"Consumer engagement through Branded Content integration in cinema– An Empirical study"

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1.   Introduction

Enhancing visibility by placing a brand at strategic points in different communication platforms has been effectively used as a tool for recall by marketers for long. However with increasing clutter& rapidly changing consumer dynamics engagement with a passive placement seemingly has become ineffective. This has fuelled the need for a more active involvement of the brand with the consumer giving rise to an effective integration of Branded content with a concept using versatile media & entertainment platforms.

The rise of Branded integrations as a communication strategy can be credited to the fact that "Branded integration can provide advertisers with unique opportunities that traditional commercials cannot deliver". (**Masters Douglas N. McGinn Coyle Nerissa August 2011).**

The emergence & rise of Branded Integration as a communication strategy could also be attributed to the growth of product placements through various communication channels. While Cinema has always been a strong contender for placements off late TV serials and reality shows have become a potential medium for projecting a brand and making an impact.

Branded Integration has certainly added a differential edge to the ATL & BTL platforms making communication much more attention grabbing. Apparently a brand that has been integrated with certain content actively or passively might lend it that much needed recall even at times reduces the threshold.

The in-film placements strategy in the current scenario has evolved emerged and moved way beyond mere co-branded tie-ups with minor product appearances and subtle testimonials by film stars. In the current context Brand names are flaunted in song lyrics (Zandu Balm, Fevicol) and the scenario also has seen entire movie titles (Mere Dad Ki Maruti) with a specific Brand name.

 Growing competition, Media fragmentation, Segmentation complexities apart, one of the primary reasons for the rise in integration as a communication tool can also credited to the growing might of celebrities coupled with their excessive endorsement fees. However, collaborating with a film Brand having reputed actors & leveraging its content serves a dual purpose apparently it is an easier and a more cost effective route to gain not just an instant recall due to the "celebrity rub off effect" but may also provide a platform for better association & pull in the competitive market.

The paper aims at exploring the influence of Branded content especially in the cinema medium towards a certain target audience.

2.   Background and Review of literature:

Most of the opinions & definitions on Branded content integration perceive it as a cross or "intersection" between advertising & entertainment.
Wikipedia defines Branded content as "a relatively new form of advertising medium that blurs conventional distinctions between what constitutes advertising and what constitutes entertainment".

According to the definition Branded content is essentially a blend of the two (advertising and entertainment) into one product. The intention apparently is the distribution of entertaining content, although with a highly branded quality.

While content is intended to engage the customer with information or entertainment, advertising is driving towards a more immediate purchase. (www.mailonline.com/blogspot)

The contemporary era looks beyond traditional advertising & hence several new terms and concepts have been coined. The concept of "Advertainment" has apparently replaced the conventional concept of "Advertisement". Combining advertising with entertainment this concept has matured with "the increasing advertising clutter, escalating advertising costs, and the reduced effectiveness of traditional advertising messages. Consumers are exponentially exposed to commercial messages but at the same time they are finding new ways to avoid them". (**CRISTEL ANTONIA RUSSELL 2007**).

As per literature, since the early 20th century Product placement has witnessed a radical change, evolving over the years. Digitalization has only enhanced the content, value and prominence of branded content integration as a tool. Given the current context product placement has grown tremendously, moving way beyond the concept of placing a static logo in a movie background or a passing reference in other platforms.

Product placement has now blossomed into a whole new form of advertising called branded integration, and trade mark owners must take steps to understand the pros and cons in order to make sure their brands are protected. (**Masters Douglas N. McGinn Coyle Nerissa 2011**).

With the dynamic proliferation & revolutionary transition in media platforms more inclined towards customer interaction and engagement the content in Branded integration has assumed versatile proportions. While the growth is an optimistic sign for creativity, yet the increased fragmentation in the media has made the consumer more elusive and highly split for choice, not focussing on any particular media of communication. However given the susceptibility of some Medias especially Television to obstruction & impending noise in the communication process has further fuelled the need for an engaging platform that could rise above the clutter.

"Consumers have always wanted choice, and now they finally have it. And one choice they are making is not to watch television advertising". (**Kanner Mitch 2005**)

While several studies attribute the rise of Branded content integration as an extended version of Product placements, it can be looked at as a more elaborate form of sponsored content.

