Product Placement in Movies: The Bollywood Experience

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Abstract

Advertising means bringing a product (or service) to the attention of potential and current customers. It is focused on one particular product or service. Thus, an advertising plan for one product might be very different than that for another product. Advertising is typically done with signs, brochures, commercials, direct mailings or e-mail messages, personal contact, etc. Promotion, the fourth P of marketing, holds the key to the success of a given marketing strategy as it involves communication with the prospective customers. The ongoing activities of advertising, sales and public relations are often considered aspects of promotion. It is through an effective communication that a business enterprise can enter any market. The main thrust of such a strategy should be to ensure long term presence in the market. The marketers need to select the most appropriate communication model to plan for promotional strategy for the success of the business. The range of options available to a marketer to plan the media for communication has widened with the advent of information technology and its all pervasive applications. The options for media selection are: Print Media (newspaper, magazines, journals, yellow pages, hand bills, etc), Electronic Media (T.V, Radio, internet, cell phones, video games, electronic billboards, telephone, etc), Celebrity Endorsements, using Storyline of the Film, Events, Direct Mail, and so on. The marketer needs to assess the effectiveness of a particular medium for communication before selecting the most appropriate and effective medium for planning the promotional strategy for the product(s) of the enterprise. The present study attempts to study the effectiveness of product placement in movies as a medium for advertising.

Keywords: Advertising, Product Placements, Bollywood
Introduction
Marketing strategies are central to the formulation of overall business strategies. The imperative reality of operating in a market environment where too many sellers are chasing too few customers requires that a “value rich offer” that is better than the best to be made to the customers to be a winner at the market place. This calls for creativity and innovativeness in formulating the policies as regards the fourth P, Promotion. It holds the key to the success of a given marketing strategy as it involves communication with the prospective customers. It is through an effective communication that a business enterprise can enter any market. The main thrust of such a strategy should be to ensure long term presence in the market. The marketers need to select the most appropriate communication model to plan for promotional strategy for the success of the business.

The range of options available to a marketer to plan the media for communication has widened with the advent of information technology and its all pervasive applications. The options for media selection are: Print Media (newspaper, magazines, journals, yellow pages, hand bills, etc), Electronic Media (T.V, Radio, internet, cell phones, video games, electronic billboards, telephone, etc), Celebrity Endorsements, product placement in movies (i.e., using storyline of the film), Events, Direct Mail, and so on. The marketer needs to assess the effectiveness of a particular medium for communication before selecting the most appropriate and effective medium for planning the promotional strategy for the product(s) of the enterprise.

The present study makes a modest attempt to measure and assess the effectiveness of using ‘product placement in movies: the bollywood experience’ as an emerging advertising medium in today’s global marketing environment.

Product placement in movies: the Bollywood experience
Films are a prominent medium of entertainment in India. Impact of films is evident from the fact that film stars have iconic status in India [1]. The Indian film industry is 100 years old and world’s largest producer of films in volumes, producing around 1,000 films per annum and accounted for 1% of the global film industry revenue [2]. In India, basically two types of films are produced-commercial films and art films. The other emerging genres are tele-films, special effect films and sequel of very successful commercial films. Film producers now make films which are for masses or for specific target groups [3]. Leveraging on the emotional value attached with a movie and diverse genre of films produced, corporates and advertisers have the opportunity to associate their brands with the right movies through “in-film advertisements”. Advertising agencies thus play a crucial role between film producers and corporates who want to associate their brand with a movie.

Product placement in Indian movies is not something new. A discernible trend as regards using storyline of the film to advertise products has been noticed in the recent past. The products chosen for advertising through this medium have varied from automobiles to soft drinks, garments, gift items, services, pharmaceuticals to name a few. This industry was an unorganized sector, it was granted “industry status” only in the year 2000 by the Government of India [4]. Thereafter began the journey
towards its formation as an organized sector. Currently, there are 26 conglomerates in
the film industry. Adlabs Films, Yash Raj Films, UTV, and Pritish Nandy
Communications etc are a few companies which have led to vertical integration across
the value chain between film producers, distributors, exhibitors, broadcasters and
music companies.

In this context, it will be interesting to cite some of the recent Indian movies in
which products and services have been advertised. The early instances of a product
promoted in a movie include the 1967 movie, “An Evening in Paris” where actress
Sharmila Tagore was seen sipping delicately from a 200 ml bottle of Coke, struggling
to make sure the logo was visible. Raj Kapoor’s 1973 “Bobby”, starring Rishi Kapoor
and Dimple Kapadia. The Rajdoot motorbike from Enfield Motors was launched in
the movie. In the movie, “Awwal Number”, the Dev Anand flick released in 1990
starring Aamir Khan, every time the hero hit a four, the ball bounced off a poster
saying Garware! A lot of people unrelated to the story line were shown carrying
Benzer bags in the 1992 movie, “Prem Diwane” where an entire sequence with
Madhuri Dixit was shot inside the famous Benzer stores of Bombay. In recent times,
Mc Donald’s India has been quite active on the product placement front. In “Love Ke
Liye Khi Bhi Karega”, the hero strategically holds a ball with the Mac ‘M’ on it.
Another direct reference is when the heroine declares she consumes nothing but
Domino’s Pizza and Diet Coke. A similar example is when Hritik Roshan flexes
biceps etc and asks irritably, “McDonald’s ka burger laon kya?” in the movie,
“Kaho Na Pyar Hai”.

