

## **In Film Brand Placement: A successful strategy for brand promotion**

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### **Abstract**

As the traditional media is getting over saturated with advertisements, brands are looking for new avenues every time to promote their names among the consumers. In film brand placement emerged as a successful avenue to gain attention from consumers. Though It's not a very new phenomenon, but over the years it has gained huge importance from the market making it a billion-dollar industry. It's interesting to see how methodically both the film makers and the brands are working together to integrate the brand message within the films as an integral part. Throughout the World, in film brand placement is gaining huge popularity. In India also in film branding is becoming a very important source of earning revenues. Not only in Hindi films, regional films are also earning huge money from this technique. Scenes within a film are made these days to accommodate brand placement in presence of popular actors. In India, idol worshipping is very common hence whenever celebrity endorses a brand that too within a film, consumers notices and remembers the brand. The research paper attempts to find out the acceptance of in film branding among audience and their recall capacity. A survey was conducted among the people to see how they reacts to in film brand placements for this study. The results clearly show how easily people do remember and recall the brands shown within films. In fact, consumers find nothing wrong about in film brand placement. People belonging to the age group of 17 years to 27 years, who watches movies regularly, accepts in film brand placement positively and do remember the brands shown.

**Keywords:** brand placement, celebrity endorsement, brand recall, experimental study.

## Introduction

These days we live in an over-communicated society. For a single product, we have several brands, and all of them are trying to influence us in various ways. The primary intention behind creating new promotional techniques by brands is to break the clutter and create a position in the human mind. For that, many brands are always busy in planning and strategizing new and effective methods. Traditional forms of promotion are losing their charm and effectiveness. The world in which we stay exposed to hundreds of promotional communications. On average, more than 3500 stimuli hit us every day, and that is why brands are always busy in trying ways to differentiate themselves from competitors. Brand placements in films are emerging very strongly as a new promotional strategy. In recent years, the practice of in-film brand/ product placement has increased a lot (McKechnie & Jia, 2003). Brand placement defined as 'the planned entries of products into movies or television shows that may influence viewers product beliefs and behaviour's 'favourable (Balasubramaniam, 1994).

Brand placement is popularly known as 'embedded marketing', basically describes a phenomenon of incorporating product, package, signage of a brand in a movie for the intent to deepen the brand image and instant recognition at the point of purchase. 'Brands placed in the form of verbal mentions through dialogue or actual use by character, visual displays in the form of corporate logos on vehicles or billboards or maybe products used as a part of set decorations, or even showcasing of actual radio or television commercials', Mandal, 2008. The main advantages of brand placement in the film are a cost-effective way to promote the product (DeLorme, Denise E., & Reid, 1999). Brand placements through films give a chance to exhibit the product/brand into the public eye where they will get uninterrupted attention, unlike the traditional media.

Brand placement in movies and other entertainment works like serials, and reality shows is now a regular practice worldwide and its more prevalent in superstar films (Gregorio & Sung, 2010). Brand placement is not a new form of promotional strategy. However, it has become a focus of study for researchers in the marketing field due to its huge success and acceptability among the audience. Product placement defined as 'the planned entries of products into movies or television shows that may influence viewers product beliefs and behaviours favourably' (Balasubramaniam, 1994). Brand placement is brand integration. It mainly includes branded products or brand identifiers through audio or audio-visual means as a part of mass media programming (Balasubramaniam, 1994).

Jules Verne novel "Around the World in Eighty Days" (1873), had led transport and shipping companies to lobby to be mentioned in the story. Nevertheless, there is no evidence

on whether Verne received any payment to do so. Hence it can be said that the concept of brand placement is quite old. In the early twentieth century movies also, traces of brand placement can be witnessed. If we look back, brand placement in its most real sense traced in from the 1980s. The 1982 movie, E.T. directed by Spielberg showed the first-hand account of how a brand easily used in the movie for the sake of business. The film resulted in an estimated 66% spike in Reese's Pieces Candies. Not only in Hollywood films, but brand placement is prevalent in India as well.

A film is a compelling form of entertainment across the world. It plays a significant part in the global economy. In a country like India, films enjoy a considerable market. It has a considerable capacity to alter the thought process of the people. Movies this day earns money not only from its run time but also from the brand placements. Films these days very creatively place the brand within the script. The product also becomes a part of the film. Promotional opportunities and merchandising possibilities heightened the chance of brand placements in films. This paper focuses mainly on Indian films and brand placements in them.

