A STUDY OF EFFECTIVENESS OF PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN INDIAN WEB SERIES AMONG YOUNG CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT
This Research paper deals with the study of effectiveness of product placement in Web series among young Indian consumers. With increasing competition and media clutter, grabbing consumers’ attention is becoming increasingly challenging for advertisers. With the advent of digital technology, the newest way advertisers have found to reach the audiences is through online content. Online content has a wide variety. From blogs to social media to Vlogs there is some form of content platform rising every day. One such phenomenon is the growing popularity of Web series; which are like regular TV shows except you can watch them online. Product Placement in Web series refers to commercial inclusion of a brand within an episode either by way of visual presence, verbal mention or integration into the story line with an aim to influence recall and thereby consumers’ perception towards the brand. Although the digital growth in India is one of the highest in the world, and advertising in this medium is a growing trend; it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of these placements as well as identify specific placement characteristics that can facilitate brand recall. The study will help students and academicians to understand the scope and value of Product placement and also contribute to marketers in getting connected to the consumers in a stronger manner.

This study was developed in two stages, including majorly secondary and some primary data to understand the secondary data in Indian perspective. Primary data was obtained through an on-line questionnaire survey using convenience sampling to select young consumers in the age group of 18-30 in Pune. Through simple statistical analysis it was possible to conclude that product placement in Web series influences recall.

Key Words: Brands, Product Placement, Digital, Web series, Brand Awareness, Brand recall

Introduction
Advertising made in the traditional media has lost its once golden effectiveness. Oversaturation of the traditional media, decreasing attention span and increasing consumer cynicism, has necessitated that marketers use different and evolving forms of advertising products, services or brands and break the clutter.

Although brand placements are usually paid for, audience do not normally associate placements as the paid messages. Thus, placements are unique combination of promotional communication tools viz Advertising and Publicity wherein a brand name, product, package, signage, or other trademark merchandise is inserted into and used contextually in a motion picture, television, or other media vehicle for commercial purposes.
Product placement is a very common advertising strategy in today’s world. Holly having Breakfast at Tiffany’s, or James Bond arriving in an Aston Martin DBS V12 in Casino Royale are typical examples of product placements in films. Any popular Hollywood or Bollywood movie that you pick today will have at least one product integration in it.

As per WARC, the Global Product Placement Spending Forecast reported that the fastest growth was seen in China and the Indian market recording expansions of more than 20%.

The expansion of product placement into various Internet platforms, new social media and interactive games is gaining more attention. With the growth of internet, have become very popular in the past few years. According to Wikipedia, a is a series of scripted or non-scripted videos, generally in episodic form, released on the Internet and is part of the web television medium. Each episode of a is commonly known as a “Webisode”.

The advent of online channels such as Netflix and Hotstar and platforms such as Youtube, Vimeo and Facebook play a major role in making this possible. Netflix's first self-commissioned original content series House of Cards was released in 2013, and the company has dramatically grown its original content since that time. House of Cards are the first Netflix Originals i.e. a launched exclusively on Netflix. In India TVF, AIB and Y Films are some of the popular producers of .

Of late, Product placement is increasingly gaining momentum in in India with an aim to influence recall and thereby consumers’ perception towards the brand. Accordingly, to Vikas Katoch, founder and CEO, Adomantra Digital the share of in digital is less than 5% of the total digital ad spends in India. But it is expected that 10-15% of digital advertising spend will be diverted to in next two years through integration of brand stories with content, product placement, creating characters for brands, integrated logo unit, pre-roll ads, etc.

For example, Tata Tiago is an integral part of the popular TVF Tripling. According to vidooly.com, TVF Tripling had crossed 19 million views and Y Film’s Bang Baaja Baarat 25 million views and and TVF’s Permanent Roommates 31 million views by the end of 2018. Similarly VelvetCase – an online jewellery store is always a part of the plot in the web Dice Media – Little Things which depicts a cute urban love story.

As product placements appear in newer media like computer, video, digital, online, and simulation games, this research paper is an attempt to find out the brand recall of Product placements in .

Throughout this paper, some terms are used as synonymous: product placement and brand placement, and all of those can be defined as the use of specific products or brands in the movie script, also in television programs, and other media (Solomon, 2008). The various theoretical concepts and studies outlines them clearly.

