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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	RECOGNISING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY: AN ILLUSTRATION FROM ORGANISED RETAIL SECTOR <i>DR. R. R. CHAVAN & ANIL DONGRE</i>	1
2.	PRODUCER GAS AS A VIABLE ENERGY SOURCE <i>RAHUL BASU</i>	4
3.	ENSET VALUE CHAIN ANALYSIS: THE CASE OF DIRE ENCHINI WOREDA, OROMIA REGIONAL STATE, ETHIOPIA <i>ABEBE UMA & DR. J. PAUL MANSINGH</i>	7
4.	ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW OF NEURAL NETWORK <i>KULBIR KAUR & GAGANDEEP KAUR</i>	15
5.	EXPERIENTIAL BRANDING IN WONDERLA (VEEGALAND) AMUSEMENT PARK, KOCHI: THE ENHANCING ROLE OF GROUP ORIENTATION OF VISITORS <i>K.J. JAIS & BELAGAVI BAKKAPPA</i>	22
6.	CAREER GOAL AND CAREER PREPARATION AMONG THE UNDER GRADUATE STUDENTS: A STUDY ON SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AFFILIATED TO BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY, COIMBATORE, TAMIL NADU <i>DR. VIJAYALAKSHMI</i>	30
7.	CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK <i>SHAILAJA D.KELSHIKAR & DR. MANOJ SHAH</i>	36
8.	FACTORS INFLUENCING CORE QUALITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (THE CASE OF SOME SELECTED COLLEGES OF ETHIOPIAN MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE) <i>DR. BREHANU BORJI AYALEW & ABEL DULA WEDAJO</i>	40
9.	EXPLORING BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF URBAN CONSUMERS TOWARDS SHAMPOOS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES FROM INDIA <i>S M FATAHUDDIN, MOHAMMED NAVED KHAN & AYESHA ANUM</i>	58
10.	PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN MOVIES AND TV SERIES: CONCEPT, EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES <i>PRAMA VISHNOI & NAMITA PADHY</i>	62
11.	A REVIEW PAPER ON MULTICULTURALISM IN WORKPLACE <i>DR. POOJA DASGUPTA & KHUSHBU DUBEY</i>	66
12.	A STUDY ON IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WITH S.R.F TO BANGALORE CITY <i>JONITA PREETHI SEQUEIRA</i>	69
13.	EXPORT GROWTH AND PROSPECT OF FLORICULTURE IN INDIA: GLOBAL SCENARIO <i>R.SENTHILKUMAR</i>	74
14.	RECOGNITION: AN EMPLOYEE RETENTION TOOL <i>RASHMI BADJATYA</i>	78
15.	IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNET OF THINGS IN RURAL SENSITIVE AREA OF CHHATTISGARH <i>DR. ASHIM RANJAN SARKAR</i>	81
16.	WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN MADURAI CITY <i>DR. S.C.B. SAMUEL ANBU SELVAN & V.SUGANYA</i>	85
17.	INDIAN CIVIL AVIATION INDUSTRY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES <i>JAYA G. PRABHU PARRIKAR</i>	88
18.	ROLE OF PUNE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SLUMS <i>SHEETAL RANDHIR</i>	90
19.	SALES PROMOTION STRATEGY: A STIMULATING FACTOR FOR THE CONSUMERS TOWARDS THE ORGANIZED RETAIL SECTOR IN BILASPUR <i>PRATIBHA RAI & DR. (MRS.) B.B. PANDEY</i>	94
20.	EFFECT OF STEREOTYPE ON EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA <i>JOHN WEKESA WANJALA, DR. SUSAN WERE & DR. WILLY MUTURI</i>	99
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK & DISCLAIMER	104

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PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN MOVIES AND TV SERIES: CONCEPT, EXAMPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

If the mention of your dream phone by your favorite sitcom character ever caught you by alarm then, you have been hit by the product placement bug. Product placement is an embedded marketing technique in which marketers constantly use to excite customer attention in the most subtle and surprising manner. This syndrome is most common to be found at places where conventional advertising doesn't have a major role to play. From the use of Coca-Cola in American Idol to the overuse of exotic locations by bollywood films, all collectively constitute to what we attempt to define as product placements. And as with any marketing some of them are destined to fail. By the end of this paper, we attempt to derive some of the best practices to be looked at while indulging in product placements.