In India, Hindi films have a considerable market. In terms of investment as well as revenue generation Hindi films are doing well. Even the production houses from outside India are also investing a considerable amount of money in Hindi films. The considerable amount invested in films needs every effort to generate as many revenues as possible through both in and off-screen activities. Brand placement is a concept that helps in generating revenues. The earlier form of product placement known in India traces back in the 1950s. One of the oldest known brand placements in a Bollywood movie was showing Coca-Cola in "Chalti Ka Naam Gadi" (1958). Raj Kapoor's 1973 super hit film "Bobby" had Rajdoot bike (Enfield Motors) launched. The Nokia phone used and explained by Shaharukh Khan in Chennai Express film was one of the placements that viewers can hardly miss. Even branding activities are very prominent in the title of films like "Ferrari ki sawari", "Meri dad ki Maruti" or in songs like "Fevicol" in Dabangg.

The super hit film, "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai" gave a platform to more than 100 brands to showcase themselves within the film. Coca Cola brand used the film "Taal" as a platform to promote their brand. 20% of the budget of the film came from that brand placement. Both the films targeted towards a young audience and the products that are shown mainly for the same age group.

These brand placements observed in regional films but for this paper, the focus remains on Hindi films.

Brand/ product placement in films takes place in several ways and formats. Like:

- **Placement as a part of the film title:** Names of the brands placed with the title of the film. Like “Ferrari ki sawari” or “Meri dad ki Maruti”, etc. every time you takes the name of the film, the brand name also gets recognition.
- **Placement in the visual frame:** This is the most common form of placements in film. In several ways, ' brand/ products are shown within the film. Like in the film "Chup Chup ke" (Kareena Kapoor and Shaheed Kapoor starrer) in a sequence Tide washing powder shown but also its utility described.
- **The character uses the product:** Hrithik Roshan in "Koi Mil Gaya" drinks Bournvita any day creates better brand recognition. The bikes used in Dhoom also play a significant role in creating a proper brand placement.
- **Placement as a part of the songs:** Brands like ‘Fevicol’ or ‘Zandu’ used in super hit songs helps the brand is getting more attention than any other ways of promotions.
- **Brand as a part of the story:** In many films’ brands/ products are placed as a part of the script only. For instance, in the film "Chak de India", players go to have their lunch in McDonald's or the film.
- **Character Talks about the product:** In some scenes, characters talk about the brand like Shahrukh talk about Nokia phone in Chennai Express or Akshay Kumar in the film “Good Newz” not only talked about the brand Volkswagen but also played the role of an employee for that company.

Brand placement is a type of promotional activity. The main focus of this study is to understand the success of brand promotion as a promotional tool. The research tries to see how it helps in brand recall process mainly when celebrities used for the same. The paper also tries to find out the acceptance of this promotional tool among the audience. Consumers are always the main focus of promotional activity, and these days they are very aware also. They know how brand placement happens within films. Hence it is essential to understand the acceptability of this technique among consumers.

Brands use several creative means to get better recognition and recall among the audience and films provide that platform. The objectives of this paper are firstly to see whether there is any impact of in-film brand placement on brand recognition and recall or not. Secondly, the paper tries to understand if the impact of brand placement is more substantial when celebrities are present in the sequence. Finally, it tries to figure out the awareness of audience

related to in film brand placement strategy. Surveys among the residents of Kolkata are conducted and then analyzed to get the results.

### **Literature Review**

Brand placement is not a new phenomenon. Friedman (1985) researched and found out that the product placements were present in several popular novels and hit songs which had accelerated huge growth post Second World War. Brand placement that started as a barter system is now a multimillion-rupee investment in Hindi movies (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003). It is now an essential revenue source for the film industry (Schneider, 2002).

However, before going to the depth, let us discuss some of the popular definitions of brand placement. As per the research done by Balasubramanian (1994), “brand placement means the planned entries of products into movies or television shows that may influence viewer’s product beliefs and or behaviours favourably”. Balasubramanian (1994), explained brand placement as a kind of “hybrid message” that combines both advertising and publicity aspects. By “Hybrid message”, he meant to say “all paid attempts to influence audiences for commercial benefits using communications that project a non-commercial character.” By saying this, he wanted to describe brand placement in the film as a type of advertising without viewers conscience. Karrh (1998), defined brand placement as ‘the paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and visual means, within mass media programming’. La Pastina (2001), says ‘commercial insertions within a particular media program intended to heighten the visibility of a brand, type of product, or service’.

From the above-discussed definitions, we can conclude that brand placement is a promotional technique used to promote products/ services subtly through a nontraditional technique and initiated after arranging a brand and the media company in which both benefited. Brand placement originated as a means to reduce the product cost now is a multi-million-dollar industry and a very successful promotional tool (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003). The success of brand placement has converted it into a popular promotional technique. The practice is very prominent in movies these days (Delorme & Reid, 1999; Gould, Gupta, & Grabner-Krauter, 2000). Since it supports the production cost of movies, hence the brands want more prominent screen space for them (D "Orio, 1999; McCarthy, 2000). Newell, Salmon & Chang (2006), found that the more interest put up on films and television programming created around the 80s and later before that product placements were often limited. According to Hackley and Tiwasakul (2006), the habit of using entertainment as business marketing was "to create a symbiotic relationship between promotional communication and mediated entertainment and

abolish the category boundary that separates the two". Malvania (2017) discussed in his research that product relationship with films divided into two main categories, one is the in-film brand placement, and the other one is co-branded marketing.