**Literature review**

Boone and Kurtz (1998) said that to have a more effective communication with their target market, the marketing professionals mix different promotional elements during the development of a promotional strategy. The same authors also explain that 'promotion' is the communication link between those who want to buy and the ones
who want to sell, and several ways are used to send messages about their products or service, or even about their idea communicated in a direct way, or an indirect way. Product placement, also known as brand placement, can be defined as an indirect way of advertising. Product placement is defined by Balasubramanian (1994) as a paid product message aimed at persuading audiences through the planned inclusion of a branded product into a movie or television program. (Gupta and Lorf, 1998). They describe product placement as the integration of brands into films in return for money or some form of promotion. The media programming Karrh (1998) defines it as a paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means within mass media programming. (Panda, 2004) defines brand placement as “commercial insertions within a particular media program, intended to heighten the visibility of a brand, type of product or service”.

(Hudson, 2006) considers whether or not branded entertainment is a new technique, or just another form of product placement. In the last few decades product placement has matured and become more sophisticated. Branded products are no longer just ‘placed’; there is a convergence of advertising and entertainment making a stronger emotional connection with the consumer. A conceptual framework for understanding the various forms of product placement is presented, and this highlights the key influences on the effectiveness of this fast-growing marketing phenomenon. The important management issues related to product placement are considered; issues related to measurement, control, and ethics. The article then concludes with recommendations for further research.

(Lehu, 2009) says that with technology-empowered consumers increasingly able to skip television ads, brand owners are turning more and more attention towards product placement as an alternative means of connecting with their target audiences. He outlines the origins of and reasons for product placement and brand integration. (Horrigan, 2009) described Branded Entertainment, as a fusion of advertising and entertainment into one marketing communications product that is integrated into an organisation's overall brand strategy intended to be distributed as entertainment content with a highly branded quality. (Ginosar and Levi-Faur, 2010) explains product placement as a form of promotion wherein there is a purposeful incorporation of commercial content into non-commercial settings, that is, a product plug generated via the fusion of advertising and entertainment.

Even though product placement was named and identified formally only as recently as the 1980s, product placement is not new (Balasubramanian, 1994). (Newell, Salmon, and Chang, 2006) Originally, product placement served as a way for movie studios and television networks to reduce the cost of production through borrowed props and first appeared in Lumiere films in Europe in 1896. (The Economist, 2005) Beginning in the 1930s, Proctor & Gamble broadcasted on the radio its "soap operas" featuring its soap powders. Also, television and film were used by the tobacco companies to lend glamour and the "right attitude" to smoking.
However, due to poorly organized efforts and negative publicity about the surrender of media content to commercialization, product placements were relatively dormant after the Depression.

According to Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan,(2006) Product placements were recatalyzed in the 1960-70s with a growth spurt during the 1980s and 1990s.

It’s evident that the meaning and nature of product placement has been evolving over the years.

According to Kureshi (2010) product placement research in traditional media like television and film is decreasing as product placements appear in newer media like computer, video, digital, online, and simulation games. Earlier examples of product placement were more focused on the mediums of film and television earlier and now on world web platforms. García-Pujadas (2010) states that are a tool of brands to connect and relate with different publics.

A recent interesting view defines product placement as the merge of entertainment and advertising by plugging a product within engaging media content. (Williams et al., 2011)

Arjona (2012) considers branded as an innovative advertisement resource in newer media especially targeted to young population segments resulting in a higher reach of brand stories. Arjona (2012) also highlights the viral capacity of these audio-visual formats, online, with a short duration and ability to integrate content with branding.

(Costa-Sánchez, 2014) Brand stories told through fiction, social networks and online platforms are part of the increasing trend of advertisement creative strategies.

**India – Digital growth and advent of Web series**

In India, the digital revolution in India is largely driven by smart phone penetration, the roll out of 4G, reducing data costs and thereby increasing time spent on mobile phones. Digital advertising is thus expected grow at a faster clip as against the traditional media over the next three years.

According to a report on digital advertising by Dentsu Aegis Network, the Indian digital advertising industry, currently pegged at around Rs 8,202 crore, is slated to see a growth at 32% CAGR to reach Rs 18,986 crore by 2020. The report also forecasts that digital media spends, currently contributing 15% of the total advertising pie, will reach 24% of the entire market by 2020 according to an EY report, ‘Digital Opportunity: India Media and Entertainment.’ Also, the digital video market is expected to be worth Rs 160 crore by 2022, according to Media Partners Asia.

This shows the possible growth potential of brand placement on various digital platform including eb series. Currently, the share of digital is less than 5% of the total digital ad spends in India.