KEYWORDS

Product placement, Brand placement, Product placement advertising, Product placement in movies, TV product placement.

INTRODUCTION

"... A martini shaken not stirred -- with Smirnoff vodka. "

Everyone remembers seeing the classic scene in almost all bond movies where bond orders his favorite drink, or when he gets his new Aston martin from Q. It is common knowledge that Bond wears an omega! And this is the world of product placements.

Product placement is often described as embedded marketing. Using this marketing tool, brands are placed context/scenario in which advertising isn't generally expected. The product placement is often not disclosed at the time that the good or service is featured. Product placements further enhance television/other media's ability to deliver integrated branding campaigns for advertisers.

In this new age, people have become fed up with the constant bombardment of advertising, and are finding ways to avoid it. Ways which are further being aided by technology like TiVo and other DVR devices which allow a user to skip over commercials. Thus as the public finds new ways to avoid advertisements advertising firms must figure out ways to enable their customers (brands) and their messages to reach the public. This is where product placements come into picture. The knight in Armani clad armor.

Product placement is perfect for advertisers because it's almost impossible to avoid it. James Bond smoking Lark Cigarettes in License to Kill, Michael J. Fox drinking Pepsi in the Back to the Future series, or Reese's Pieces being used to lure an alien in the movie E.T. are a few examples.

Not only are products being placed in the background of movies and shows etc., product placements these days are more and more frequently being worked into the plots of movies. For example, the movie Cast Away featured FedEx throughout the entire movie.

Once the importance of product placements is highlighted we can broadly classify the reasons for their usage as:

- Stronger emotional connection
- better dovetailing with relevant content
- targeting a specific group

Companies may benefit from placements because primarily it helps them to correct or extend an existing image of a product. A product is shown in many ways and maybe in connection with unusual usage scenarios in order to extend its area of use.

There might be certain falls of product placements. One of the major disadvantages of product placements is that sometimes spectators do not recognize a brand because it is portrayed either for a small duration or at an unfit moment. In case of film or TV show promotion, the brand might suffer if the film/show is bad or a failure. Another issue that may arise is the one pertaining to portrayal which may happen when the product is presented in a very unrealistic way and spectators feel teased or annoyed by an exaggerated or repeated representation of a branded product.

METHODOLOGY

The paper makes extensive use of secondary research and the recent examples of the brands which have used product placement in the movies, TV. Series, etc.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this paper is to understand the concept of product placement as a tool of advertising by looking into the examples of the movies, TV series where it has been used. Also, the paper in the end derives the best product placement practices which a brand can use.

DISCUSSION

A scenario of product placements may arise when:

- **PRODUCTS ARE USED AS PROPS:** These products are an integral part of the sequence and are not intended to be advertised. They are used to convey certain attributes of a sequence. For example, RAID, a famous rat-kill is commonly used as a substitute for denoting poison. Such placements are involved primarily to add a more realistic appeal to the sequence.
- **PRODUCTS ARE DELIBERATELY ADVERTISED IN PRODUCTIONS IN EXCHANGE FOR FEES:** This is the most common form of product placement wherein the manufacturer/owner attempts to advertise his product by placing it in a production sequence wherein the meaning derived from the product's placement matches with some of the product attribute that are required to be conveyed.
- **UNINTENDED PUBLICITY:** This comprises the cheapest and the most cost effective form of product placement wherein a product accidentally features in a production sequence. Though it seems to be lucrative enough for the brand owners but such form of placements usually go un-noticed by the audience and are thus not very effective. Besides, if placed in a negative/derogatory sequence, these might have a negative impact on the brand image.