Hindi films generally portray more significant than life sequences. It entertains its audiences emotionally by presenting facts sometimes linked with reality and sometimes with fictions (Hirsch, 2009). Films help in creating a Universal appeal that breaks the age barrier and reaches out to people. The illusionary nature of the film provides a creative license to both filmmakers and brands to meet their particular needs (Kavoori and Punathambekar, 2008). Films can very easily break the age barrier. A considerable percentage of audiences come from 17 to 27 years age group. Therefore, brands target to reach them through films (Sinha, 2009).

Majority of the literature review on brand placements based on a few significant characteristics, they are prominence and plot connections. Lehu and Bessoud (2009), in their study, defined prominence as the ability of the brand to gain maximum attention. This is only possible when the brand gets long screen time and prominent visibility in the film. While talking about plot connection Lehu and Bessoud (2009) defined it as the involvement or extent to which a brand shown in the film is related to the story of the film. Product placement and brand placement are the two terms often used interchangeably (Lehu and Bessoud, 2009). Research is done by Thomas and Kohli (2011), on the other hand, talks about three different impacts of brand placement. They are:

- **Reach:** In this context, reach refers to the number of people exposed to a particular communication.
- **Impact:** Impact talks about the impression that audiences generally have from communication.
- **Frequency:** Frequency discusses how many times a brand shown in the film.

All these three things together play a role in influencing consumer behaviour.

The impact of advertising through traditional media, namely, Television, Radio and print media is going down due to several social, political, economic and technological changes. Also, the increasing popularity of digital media is playing an active role in reducing the viewership of traditional media. Several studies have done to determine the impact of brand placements on consumers by highlighting the on-going decrease in television viewership with the increase in digital media (Auty and Lewis, 2004; Russell 2002, and Russell, 2014). Decreasing television viewership is increasing trend of in-film brand placement.

Brand awareness comprises of two essential factors. They are brand recognition and brand recall. Both this factor plays a significant role in making a positive brand attitude. Brand image is also essential in creating a favourable environment for a brand. Keller explained that brand image should be compelling, unique and favourable. Several studies showed that there exists a strong relationship between advertising repetition and memory (Janiszewski, Noel, and Sawyer, 2003). Consumers must be able to retrieve information from memory while purchasing, and all the promotional activities done for the purpose. As described in Belch and Belch, repetitive messages with strategic positioning help in creating brand awareness. Increasing exposure in media helps in increasing the subconscious influence of brand placement on consumers (Johnstone and Dodd, 2000).

Brand placements are increasingly growing as a promotional tool though it has its advantages and disadvantages. The product placement can be more effective than any other forms of promotions (Soba & Aydin, 2013). D'Astous and Chartier (2000) research showed that brand/product Placement, along with increasing brand recognition, also helps in developing brand recall. In research done by Jin and Villegas (2007), they discussed different types of brand placement in films which can influence brand recall. They discussed that there could be three different types of placements, namely "prominence/subtlety", "audio-only" and "video only" presentations.

The popularity of brand placements is increasing these days massively. This paper tries to analyze the impact of brand placement on consumers brand recognition and recall. The paper mainly focuses on the brand placements made through Hindi films. Many researchers have worked on this subject, but there exists a research gap. This paper tries to analyze the impact of brand placement on the consumers brand recall, uniquely when placed using celebrities. The paper tries to find whether the audience is aware of the in-film brand placement is a promotional strategy.

### **Research Methodology**

The quantitative research methodology used for the paper. Quantitative research methodology focuses on the systematic investigation of phenomena by gathering quantifiable data and performing statistical analysis. The research starts with the following objectives.

#### **The objectives of this study**

- Brand placement creates a positive impact on people of different ages.
- To analyze the impact of in-film brand placement on the viewer's brand recall, especially when celebrities are present.

- To check whether audiences are aware of the brand placement strategy or not and how they accept it.
- To try to find out whether the audience feels it as unethical.

Based on the above objective, the following hypothesis created:

**H1: Brand placement creates a substantial impact on people of different age group.**

**H2: Brand placement plays a significant role in creating reliable brand recall.**

**H3: Brand placement creates more impact when celebrities use that within the film.**

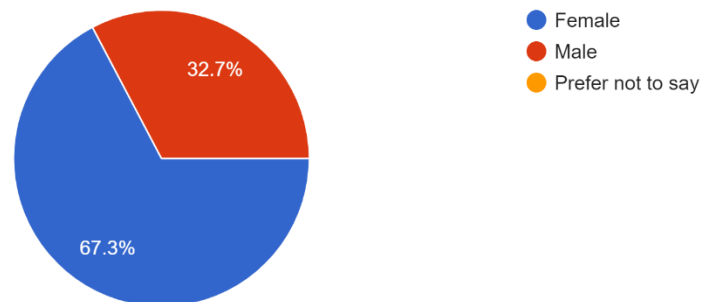
**H4: The audience positively accepts brand placement within the films.**

To do the analysis, a survey conducted among the residents of Kolkata. A total of 110 people surveyed with a structured questionnaire. After getting the response, the result is analyzed and displayed through charts and graphs.