According to a study conducted by MC Ginn & Masters 200 11 An important feature of branded integration deals "which has changed dramatically from past product placement deals is the brand's funding of the entertainment content and its control over the entertainment content."

As per the above observation Brands can now be actually seen "funding television program or entertainment vehicle in exchange for more control of the content of the television program and the ability to coordinate commercials and promotions with the appearance of the product in the entertainment content". (**Masters Douglas N. McGinn Coyle Nerissa 2011**).

There are several studies that have different references about the impact of Product placement which include constructs like Image, Perception, memory & association; however all these studies are limited to Brand & Product Placement with a very limited focus on the aspect of Content integration in media through branding.

The results of a research study conducted by **Eva A. van Reijmersdal, Peter C. Neijens, et al** on the Effects of Television Brand Placement on Brand Image in **2007** delineated that integration of a brand into the editorial content of a program had a significant effect on brand image: As people watched more episodes, the brand image became more in agreement with the
program image.

Earlier Studies by **Law and Braun (2000; 2004)** and **Auty and Lewis (2004a; 2004b**) showed that effects of brand placement could be established without memory of the placement. Law and Braun (2000) demonstrated that people could not remember having seen certain brands placement effects.

A brand appearing in popular television shows, serials & especially in movies is a common phenomenon. However, while changing consumer dynamics due to over exposure increases vulnerability to information overload, the ever rising competitive might on the other hand has made customer attention & engagement a formidable challenge. Hence the increased inclination
towards integration of a brand in various entertainment genres.

Following table reflects the vital factors for successful integration.

Success Factors for Brand Placement/Integration	
Fit	The degree of interest in the brand or product category
	The relevance of the content to the target audience
	The fit between the content and the brand
Focus	The degree to which the integration is engaging
	The degree to which attention is focused on the brand
Fame	The level of additional supporting activity (advertising or publicity)

Branded content more than just showing up Source: Mill ward Brown POV (Feb 2007).

While Passive Branded integration has long been a part of conventional media platforms especially movies. TV has emerged as a popular medium with versatile formats like sponsored content & Advertiser funded programs becoming an attractive proposition both for the marketer from ROI perspective & for the customer from the Entertainment Point of view.

Advertiser Funded Programs & Title & content sponsorships mainly leveraging the TV Platform as in case of Coke studio, LG Malliaka e- kitchen are also popularly used in Broadcast mediums like radio. One of the most Popular in the AFP genre has been Bournvita quiz contest & **S Kumar's ka filmy mukaddama** way back in mid-70's**.**

Advertiser funded programs have the ability to go beyond the 'plug' into actually weaving in the brand promise and the brand insight into the communication in a subtle yet effective way. Branded entertainment doesn't just have to be about soaps and quizzes and reality shows, ticket has been one of the best examples of branded entertainment (**de Souza Lynn**).

Brands have mastered the art of leveraging the content of media to their optimum advantage.
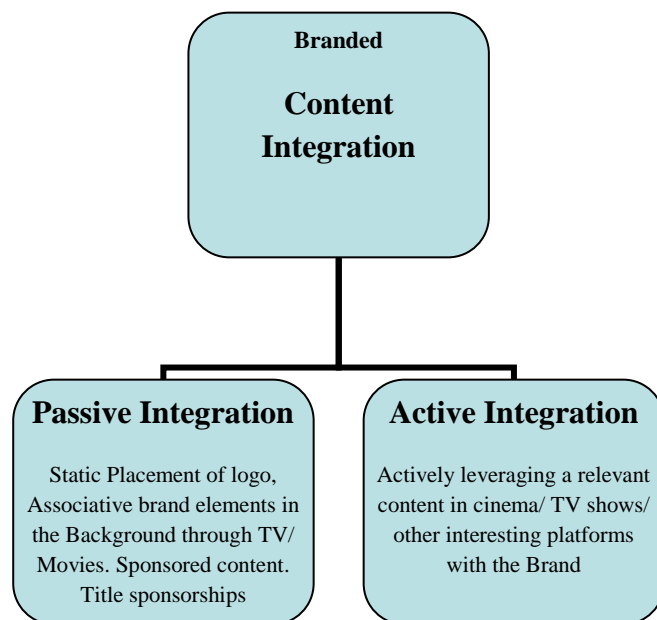
"Thums up Khatron Ke Khiladi" wasn't an advertiser-funded programme, though it looked like one. The brand was extremely visible, the ambassador was jumping off cliffs - it looked like a commercial. It was one of the biggest stories of marrying content and brand**," (Hoon Simran 2007)**

