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## PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN FILMS: AN ATTEMPT TO BREAK THROUGH THE CLUTTER

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### Abstract

In a world where mass media are the quintessential tools of communication, marketing has become mandatory for businesses to stay afloat in an increasingly competitive market. Promotion is the key to successful marketing as it has communication with the potential customer at its nucleus. Due to high resilience for traditional advertising amongst the customers, as the traditional tools of promotion struggle to have a desired impact, it is imperative for the marketers to break through the clutter with some innovative and novel methodologies.

Some of the inventive tools of contemporary marketing communication are Content Marketing, Product placement, Product Integration etc. These methodologies are subtle and received without much resilience or resistance at the receiver's end. While Content Marketing is not limited to but mostly prevalent through digital media, Product placement/ integration is one of the few forms of advertising that makes innovative use of traditional advertising media. Product placement can be done in TV series, game shows, News programs but the commonest platform for it remains Feature Films. Product Placement in Films is an interesting and increasingly becoming popular mode of promotion these days.

The Hindi Film Industry in India exerts a great mass influence. Films therefore becomes a favourable choice for product placement. The practice of Product Placement in Hindi Films is subtle and has the added advantage of celebrity endorsement as well. Film stars have an iconic status in India and therefore association of a brand with them renders a new lease of life to the brand.

This study has been actuated in the wake of a discernible rise in the trend of product placement in hindi films. The study examines product placement as a methodology of marketing and makes an in depth assessment of the various advantages and opportunities it offers the marketers.

The paper concludes that Product Placement in Hindi movies is a favorable trend in marketing as it is unobtrusive as compared to traditional marketing communication. Besides this, it generates a higher brand recall and the impact of celebrity endorsement of the product is an added advantage of the already breakthrough technique. The study reaffirms that Product Placement is becoming an essential part of the brand building process.

## Introduction

They say 'Knowledge is wisdom'. The dissemination of information about a product, service or idea is as important as its manufacturing or invention. In an increasingly competitive market scenario it is imperative for brands to have a well-outlined marketing strategy. For things to have an intended impact socially and economically, they have to be made known. Marketing does precisely that.

Marketing maybe defined as the act or the process creating, relaying, conveying, and exchanging offerings that hold a value for the receiver who could be a customer, a client, a retailer or the society in general. While the core objective of any type of marketing is generating profits for the business it markets, it also serves many socio- economic purposes. By providing information about a product, service or idea to the public, marketing widens the knowledge base of the audience. This knowledge shapes consumer behaviour and is instrumental in their purchasing decisions, it builds brand recognition, creates customer loyalty via consistency in services. A carefully researched, constantly evolving marketing strategy and repetitive reinforcement are the ideal ingredients for establishing a strong buyer-seller relationship.

The traditional methods of marketing have undergone a thorough transformation and are still constantly evolving. The constant bombarding of the audience with promotional messages through traditional marketing practices such as advertising, sms messaging, outdoor advertising etc have gradually resulted in resilience amongst the audience to these messages. The usual communication is getting ineffective and it is thus imperative for the marketers to break through the barrier with some innovative and novel methodologies. An increasing access to mass media, availability of more choices and variety in products and services have changed the gamut of marketing practices worldwide. Product placement/ integration is one of the few forms of advertising that makes innovative use of traditional advertising media. Product placement can be done in TV series, game shows, News programs but the commonest platform for it remains Feature Films. Product Placement in Films is an interesting and increasingly becoming popular mode of promotion these days. Product placement is also known as Product Brand Promotion. It is a marketing methodology of inserting a brand name, product, signage/logo or trademarked merchandise in a motion picture or television program for the purpose of promotion of that brand. The purpose of the insertion is to make the process of exposure to a brand or product as natural for the audience as possible.

Films are a popular mass medium in India. The Hindi Film Industry exerts a great mass influence. Films therefore, especially in India becomes a common choice for product placement. Product Placement can be used in movies both in context and out of context. It can be done primarily in two ways. Firstly, by just placing the product in the frame in such a way that it is a prominent element in the frame or the product when used in context with the content of the movie can be woven into to the storyline and thus become a part of the plot.

The increasing popularity of Product Placement in Hindi Films calls for an in depth study of the phenomenon so that its efficacy and usefulness can be understood. This paper is an attempt to study the dynamics of Product placement in hindi cinema, its receptivity by the audiences and its influence on the Brand image.