### Data Analysis

The survey data are collected from the residents of Kolkata by circulating Google form. One hundred ten respondents gave their responses. Following charts and graphs are used to depict the result. Out of 110 respondents of which 32.7% are men, and 67.3% are women.

Gender  
110 responses



**Chart 1**

The ages of the respondents are mainly between 17 yrs to 27 yrs. The main reason for selecting this age group was that they watch movies the most.



age

110 responses

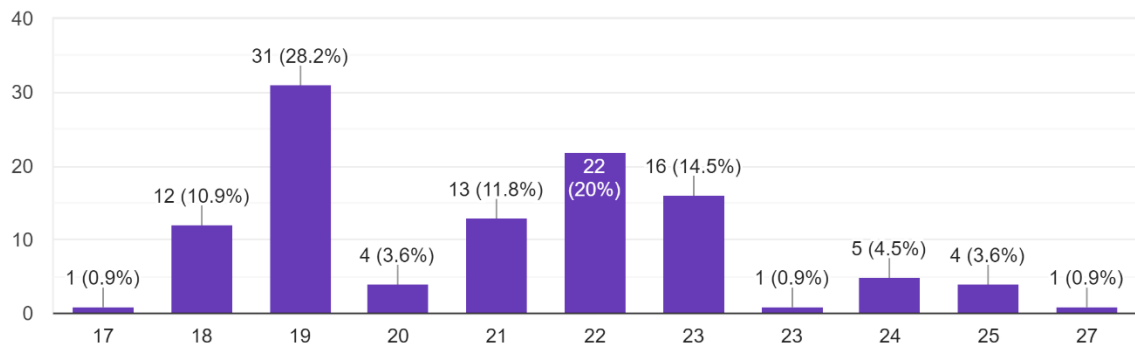


Chart 2

As a filter question respondent asked about their movie-watching habits and also the number of movies, they watch on average.

Do you like to watch movies?

110 responses

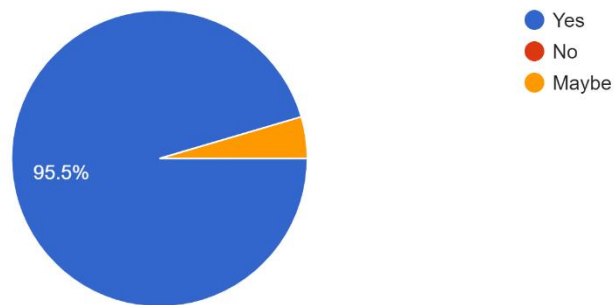
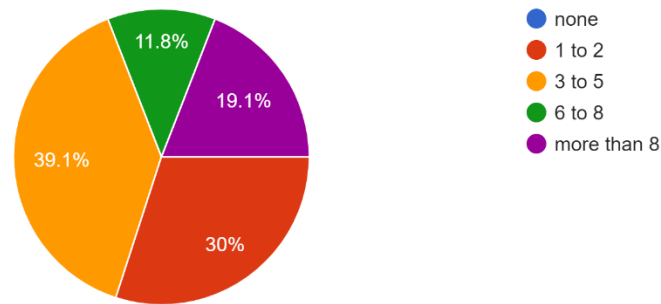


Chart 3

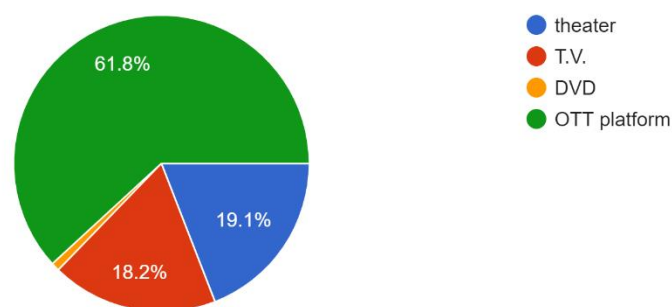
How many movies you see, in average, per month?  
110 responses



**Chart 4**

These days there are several options of watching movies; starting from theatre hall to OTT platform to mobile phone everywhere one can watch movies. So, in this study, we tried to see the places where the respondents go to watch movies.

