

Host

In this episode, we are in conversation with Debdatta Das, head of content strategy, digital CNBC TV18 and winner of LinkedIn content 50, India. Debdatta is a content marketing specialist. We speak to her about emerging trends in digital content consumption, and monetization.

So we know I would want to ask you, or I would want to start asking you what are some of the emerging trends that you have seen and, you know, digital content consumption in India, particularly in 2020?

Debdatta

Yeah, so it's very interesting. You know, I mean, I think the thing that I like to tell people the most is that in 2020 that a massive crisis came upon us, right? And, as is the idiom, that goes, every crisis is also an opening of a massive opportunity. Digitization was the way forward, but it was, it was a slow moving process. What COVID did was that it snowballed what five years of digitization would look like into a month, and then the whole thing started rolling, in terms of consumption, while TV when the lockdown started happening, while television was still the single most important factor in terms of consumption, right in terms of consumption of content, because everyone was looking at what's happening. And it was so new people didn't know what to do about it. So news, television news became one of the most important spaces where people were constantly coming during the long lockdown, at least the first two months or so to figure out what their lives would look like. What is it that is happening around them? Is it only India? How is it shaping up and everything, all the time that people spend on media, which is almost five hours every day, people are consuming some form of media 30% of that was being spent on TV, and about 15% that was being spent on digital platforms, and which is a massive, massive bump over there. So people were always on the phone, people were using, you know, figuring out what is happening, which is what was reflecting on the kinds of stuff that people were reading. Also, in the first couple of months, the first two, three months, at least, in his first four months where people were searching for shops to go to order grocery, daily essential needs, medicine, medicinal needs, then, people were reading up a lot on health, healthcare, starting to move out. But largely it is this what has kind of been the trend and the life has changed for good, I would say.

Host

So that in fact brings me to you know to my next question, because a lot of it you were also talking in terms of revenue generation, monetization, etc. How did that change? Because, you know, while some sectors advertised some sectors, like automobile, for example, almost came to a standstill, right, I guess, essential services, you know, brands and personal care brands probably gained, but there were several other sectors that had to, you know, put everything on hold. So how did this monetization game for TV channels and for digital platforms change?

Debdatta

Absolutely changed quite a bit, because even when television happened, it's not that large campaigns weren't happening on television. I mean, even if it was being shown on TV, it was being done digitally, right. Cameras weren't traveling anywhere. People connecting through zoom or WebEx or Microsoft Teams, whichever platform were available, approved have allowed across

networks across organizations. Now, the other thing that I saw in terms of, you know, in terms of sectors that started working, so as you rightly pointed out, that auto pretty much stopped advertising, you know, and the fact is that auto was going through a bad phase even before COVID happened. I remember in February, there were reports already that the auto sector had seen 35% to 45% D growth in the revenues, factoring companies, including Maruti, were facing a tough time even before COVID happened for co COVID, it was absolutely brought the sector to a standstill. But on the other hand, IT, ITeS companies, software, many software providers, SAS providers, essential services providers, ecommerce services, consumers, consumer product, companies may gain massively, and they brought their entire inventory on digital because most of it was ROI driven from where I see it. While a lot of large campaigns were being done, the actual ROI is the returns were being provided through that digital amplification. So registrations access to very, very customized targeted teachings. So we got companies asking us to give us a very specific kind of target companies for them. So a webinar where we were asked to kind of get people who had an income salary of about five lakhs per five lakhs per month and above, for wealth management companies who wanted to target HNIs, it is companies who wanted to get across to decision makers. So we got sector specific decision making platform. So retail, we were asked to gather companies, retail and FMCG companies and bad decision makers to make them understand about and how it is driven services could help run the companies without any, you know, issues and without any stoppages or hurdles coming up. So that it is of consumer consumer products, retail, e commerce, healthcare, massive healthcare, so a boom. So these are the kinds of sectors that we saw of, you know, kind of truly come out and use or enhance and harness the power of digital that was to offer and they went all out, I would say, in terms of trying to get to the right kind of people harnessing language even, you know, I mean, what this is, the COVID has shown us, there's also the fact that finally, people and advertisers were really waking up to the true potential of what language and custom language products can do custom language marketing can do, because ultimately, India is a place of many, many markets of many, many different kinds of people. And, you know, the saying goes at every 50 meters, your market changes practically. And that is what people did, because digital allows you to do that, right? I mean, it allows you to customize your offering, it allows you to kind of reach a very specific targeting, and it allows you to collect data, like no one else, no other platform can. So and it allows you to not only collect data, it allows you to understand the efficacy of the campaign that you run in a way that otherwise doesn't happen as well.

