
Covert Advertising: Impact in India

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ABSTRACT:

India is a country where large amount of money is spent on advertising because of its vast regional area, huge population, diversity in culture, religion, customs & rituals and diverse demographic characteristics. But then there are some other ways also that needs to be adopted by companies in India to attract the potential customers in India towards their products, because just by doing routine advertising a company cannot feel comfortable due to various reasons like competition and changing consumer habits etc. Covert advertising is one of those ways which has been used by companies in India. This paper will highlight some examples of covert advertising and their success or failures. This paper will also talk about the different techniques of covert advertising used by the companies and what impact they made on the minds of Indian consumers.

Keywords- Advertising; advertising techniques; product placement; covert advertising.

1.1 INTRODUCTION- As there has been a spur in demand of superior products and services; simultaneously it has become more difficult for the companies also to reach to the consumers mind in an effective way. In this matter, advertising has become a great weapon for the companies to speak to consumers about themselves and to communicate to them. People have become habitual of celebrities, brand ambassadors, brand launches etc. and these tactics now look very ordinary and common. Clutter in the market has made the life worse for the marketers and the need arises of something different and non-ordinary. Here comes the

refreshing and innovative advertising technique- Covert Advertising.

Covert Advertising- About

Covert advertising is when a product or brand is embedded in entertainment and media. Many films and other media use covert advertising because advertisers pay for the inclusion of their product within a film. Covert advertising is a unique kind of advertising in which a product or a particular brand is incorporated in some entertainment and media channels like movies, television shows or even sports. There is no commercial in the entertainment but the brand or the product is subtly (or sometimes evidently) showcased in the entertainment show.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW-

S. Vasanthi (2013) stated that Covert advertising is currently a hot trend in the marketing of services and products as there are different varieties and substitutes available to consumers and it leads to saturation point of customers. Traditional advertising by celebrities may be skipped by the viewers as they tend to

switch the channels during commercial advertisements.

As per Choi (2007), If the traditional media is giving message clutter to the audience or consumers, the companies or brand personnel will try to look for other alternative ways to advertise their products or services. And out of these alternative ways, product placement has emerged as a better alternative compared to other traditional ways.

In 2013, Prachi Singh in her study revealed that the product placement is considered successful only if the association translates into curiosity, awareness, recall, reference or trial. Bollywood benefits from a large audience eager for consumption. Viewers like product placement because they enhance realism, aid in character development, create historical subtext and provide a sense of familiarity.

Yang and Ewolden (2007) in their study found out that the product in the movie should be in sync with story of the movie and if this happens it will play an important role in the recognition of the brand by the viewers. And if the product makes a valid and high association in terms of resolving an issue or a difficulty, the recognition of the product by viewers will be high. And similarly if the association of the product with the story is not valid and it has just been placed in the movie, the significance of the product will be treated low by the viewers.

Morton and Friedman (2002) stated that audience usually try to link the product placed with the film stars. If they find it viable, the expressiveness of both the movie star and product increases but if the audience observes the actor using a placed product, they link the credibility of the movie star with the product placed in the film.

According to Balasubramanian (1994), “If the product will be placed prominently in the film, it will enjoy better brand recognition and awareness as compared to subtle placement in the film, because of the reason that prominent placement focuses on higher visibility”.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the impact of covert advertising with reference to products and services in India.
- To identify the various covert techniques used by the marketers/brand managers.
- To know the benefits and negatives of covert advertising.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

Since it is a secondary research based paper, the data required for the study has been collected from secondary sources. Secondary data collection may be conducted by collecting information from a diverse source of documents or electronically stored information. In the presented research paper, the secondary sources include the Advertising agency websites, some movies’ websites and published journal papers.

1.5 COVERT ADVERTISING TECHNIQUES

- Product Placement
- Sponsorship
- Viral Marketing
- Guerilla Marketing

Product Placement

According to Business Dictionary, "advertising techniques used by companies to subtly promote their products through a non-traditional advertising technique, usually through appearances in film, television, or other media."

Sponsorship

It is also a covert advertising technique as it is not the actual advertisement but still it links the product to the event or program. It is costlier compared to product placement.

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing works like a virus. Once the message is targeted and initiated, it spreads like a virus among the target customers.

Guerilla Marketing

In guerilla marketing, the potential customers are targeted by using specialized media. It works for a niche segment and targets the individuals as compared to groups in other advertising techniques.

1.6 COVERT ADVERTISEMENT IN BOLLYWOOD

Marketers and brand managers have started paying attention to covert advertisement in Hindi movies in the last decade or so. There are no. of examples where the products were embedded in the Hindi movies successfully and unsuccessfully.

Domino's Pizza in movie Phir Hera-Pheri



Suzuki HayaBusa in Movie Dhoom



ICICI Bank in movie Baghban



Coca-Cola in Movie Taal & Yaadein



1.6 BRANDS AND MOVIES- THE LINKAGE

There has been an old linkage between the brands and movies in India. But from the 90's only it has took off. The advertisement or product placement in movies depends upon multiple factors like, nature of product, Hero/Heroine or the user of the product in the movie, timing of the release of the movie, and the association between the product and the user in the movie.

The product placement in the movies is different from the celebrity endorsement. The reason behind that the celebrities endorse the product for commercial purposes and reasons but in product placement in movies the audience gets exposed to the products in the natural process of movie or entertainment. In the same process audience cannot switch the channel or cannot avoid the

product exposure that is being provided to him during the movie.

1.7 COVERT ADVERTISING: BENEFITS

It is unlikely that the product which is placed in the movies will go unnoticed as compared to other means of communication. Because in other means of advertising, audience may skip the content or the advertisement but in product placement/ covert advertisement technique audience will have to notice the product because audience do not have any other option but to watch the film. So in this way the product will get more publicity and recognition. Since the cinema and movies are broadcasted throughout country, it also reaches to the different kinds of masses and gains more popularity. It also strengthens the

corporate image of the company and speaks volumes about the credibility of the company.

Since celebrity endorsement is very expensive, this may work wonders for a company which cannot afford celebrity endorsement or expensive TV advertisement cost. It can also work wonders for local brands for regional films as the local audience will get to know about the local brands available in their region.

1.7.1 COVERT ADVERTISING: NEGATIVES

Like covert advertising has some benefits it also holds some negatives also. Some of the negatives are

- Marketers cannot control how the product will be viewed or what kind of image it will leave on the audience.
- Again there may be a clutter of products in the same movie/program.
- It carries the risk of losing credibility if it is associated with the negative character.
- There should be a positive and logical association between the product and the character who is using in the product and that may not be possible every time.
- The fee of product placement may prove very expensive and may not get that much attention compared to the fee paid for the same.
- Once the message is out you cannot control it but in celebrity endorsement or TV advertisement you can withdraw the advertisement.

1.8 CONCLUSION-

Covert advertising has evolved and emerged as an important and vital part of the communication and promotion strategy. It was noticed in the

Bollywood movies in 1970s but for the last 2 decades or so it has become a preferred choice of many brand managers and marketers.

The famous product placement in Hindi movie was the yellow colored 'Rajdoot' bike in the movie 'Bobby'. However the first recognized covert advertising in India was of 'Coca Cola' in the film 'Taal' in the year 1999. Since then, the scope of covert advertising has grown leap and bounds. In short it can be concluded that-

- If applied properly, covert advertising can prove to be a boon for the marketers.
- The brand or the product needs to be judiciously associated with the user in the movie.
- The brand or the product needs to be positively associated with the user in the movie.
- It gives the advantage of low cost per exposure.
- It gives a new and multi dimensional approach to advertising.

1.9 REFERENCES-

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