In the contemporary scenario Brands like Max New York life have effectively utilized the platform of TV serials & leveraged in-programme integration for one of their child schemes. While Brands like Lenovo, Parle Krack- Jack, idea, have very effectively leveraged the content of games shows like KBC establishing a perfect Brand rub off.

While it is extremely challenging to keep customer attention span alive in the cluttered communication content (especially in case of Above the line media) ; Branded content integration seems like a creative attempt of marketers to move beyond the tried and tested 30 second advertising spot and capturing his span of attention.

Branded Content Integration Objectives inferred from the above study

- Customer Engagement – Entertaining content for better attention span.
- Customer relevance – Leveraging the Right Content
- Customer Retention - Right celebrity & Right Media platform
- Customer Recall – Brand Repetition.

- **Broad Classification**

Branded

Content Integration

Passive Integration

Static Placement of logo, Associative brand elements in the Background through TV/ Movies. Sponsored content. Title sponsorships

Active Integration

Actively leveraging a relevant content in cinema/ TV shows/ other interesting platforms with the Brand

Recent trend shows a gradual shift towards a more active Branded Content integration increasing Interactivity & thus the element of customer engagement. While the chances of a captive audience & the scope for creativity is higher in cinema medium. The number of obstacles (noise- in terms of commercial breaks, rival ads) is comparatively more in TV media and hence the level involvement in cinema is apparently higher.

Following table depicts a compilation of transition in branded content integration through cinema medium in India.

	Brand	Nature of Integration	Plank, Proposed objective	Outcome
Bobby	Rajdoot motorbike	Passive	Brand Association	First Of its kind integration giving a high Recall value.
Professor Pyarelal	Erasmic	Very Passive	No Clarity of objective	
Naseeb	Strepsils (Cough lozenges)	Moderately active	Lead protagonist essaying a singer models for the Brand in the plot.	
Yaadein	Paas Paas Mouth freshener	Effective Passive (Logo placement)	Brand in the backdrop during a sports event with all the main leads.	Very High Recall helping to develop positive attitude and association
Baghbaan	ICICI Bank, Tata Tetley Ford	Active	Lead Actor working for the Brand. Here, the lead actors leveraging the Brands Ford & Tata Tetley at crucial junctures in the plot for association.	Highly Visibility leading to better association and recall
Buddha Hoga Tera Baap	Harley Davidson	Active	Lead Protagonist utilising the Brand stylishly in all major action sequences.	Garnered High Attention value for already established Brand.
Heroine	Jealous 21 Lakme	Active	Introduction sequence of the Female Lead. Brand Launch of Inspired collection and Lakme was relevant to the storyline & concept.	Visibility & Association was strong for the brands
Dabangg	Fevicol	Active	Active Integration with an interesting Item song.	Very High Recall & repeat value.
Mere Dad Ki Maruti	Maruti Ertiga	Active	Leveraging the Title content for visibility & conversions.	30% rise in Test drives Lead generation & enquiries. (**Afaqs -Sept 03, 2013**)
Satyagraha	India Gate Basmati rice. Ultra tech cement.	Active.	Integrated with an important sequence at a very crucial point in the film leading to high visibility & Association.	High Recall & Consumer Evoked set (**Authors perspective**) giving high Visibility.