### **Objectives**

1. To study the effectiveness of product placement as a marketing methodology in Hindi Films.
2. To assess the additional benefits of Product Placement for marketers
3. To examine the suitability of Hindi films for embedding products for marketing.

### **Review of Literature**

A study by Rishi. P. Shukla in 2013 discussed the use and rise of product placement as a marketing communications method. The study concluded that audiences were receptive to and accepted the brand messages as a part of their films. The brand recall was better and audience did not mind brands showcasing their messages through films. Higher brand recognition and recall also is supportive of the use of product placement as means of integrated marketing tool and affirms it as a good trend in marketing. The researchers also recommended that as per the facts and figures of the study, Product Placement in India has a promising future and it can be bettered and refined to suit the viewers as well as marketers if thorough research could be conducted into viewers preferences and attitudes. [4]

A study by Beng Soo Ong found that although the samples he studies were aware of product placement in TV as well as movies, the respondents had better recall of movie placements as compared to TV placements. He therefore concludes that Movie placements are more effective and TV placements may lead to a loss of labour and money. [17]

Another study by Pola. B. Gupta and Stephen. J. Mould indicates that while the public finds product as a welcome change from the obtrusive traditional advertisements, ethically-charged products such as alcohol, cigarettes etc and to have comparatively poorer reception among the viewers. Variables such as social attitudes, gender, age and movie watching frequency also tend to have an impact on their perception of product placement. [18]

In a study titled, 20 Years of Research on Product Placement in Movies by Vildan Jusufović Karışık it is observed that effect of product placements in movies on

consumer memory and attitude is appreciable but their impact in terms of operations customer conduct, their purchase intention and preference for placed products remains uncertain. [19]

Another research study by Hirenkumar Jayantkumar Patel & Avani Chauhan found that success of the product placement depends on the type of the product placement. This study finds that integrated explicit product placement is appropriate and high number of respondents demonstrate a enhanced recall value of such product placements in TV shows as well as movies. [20]

Nuno Barroso noted in his research that comedic themed movies are bound to be more effective than dramatic themed ones [21]. Another study examined the effectiveness of brand placement in movies and studied the efficacy of this innovative marketing methodology via certain parameters such as consumer brand preference, loyalty and intentions to purchase. It was found that Malaysians have a better acceptance and recollection for brands placed in movies. The study reiterates that product placement has become a popular and effective methodology of marketing across globe and is being increasingly used by brand managers to enhance their brand recall. It also indicates that brand placement plays a vital role in augmenting the brand recall and image in the minds of the customers.[22]

Long term marketing directly impacts the competitiveness of a business and coupled with integrated marketing it can take the company to a greater height. Product placement is integral art of the marketing strategy and while formulating a product placement strategy, the long term implications of the process should be considered as product placement is a small but essential part of the process of brand building. The brand building process is , in turn, a building block for enhancing the competitiveness of a brand/ business. [11]

From the review of literature it can be ascertained that product placement is a fast becoming popular method of marketing among brands. While the traditional methods struggle to catch and retain the attention of the customer that is slipping way from their grips, product placement provides a fresh lease of life to the marketing world. It exposes the audience to marketing messages in a most natural and unobtrusive manner.

### **Methods and Materials**

The paper uses content analysis as its primary methodology. Literature available on the topic and 5 Hindi Films noticeable for their product placement from last six months onwards have been carefully studied to understand the nuances of Product Placement.

### **Discussion**

Product Placement is widely considered as a popular, frank, amusing and dynamic practice that has vowed many a marketers across the globe. The concept of embedding products in different media vehicles is not new. It has been in practice since a long time. It enhances the brand recognition and recall and provides a historical subtext and sense of familiarity for a brand.

Although most commonly, the initiation of the idea of product placement is credited to Steven Spielberg for E.T. (Alex Walton, 2010), product placement was used in Hollywood movies since early 1900s and instances of it can be found in various movies across the timeline. The Garage (1919), Wings (1927), It's a Wonderful Life (1946), The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951), Goldfinger (1964), The Love Bug (1968), A Clockwork Orange (1970), Game of Death (1978), The Shining (1980), E.T. (1982), Risky Business (1983), Back to the Future (1985), Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (1989), Reservoir Dogs (1992), Forrest Gump (1994), Men In Black (1997), The Matrix (1999), Cast Away (2000), Ray (2004), The Devil wears Prada (2006), The Dark Knight (2008), Gran Torino (2008), The Social Network (2010), Inception (2010), Friends with Benefits (2011), Now You See Me (2013) are some of the instances of Product Placement in Hollywood movies. The trend is extremely common and every marketer and filmmaker these days is making the most of it. Talking of Hollywood's Indian Cousin Bollywood or Indian Cinema, the trend registers a strong presence here too.

