

Consumer attitude towards the Product Placement in movies and TV serials

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Abstract: Marketers have always been looking for alternative ways to reach the target population with their messages. One approach that has grown the last decades is product placement that has become a large arena for companies to involve in their marketing communication. It has been shown that people tend to dislike traditional advertisement such as commercial breaks in TV and tries to avoid it by switching channel. Since product placement is a type of advertisement that is embedded in a movie or TV-show and cannot be zapped away without missing the story of the movie or TV-show, it is a good opportunity to reach out with a company's message. The purpose of this study is to investigate what attitudes the audience has towards product placements in Movies and TV-shows, which will lead to a greater knowledge for marketing managers about the attitudes towards product placement. This research paper is an attempt of exploratory research, based on mainly secondary data collected from various sources, such as reference books, magazines, journal, and research papers & websites.

Keywords : *Product Placement, Branding, Consumer Behaviour*

I. INTRODUCTION

Branding is a way to differentiate a company from others in the competitive market. A Brand is build up by a name with different signs, symbols and attributes that together makes a company's brand unique through marketing communication a company can be able to promote its products or services for the consumers. Even if a company has good products or services it is still important that prospect customers recognize their existence and learn about the value the company can be able to give them. Therefore marketing communication is essential for a company's success. Companies advertising strategy is consisted of two elements: the created advertising message and the selection of advertising media. In a world where an average person is exposed to around 1,600 ad messages a day, advertising can only succeed if the ad gains attention and is communicated well (Armstrong et al., 2009). Marketers are always looking for alternative methods to convey their messages and communicate with their target population. One approach that has continued grown and received attention the last decades is product placements. The practice of product placements where brands are placed into media content, mainly in movies and TV-shows is not new. Product placements have a history back to themid-1890s but it was not until 1982 with the blockbuster movie "E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial" with the placement of Reese's Pieces candy that the real product placements industry was born. After the movie release, Reese's Pieces increased their sales with 65 % and other marketers saw the benefits with product placements For what has been an effective tool for reaching audiences for more than 50 years, the role of product placements has shifted from being a part of the background settings to being a substantial part of a movie or TV-show (Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007). For instance that James Bond is driving a kitted up Aston Martin car in the movie Casino Royale (Campbell,2006) and in the movie Castaway (Zemeckis, 2000) where Tom Hanks is stranded on a emptyisland with numerous of FedEx packages that helps him to survive and he even creates arelationship with a Wilson volleyball, that he aptly names Wilson. The different types ofproduct placement can be divided into two types of placements; prominent and subtle.Prominent placements is easy to notice and can be very obvious through showing, using ortalking about the brand while subtle placement is harder to notice and does often occur in the background (Ferraro & Avery, 2000).

How about in India ?

Though there has been a longer history of brand placements in Indian films but not enough research has been conducted to prove its effectiveness. The earliest reference of a brand placement comes in the 1940 classic Chalti Kaa naam Gadi with the brand Coca Cola. The movie Dilwale Dulhanyian Le Jayenge of the 1990s was a successful story of launching of Stroh bear in Indian market. Today, product placement is used as an often used strategy for the advertisers in Hindi films.The practice of product placement has proliferated due, in part to the high level of message clutter in traditional

advertising media, combined with the increased fragmentation of media audiences (Gunther 2000, Gupta and Lord 1998). Product placement gives marketers an alternative means for gaining product exposure through a media context where targeted audiences may be particularly receptive. This audience receptivity means the difference between reaching sales and profitability objectives or falling short of them entirely. Previous research also suggests the effects of product placements on consumers can influence brand recognition, recall and attitudes. Consumer's beliefs towards product placement activities have been found to influence their acceptance of the placements in general. A few number of research studies have also attempted to establish a correlation between audience beliefs towards product placements activities and their purchase intent following exposure by comparing the effects across the cultures (Karrh, Frith and Calisson 2001; Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Krauter 2000). However opportunity exists about the nature of the relationship between product placements beliefs and subsequent behaviours as well as variables that can predict behavioural outcomes. Increase in product placements and institutionalisation of the industry indicate that advertisers are using the technique to sway consumer's brand attitudes. The type of placements should look natural to the narration as consumption symbols are often used to enrich the plot, theme and characters of popular culture texts (Hirschman 1998; Holbrook and Grayson 1986). Some consumers may feel that the use of brand names in popular culture simply reflects the increased commercial content of a culture (Freidman 1985) or the producer's efforts to enhance the realism of their film (Solomon and Englis 1994). However in case where the brand takes a major role in the story of the film as in the movie Friends or where its presence in the movie might look suspect (Indian Film Yadein), audience may realise that it was placed there to affect their judgements and they may counter argue them just as they do to the traditional advertising messages (Friestad and Wright 1995). Critics have already voiced their concern about the increasing embeddedness of marketing efforts within popular culture and the intensifying commercialisation of films (Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 1993) Though product placements are gaining ground in Indian films and have taken quite a substantial progress in American and European films, there is less or no research done to find out its effects on audience. Hence this study has been undertaken.

