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Avinash Kumar



Avinash Kumar has completed his Ph.D. in International Investment Law from the Dept. of Law & Governance, Central University of South Bihar. His research work is on "International Investment Agreement and State's right to regulate Foreign Investment." He qualified UGC-NET and has been selected for the prestigious ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship. He is an alumnus of the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Formerly he has been elected as Students Union President of Law Centre-1, University of Delhi. Moreover, he completed his LL.M. from the University of Delhi (2014-16), dissertation on "Cross-border Merger & Acquisition"; LL.B. from the University of Delhi (2011-14), and B.A. (Hons.) from Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. He has also obtained P.G. Diploma in IPR from the Indian Society of

International Law, New Delhi. He has qualified UGC – NET examination and has been awarded ICSSR – Doctoral Fellowship. He has published six-plus articles and presented 9 plus papers in national and international seminars/conferences. He participated in several workshops on research methodology and teaching and learning.

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ESSAY ON EXPLOITATION OF TRADEMARKS.

AUTHORED BY - JAYANT KUMAR

LLB 3rd SEMESTER, AMITY LAW SCHOOL, AMITY UNIVERSITY, PATNA.

ABSTRACT:-

A trademark owner owns the right that either he/himself uses or assign others to use his registered trademarks. The unauthorised use of registered trademarks that may be identical or deceptive to the original registered trademarks would lead to infringement or exploitation. The registered proprietor, in case of original registered trademarks, possess the right to take action against the infringement whereas passing off action is needed in the case of unregistered trademarks as a common law remedy. The remedies in Trademark Act,1999 are not only confined to the infringement and passing off but also to falsification of registered trademarks and as the case may be of breach upon trademark proprietor or user.

Keywords Trademarks. Infringement. Exploitation. Remedies. Proprietor.

Exploitation of trademarks is a serious problem in the global market. It negatively affects businesses, deceives consumers, and undermines the credibility of the marketplace. It entails undertaking the illegal use of a mark to take advantage of the recognition and goodwill built by the legitimate owner. This essay will discuss the types of trademark exploitation, the effects they cause, and the solutions provided by law against them.

Forms of Trademark Exploitation

Trademark exploitation manifests in several ways, each with unique characteristics and legal implications. The most common forms include:

- **Trademark Infringement:** This occurs when a party uses a mark that is **identical or confusingly similar** to a registered trademark in a way that is likely to cause confusion among consumers. It is intended to mislead the consumer that the infringed goods or services are manufactured or supported by the trademark owner. As an illustration, a firm marketing apparel with a logo that closely resembles that of Nike, “Swoosh” logo, would probably be engaging in trademark infringement.

- **Counterfeiting:** A more heinous type of infringement is counterfeiting, comprising **unauthorized manufacturing and selling of fake goods** featuring a registered trademark. Most of these items are of low quality and meant to be sold as genuine. Counterfeiting is a billion-dollar business that not only deprives brand owners of revenue but also endangers the health and safety of consumers, particularly when they have a product such as counterfeited medicine or car parts.
- **Passing Off:** This is a common law tort that protects the goodwill of an **unregistered trademark**. It occurs when one company misrepresents its goods or services as those of another, causing consumer confusion. The key elements to prove passing off are: goodwill attached to the mark, misrepresentation by the defendant, and damage to the plaintiff's goodwill or reputation. While infringement deals with statutory rights of a registered mark, passing off protects the "reputation" of a mark, regardless of registration.
- **Trademark Dilution:** Unlike infringement, dilution does not require a likelihood of consumer confusion. It applies to **famous marks** and occurs when another party's use of a similar mark diminishes the unique distinctiveness of the original mark. There are two main types of dilution:
 - **Dilution by blurring:** This happens when a third party's use of a mark weakens the famous mark's ability to serve as a unique identifier. For example, "Google" brand shoes would dilute the distinctiveness of the famous search engine brand, even though there's no consumer confusion.
 - **Dilution by tarnishment:** This occurs when a mark is used in a way that creates a negative association with the famous mark, such as using it on illicit or low-quality goods.
 - **Cybersquatting:** This involves the registration of a domain name that is identical or confusingly similar to an existing trademark, with the intention of profiting from the trademark owner. The cybersquatter may try to sell the domain name to the rightful owner for an inflated price or use it to divert traffic to a competing or deceptive website.

Impacts of Trademark Exploitation

The consequences of trademark exploitation extend far beyond the direct financial losses incurred by brand owners.

- **Harm to Businesses:** Companies lose significant revenue and market share to counterfeiters and infringers. The brand's reputation and goodwill, painstakingly built over years, can be irreversibly damaged when consumers have a negative experience with a fraudulent product. This may result in reduced sales, reduced consumer confidence, and devalued brand.
- **Negative Impact on Consumers:** Consumers are the most affected people because they are always deceived into buying low-quality or unsafe products. They may be defective, ineffective and even hazardous. Due to the similarities of marks, consumers are confused, thus unable to make an informed choice when purchasing one, and thus lose confidence in brands and the entire market.
- **Economic Consequences:** The economic effects of trademark exploitation, especially counterfeiting, are more widespread. Counterfeiters don't pay taxes, which means that governments lose money. Organised crime and other criminal activities can also be related to the illegal trade, thereby endangering national and international security.

Legal Remedies

Various approaches are provided by legal systems all over the world to address trademark exploitation. Such remedies are usually civil, though criminal punishment can be imposed in some instances.

Injunctions: The court can issue an injunction which is a court order that restrains the infringement act. It will generally be the first and most important step, which will lead to real-time prevention of further harm to the brand of the trademark owner and reputation.

- **Monetary Damages:** exploitation caused by the exploitation allows the trademark owner to seek monetary compensation. This may encompass:
 - **Actual damages:** Damages caused by the infringement.
 - **Punitive damages:** Additional penalties for intentional or willful violations.
 - **Disgorgement of profits:** The infringer is advised to provide compensation on all the earnings realized due to illegal use of the mark.
 - **Seizure and Destruction of Goods:** The market may be blocked by the seizure and destruction by a court of all infringing or counterfeiting goods.
 - **Criminal Penalties:** In extreme instances, especially those that deal with massive counterfeiting, criminal prosecution may be initiated against the perpetrators, and there are hefty fines imposed and penitentiary sentences imposed.

It involves the use of the unregistered mark as an equivalent of profit on brand name and goodwill of the valid owner. In this essay, the various forms of trademark exploitation, the impact and the legal remedy that can be taken against them are to be discussed.

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