Where do you watch movies mostly?  
110 responses



**Chart 5**

Most respondents told that they prefer OTT platform to watch movies. This also helps to understand the lifestyle pattern of the respondents. People these days prefer to watch movies using OTT platform and hence they are also emerging strongly as a platform for promotional messages.

Though the respondents prefer to watch movies through OTT platform but then also in this study, tried to figure out how many times they go to watch the film in the theatre.

How often do you go the theater?  
110 responses

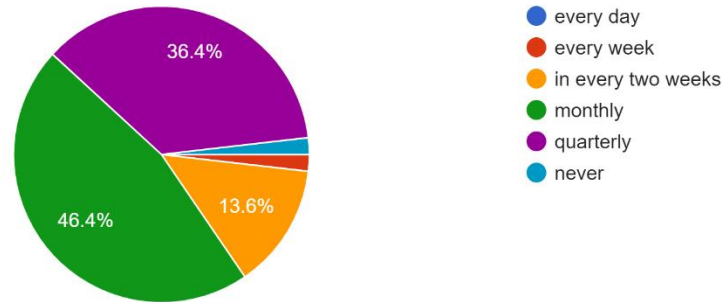


Chart 6

Selections of movies are essential. This research tries to find the impact that the presence of a celebrity creates on the audience. The chart below clearly shows that people do select films based on the presence of actors.

How do you select a movie?  
110 responses

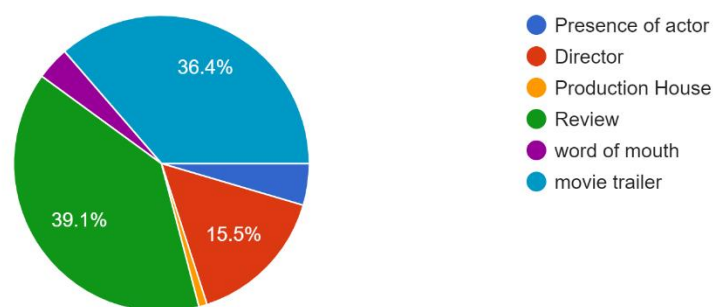
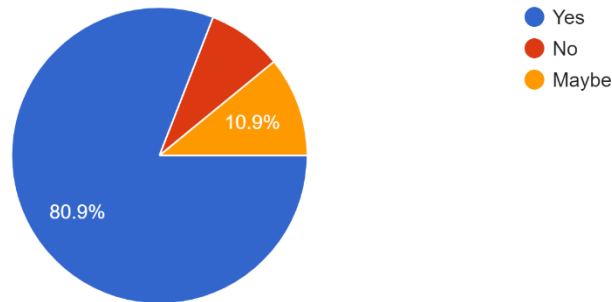


Chart 7

The above chart clearly shows that the presence of actor plays a significant role in selecting the films.

Respondents asked whether they were aware of the concept of in film branding and the majority of their responses are positive.

Are you aware of in film branding?  
110 responses

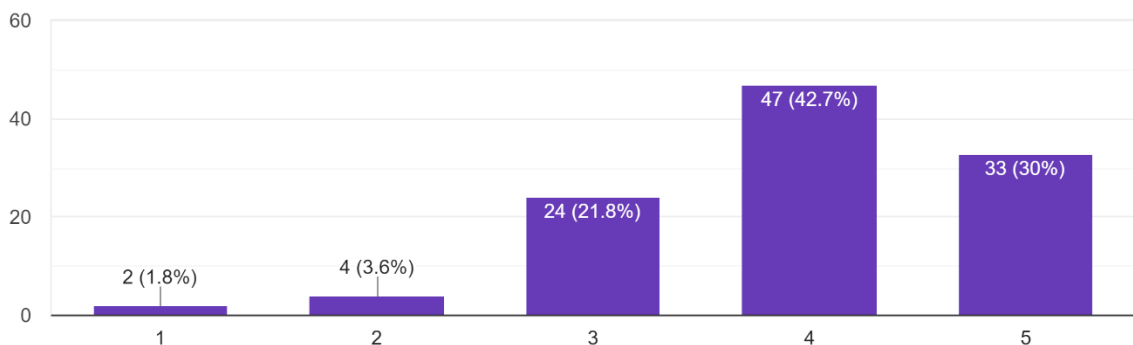


**Chart 8**

More than 80% of respondents told that they were aware of in-film branding. They know very well that films are used as a platform to promote brands.

The next few questions are statements where the respondents need to rank them on a scale of 5, where one is negative, and five is exceptionally favourable. When the respondents asked whether they can recognize the brand name within the film, the majority of them says yes. The following graph shows that.

I can recognize a product name/ brand name shown with in the film.  
110 responses



**Chart 9**

Not only they can recognize the brand. They admitted that they remember the brand name also. The brand name stays in their mind even after the film is over.

I can remember the brand used in the film.

