



Covert Advertising in Indian Movies : a Theoretical Review

KEYWORDS

covert advertising, product placement, guerrilla marketing, viral marketing

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ABSTRACT Extensive brand proliferation forces the marketers to select a new marketing communication technique to advertise their product and services. Digital brand integration and some other latest technologies like Personal Video Recorders (PVR), Video-on-Demand (VOD) force the marketers to adopt the covert advertising technique. The covert advertising technique is, "A product or brand embedded in movies or television programs". This article highlights the important covert advertising techniques like product placement, sponsorship, plugging products, viral marketing and guerrilla marketing and also brings out the examples of Indian movies where the products are successfully placed. It emphasizes the benefits of covert advertising which stresses the fact that, "placing a brand name, products or services within a movie or program increase the corporate image, brand awareness and brand image".

INTRODUCTION

Today's competitive market has an extensive brand proliferation and marketers need to resolve a unique method in order to reach their target audience. Thus the search of both the media and marketers for innovative advertising techniques lead to covert advertising, which is seen as a hybrid form of advertising. Covert advertising is a product or brand embedded in entertainment and media. In other words, "Branding of various products by placing them within films or television programs where the audience may not realize that this is another form of advertising". Covert advertising is different from celebrity endorsement. The celebrities endorse products and brands with commercial reasons, which normally come with the breaks of television programs. Brand placements provide an opportunity where the involved audience gets exposure to the brands and products during the natural process of narration of the movie or television commercial.

In covert advertising, companies are paying fees or providing service to display their products or services used in the motion of the movie or television commercial. Covert advertising occurs with the inclusion of a brand's logo in a shot, or a favorable mention or appearance of a product in a shot. A few firms get this advertisement at no cost by supplying their product to the movie company (Nike does not pay to be in movies but often supplies shoes, jackets, bags etc.). Covert advertising is one major form of brand communication which allows the advertiser to communicate a silent message to the audience. It gives an opportunity to develop an ongoing relationship between a consumer and a brand. The concept of covert advertising is aimed to pay consumers' attention to the communication, but does not realize that it is an advertiser message that they otherwise might ignore, the advertiser here also tries to make the disguise appearance of material to consumers. (Russel, 1998; Stephen, Pola & Sonja, 2000; Roffed 2000).

Covert advertising techniques are the opposite of overt advertising techniques. Overt advertising is the typical blatant advertising found in magazines and newspapers, on television, on billboards, on leaflets, and in film trailers. Covert advertising is sneakier and it is cheaper. Businesses need covert advertising because it is the tactic that simply works. It is the basement of brand awareness and the consumer can easily recall the brand when they think about the movie. Nowadays, covert advertisements are having an important place in the media.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Choi (2007) stated that "In the field of advertisement, as the audience fragmentation and message clutter became more severe in traditional media outlets, the marketers began looking for alternative ways to advertise products or services. Among the new marketing communication tools, Product Placement has evolved, being utilized more frequently these days". Karrh (1998) stated that "the memory is enhanced for a brand that is placed inside the movie relative to the memory of the same brand when advertised without placing it in the movie". According to Balasubramanian (1994), "when the product is prominently placed within the movie, the brand recognition and awareness are high as compared to the subtle placement because prominent placement focuses on longer screen placements and high visibility". Yang and Ewolden (2007) stated that "the association of storyline in the movie with the product plays a vital role in the recognition of the brand by the viewers. When the product is highly associated with the storyline of the movie-like using the product to resolve a difficulty in the movie, the recognition of the brand placed within the movie is high. Whereas, when the product is not well linked with the storyline of the movie and is just used in the background of the film, the recognition of the placed brand by the viewers is low". According to Morton and Friedman (2002), "Viewers usually try to link the movie star with the product placed in the movie. This connection of the product with the actor increases the intrinsic expressiveness of the placement messages. When the consumer sees the movie star using a placed product, they try to associate the credibility of the actor with the product placed in the movie and build a positive behavior towards the product".

COVERT ADVERTISING TECHNIQUES:

Following are the important covert advertising techniques :

1. Product placement, 2. Sponsorship, 3. Plugging products, 4. Viral marketing and 5. Guerrilla marketing.

PRODUCT PLACEMENT

It is a marketing practice in advertising and promotion, 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.

SPONSORSHIP:

Sponsorship is a covert advertising technique because it is not actually advertising overtly. The sponsorship advertisement is usually entertaining, it is never a hard sell and it is

never very informative. Sponsorship hopes to link the product more directly to the film or program and it is more expensive than product placement but also more effective. For example, 'The Premiership' program sponsored by Coca-Cola.

PLUGGING PRODUCTS

It is the practice of a company paying for its product to be placed in a prominent position in a film or television program as a form of advertising. In Cinema theaters or restaurants, the customer may get special promotional offers to encourage them to buy a product.