Product Placement

Russell and Belch (2005) define product placement as "the purposeful incorporation of a brand into an entertainment vehicle" (Russell & Belch, 2005, p. 74) and this is also the definition that Wilson and Till (2011) uses. Further on Russell and Belch (2005) writes about that product placement is found in many different media, all from obvious as movies, TV and video games but also in novels.

Product placement appearance

The impact that a product placement can have to the audience is according to Lehu (2007) based on the appearance of the placement and it can be divided into four different types of appearance: classic placement, corporate placement, evocative placement and stealth placement.

Classic placement

The first type of placement that Lehu mention is the classic placement that has existed since the practice of product placement was first derived. In this type of placement the brand appears in the camera's view and is almost naturally integrated in to the scenario of the movie or TV-show. For example when Will Smith is wearing Converse shoes in the movie I, Robot (Proyas, 2004) or in the movie Forrest Gump (Zemeckis, 1994) where Tom Hanks drinks about fifteen Dr. Peppers for free during a visit at the White House. A classic placement is easy to put in place in a certain movie or TV-show for a low cost, or sometimes for free when a brand can appear without the advertisers expressed wish. But it can sometimes pass by unnoticed by the audience, particularly if there are a high number of placements in the same movie or TV-show (Lehu, 2007).

Corporate placement

With a corporate placement the placement is focused on the brand and not a certain product. It can sometimes be easier to put in a brand instead of a product in a movie for instance by putting the brands logo in the background of a movie (Lehu, 2007), such as the big billboard of McDonalds in the movie The Fifth Element (Besson, 1997). This kind of

placement is best to use if the brand is a recognizable brand for the audience, otherwise it may never be noticed. If the placement is successful it will be beneficial for all the product of the brand and not just a certain product (Lehu, 2007).

Evocative placement

An evocative placement is a discreet and subtle placement where the logo or name of the brand is not visual or neither mentioned. With this kind of placement it is important to have an original and unique design or packaging that can be associated and recognized to a brand by the audience. This can for example be different car brands that can be recognized by their design (Lehu, 2007), or in the Swedish TV-show *Solsidan* (Herngren & Kvensler, 2010) where the character “Fredde” is using a Segway without that the logo or the name of the brand is mentioned or shown.

Stealth placement

The last type of placement that Lehu writes about is stealth placement that is a highly discreet and subtle placement that sometimes almost can be undetectable. This type of placement is often well integrated into the scene that can generate a positive effect when the brand is identified due to that it is placed in a movie or TV-show in a natural way that the audience can perceive as more credible (Lehu, 2007). This type of placement does often concern fashion, for example in the movie *Drive* (Winding, 2011) where Ryan Gosling is wearing a pair of sunglasses from Selima Optique.

Different dimensions of product placement

The most usual way to integrate product placements into media is to use either just visual-only or audio-only placements (La Ferle & Edwards, 2006; Wilson & Till, 2011). Galician & Bourdeau (2004) assert that vision-only placements are more common than audio-only placements. According to Russell (2002) product placement can be categorized in to three dimensions: visual, auditory and plot connection. The visual dimension is referred to how the brand is appeared on the screen, this is also called screen placements. This kind of placement can have different levels, depending on different aspects such as the number of appearances on the screen or in which way the product is filmed (Russell, 2002). The second dimension is the auditory dimension, or the verbal dimension, is referred to how the brand is mentioned verbally in the dialogue and is called a script placement. This type of placement also has different degrees which is depended on in which context the brand is mentioned, how many times it is mentioned and in which way it is mentioned through the tone of voice or place in the dialogue (Russell, 2002). The third and last dimension, the plot connection is referred to the degree of how the brand is integrated in the plot of the story. In such placement the brand or the product becomes a part of the plot or takes a major role of the storyline. It has been shown that small and subtle plot connected placements do not make any bigger differences to the story while prominent plot connected placements can have a major impact of the story, e.g. building up a character as a person (Russell, 2002). Wilson and Till (2011) takes up that studies by Gupta & Lord (1998) and Russell (2002) came to the result that audio-only placements have the greatest recall over visual-only and Law & Braun (2000) came to the conclusion that visual-only had the largest recall. But they point out that they came to the conclusion in their field study that it was no significant difference between audio-only and visual-only placements. However Wilson and Till (2011) did find that when both audio and visual placements were combined the recall was higher than the two separate, they also suggest a ‘recipe’ for the placement with highest recall; “combined audio-visual presentations, that are prominently displayed, have actor involvement, and have two or more verbal mentions” (Wilson & Till, 2011, p. 391). But they also say that marketers often do not have the ability to control the placements exactly how they want in movies and TV. MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) write about how branded messages have more response when customers have greater opportunities to process the messages. Wilson and Till (2011) agrees and defines these opportunities as time on screen and how often, actor involvement and how prominent the message is. Further they found that placements that were placed in the first half of a movie did not have an equally high level of recall (Wilson & Till, 2011). Prominent placements are those that are in the foreground of a scene, they are easy to notice and can sometimes be the only thing that can be seen in the screen (Ferraro & Avery 2000). Subtle placements are those that are in the background of a scene, they are not always so easy to notice. Subtle placement can often share the screen with many other brands (Wilson & Till, 2011). Several studies have showed that prominent placements have a higher recall than the subtle placements (Law & Braun, 2000). Reijmersdal, Neijens and Smit (2009) add that the prominent placements that even are involved into the plot get an even higher brand recall.

Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Kräuter (2000) based their research on Gould and Gupta (1997) that conducted the same research but limited to just the US. Now they went further and did the same survey in both France and Austria as well in order to compare the results of attitudes towards product placement in movies in each country. All three surveys were done with a sample that 75 % - 99 % was under the age of 25 and very close to 50/50 balance in terms of gender. (Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Kräuter, 2000). The results that they came to were that it was difference in how acceptable product placement was in the different countries. In the US the survey showed that they were more tolerant towards placements in movies than in both France and Austria, but at the same time they could see some similarities between all three countries. For example placements regarding cigarettes, alcohol and guns had little acceptance in all three countries. They also found that it was a significant gender difference, women were less positive to placements and this was found across all the three countries. So the conclusion was that it is similar attitudes across the three countries but they differ in intensity. Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Kräuter (2000) article did not take up any difference in the placement types but they gave the recommendation that further studies also should include Television. They also made a managerial advice to be aware of the difference between countries attitudes towards product placements. An article written by Brennan, Rosenberger and Hementera (2004) was inspired by Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Kräuter's (2000) research and wanted to test it further more. Brennan, Rosenberger and Hementera used the same questionnaire and mainly the same hypothesis about gender difference and how unethical placement was judged and then applied this to an Australian sample. The difference in this case beside the country was that they did not get a sample that was as equally distributed between gender as Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Kräuter's (2000) researches were. Instead of fairly equal they had roughly 63% male and 37% female in their test. But they did anyway draw the same conclusion that women were less positive than men towards placements and that unethical placement with alcohol, guns etc. was regarded less positive overall. They also saw the same indicators as Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Kräuter's (2000) that it was the same attitudes across the countries but different intensity, also in Australia. In 2010 Reijmersdal, Neijens and Smit did a research where they investigated the correlation between a positive attitude toward a movie or television show and the outcome of attitudes against a certain placement that was in the media. The research was conducted in the Netherlands and the method used was a combination of first a TV-program being showed to the respondent in their home setting alone, and then the day after they answered a survey. Some of their findings were that product placements that occurred in programs with high perceived Value such as a cooking program or home makeover program had a higher level of brand recognition than in programs with general program. They also came to the conclusion that people with higher education and also people that were younger tended to be less affected by brand placement, both in terms of attitude and buying intentions. Their reasoning around that is that some studies has shown that just that group has higher knowledge of advertisers' motives with branding and therefore is less persuaded. (Reijmersdal, Neijens & Smit, 2010). A research comparing the attitudes towards product placement in movies and television was done between USA and Korea by Lee, Sung and Choi (2011). They conducted an internet based survey and let respondents between the ages of 19-29 answer their survey. The both samples were conducted at colleges in both countries. What they noticed in their research was that the attitudes were similar but that the Koreans was a little less positive towards placements in TV and movies, they perceived it more unethical than the respondents from US. They also found that the respondents that had a more positive attitude toward advertisement in general tended to be more positive towards product placement as well and also that individuals that perceived that product placement could lead to a more realistic setting in a movie were those that were likely to pay more attention towards the actual placements. The authors of this article also suggested that a reason to the difference between the two countries can originate from the different cultures where USA is seen to be more materialistic (Lee, Sung & Choi, 2011).

Conclusions

It can be concluded from the research that people in general have positive attitudes towards the product placement. Even though Product placement gives marketers an alternative means for gaining product exposure through a media context where targeted audiences may be particularly receptive and also . the effects of product placements on consumers can influence brand recognition, recall and attitudes but still type of product placement does matter. According to our analysis, out of 3 types of product placement , plot placement has the edge in influencing the audience, but there is a danger of going too far and viewers might find it overtly-excessive , so, marketers need to find the right balance between type of product placement. Also, the type of TV show for product placement plays crucial role in maintaining the

relevance of the product. Product placement in shows like reality shows like Bigg Boss will be far more relevant than any news show. Even from perspective of making movies realistic, depiction real brands rather any fake one will pay off. So, finally, it can be said that with conviction that, product placement is here to stay.

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