Some commonly placed product categories are:

- Automobiles
 - X-files used Ford
 - GM in Transformers
 - Nissan in Heroes
- Consumer electronics and computers
 - Casino Royale featured various Sony products
- Food and beverages
 - Godzilla featured Pepsi, Hershey's, Taco Bell
 - American Idol portrays Coca-Cola
 - Coke Studio by MTV
 - Need For Speed: Most Wanted has various ads for Burger King
- Travel
 - Yeh Jawaani hai Deewani featured Make My Trip
- Tobacco
 - Slumdog Millionaire featured Marlboro

PRODUCT PLACEMENT TYPES

Product placement can be divided on basis of either on the category of program/media utilized or on the basis of the way the product is placed inside the media/program.

On the basis of the way product is placed inside the program/media placement can take several forms such as:

- Visual imagery in which the product appears within the entertainment program
- Actual product use by an actor in the program
- Dialogue spoken by an actor that contains product information -

On the basis of the media utilized product placement could be categorized as:

- **MUSIC** – The product is either a part of the lyrics of the song or is displayed used in the music video. In 2010, video for Lady Gaga's "Telephone" featured nine brands in nine minutes. In 2011, PlentyofFish and Sony were advertised in Britney Spear's music video for "Hold It against me".
- **COMIC BOOKS** – To allow for its free distribution, South African comic book "Supa Srtikas" accepts product placements. It occurs on player's shirts, billboards, through branding of scenarios or locations etc. The team depicted in the comic is often seen eating at the Spur Steak Ranches in its South African edition. Chevron is the comic's global headline sponsor. Besides Chevron, VISA, Henkel and GT bank are the other headline sponsors of the comics.
- **MOVIES** – A feature film reaches out to millions of viewers and hence attracts marketers. Among some recent products placements in Bollywood, in the movie Mary Kom, more than a dozen products were placed including the likes of TATA Salt, Mother Dairy, Sugar free, Iodex etc.
- **TV SERIALS** - The emergence of reality television programs has given a huge boost to the product placement market within TV shows.
- **SPORTS** - Product placement has long been prevalent in sports as well, from professional sports to college sports, and even on the local level with high school sports. Sports being prevalent on television lead to an increase in product exposure. Product placement in sports began to rise in the 1970s, when NASCAR began to allow sponsors to cover the cars they were sponsoring with their logos. This has subsequently followed with the uniforms the drivers themselves wear having sponsor logos. Something so heavily copied by other sports like formula one and football etc.

There are three major product placement strategies

- **IMPLICIT PRODUCT PLACEMENT** - An implicit Product placement is not expressed formally. The brand name or the name of the firm appears without a clear demonstration of product benefits. It plays a passive, contextual role. For e.g., in the Bollywood movie Mary Kom, actress Priyanka Chopra is seen using TATA salt while cooking, without explicitly mentioning the name of the brand.
- **INTEGRATED EXPLICIT PRODUCT PLACEMENT**- In this type of Product placement, the attributes and benefits of the product are clearly demonstrated: it plays an active role. For e.g., in the Bollywood movie Chalte Chalte, actor Shah Rukh Khan is seen asking his employee to fill 'Castrol' in his truck.
- **NON-INTEGRATED EXPLICIT PRODUCT PLACEMENT**- In a non-integrated product placement the product or the brand is not integrated in the program or movie. The company/brand name may appear in the beginning of the program (this program is brought to you by) or the brand or company name appears on the screen. For e.g., Mahabharata TV series on Indian television had Fortune Oil as its title sponsor.

LEGAL ISSUES

Product placements are not without their set of legal issues. Public emotions ran high in the United Kingdom during the run-up leading to the legalization of the practice. Since May 2011, product placement has been authorized nearly everywhere in the EU.

A common moral and legal issue encountered with this regard is how do people get to know whether a programme contains product placement? UK seems to have found a unique solution for this. If a UK programme contains product placement, the TV channel has to show a special logo. This will let viewers know that the TV channel or the programme-maker has been paid to include products in that programme.