The first explicit product placement in Indian movies is noticed in *Bobby* (1970) that of a Rajdoot motorcycle. It can be noticed that product placement reached Indian Cinema much later but soon became a favorite trend with the Indian companies and filmmakers. Many other films in Bollywood that used product placement were *Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikander* (1992) starring Aamir Khan uses BSA SLR cycle as the movie is set against the backdrop of a cycling race. *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) features canned Stroh's Beer. *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) is infused with instances of product placement. Some of the brands are DKNY, GAP, and a number of other clothing brands etc. *Hum Saath-Saath Hain* (1999) and *Taal* (1999) have Coca Cola in their scenes. *Road* (2002) had Tata Safari. *Baghban* (2003) showcases brands like ICICI Bank and TATA Tea. In *Dhoom* (2004) has Suzuki bikes while *Dhoom 3* (2013) has Aamir Khan ride a BMW Bike. *Om Shanti Om* (2007) promoted Maybelline. Sonam Kapoor drives a Volkswagen Beetle in *Aisha* (2010). Poster of *Don 2* (2011) has Shahrukh Khan wearing a Tag-Heuer Watch. Nokia Phone is seen in some scenes of *Chennai Express* (2013). *Two States* (2014) has Sunsilk in one of its scenes. The movie stars Arjun Kapoor and Alia Bhatt. *Piku* (2015) has Syska, Amul and a few other brands embedded in its scenes.

The exhausting list is evidence enough to prove the popularity and effectiveness of Product Placement as a marketing methodology. Product Placement as a marketing tool has advantages not only for the marketers but also for Filmmakers and audiences. The practice is mutually beneficial for every party involved in the exchange process.

Product Placement is a favorite marketing tool for companies across the globe. Films assure a longer shelf life and an audience across borders. For filmmakers, the trend seems favorable as it grants them financial assistance in return. The mutually beneficial methodology is also light on the audience which takes in the marketing message without much resilience and in a more natural fashion.

In a paper titled 'Product Placement in movies: The Bollywood Experience' by Bimaldeep Kaur, the author observes that product placement is an effective method of promotion of products and services. She cites two reasons for her observation. Firstly, the Indian Films are a very powerful and widely popular medium and have

the ability to change or alter the consumption preferences and behaviour of the audiences. Films therefore become a good choice for product placement. Secondly, unlike advertising, product placement is unobtrusive. It doesn't hamper the flow of a program and is thus received better by the audiences. Additionally, films travel across borders and are not limited by geographical boundaries. This leads to a better reach across the globe.[1]

Similar to this is the observation of another study that states that films are found to be of higher involvement as compared to Television. The audience can multitask while watching TV at home thereby reducing the attention span of the viewer in case of Television. This reduced attention span will lead to less retention and recall of Brands shown in TV programs. In contrast to this a movie goer makes an informed investment in terms of money, time and attention and hence he is more attentive and receptive to all sort of information provided in a movie hall which also includes product information or brand messages. In addition to this, the Television audience has the choice of channels. The viewer has the prerogative of shifting through channels in search of messages or programs that are of his taste and interest. Such is not the case with films. A movie goer will give a film his full time and attention. The features of film such as versatility of content, less clutter of similar programming, bigger stars with iconic public image are some of the factors that make films an interesting choice for marketers and generate a great deal of interest in researchers. Product placement is fast becoming popular in films across the world including Indian Films. [2]

Another study reiterates the need of higher involvement and attention required to watch a film than viewing Television. Television viewers can do multitude of tasks while watching television at home thus resulting in decreased attention span and brand retention. Moviegoers, on the other hand, are more attentive as they have consciously chosen the date, time, content and cost of the program. A majority of moviegoers demonstrate a favourable attitude towards product placement and prefer this communication to the commercial breaks on Television programs. The effect of product placement is better on more frequent film viewers. [3]

Globalization in media has led to the emergence of a transnational audience who are exposed to a variety of national and international brands through various media. Indian films are a prevalent mass medium, especially when targeting rural population. All the rural folk may not have access to Television at regular basis but almost everybody watches films (Britt, 2002). Another characteristic that is in the favour of films as a product placement medium is that Indian films tend to be longer (~3hours) than their western counterparts (~2 hours). Increased time span of the film means increased opportunity of product placement. Hence films in India are a great mass medium for marketers.