GUERRILLA MARKETING

Guerrilla marketing target niche audiences by using specialized media. In guerrilla marketing, the investment is more in terms of time, energy and creativity. It targets the individual, not groups. Guerrilla marketing is needed because it gives small businesses a delightfully unfair advantage, certainty in an uncertain world, economy in a high-priced world. It has simplicity in this complicated world.

VIRAL MARKETING

In viral marketing, once the communication process is initiated, it spreads like a virus among potential customers. For example, Video clips with embedded messages can be easily diffused throughout the World Wide Web. In essence, viral marketing creates an incentive for others to communicate the marketing message through the Internet or E-mail.

COVERT ADVERTISEMENT IN INDIAN MOVIES:

Covert advertising technique plays a more important role in building brand recall and recognition than the other types of advertisement. Today's competitive market requires the use of covert advertisements in movies and television programs. Coca Cola in India, for instance, has benefited from placement in movies along with a celebrity endorsement with Bollywood movie star Amir Khan. The most successful movies branding for Coca-cola in India was Rang De Basanti. The film Dhoom created such an impact on the Indian youth that increased motorbike sales up to 30 percent. Krrish, on the other hand, prominently featured Singapore Tourism Board, Sony, John Players, Bournvita, Tide, Hero Honda, Boro plus, Lifebuoy, HP power and Lays chips. Krrish, in fact, showcased a brand every nine minutes and highlighted 37 brands in the entire movie. Bum Bum Bole uses plot connection technique in the movie and the storyline is constructed around a pair of shoes. The lead character is a small-town boy who bends the rules and wins against all odds a theme that resonates with Adidas' slogan- "Impossible is nothing". In Namaste London, which revolves around a wedding, the producers brought in Bharatmatrimony.com for associative marketing via a multimedia campaign. The maker of Zandu Balm pain reliever rub and Boro-buo anti-septic cream has had its brands present in some Bollywood super hits such as Dabang. Most Bollywood movie producers now have separate departments to handle product placements in their movies. Nowadays Tamil movies are also using covert advertisements. For example, Emami had tied up with '3' for brand placement in 'Kolaveri Di' song. Swift Desire was introduced in ' Chillunu oru Kadhal'.

BENEFITS OF COVERT ADVERTISING:

Covert advertising in film and television has several benefits that they offer to all the agents involved in the process. It

ensures that the audience will notice the products because the audience have no other option but to notice products when they are embedded in a film. The products have gained greater credibility when popular movie and television stars use them. The product is made aware of its existence in the mass market. The company's corporate image is recognized internationally due to their product awareness among the mass market. Placing brand name, products or services within a program or movie gives them an intensified size of realism. For some companies, this may be the only avenue to get their product or service in the hands of an actor or actress. Technological development like a PVR (Personal Video Recorder), VOD (Video-on-Demand) also influence covert advertising. PVRs are devices that allow individuals to record the programs and avoid undesirable elements (such as ads). VOD refers to the ability of networks to provide programs to individuals at any time. In such situations, covert advertisement is a very important technique for meeting the customers to create awareness about their products.

NEGATIVES OF COVERT ADVERTISING:

There are several negative aspects of placing products in the media: 1) Lack of control, 2) Media programming may not be successful, 3) Possibility of negative character association, 4) Difficulty in pricing and (Cowely and Barron, 2008). The first downside of using covert advertising technique is that the marketers may have a lack of control over how products are portrayed or incorporated into a scene or storyline. Products may end up being misused, ignored, criticized, associated with questionable values or used unethically. The second downside of using covert advertising technique is that the marketers have little influence over the placement of products or services in media. It is difficult to predict where to place brands for maximum positive exposure. Also, if there are too many product placements, consumers may feel that they have had enough and the saturation may have a negative effect. The third downside of using covert advertising technique is the possibility of a negative character association. That is, the target audience may shift their attitude about a character in such a way that products associated with the character also will be diminished. The fourth downside of using covert advertising technique is the difficulty in pricing the placement of product. Typical placement fees are based on a fairly standard scale of expected audience size for the media vehicle. This pricing method assumes that product placement exposure is equal across events and scenes and equal to the exposure value marketers get from a thirty second commercial.

CONCLUSION

Covert advertising is currently a hot trend in the marketing of services and products because varieties of brand for a single product results in saturation of customers. The traditional advertisement with celebrities have more positives. But it is not applicable for all situations because the celebrities are endorsing the product or service for commercial purposes and the viewers may skip the advertisements while they are watching television programs. The new technologies like Personal Video Recorders (PVR), Video-on-Demand (VOD) allow the viewers to record the programs and they may avoid undesirable elements such as advertisement. So, greater attention can be taken to change the negative opinion about covert advertising with the inclusion of innovative techniques in a positive way by not affecting the ethical values of society.

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