110 responses

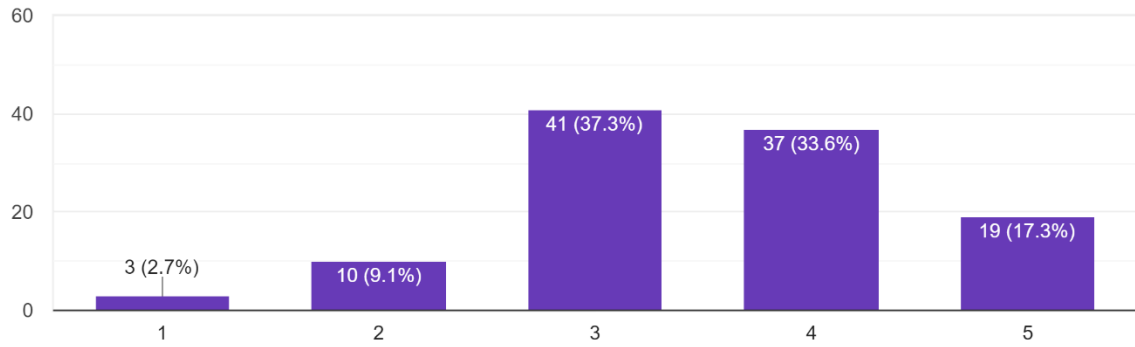


Chart 10

I can easily recall a product/ brand shown with in the film while making purchase

110 responses

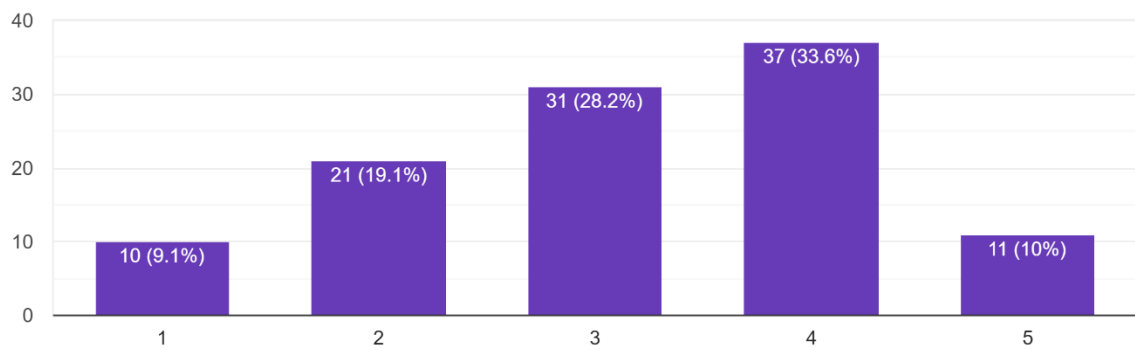
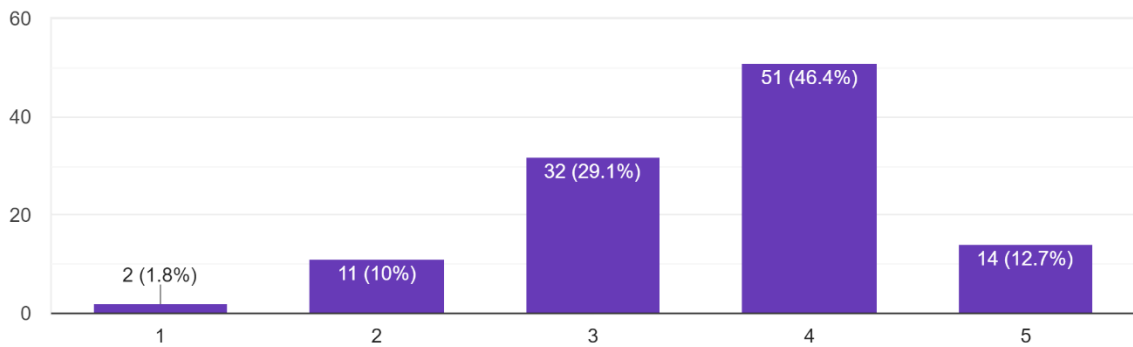


Chart 11

Brands become more acceptable when they are shown as a part of the scene with in the film  
110 responses