OTT players are catering to the millennial needs by integrating brands through product placements and/or content integrations. SonyLIV rolled out a new home improvement show, House Proud, in association with Asian Paints and home accessories e-commerce business CuroCarte. Also SonyLIV partnered with digital entertainment company Pocket Aces, which earns its revenue by syndicating content to various OTT players like Uber rival Ola Cabs and airlines like Etihad and Jet, as well as selling merchandise.
based on the series. Pocket Aces partnered with Dice Media and Pepsi Co brand Kurkure to create a called 2by3.

Measurement of effectiveness of Product placement

The measurement of effectiveness of Product placement has been the subject of much discussion. Academics suggest that message impact should be assessed at recall, persuasion, and behavioural levels (Balasubramanian 1994). Amongst marketers, the two important and used method of brand unaided recall and brand recognition are the two most popular means of assessing placements (Karrh et al. 2003).

According to Morton & Friedman (2002). Product placement can contribute to build awareness, generate recall and shape attitudes. Relationships between Product placement and brand recall helps to understand twinning factors.

(Edwards, 2006) documents the prevalence of product placement in prime-time television, while also providing crucial criteria to consider in tackling the measurement issue of this emerging industry. Content analysis was used to capture placement techniques in various types of programming, including storied programming (e.g., dramas and situation comedies) and non-storied programming (e.g., news programs, game shows, and sporting events), as well as to examine differences between plugs and placements. Consumer product placements were differentiated from other types of brand placements, such as services, sports, and entertainment. Finally, the growth placements were contrasted with data from five years earlier. The findings reveal many similarities with earlier research, but also suggest that much work it still needed to maximise the effectiveness of product placements among marketers. Implications for consumer researchers and industry professionals are provided.

Many studies have provided information about the effects of product placement on the consumers’ memory. Product placement can be the source of long-term brand recalls in certain instances: when product placements prompt more conscious processing during their exposure, long-term memory is stimulated, originating lasting brand recalls (Balasubramanian, 2006).

(Cristel Antonia Russell; Investigating the Effectiveness of Product Placements in Television Shows: The Role of Modality and Plot Connection Congruence on Brand Memory and Attitude.). This article develops and tests a conceptual framework for the practice of product placement. The empirical testing introduces a controlled experimental approach called the theater methodology. Results show that the modality of presentation (visual and auditory) of the placements and the degree of connection between a brand and the plot of the show interact to influence memory and attitude change. Memory improves when modality and plot connection are incongruent but persuasion is enhanced by congruency. While congruous placements appear natural, incongruent placements adversely affect brand attitudes because they seem out of place and are discounted.”

(The Effectiveness of Product Placement: A Field Quasi-experiment by Artur Cholinski, International Journal of Marketing Studies) Marketers are increasingly interested in the effectiveness of product placement and they want to know the rules which enable positive impact on consumers. This study shows that not only laboratory
experiments but also field experimental designs find that product placement can be an effective marketing communication tool in the scope of improving brand awareness, influencing brand attitudes and brand choice. But it is very difficult to find simple rules which will cause product placement to be effective. Such rules can only be applied in the case of improving brand awareness. If a brand is placed in a film prominently, with both audio and visual components, and is highly connected to the plot (additionally a brand interacts with a movie hero) such product placement will probably significantly increase awareness of the placed brand among viewers, irrespective of other placement attributes. But making prominent, audio-visual, highly connected to the plot product placement does not guarantee positive impact on attitudes and brand choice. There are other factors (product placement creativity, image context, brand and product category characteristics etc.) which cause two product placements that are similar in execution (e.g. prominent, audio-visual, highly connected to the plot) to result in totally different effectiveness of influence on attitudes and brand choice. Thus, all generalizations of product placement influence on attitudes and brand choice which include only such factors as modality, prominence and plot connection are a big simplification which does not reflect the whole diversity of factors which affect product placement effectiveness. On the contrary, such generalizations can be justified in the case of product placement influence on brand awareness.

The above literature helps us in summarising that Product placement is a very old form of advertising which has evolved over the years and also that the effectiveness of a Product placement is very difficult to measure as it is a very psychological process involving factors such as awareness, knowledge, purchase intention, recall and recognition. But it’s safe to say that it entirely depends on the objective of the marketer and whether or not that objective is being fulfilled through the medium of product placement in that particular film, TV show or in the present situation.

A report by Polar for India stated that consumer awareness of a brand increased to 69% after engaging with branded content and purchase intent increased to 51%.

The review of literature also makes it clear that though Product placement in digital media and new social media is increasing, there still has not been much academic research about the correlation between the effects that Product placements in digital media have in creating consumers’ Brand Awareness.