From a cultural point of view, in a society such as India where film celebrities have a huge social status and are widely popular figures, reaching out to audiences via films is even more effective as it comes with an added advantage of subtle celebrity endorsement of some sort thereby increasing its overall effectiveness. Unlike other societies with societal modesty norms in place such as Denmark, film celebrities in India enjoy a great fan following and exercise a fair amount of influence on the attitudes of the public. [5]

In the age of consumerism, the market has become saturated with products and services and has resulted in clogged communication channels with marketers vying for attention. The competition to reach out to the audience is at its peak and to add to the woes of the marketers, is the resilience the audiences have developed towards traditional clutter of marketing communication bombarded their way. It is therefore imperative for marketers to innovate new ways to break the clutter. One of these novel methodologies is product placement. Indian Films are breaking the geographical barriers and Indian films are cultivating audience across the globe. Established brands have thus found bankable medium to reach audiences globally. Also observed in the same study is the increased opportunity of product placement in Indian films due to their increased length. Besides this the huge population of India is an added advantage for brands as the same message embedded in an Indian film is likely to reach a much larger number of people. [6]

In addition to the already stated observations about product placement in Indian Films, it is also observed that the products can leverage from the sheer volume and the diversity of genres that Indian films encompass. The wide genres provide marketers with the choice of selecting the content apt and congruent with their brand values to ensure better communication with the audience. Integrating products in the story or the frame does away with the need for breaking the flow of the program to showcase commercial messages. Product placement Indian films is therefore a positive trend in marketing communications. [7]

A study of 'Brand Recall for Product Placement in Hindi Films' examined the impact of film genre or content, type of placement, and gender of the viewer on brand recall. These parameters are the focus of every strategist while planning a product placement strategy. It was found that the recall of products was greater in drama genre. Also the products placed explicitly and prominently garnered more attention than those placed implicitly and subtly. [8]

In a study that focuses on the congruence between content and product placed, it is observed that products placed in Indian films garner greater response as compared to the products placed in Hollywood films. The primary reason for this is cited as the impact of vertical collectivism as is found in Indian society. Indian people look up to the prominent figures and they are accorded a star status in the society. When such a star figure openly or subtly endorses a certain product, the public tends to draw an association between the content of the film, the celebrity and the product. This leads to better recognition and recall of the brand. The recognition, on the other hand, in Hollywood films is comparatively lesser as the US films portray an individualistic society which focuses on personal goals, personal achievements, success and failures as opposed to collectivistic tendencies of Indian audiences. This study factually suggests that Indian market has a huge potential and the multinational brands trying to reach out to Indian audiences should prefer the Indian films to establish a better connect with the audience. The audience clearly showcased a better response to brands that were within the context of the scene/ film they were placed in than towards those placed out of context. [9]

The preference of in context placement is also highlighted in another study that finds that marketers prefer to place their products in films that have positive storyline. They refrain from associating their product with content that has negativity or affiliate the product with a character that is unsavoury. This study prominently not-

ed that the practice of product placement has become integral to films as the high involvement placement nearly doubled from 1977 to 1997 in Hollywood films. There was also a marked increasing in product appearances along with popular stars and important characters as compared to those with minor characters.[10]

In times when exposure to media is at the peak and resilience to the marketing information at its high, product placement comes as a saviour. There are many benefits of this marketing strategy. Positive brand association, Indirect endorsement, ability to break through the clutter and reach out to the audience in a fresh manner, Longer shelf life of films and Inexpensive marketing practice as product placement is more economical than traditional advertising (Prachi Singh, 2013).

### **Films studied for their Product Placement during last year**

The following 5 Hindi Films were selected for the prominence of product placement in them.

- Gully Boy
- Zero
- SOTY 2
- Badla
- Luka chuppi

### **Gully Bolly**

This innovative film based on rap stars featured various brands such as True Caller, JBL, Adidas and Social Offline. The brands placements are subtle yet smart. Brands are woven thoughtfully into the fabric of plot but have enough space to stand out. Use of true caller app by female protagonist Alia Bhat is unmissable in one of the scenes. Protagonist Ranveer Singh, who plays the role of an upcoming rapper from Mumbai's slum area, records his first music video with premium speaker brand JBL. He also receives Adidas shoes as a gift and the venue for his first proper performance is Social Offline Cafe.