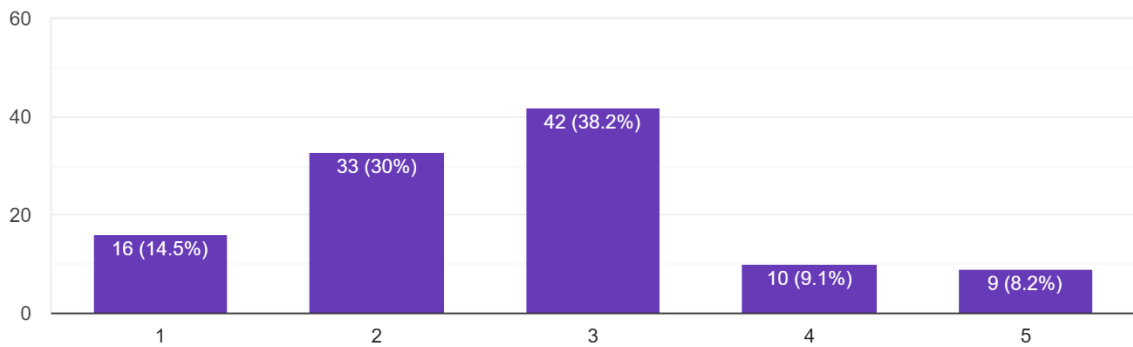


**Chart 12**

This is an essential activity in marketing. Brand recognition and brand recall are the most important thing. If consumers can recognize a brand and recall it when necessary, that means the brand is successful in gaining space in the mind of the consumers. Therefore the first hypothesis which talks about that the Brand placement plays a significant role in creating reliable brand recall is proven here.

Respondents asked whether they want to use those products shown in the film; the majority of them responds as neutral.

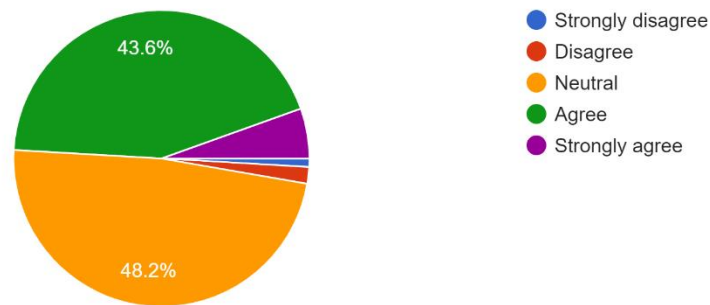
I like to use the product/ brand used by the actor in the film.  
110 responses



**Chart 13**

Though here, the majority of the reactions are neutral when asked whether they feel the products shown in films with real uses appears to be more realistic.

The use of real products with in the films make scenes more realistic  
110 responses



**Chart 14**

The above chart shows that majority of the respondents do not disagree with the fact that the practical use of the product within the films makes the use of the product more realistic to them. Now comes an essential part.

H2: brand placements create more impact when celebrities use that within the film.

The following chart clearly shows that impact is more substantial when the product/ brand placed on a popular actor.

I remember the brand when my favourite actor uses it with the film.

110 responses

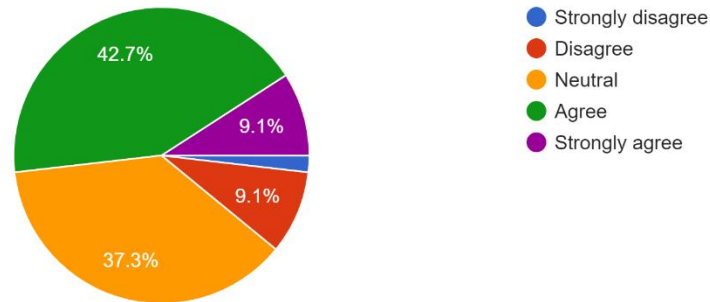


Chart 15

I develop a favorable attitude towards the brand when i see my favourite actor using that with the film.

110 responses

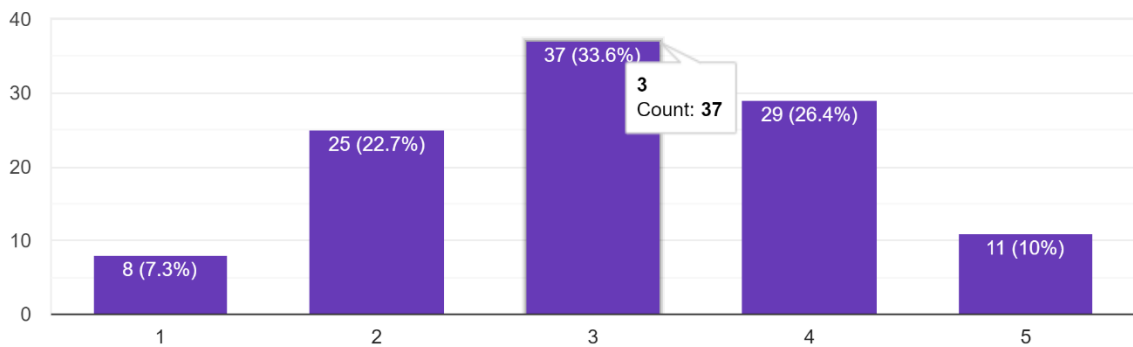


Chart 16

Both the above chart clearly shows that people develop an affinity towards a brand which is shown within a film and is endorsed by a popular actor. Therefore, the second hypothesis also stands correct.

