

An assessment on “Product Placement” as a promotional strategy in Bollywood movies

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Abstract- Product placements have always been used as an influential tool by the marketers for increased exposure and generating interest amongst the latent audience. This promotional strategy is leveraged by the marketers, in a way, including the brands in different popular media vehicles. This paper tries to assess the potential of placement as a strategy specifically in Bollywood movies, its possible benefits and risks associated and various types & strategies incorporated.

Key words- Product placement, Media vehicles, Filmed entertainment, Bollywood movies

Introduction:

In today's market where marketers are using increased brand proliferation and implementing creative methods to reach their large and fragmented target audience such as Internet marketing, social networking, mobile marketing, using blogs, etc there needed something which is an exception yet superior than all these mediums, which a customer doesn't feel to be interfering, which they watch yet are interested in it and this is when product placement comes in the picture.

Over decades brand inclusion as a strategy is been used in the entertainment industry but it is only now that the concept has garnered eyeballs and is largely accepted and utilized by potential marketers. Brand placement is a powerful tool for the new age marketing which reaches large audiences in a cost effective way. It provides an opportunity to the marketers to acquaint the customers with different brands and product lines through different media and entertainment vehicles.

What is Product placement?

Product Placement (PPL) refers to placing a brand, package, a firm or any other merchandise in an entertainment medium for promotional purposes. Generally the basic reason behind placing these things is to create positive feelings towards the brand being advertised, increase recall for the brand which in turn may result in immediate recognition at the point of purchase. To intensify the visibility of a brand in a competitive environment where there are end no. of companies offerings product placements is a most sought after concept. Through product placement a rigorous attempts are made to develop a positive and strong connection between the viewer and the brand placed which in turns provides explanation on the purchase decision. Viewers also get a real picture about the product on the basis of the characters using,

referring and approving it. Research has revealed that audience likes watching a product placed because of different factors attached with it like realism, association, familiarity and character attractiveness.

Product placements differs from celebrity endorsement. Celebrities endorse products and brands which generally come in breaks during a television program or in cinema halls. The effectiveness of a commercial has been reduced due to the zipping and zapping effect ultimately putting companies at stake. To nullify the zipping and zapping effect of commercials product placement as a concept evolved. Other reason being commercials at the cinema halls were generally found to be of low involvement. Brand placement provided an opportunity to the marketers to reach a very large audience with high involvement in a very natural ongoing process of watching a movie and the brand included in the plot without disturbing the audience interest.

Product placement defined

According to Balasubramaniam (1994) “Product placement can be referred as paid message with planned and unobtrusive entry of brands in a movie or television program meant to influence the audience for promotional purpose”.

Steertz (1987) defines product placement as “the inclusion of a brand name, product package, signage, or other trademark merchandise within a motion picture, television show, or music video”.

Ong and Meri (1994) defines it as “The practice of arranging for brand name goods to make prominent, paid for appearances in films, television programs and other entertainment programs”.

According to Baker & Crawford (1995), “The inclusion of commercial products or services in any form in television or film productions in return for some sort of payment from the advertiser”.

Entertainment and Resources Marketing Association (2004), “Product placement is a practice of integrating specific product and brands into filmed entertainment”.

Falkow (2010) is of the opinion that brand placement consists of a company producing some engaging content with the motive of selling something. The brands are placed intentionally as a commercial content in a non-commercial setting, which is, created through the blend of advertising and entertainment (Ginosar and Levi-Faur, 2010).

Brand placement incorporates involving the audiences in the process of brand exposure in its natural setting in a media vehicle (Panda, 2004; Cebrynski, 2006)

Product placement provides exposure to the latent target audiences by portraying the brands being consumed or used in a real setting by including it in a popular mass media (Stephen and Coote, 2005).

Product placement strategies

Shapiro (1993) gave four types of Product placement which is used in a movie. They are

a. where there is clear visibility (product/brand name shown) of the brands placed, the type of placement is called implicit PPL example: In Rab ne bana di Jodi movie TagHeur a reputed watch brand is shown in a hoarding above the main lead when the main lead shahrukh khan is delivering dialogue. b. Used in a scene example Ranbir Kapoor wearing a RayBan sunglasses in Anjana Anjani movie without mentioning anything about it or coca-cola in movie Taal; c. has a spoken reference or called as Integrated explicit PPL example Katrina Kaif verbally taking the brand name “Complan girl” in movie Mere brother ki dulhan and d. provides demonstration and verbal mention by a main star example Hrithik Roshan telling the benefits of drinking bourn vita in koi mil gaya.