Host

Correct. That's true. And you know, that sort of that's sort of interesting, because what also happened in 2020, if you see is that a lot of social media platforms, a lot of digital news platforms, a lot of television have also gone through a kind of a transformation in terms of, you know, the the veracity of the news, the, the the kind of reputation that gets built in terms of the way they deliver news, right, I mean, and we've seen a lot of controversy around, you know, whether it is Facebook, or whether it is fake news, in general, per se, across the platforms that is coming. And then now, of course, we've been seeing a lot of TV channels also in some kind of battle or the other about or trps and things like that. So now, what it also brings in its own bag of, you know, reputational challenges and trust challenges, right? And how do you see that, you know, how do you see that panning out?

Debdatta

See, the tabloidization of media happened quite a while ago and it was an easy game of TRPs. And when I say these things aren't these are my personal, you know, opinion this in no way reflects what the company I work for the network, I work for states, but the fact that is that, you know, the medium or the platform that we are working in today and the way it has panned out is very different from what has happened in the Western world. Okay. The only difference I see is that a we have a larger population that is yet to be impacted by serious penetration of educational growth, right. There is there is a massive problem of literacy in our country? Yes. And there is also a massive problem of trying to therefore figure out or differentiate between what is fake and what is not. Yeah, often given this entire mad race for TRPs, what has happened is that verification and checking for real versus fake has kind of taken a backseat. However, there are still organizations. And I'd like to say that I'm lucky to be working in one of them, Network 18 and CNBC. They did not kind of let go even in this entire madness, you know, I mean, even when everything was TRPs, and it was a mad race for TRP, we still stuck to what was the right thing to do the main agendas. And fact checking again, is a very, very important and a very, very essential part of what one puts out,

Host

That's interesting that you point out that they better because I remember when TV came in, I mean, TV channels, and you know, and also business TV channels came about with CNBC being there for some time for a very long time, actually, and then NDTV profit and then the rest of the, you know, flock, at that point in time, this breaking news culture, it's all got redefined, because a lot of channels went after this breaking news, you know, kind of a culture. And now we I see it, this whole TRP game is probably on heightened extension of that breaking news culture. Right. So how do you see this? I mean, is it that people will come back to consuming news the way it needs to be consumed? Or they will probably go even one step backwards to see what is it not just in terms of, you know, breaking news, but what is that information that I'm getting and how well balanced that information is?

Debdatta

See when when NDTV Profit and Bloomberg TV and CNBC start. I mean, when CNBC TV 18, and NDTV profit started, there was very little by way of digital that was happening, right and in the digital media was pretty much irrelevant at that point of time, Direct TV broadcast was the way forward. Yeah. Now. Now what you see is that there is almost a 5050 take in terms of what TV does and what TV produces as well as what digital produces, right? There is a regular, regular customer or a regular individual has access to all kinds of news across the board across the platform. That's right. Even if you say that, you know, I mean, that is one channel that is giving you fake news, there's one channel that isn't is being true to its word. And then there are 1000, other digital platforms that are giving you all sorts of platforms. And under all, there has been over the last few weeks of last few years, the emergence of fact checking platforms like boom and all for news, right? They every time there is an imbalance that is created in any industry in the society, there is also an effect that comes in or also a catalyst that happens that creates a sort of balance, right? So these fact checking platforms become that catalyst to return that particular sector to a certain state of balance. And digital helps a lot in doing that. Because, as I said, the fact checker platforms and then there is social media that comes into play, and a lot of other factors that goes on to kind of negate the wrong and bring out the positives. So I believe that that's that's what we should kind of give space for and that change is coming time. So

Host

Thank you Debdatta for this conversation, it was really a very interesting conversation.