The logo has to be shown at the beginning of the programme, and repeated after any advertising break during the programme. It also has to be shown again at the end of the programme.

USE OF NEWER FORMS OF PRODUCT PLACEMENTS

- **ATM'S** – in ATM machines outside the Indian subcontinent, the user is often exposed to an infomercial which is a kind of product placement during his transaction. This is mainly static image based product placement and has the primary motive to enlighten the customer about the existence of a product/service.
- **VIDEO GAMES** - Traditionally, advertisers have not paid video game makers for product placement. As an early controversial example of product placement in games, in 1990 a group of doctors found billboard signs with Marlboro and Budweiser logos in video arcade games. It was later found that this was a purely unintentional occurrence resulting because of the game maker's (Sega) commitment towards building a realistic in game environment. Nielsen ratings in 2003 showed a 7% decline in television viewing among 18 to 34 year-old males. This decline was directly attributed to the growing popularity of video games. A very unique thing about gamers is that they seem to respond positively to product placement. In one study, 70% of gamers surveyed considered product placement a positive feature that increased the realism of the game. Product placement in video games can be very diverse. Streetscapes in the game can contain billboards with advertisements for products. Products can also be woven into the story of a game.
- **REVERSE PRODUCT PLACEMENTS** - In traditional product placement a real brand is integrated into a fictional environment, in case of a reverse product placement a fictional brand is created in a fictional environment and then it is released into the real world. The restaurant chain Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. was brought to life through its association with the film Forrest Gump. Reverse product placement can also be used to generate buzz about a product before its launch. American Apparel launched a line of jeans in the virtual world Second Life several months before launching them in its real-world stores.

PRODUCT PLACEMENT EXAMPLES

MOVIES

A. WILSON IN CAST AWAY: A BRAND PORTRAYED AS A CHARACTER

When Chuck (Tom Hanks), the main character from the movie crashed on the island, he was there alone. But somehow he got company ... from the unlikeliest source. When he opened boxes from the plane, he found Wilson volleyball. That ball eventually became "Wilson", Chuck's only company on the island. This product placement is very interesting and special for one particular reason: product was not just visible and used, and Chuck didn't just speak about it – the product became a character. It "listened" and provided company to Chuck.

As a result of product placement Wilson Sporting Goods Company created a promotional ball, complete with the facial markings as seen in the film. This is the best form of product placement. Hanks' and Wilson's relationship was genuine and as a viewer perceives Wilson as a character, not some branded product. From a brand's point of view that's even better than highly visible placement or heavy usage. And in case of Wilson it was for free.

B. CALIFORNIA WINES IN SIDEWAYS

Sideways (2004) is an American comedy-drama, directed by Alexander Payne. It follows two forty-something year old men Miles (Paul Giamatti) and Jack (Thomas Haden Church), who take a week-long road trip to the wine country of Santa Barbara.

Wine is a central element of the movie screenplay, and tasting sessions often provide the opportunity for a central close-up on the bottles and brands. In the movie Miles often spoke fondly of Pinot noir, but he didn't like Merlot that much. Following the movie's release in October 2004, Merlot sales dropped 2 per cent while Pinot noir sales increased 16 per cent in the Western United States. In the following months sales of Pinot noir rose by 22 per cent on the whole US market. Pinot noir brand Blackstone achieved even bigger boost – its sales increased by almost 150 per cent. The wine-growing valley of Santa Ynez in California also received a boost in tourism and at the restaurant 'The Hitching Post' which also appeared in the movie, business increased by 30 per cent.

TELEVISION SERIES

A. APPLE IPAD IN MODERN FAMILY

The episode with iPad as a focal point of the story was aired just three days before the stores started selling Apple's new gadget. The plot was flawless: the Dunphy family tried to buy their dad an iPad for his birthday, which coincided with the device's launch day. Of course family members didn't pre-order it, so they tried desperately to fulfill their father's birthday wish.