	(Other Brands like Sahara Q shop, Rupa, Wishtel India- Passively integrated with active logo placement)			
Chennai Express	Nokia	Very Active	Extremely well integrated with a comic sequence where the lead protagonist Shah Rukh Khan actively showcases brand Nokia Lumia while briskly describing the product features.	High Visibility and creation of awareness about features leading to better brand recall
Dabangg	Fevicol	Active	Active Integration with an interesting Item song.	Very High Recall & repeat value.
Ra.One	Western Union Money, McDonald's, Nerolac Cinthol Deo	Passive	Brands integrated at various spots thus leveraging Brand Association with the movie & the lead star beyond logos.	Mc Donald's leveraged the association smartly linking it to sales Western Union – highly visible during the movie Promos as well skewed towards prime time and high-impact buys. **(Ag faqs – Nov 20-2011)**
Ek Tha Tiger	Tourism Ireland	Active	Tourism promotion	High Visibility & awareness
Jab Tak Hain Jaan	Canon Camera Discovery channel	Active	Effective integration with the major characters in the film who plays a scribe and uses the camera whilst working for discovery channel	Very High Visibility & Recall for effective association.
Krishh 3	Bournvita, Rado, Tata Motors	Active	Integration at relevant points in the movie showcasing the benefit of the Brand	Effective association, high visibility and recall

Source: Compiled By the authors

Majority of the literature studied is not very relevant focuses on aspects other than the effect of Branded integration in movies on consumer attitude & purchase behavior which is important from the point of view of this study. Hence we decided to study the same.

Objectives:

Based on the review of literature & practical observations the following objectives were extracted for the study:

- To find the effect that Branded Content integration have on the retention of the brand in the consumers mind

- To analyze how Branded Content integration affects the consumer attitudes and decision making process

The research questions that originate from the above objectives are:

1) Does Branded Content integration have an influence on retention of the brand in the consumers mind?
2) Does Retention lead to
   a) Change in attitude of the consumer
   b) Purchase decision

Research Design and Methodology:

To substantiate the research objective & questions thereof a questionnaire has been designed by adapting the AIDA (Attention, Interest Desire & Action) by ELMO Lewis to derive responses from the targeted sample in the age group of 20-30 on a 5 point likert scale.

The Scale ratings: **Strongly Agree (5) Agree (4) Neutral, Disagree(2), strongly disagree(1)**

- For designing this questionnaire a pilot study was conducted on a sample of 67 students in the age group of 20-30. A 1 minute clipping displaying active branded integration was displayed and the gist of opinions gathered as follows.
- **Content was entertaining**
- **Celebrity was entertaining**
- **Brand was engaging**
- **Brand was relevant**
- **Brand was highly visible**
- **Brand can be purchased**
- Following questions were derived from the pilot study to investigate: Retention, Change in attitude, Purchase intent.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral	Disagree(2)	Strongly disagree(1)
When A brand is actively integrated with the content of a movie					
It grabs my immediate attention					
I hardly notice the brand					
The integrated content gives more awareness about different Features of the Brand (An actively placed brand stimulates my need)					
I start noticing different aspects of the brand more carefully.					

The Brand has more recall because of the content (entertaining).					
Actor in the branded content gives a better brand recall					
If the Brand is actively integrated with an interesting content					
I feel more involved with the Brand & spend more time in understanding it.					
If I already own the brand I feel a high sense of Belongingness towards the Brand.					
An actively placed brand stimulates my need					
If the Integration has a good Brand - Content Fit					
Brand becomes more relevant					
It helps me to know if the brand fits my need.					
Brings the brand into my consideration (evoked) set					
Outcome of Branded content integration					
I will almost impulsively buy the brand					
I will talk about the brand to others.					
I will just notice the Brand and forget it.					

- The sample selected was based on a pre -test which reflected more receptivity of the age group towards content integration. Movies a more popular platform for the selected sample Vis- a Vis TV.

- The data has been collected and statistical analysis on the collected data would be the next step in this research.

Conclusion & Scope for further research :
Consumer needs change continually and as such effective communication ways to deliver the Brand promise should be used for getting a differential edge over the competitors. Branded Content integration is a step in this

direction. Branded Content Integration has a positive impact on the Consumers attitude; it can be leveraged to engage the consumer's better thus gaining a competitive edge.

In doing so the given aspects need to be addressed more prominently for engagemnt
While integrating content the entertainment value can generate a better recall.
The content should focus on creating a high sense of Belongingness towards the Brand.
Leveraging the right Actor in the branded content for a better brand recall
To make the Brand becomes more relevant, the need fit to be addressed in the content.

Further research needs to be done on consumer engagement through various platforms especially digital media by utilizing branded content integration.

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