D’Astous and Seguin (1998) gave one of the methods of classifying product placement on the basis of combination of integration and explicitness.

They classified it in three categories viz. Implicit PPL In this form of placement the firm or the product is existent in the plot of the program but no formal mention of it is done. It plays an inactive and contextual role. No

demonstration or verbal mention is made and only a logo, brand name or firm’s name appears

Integrated Explicit PPL: A placement is integrated explicit if there’s formal mention of brand or the firm and it’s used in the plot of the program. This plays an active role because mentioning about a brand catches attention of the audience making them aware about it. It is beneficial over the former type because audiences are aware about and demonstrated the attributes and benefits of the product.

Non Integrated explicit PPL: is where the brand or the firm is formally mentioned or shown but is not included in the contents of the program. In this the sponsor name can be acknowledged at the beginning, middle or end of the program, for ex. in a form of media partners or sponsors.

Unlike the former authors, Russel (1998) have been classified along three dimensions: visual or screen placement, auditory or script placement and plot connection or story line placement. The visual dimension or screen placement deals with the appearance or visibility of the brand on screen depending upon the number of times brand been displayed on screen or the style in which the camera shots been done so on and so forth. The second dimension verbal or non verbal placement depends upon the context in which a brand is mentioned, factors influencing the occurrences, the tone of the voice, the accent, dialogue delivery style, audience connection with the endorser speaking at that time. Plot connection refers to the degree of integrating a brand in the negative or positive plot.

Product Placement: Types

Corporate placement: To improve the reputation of a firm or company. Example -Taj Hotels, Hotel Marriot to show parties, or celebration in a movie. Lenovo used in game shows like KBC, Samsung Tablet used in Reality shows like Roadies.

Generic Placement: To demonstrate or use a product without mentioning the particular brand name. Ex: RayBan Sunglasses and Shades used in all the movies, Apple desktop or iPhone. Service placement: To present a public or private institution. Showing particular Bank or a restaurant in a movie. Ex. – showing McDonald in the movie do dooni char.

Idea placement: To incorporate facts and figures, opinions or statements in a plot, discussing any forthcoming movie or any upcoming television serial in a reality show or daily soaps. Example – Celebrities come in reality shows to indirectly promote their films.

Historic placement: To demonstrate a traditional brand which is serving the public from a long time.

Negative placement: To portray a product in a negative context. For Example a Samsung mobile used as a bomb or Jet airways shown as crashed in some plot in the movie. This is generally unintentional and is only to justify the plot.

Innovation placement: To introduce a new product. Ex Swift Car was introduced in the movie Bunti aur Bubli and Maruti Suzuki Ertiga in Mere Dad ki Maruti.

Product placement practice:

Risk associated Exposure: Unless there is a considerable exposure to the placement or unless the camera zooms in, the placement has chances of not being noticed.

Limited Appeal: It can't be enumerated or described in a detailed manner like other forms.

Ethical concerns: Sometimes viewers might feel it unethical to be incorporated or some ethically charged products might not be taken positively by the audiences thus hampering the brand & the organization.

Competition: There is immense competition between the brand marketers to get their brands embedded in an entertainment medium. For e.g. the movie "Sultan" had eight brands and thus one brand had to compete with other seven for getting noticed and recalled.

Clutter & wear out: Because of immense competition and inclusion of too many brands the possibility of getting it noticed and remembering gets less.

Negative placement: If a brand is integrated with a negative plot, it may get perceived in a negative way. Benefits of product placement

Product placement due to its unique and diverse strategies have many advantages to be used as a marketing tool, the social nature being viewed in and lack of clutter unlike other forms of advertisements (Dunnett & Hoek, 1996). Belch and Belch (1999) describes the benefits to be frequency, greater exposure, source and product association, audience and source association, other media support, low cost and recall. Because of these benefits product placement in Bollywood movies is heightened in last decade and we can see at least five brand placements in each and every movie. Media clutter, zipping and zapping effect, audience low involvement in commercials during break are the basic reasons for the popularity of product placement among marketers and researcher to study about the prevalence. This concept is gaining utmost importance because of the following advantages associated:

If the placement strategy is efficient then the audience will notice the products. Audiences come to watch a film out of

their own interest and when they are embedded in a film plot or television scene they have no option but to notice products. Frequency – A viewer watches movie once or sometimes more than once and thus whenever they watch it get exposed to the brand Product recall intensifies due to wide coverage and multiple exposures.

Low Cost compared to above-the-line methods of advertising or celebrity endorsement. Unlike advertising, it is not interrupting and hence is less obtrusive. Product credibility increases when associated with a reputed movie star.

