

“I SAW IT IN THE WEB SERIES”: AN EVOLUTION OF PRODUCT PLACEMENT.Vishal Yadav¹, Mahesh Reddy² & Haritha S³Vishal Yadav, BBA Student ISME, Bangalore Karnataka. Email- vishaly.isme1720@gmail.com

Mahesh Reddy, BBA Student ISME, Bangalore Karnataka.

Haritha S- Faculty ISME, Bangalore Karnataka. Email- haritha@isme.in**ABSTRACT**

Product placement in the entertainment industry has been constantly going through a change and has is one of the most lucrative forms of advertisement. With the increase in the tech-savvy consumers, there is a remarkable shift from Product Placements in movies to the web series. The substantial portion of entertainment consumption in India is currently through Web series, although this does not mean that product placement in movies has reduced. In the era of Digital Renaissance, the techniques of product placement have become more vivid. Ever since video streaming platforms like YouTube, TVF, and Netflix became prominent, the idea of Product Placement has taken different forms. A huge research gap is there in the context of product placement in web series, an effort is made to address the gap by reviewing relevant papers and content on various websites and provide an overview.

This paper investigates the factors that led to the growth of Product Placement in Web series in India and distinguished itself from the way the majority of entertainment production houses operate. The paper specifies the basic reason for the growing popularity of Indian Web series over movies and the ways Brands are being associated with the trend by sponsoring them and giving rise to a completely new field called Branded Entertainment. This research can provide insights for organizations to build upon metrics and models to leverage Brand integration in order to enhance brand effectiveness and formulate cost-effective strategies for advertisement.

Keywords: *Brand integration, Web series, Product placement, Advertising.*

Introduction

Smartphone industry in India is expected to grow to 520 million by 2020, making it one of the largest in the world. Broadband penetration will increase from 14% to 40% by 2020. Smart phones, digital devices and internet connectivity have spearheaded the shifting of traditional media formats such as broadcast and cable TV towards digital mediums (Ernst and Young, 2016). As we evidently see, the shift in the media is being consumed and diversion of production resources towards much more portable content product placement in segments such as web series short films available for mass consumption would eventually prove effective for any endorser. With the boom of the digital medium, we have seen an increased number of web-channels and subscription based apps, which are coming out with new and fresh content on regular basis. In India where censorship decides the fate of a movie to be run, web series have broken that taboo and are now the go-to source of thought breaking entertainment for millennials.

Need for the study – In the recent few years promotional techniques have undergone a huge transition; marketing organizations are grappling to identify the most cost effective medium to maximize their results. One of the significant observation is consumption of entertainment is mainly through the internet. Content on the go is catching up with millennials. Marketing organizations in order to tap this segment of consumers have started product placements in web series. However, research in this area is very sparse. Especially in the Indian context, research is very nascent. This paper aims to provide a perspective to the marketing organizations to identify good sources for product placement and to assess what type of placement would better suit their product. In the present day, where a viewer can skip ads and exhibit ad blindness, product placement is becoming a huge way for brands to reach their target audience in more “subtle” ways.

Research gap – A lot of research has been done in terms of product placement and brand integration in USA and Europe .India has been quickly catching up on this trend, off late many of the web series have product placements integrated either in the main plot or in the background. However, scientific studies to understand these product placements have not been done in India.

One of the main reason could be lack of literature and data. An attempt is made to address this gap by reviewing research papers, websites and reports.

Literature Review

Product placement is defined as the intentional presence of a branded product or service into mass media content with the goal of influencing consumer behavior (Jay Newell, 2006). Product placement enables the audience to build up a more grounded association with the brands, though they are not explicit advertisements. (Kenton, 2018). Placements can influence consumption patterns and styles for a long time after the film's discharge (Yorks, 1989). Product Placement serves various advantages, it overcomes the problem of zapping because people are unlikely to leave the room or switch channel when a brand appears in movie as if they might for the typical commercials (Avery, 2000). Secondly, product placement enables brands to target specific demographics in light of the fact that what movies are well understood to the particular group. (Nebenzahl, 1993). Product placements also have longer life span, perhaps are perennial. (Brennan, 1999). Product placements also have longer life span, perhaps are perennial. (Brennan, 1999). Brands are utilizing Product Placement as a communication technique and the same is being used more than ever by advertisers (Karrh James A, 2003).

Web series is episodic entertainment delivered via online distribution platforms. Web series as “a collection of scripted, semi-scripted, or serialized videos that are created specifically for, and distributed via the Internet, and feature a consistent theme or tone.”

Growth of Product Placement is led by a few factors like a) commercial skipping, almost 66 percent of the viewers skip or mute commercials and almost 42.7% of the users prefer to use ad blockers (Dean, 2021) b) 78 percent of the viewers feel TV advertising is reaching a new low.

Source: (Bloomberg, 2006)

The Evolution of Product Placement

The inception of product placement can be followed back to the beginning of Motion Pictures during 1890s where Lever brothers placed their soaps in probably the most of the movies made at

that time; movie stars were often paid in order to promote US based tobacco companies. (Hudson, 2010). However, the concept of product placement as an advertising practice was put into general society cognizance when the movie “E.T. the Extra Terrestrial” was released (Jay Newell, 2006). In E.T. the Extra Terrestrial (Kennedy, 1982) a child-sized alien followed a trail of Hershey’s Reese’s Pieces to his new home- the earth. The sales of Reese’s Pieces increased by 60% after the film was released. (The New York Times, 2002).

