts some of the changes that have taken place in the field of PR seem downright irrelevant and even impossible to comprehend. Further, PR is constantly evolving. Trends seem to be changing over-night. Public relations is no longer seen as a dull option. It is not seen as a second option to advertising. PR is largely seen as the only option, especially when it comes to image building. In an industry where images get built and trashed in minutes, PR comes in handy as a reliable option.

Television stars, are increasingly using PR as a tool to establish themselves. News anchor Arnab Goswami has successfully used a TV programme, 'Newshour' to build his image as a great journalist. The image has been built carefully, after thought and reflection on the power of PR. Arnab Goswami who started his TV reporting career playing second fiddle to bigger names like Rajdeep Sardesai and Barkha Dutt, has managed to bring a turnaround. The PR strategy has won him laurels. The question in most people's mind is how did this turn around happen? This time-'The nation would really like to know'.

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