### **Zero**

The film though didn't impress much in terms of content, its product placement game was on point. 'Zero' is infused with product placements of brands such as Dainik Jagran, Amity Global School, Imperial Hotel, Nykaa, India TV, throughout the length of the film. Shadi.com becomes the rescuer of the main character played by Shahrukh Khan when he sets out to seek his bride. Besides this, Zero also uplifted the digital marketing game in Indian Cinema. The film took the marketing technology game a notch higher and became the first Indian Hindi Film to join hands with Amazon's Alexa, create a Snapchat filter and even a WhatsApp sticker pack.

### **Student of the Year 2**



The second in series to the much popular product of Dharma Productions, SOTY 2 featured some blatant product placement in its scenes. From the unmissable Tommy Hilfiger promotion in one of its posters, the film had various luxury brands featured across its length and also some surreal location from all over the picturesque state of Uttarakhand.

### **Badla**

The crime thriller grabbed as many eyeballs for its product placement as it did for its impeccable Hindi execution of the famous Spanish movie *Contratiempo*. Some prominent placements included iPhone, Macbook, SEAT Toledo and Audi cars. The products were cleverly and meticulously placed in some of the most important scenes of the film giving them due prominence yet maintaining the subtlety.

### **Luka Chuppi**

This entertainer had its fair share of product placement. The movie immortalizes Coca-Cola through one of its hit songs. Also, one of the scenes in the movie featured a astute integration of Manforce condoms. The film is strewn with instances of product placement.

## **Conclusion**

Product placement in films is not a new trend but a discernible rise in the use of this method for marketing is on the rise. It is a unique way to familiarize the audience with the product or brand as it is subtle and not in-your-face experience for the audience. The marketers need to establish an emotional connect with the audience to be able to sell a product or foster a good brand recognition. It is in this scenario that Product placement comes into play as a strong and effective tool for brand building in a changing media landscape.

It can be concluded from the study that Product Placement is effective in introducing the marketing messages to the audience in an acceptably natural and unobtrusive manner. When placing a product, marketers try to affiliate their product with characters and situations in the program that have positive connotations. An added advantage is to associate the product with a character or celebrity lead with a good public image and fan following. This ensures a better reception and response of the brand amongst the viewers. In a collectivistic culture such as Indian culture, association of the product with a well-known celebrity is a sure short way to better response and recall of the product. Celebrities can charge crores for Brand Endorsements, product placement is a less expensive way to replicate similar results. Also Celebrity endorsements come with a commercial break that observes lesser involvement of audiences, in Product placement a highly involved audience receives the message thus leading to a better receptivity, recognition and recall.

As compared to Television placements, Film placements enjoy a greater response and have a number of value additions. Firstly, film placements have a much longer shelf life. A product is first exposed in a movie theatre, then through a DVD and finally continues to receive attention through satellite transmission later on. Televi-

sion programs lack this feature. Films promise longevity. Also the film stars enjoy a more iconic status as compared to most Television stars. Television stars are also popular but film stars in a country like India enjoy a much more huge fan following. Another advantage of Product placement in films is the undivided attention a movie can generate as compared to Television programs. Television provides a viewer with a wide variety of choice on term of channels the viewer can shift through. This is not possible in for a film audience. A person who decides to watch a film in a theatre setting makes an informed investment of time, money and attention. In these terms, product placement is thus a more bankable placement and more so in Films.

Films in India are a popular source of entertainment. Indian Film Industry produces a high volume of films annually. A rural person in India may not be a regular Television viewer but most of the masses watch films. Placing products in Indian films have great benefits. Indian Film Industry is not only limited to Bollywood but also includes a lot of regional cinema. There are increased platforms for marketers to place their products according to the product and the target audience. The sheer volume of films produced in India each year is a huge advantage to the brands. Film stars in India enjoy an iconic status and have the potential to influence the attitude of the public. Associating the product/ brand with certain film stars or characters in movie that have the potential to connect with the audience and have positive undertones can uplift the reception of messages embedded within the scenes of the film. Indian films have longer time duration of nearly 3 hours as compared to Hollywood films and thus have increased opportunities for product placement. In some cases the duration may be even more than 3 hours. The longer the film is the more the availability of content slots to fit a brand into.

The brands are not merely used as a prop or an element in the frame, they play an important part in the plot or that particular scene. The placement is so clever that it subtly yet surely outlines important features of the product and the added advantage of association of the product with a celebrity adds to its brand image.

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