Phil Dunphy is a bit of a geeky dad and calls himself an early adopter. The fact that iPad goes on sale on his birthday is an additional effect to his desire for it. He even said: "It's like God and Steve Jobs got together to say 'We love you, Phil!'"

The product was integrated in the plot; it was mentioned in different contexts, it was shown on the screen, it was used and it achieved the "I want to buy this product!" effect.

B. COCA-COLA IN AMERICAN IDOL

Coca-Cola was one of the first sponsors of American Idol in its first season. In the beginning the sponsorship deal cost around \$10 million, but in the Season 7 it rose to \$35 million. The most important part of the product placement deal are cups bearing logo of Coca-Cola which are featured prominently on the judges table. Contestants and host are shown gathering between songs in the "Coca-Cola Red Room," the show's equivalent of the traditional green room.

MUSIC

A. The famous original Nokia ringtone features in a number of television shows and movies including Kyaa Dil Ne Kahaa in Dil Ne Jise Apnaa Kahaa.

B. Sometimes soundtracks are advertised as well. In one scene [1:28:00] of the film Kuch Kuch Hota Hai the melody of Celine Dion's 'My heart will go on' is heard in the background.

Depending on the category of product/ services to be marketed, marketers carefully select various forms of media that best convey the inherent product/brand values.

CLOTHING

A. Sixers' or NBA shirts in Kal Ho Na Ho and New York Yankees' caps in Kuch Kuch Hota Hai represent sports or leisure clothes of young American teenagers or students. In the extraordinary case of Kuch Kuch Hota Hai a T-shirt of Polo Sport appears up to 43 times in a period of 12 minutes.

B. Kuch Kuch Hota Hai presents most clothing product placements. Anjali (Kajol), for example, excessively advertises the label DKNY. All her clothes, caps, jackets and bags portray this label's logo. In one scene at the beginning of the film [19:59], she plays an active, young and boyishly dressed girl. Later on, when becoming an adult from, she changes her attire from trousers to saris and more decent female clothes. Thus, wearing the brand DKNY might mean for a girl, to be accepted and strong like boys. Even children in the movie are used as models by wearing pyjamas and T-shirts, thus promoting popular cartoons, such as Hello Kitty, 101 Dalmatians or Mickey Mouse in a holiday camp.

FOOD AND BEVERAGES

A. In Kuch Kuch Hota Hai the main protagonists bump into each other in front of a Nescafé vending machine and immediately fall in love. Thus, Nescafé transmits the message of bringing people together or of meeting one's ideal partner when drinking coffee. Moreover, it suggests that asking somebody to coffee would create or maintain friendships or interpersonal relationships. In fact, inviting somebody is tied to paying a drink for someone and thus again is part of consumption behaviour.

B. A similar example of a beverage bringing people together can be found in the film Kal Ho Naa Ho, when the loving couple meets each other for the first time by bumping into each other. She spills all the coffee of her Starbucks cup over him. This is the first time they see each other and fall in love.

C. In Hum Tum, Rhea, the sad female protagonist grieves for her departed husband and always wears dark clothes. Suddenly Karan (Saif Ali Khan), who is full of life and energy visits Rhea in her shop and takes her for a walk in the park. At the beginning of the sequence, she seems annoyed, almost uninterested. However, she soon likes his funny jumping and encouraging singing. Exactly at the moment when in the background blurred Coca Cola sunshades appear, she begins smiling. The sunshades are then shown once again three seconds later in the background. After Karan has completed his part of the song, Rhea resumes and turns into a happy and joyful young woman playing with children and colourful balloons. Here the label Coca Cola appears in a song about enjoying life, forgetting sorrows and being optimistic because life is beautiful. In fact this is exactly what Coca Cola and its commercials usually suggest, forgetting problems and enjoying life.