Evolution of Product Placement in the Indian Context

Introduction Branded content in India has been growing at a rapid pace of 130% to 150% annually, though at a small base. With the growing popularity of web series among millennials, it seems that advertisers are trying to get in on the action with their own web series. In India, this is gaining traction as brands are increasingly looking to the digital medium to create brand web series content. The increasing fame of web series among millennials is motivating the advertisers to their own web series. The last half decade has perhaps brought a radical change to India’s online entertainment sector. India, not online saw an increasing shift in the popularity of YouTube channels such as AIB, EIC and Y-Films, but also saw several telecom giants such as Sony Entertainment and Star Entertainment launch their online subsidiaries, Sony LIV and Hotstar, respectively. This move made it clear that the future of entertainment in India was online. Following the surprising success of Hotstar and other platforms, Netflix followed suite, it announced its plans to expand into India. Following the landmark deal of Netflix, India saw the arrival of Amazon Prime Video into the country. There are several reasons for the immense popularity online entertainment in our country:

Diverse and Rich Content: Perhaps the most important factor in the rise of the popularity of these mediums in our country is the kind of content they source and create. Never in the history of country’s entertainment industry were the audience exposed to such a wide range of content options all at one place. Moreover these online platforms bought to Indian, much loved Hollywood sitcoms and movies, which were not so readily available to us, with the exception of dedicated Hollywood channels such as Star World. Adding to their benefit, it was both refreshing and

groundbreaking to be exposed to content, which not online was relatable to the Indian youth but also dealt with topics such as homosexuality and live-in relationships, which were largely left untouched before.

Availability and Accessibility: Unlike television or radio, online sources of entertainment are available at any point during the day. Any person can access these portals and catch up with their preferred sitcom or movie, at instance during the day. Considering the fact that every person has a different schedule they operate with, online sources provide the opportunity to the users to watch content anytime they desire. In addition to this, these portals can be accessed anywhere as long as an active internet is present allowing the viewers to view content even while on the go and not just a fixed spot unlike television.

Affordability: The cost of viewing online content is substantially low as compared to television. Viewers are required to pay a nominal subscription fee and the devices in which they view the content is either a mobile or laptop, which is a necessity unlike TV's, which is not a necessity.

With a significant number of broadcasters migrating to online mediums and many online entertainment companies setting shop in India, it is only a matter of time the online viewership surpass it's offline counterpart.

The product placement effectiveness depends on multiple factors like firm product factors like tie-in advertising, brand equity, market value; film factors like audience absorption, critical acclaim, number of other placements in the film etc; Execution factors like modality: number of audio visual placements, visual high plot connection, visual low plot connection etc (Wiles & Danielova, 2009). In this paper most popular web, series have been viewed and an attempt has been made to identify the type of product placement based on plot involvement. The type of plot involvement indicates the trend of product placements. Table 1.1 indicates the different types of product placements.

Table 1.1

| Type | Meaning |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Enablers | Items within a story that allow the story to proceed and are necessary for story coherence. |
| High Plot | Brand placement that plays a major role in the story line. |
| Low plot | Background placements. |
| Background | Product, which is shown with one of the main characters, but the character, is not using it. |

Source: (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007) (Russell, 1998)

In the table 1.2 a classification of the different types of product placements across multiple popular Indian web series have been given. All these web series were watched in order to make the classification.

Table 1.2

| Web series | Brand Associated | Type | Imdb Ratings | Youtube viewcount | Channel Name | Subscribers |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Truth or Dare with Dad (Comedy) | Furlenco | High Plot | 9.1/10 | 12 Million | TVF | 5.2 Million |
| Tvf Bachelors | Mi Note4 | High Plot | 9.2/10 | 7 Million | Dice Media | 5.2 Million |
| What the folks | Epigamia, Zoom car | High Enabler | 8.4/10 | 5 Million | Dice Media | 1.7 Million |
| Little things | Little App | High Plot | 8.3/10 | 6 Million | TVF | 1.7 Million |

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|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------|--------|----|-----|-------------|
| Tvf Pitchers | Kingfisher Ultra | High Plot | 9.2/10 | NA | TVF | 5.2 Million |
| Tvf Tripling | Tata Tiago | Enabler | 8.6/10 | NA | TVF | 5.2 Million |
| Permanent Roommates S1 | Common floor | Enabler | 8.6/10 | NA | TVF | 5.2 Million |
| Permanent Roommates S2 | Ola | Enabler | 7.5/10 | NA | TVF | 5.2 Million |

Sources: (Vidooly, 2018) (Guiding Tech, 2018)

Findings and conclusion

From the extensive literature review, it is evident that many of the new brands in India are opting to target the millennials through the most popular web series. The most commonly used product placements are enablers and high plot product placements, due to the seamless way they are weaved into the plot the consumer does not get annoyed nor can he ignore the product. The bottom line for all this product placement fever is for brands to compensate the loss of viewers who skip TV commercials with their remote controls (Kiran Sharma, 2015). In all the above web-series products were shown as problem solvers and product usage was interweaved in the story. According to the founders of many companies, this method of advertisement is one of the most cost effective methods. Product placement has evolved and has taken a form of Advertainment or Branded entertainment.

Managerial Implications

With more than 400 million Millennial population in India (Forbes , 2018), Brand integration proves to be great way for brands to get some real recall, given the fact that millennials are watching more web-series than TV (More, 2016). This paper gives an indication of how product placement has evolved; it provides the foundation for organizations to make a shift from traditional advertising to advertainment. Even though there is, lack of data to justify the findings, diligent effort has been made to review all the existing possible sources that indicate the success of product

placements. This paper provides a consolidated view in terms of types of product placement that can prove to be efficient with the millennials.

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