This paper aims to analyze how brands are showed in and how efficient Product placements are, evaluating if the audience can recall, or not, the brands or products that appeared in the .

For purposes of context of this article, definitions for Brand awareness and Brand recall, brand attitude and are presented below:

- **Product placement**—also known as product brand placement, in-program sponsoring, branded entertainment, or product integration—is a marketing practice in advertising and promotion.
- **Brand Awareness** - refers to the extent to which customers are able to recall or recognise a brand. Marketers typically identify two distinct types of brand
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awareness; namely brand recall (also known as unaided recall or occasionally spontaneous recall) and brand recognition (also known as aided brand recall)

- Brand Recall – Brand recall refers to the ability of the consumers to correctly elicit a brand name from memory. Brand recognition refers to the ability of the consumers to correctly differentiate the brand when they come into contact with it. This does not necessarily require that the consumers identify the brand name. Instead, it means that consumers can recognise the brand when presented with it at the point-of-sale or after viewing its visual packaging. Marketers aim to achieve these using product placements in different mediums such as films, television shows and now.

- Webisode: A is a series of scripted or non-scripted videos, generally in episodic form, released on the Internet and is part of the web television medium. Each episode of a is commonly known as a “Webisode”.

Research Methodology

Statement of The Problem

The research study evaluates the effectiveness of product placements in Indian Web series on the basis of brand recall.

Research Questions

- Is there a brand recall amongst the audience of through product placement?

To find answer to this question, the researcher reviewed existing literature and articles and also conducted an online survey through a questionnaire. The respondents who watch Web series were asked about their favourite series and further asked to remember the names of certain brands used in specific scenes of the Web series. A screenshot of that scene with the blurred brand was shown to get the answer. This helped the researcher derive whether or not there is a brand recall among the audience of brand placed.

- Do brands successfully reach its target audience through product placement in?

In order to find the answer to this research question, the researcher asked the respondent if the brand that they recall is relevant to them or not. If the consumer is able to recall the brand but does not intent to buy or refer it to others makes the value of the brand recall zero. Hence this is the second question that the researcher seeks to answer through the survey.

Data Collection and Sampling

Top 10 Indian namely Bang Baaja Baarat, Permanent Roommates, Pitchers, Ladies Room, Girl in the city, Alisha, The Sweet Breakup, Sexy and I know it, Tripling, Little Things, Yeh Meri Family were selected basis the popularity and number of product placements in the Web series. A pre tested questionnaire and a pilot survey were used for collecting the data with help of fine-tuned questionnaire.

The sampling method used was a non-probability sampling method – i.e. consecutive sampling. Consecutive sampling is very similar to convenience sampling except that it seeks to include ALL accessible subjects as part of the sample. This non-probability
sampling technique was the most suitable as it included all subjects that are available that makes the sample a better representation of the entire population. In this case, all young consumers that the researcher could reach through an online questionnaire who belong to the target group answered the questionnaire representing the entire target group.

This study was targeted at young Indian consumers from two age groups viz Young Adults – Age 18 to 24 and Young professionals – Age 25 to 30. This is because the series are viewed mostly by this target audience. Also, this is the audience that has recently started to or is going to start having a lot of purchasing power. Thus, this age group is most apt for this study.

The respondents were from Pune, representing urban youth population of the country, without any restriction to gender. This is because most are built around urban plots and are aimed at urban population. Since the structured questionnaire was built around it is important for the respondents to have watched at least one or more Indian Web series.

Scope of the research
The current study highlights only one aspect to evaluate effectiveness of the Product placements on i.e. brand recall. The un-aided brand recall is taken into consideration as a measure of effectiveness of product placements. The study is restricted to a small sample of 115 respondents from urban population of Pune.

Data Analysis and Interpretation
The data was evaluated and processed through excel sheet analysed using simple percentages of respondents answering the various options and by making tables and charts for presentation. Based on the data findings and analysis, conclusions were drawn.

- The target audience chosen was between the age of 18-30 of which 93% of the respondents were between the age of 18-24 years of age out of which over 59% of the respondents were female.
- Time spent watching visual entertainment content everyday

![Chart showing time spent watching visual entertainment content]

Analysis: 45.6% of the respondents spend over an hour per day in consuming visually entertaining content.