The first recognized product placement in Hindi film is “Coke” in Subhash
Ghai’s “Taal”. In order to promote Stroh’s Beer, actor Shahrukh Khan mentions its
name in the movie “Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge” for a 15-second slot. BR Chopra’s
“Baghban” is an instance where Amitabh Bachchan endorsed a multiplicity of brands,
namely Ford Ikon, ICICI Bank and Tata Tea. As the motorcycle Rajdoot was
launched through a film, a similar product placement was done by Maruti Suzuki
which launched its new model “Swift” in Abhishek Bachchan starrer, "Bunty Aur
Babli". Automobiles are among the more favorite products for placement in films as
is evident from the movie “Dhoom” starring actor John Abraham who promoted
Suzuki in a scene. The Amitabh Bachchan starrer "Viruddh", has promoted Asian
Paints and Calcium Sandoz tablets. Similarly, the pharmaceuticals are also being
promoted through films like in the movie “Parineeta” in which the actress Vidya
Balan promotes Saridon tablets. “Kuch Naa Kaho “, starring Abhishek Bachchan and
Aishwarya Rai endorsed Coca-Cola. The trend of multibrand advertising is fastly
catching up which is evident in the film "Chalte-Chalte" starring Shahrukh Khan and
Rani Mukherjee. The movie promotes Castrol engine oil, Santro and Versache. Coke
and Pass Pass were endorsed through "Yaadein". In the movie "Waqt", Amitabh
Bachchan is shown to be the owner of Archies gift shop. Fardeen Khan has also
endorsed Archies in the film “Pyare Mohan”, “Fiza” starring Hritik Roshan and
Neha shows the actors waltzing in front of a Close Up bill board.

Continuing with the trend of promoting products through storyline of films is
the movie “Yaaran Naal Baharaan” which has promoted the bike Karizma. In “Koi
Mil Gaya” starring Hritik Roshan and Preity Zinta, a Hero Cup was kept for a
Basketball Match along with Karizmaa (bike promoted by actor Hritik Roshan) on display for a crowd of 100 odd in a small hill station. The Times of India group associated itself with the movie “Hum Tum” and took care of its promotion also which even included a cartoon strip made especially for the film starring the characters of the film. Actor Tusshar Kapoor is shown using the Kinetic Honda’s Laser model in the movie “Gayab”. Famous actress Sharmila Tagore’s daughter Soha Ali Khan joined the Frankfinn Institute of Air Hostess Training in the movie “Dil Maange More” and is associated with the brand since.

More recently, Zandu Balm pain reliever rub and BoroPlus anti-septic cream have been part of the superhit songs “Munni Badnaam Hui” of Dabbangg. In Cocktail online shopping address myntra .com was effectively emphasised. Now in Dabbangg 2 the product name fevicol features in a song. The latest example is of Zandu Balm featuring in “Baby Doll” song of 2014 release Ragini MMS 2.

**Product placement in movies: Edge over other media**

Product Placement in movies as an advertising medium has an edge over others. Brand awareness increases with captive audience which in turn increases consumer memory and recall of the brand or product[5]. Films are effective platform to bring desired change in consumers’ attitudes or overall evaluations of the brand. There is an instant recognition of the product/brand in the media vehicle and at the point of purchase. It is able to bring out a favourable change in the audiences’ purchase behaviours. The cost of product placement is quite low as compared to the above-the-line methods of advertising or endorsement. Unlike advertising, product placement does not interrupt programming and hence is less obtrusive. Products gain greater credibility when popular and respected movie and television stars use them. This medium as more reach as the films release in a wide geographical area and across borders as well. This increases the brand’s corporate image manifold.

**Effective product placements**

The following are some observations from researches already done to assess the effectiveness of product placements in movies as advertising media.

- A product being used by characters in the movie is better than simply advertising the product in the movie[6].
- The products may be promoted by being used by other important cast members in the movie and not necessarily the lead actors.
- Audiences want to identify themselves with certain movies and characters, hence “lifestyle” products benefit more from product placements rather than daily-use products[7].
- The target audience should be aware of the product that is being placed in a movie. If this is not the case, the placement, is rendered useless.
- It has been observed by several researchers that smaller brands benefit more from effective placements as compared to bigger brands[8].
People have good brand recall of products/brands seen in movies, thus this form of advertising creates awareness amongst the people. Research also highlights that it is very important to very carefully place the product within the storyline or it may become out of place and thus attract negative attitude from the target audience.

Limitations of product placements in movies as an effective advertising medium:
The marketers have little control over how their product is portrayed in the storyline. The product may end up being misused, ignored, criticized, associated with questionable values, or used unethically. If the movie is a hit, then the visibility is more but if the movie flops, then the entire exercise is futile as there is no visibility of the product. There is also problem of pricing the placement as generally the fees depend on the expected audience for the movie which is difficult to enumerate. There is a limitation over what type of products can be advertised through this medium. Consumer products are generally more effectively placed like this. There are ethical issues like whether the products being presented and used in their intended ways or are there any false impersonations being shown to the viewers. To sum up, the main disadvantages of product placement in movies is that it can be: distracting, intrusive and unethical. There should be a careful planning done to avoid the perils in order to use this medium effectively.

Conclusion: Product placement is a growing field
Product placement has withstood the test of time by continuously demonstrating its capabilities to marketers. The once threat to advertisers has become a viable venue, providing new and better ways to do business with clients. The evolution of product placement will flourish as informed advertisers and marketers capitalize on the right entertainment property with the right cross-marketing programs. Product placement in Indian movies is also quite old. Brands and popular Indian cinema have aligned quite famously, and the trend of in-film advertising is gaining ground as both producers and advertisers see long-term benefits. Put together, the analyses suggests that this strategy can be developed into a very effective tool for advertising the products if product placements are planned in a creative, innovative and enjoyable manner.

References