AUTOMOBILES

A. In Kyaa Dil Ne Kahaa, Rahul (Tusshar Kapoor) most of the time wears Harley Davidson's jackets and boots and drives the same-named motorbike. He acts out the free and independent biker, flirting with women, especially with Esha (Esha Deol) but rejecting to marry her. Armstrong even claims that the main motivation for buying a Harley Davidson is to act out one's inner feelings and wishful lifestyles.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

A. Nokia uses an interesting way of bringing people together by extending its advertisements from on-set to creative placements. In Kal Ho Naa Ho Aman (Shahrukh Khan) helps Rohit (Saif Ali Khan) to behave correctly and attract a girl friend. The former, possessing a Nokia phone gives instructions to the latter being equipped with a Bluetooth headset of the same mobile phone brand. As this headset is not noticed by anyone, they communicate with each other all day long. Thus, Nokia accompanies Rohit through a large part of the film, helping him to stay in contact with his friend in order to find a girl friend. In fact, Nokia and Aman are successful, bringing together Rohit and Naina.

LOCATIONS

A. Exotic tourist locations such as London, Switzerland etc., have been overly promoted in Bollywood movies like Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge and Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham.

FAILED PRODUCT PLACEMENTS

- The first view of swift desire in a song of the movie Bunty aur Babli – Swift desire was first introduced to the Indian audience via a song in Bunty aur Babli wherein the car is shown as an active component of the song. Unfortunately for Suzuki this product placement went almost totally unnoticed and horribly bad. Very few people even realized that they had seen the car that had built a great amount of buzz before its launch. Even though the movie was a blockbuster this product placement was as big a failure as they get.

- The Island was a movie having around thirty five paid for product placements. The sheer number of brands was overwhelming, and some imaginary such as that of a Pizza Hut shirt with a Nike logo on it, were just plain ridiculous. The movie failed miserably at the box office and as a result, the advertised brands barely got a look in.

- In the movie Twister. The good guys all have old beat up clunkers. But the bad guys led all drive black Dodge mini-vans. The problem that arose with this bad boys ride concept was that the sales of Dodge minis actually dropped after this movie release.

CONCLUSION

Product placements are unlike other marketing tools. They represent a dual edged sword. When implemented correctly they could be highly beneficial for the brand and help it communicate messages that are generally not deliverable by other media. Some of the best practices derived out of this research are as follows:

- **FIND THE RIGHT MATCH** – The product/service advertised using this technique should be in sync with the content/theme of the media (film, TV etc.). For example a movie on racing is a good bet to advertise for a company like Mobil. This ensures that your product does not feel out of place of in the whole scenario. An out of place product placement is a recipe for disaster. To put it in a nutshell make sure placements appear natural onscreen.
- **THE TRAP OF NEGATIVE ADVERTISING** – Dodge tried to sell and popularize its minis using a 'being uncool is cool' factor. This however did not work for them. Very few products/services have the ability to sell using negative advertising as it is.
- **GENRE STRENGTH** – The aim of the product placements should be designed in a way so as to play to the strengths of the genre such as its ability to educate viewers and normalize brands. For example product placements could work better as part of a long-term strategy to shift perceptions or brand choices.
- **SUPPLEMENT** – Product placement on its own might not be a very penetrative tool. As evident by Suzuki swift example. In certain cases relying only on the medium (in this case film) for attaining the desired results might result in disappointment. Hence a better strategy would be plan as to how placements will be activated off-screen by other activities, and how they can be integrated into a brand's other promotions and messaging efforts.
- **DO NOT TRY TOO HARD** – Hard selling must always be avoided while undertaking a product placements. Repetitive usage of the product generally turns off the user.
- **AVOID OVER CLUTTER** – As applicable with other means of advertising over cluttering a show/program with product placements leads to a failure for almost all the associated brands. As evident by the example of the movie 'island', too many product placements make the medium too commercial and akin to an advertisement.
- **BE READY: THEY FAIL, YOU MIGHT FAIL** – Once a product is embedded into a medium, the shortcomings of the medium could rub off to the brand too. The failure of a movie/TV show or a negative perception about the same could be transferred to the brand being advertised.

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