It helps in building national recognition as it reaches mass markets with greater frequency and longer time. Building corporate image through products awareness among the mass market. Promoting a brand with most successful films and TV programmes.

Advantage of celebrity endorsement by making the celebrities use the product in the movie which they are endorsers of.

Product placement in Bollywood movies

In the early decades, Product placement was not that prevailing in Bollywood films as is seen in today's cinema. One of the classic examples of product placement in the early 1970's is the "Rajdoot" motorcycle featured in the movie Bobby. Along with the movie, the brand also gained popularity among the youngsters at that time. Since then till the movie Bunti aur Babli (2005) in which Maruti launched its car Swift, Bollywood had not experienced a huge amount of product placement. But in this era almost all the films have in it products placement because of the commercialization of movies on a wide range from movie Taal where the leads were often seen implicitly using Coca Cola till date.

Bollywood film industry is the biggest film producing industry offering huge production output of approx. 1000 films a year compared to Hollywood. Indian consumers cater a large audience eager of consumption, are sophisticated and information savvy. In the last ten years MNCs have eyed on the potential of this industry to reach a diverse and latent target audience. Films are a part of Indians daily lives and thus grabbing such opportunity is what reputed brands Zandu Balm and Fevicol did by introducing a new concept of song placement.

Bollywood and Indian Culture

group loyalty also influences the selection of particular brand. Indian audience is emotionally attached with the onscreen

actors and looked upon them as a source of reference for ongoing trends and fashion. Because of source attractiveness and likability the If framed in Hofstede's cultural dimension model (2001), Indians are collectivistic rather than individualist as the individuals are influenced by the norms of groups and collectives. They look upon celebrities as a reputed figure and thus in movies seeing them using a product or explicitly announcing it is of greater potential and effective. In probability of conversion from seeing to buying a product increases providing an added benefit to the firm whose product is placed in a movie.

Table-1.1 - Products placed in Bollywood movies from the early century.

Movie	Year	Product integration in the scene
Shree 420	1955	Raj Kapoor comes to Mumbai for the first time and a large Coca Cola banner was placed right above his head.
An Evening in Paris	1967	The protagonists are seen carrying coca cola everywhere they go
Koshish	1972	A crate of Coca Cola is placed right beside the central character in a scene
Bobby	1975	The motorcycle famously started getting recognized as bobby motorcycle after the movie where the protagonist is seen riding it in a song

The brands in table 1.1 were placed non-monetarily. The brands started getting placed for money only in 1990's

Table 1.2 Commercialization of product placement post 1990's

Movie	Year	Products Placed
Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar	1992	BSA SLR
Dilwale Dulhania	1995	Canned Stroh's
Taal	1999	Coca-Cola, Thumps Up, BMW,
Koi Mil Gaya	2003	Karizmaa, Hero Honda
Baghban	2003	Ford Ikon, ICICI Bank, Tata Tea
Hum Tum	2004	Times of India Group, Lays
Khakee	2004	Thumps Up
Dostana	2008	Verve
3 Idiots	2009	Air India , Airtel , Fortis Hospitals, Mahindra Flyte, Pepsi's Aquafina Samsung Mobiles , Van Heusen , Volvo
Mere brother ki	2011	Complan

Movie	Year	Products Placed
Mere Dad ki Maruti	2013	Maruti Ertiga
2 states	2014	Sunsilk , Yes Bank
Piku	2015	Amul, Syska, Himalayan Water, Priya Gold snakker, Jaypee Greens, Mitashi
Sultan	2016	Astral pipe, Force motors, Flair pens, Relispray, Escorts
Toilet	2017	Honda shine, Ape truck, Ralco tyres, Astral Pipes, Kajaria



Scene from Mere Dad Ki Maruti

Conclusion:

Product placement is widely used in the modern times as an effective measure of marketing communications method. Product Placement has emerged as an effective promotion tool to the advertisers and the once not so popular tool to marketers has now become a feasible venue. This strategy has evolved over time and will flourish in the years to come considering the benefits associated with it. A traditional television ad or radio ad gets perished soon after it's viewed or heard but products placed in a movie, once placed, can be retrieved for a longer period of time. This practice got recognition and commercialization in Bollywood movies only after the era of 1990's, from then to now, this strategy has garnered quite an eyeball from the marketers. Brands and Bollywood has always aligned itself famously as it gained popularity because of the diverse audience it cater to , both the producers and advertisers foresee it a long term benefit. Concluding, the review suggests that this strategy, if planned and executed in a creative and entertaining way may turn out to be an effective tool as it gives an opportunity to cater to the fragmented Indian audiences in a most cost effective way.

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