Inference: The impact of product placement is more likely to be noticed effectively since consumers seek visual entertainment almost an hour per day.
Preferred Internet platforms to consume entertainment content:

Youtube is the most preferred internet platform to consume such content. This can be attributed to the fact that it is a completely unpaid streaming service unlike Netflix and Amazon Prime. Netflix is the most preferred after YouTube, followed by Amazon Prime.

People who have watched Web series:

Observation: 82.5% of the respondents watch.
Inference: This supports the need to study the effectiveness of the product placement with increasing viewership. Also indicates good opportunities for advertisers to explore to break the clutter and create impact. Also the questionnaire was only administered to respondents who view.

Reasons for watching among the respondents:

The most important reason for watching is its content. This goes to show the importance the audience gives to the story and the concept.
Regularity of watching:

- **Analysis**: 45.7% of the respondents watch every day or almost every day.
- **Inference**: This shows that the audience is high and only increasing with time. Thereby giving opportunity to advertisers to capitalise on this opportunity.

Time spent watching Web series:

- **Observation**: Almost 50% of the respondents spend about 30-60 minutes per day or more in watching Web series. Over 80% of spent between 30-90 minutes each day.
- **Inference**: The impact of product placement in Web series is more likely to be noticed effectively. Since consumers spend considerable time per day watching; the time devoted being concentrated thus increasing the chance of the product placement to be noticed.

Top three among respondents: (Top 3 choices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bang Baaja Baarat</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Roommates</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitchers</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies Room</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl in the city</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliens</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sweet Breakup</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy and I know it</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripling</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Things</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeh Meri Family</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple movies from Netflix</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not aware of many</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Games, breath</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to get away with murder</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observation: Over 82% respondents mentioned Little Things followed by Permanent Roommates and Pitchers as their favourite Web series.
Inference: This justifies the selection of the same for the study, as they are popular ones.

Observation: Relatability of content and the storyline is the most important factor for audience in a watching a Web series.
Inference: This leads to a higher recall among audience. Marketers need to emphasize on these factors in order to be more effective. Higher recall can be achieved if the product placement is intrinsic to the storyline that it simply merges with the film

- Recommendation of favourite Web series to others:

  93.6% of audience recommend their favourites to others which makes recommendations the best source of advertising. They increase the probability of virality for advertisers.

- Relevance of product placements to the respondents:
Observation: Only 21% respondents find it relevant, and around 35% find it irrelevant. Inference: Marketers need to work on making the product placements more relevant for the audience to influence brand attitude.

- Product placement as observed by respondents:

  ![Product Placement Chart]

  Inference: Marketers need to ensure that the placements are subtle and fit into the storyline, otherwise audience find it irritating and irrelevant. Overtly usage of product placement may annoy the consumers and cause negative attitude towards the product.

- Brand recall for product placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of people who mentioned as their favourite</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of people who named brands correctly</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation: Over 61% respondents could recognise brands in the top three that they mentioned as favourites.

Inference: Product placement in shows high recall, providing the advertisers an innovative platform for more scope for garnering attention and interest amongst the audience.

- Intention to buy / refer to others:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of people who mentioned as their favourite</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of people who named brands correctly</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of people who recognised it correctly and will refer/buy the products</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of people who recognised it correctly and may refer/buy the products</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation: Only 20% respondents were willing to consider purchase of the brand placed and/ or refer it to others.

Inference: 47% respondents may buy / recommend and around 33% will not buy/ recommend which means that advertisers need to create positive brand attitude and supports other research which mentions that brand recognition may not necessarily lead to brand attitude and intention to buy.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research
This study is very preliminary to support the secondary data and various reports in media. As it is for every study, this study had the following limitations:
- The size of the sample was relatively small – 115 - a bigger sample would probably enhance the reliability of the research
- The effectiveness of any product placement can be measured by various parameters. For this study, only brand recall is being used to measure the effectiveness. There is a need to study role of demographic factors, brand familiarity, celebrity, and other stimulus factors.
- Apart from this, the need to study use of language and role of ethics is an area to be explored.

Conclusion:
Expansion to the online universe, social networks and interactive platforms in India has seen a progressive increase in the number of advertisers that use branded in their communicative strategy.
Over 82% of the respondents use for which goes to show the drastic change in the preference of platform used over the years. This change can be attributed to the fact that internet has become cheaper and more available. This has also led to an increase in online streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar etc.
Innovation and creativity will play a pivotal role in creating recall and transmission of the brand values.
Web series has an ability to be an innovative, subtle, minimalist and an effective medium to create and maintain close bonds with their audiences especially that tends to reject the presence of traditional and conventional advertisement.

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