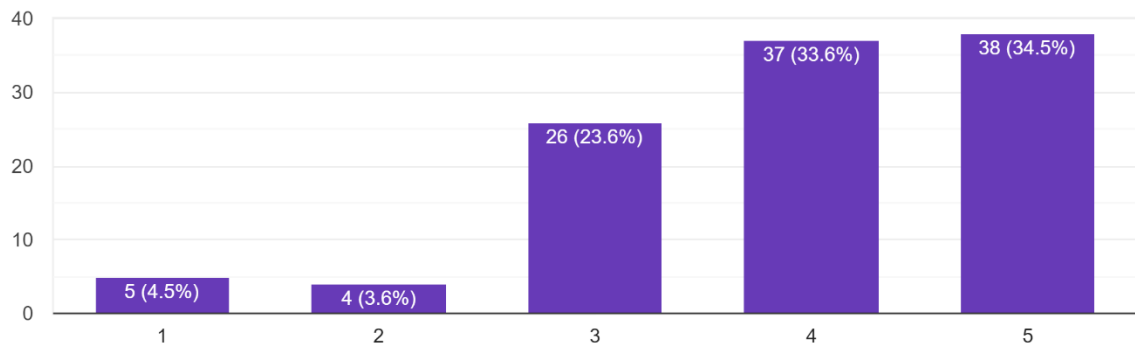
Now comes the third hypothesis,

H3: The audience well accepts brand placement within the films. The following charts show that:



I find no problem when brands uses films as a means of promotion.

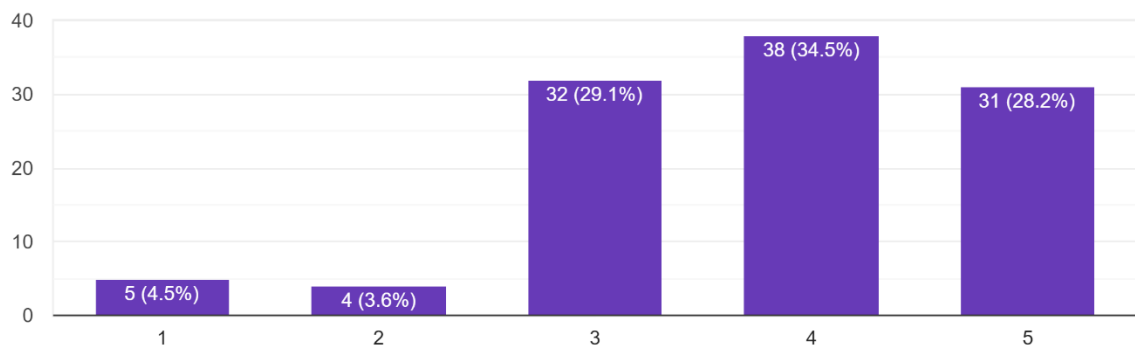
110 responses



**Chart 17**

In film branding never damages my attitude towards that brand.

110 responses



**Chart 18**

The above two charts clearly show that people are not only aware but also accept the concept of in-film branding, which the last and final hypothesis.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This research aimed to find out the effectiveness of in-film brand placement on brand recognition and recall. The brands plan strategies to create a place in the mind of the people which they are doing very successfully through the in-film brand placements. Films, when watched get full concentration from the audience compared to serial or reality shows. The main reason for that is the duration. When a person watches a film for 3hours, he concentrates on that only, and hence the brand shown in the films get constant visibility. Another important reason for getting excellent visibility is when the brands in the film they are shown as a part of the film so one cannot ignore that.

The survey for this research clearly shows that people do remember the brands shown in the film and can recognize and recall later while making the purchase decision. The survey clearly shows that product placement in films accepted by people of a different culture, language and beliefs. People of different ages accept brand placement inside films positively. Respondents of the age group between 17 years to 27 years showed positive responses towards this promotional technique. In a country like India in film brand placement is a useful technique as it appeals to people across different ages positively. The age group (17 yrs. -27 yrs.) was selected purposefully. This age group plays a significant role in buying decision hence creating an impact on them is essential. Also, this group watches movies a lot; hence this is the best way to grab their attention. Another important thing is that the barrier of gender and culture broke when a brand is promoting itself through films. These findings will help the marketers to use in film brand placement for subtly influencing the younger generations.

In India, Idol worshipping is very popular; hence the presence of celebrity plays an important role both in the movie selection as well as in creating the impression among the people. People remember and connect well when their favourite celebrity comes on screen to talk about a brand. In film branding using celebrities were observed even in Raj Kapoor starrer superhit movie "Shree 420", (1955). In that movie, when Raj Kapoor entered Mumbai for the first time, a big banner of Coca Cola was shown in the background.

The most exciting thing that came out through this research is that audience do understand that in film brand placement is a promotional strategy, but they find it acceptable. The survey clearly shows that the audience not only accepts the brands shown in the film, but they also find its okay to use films as a platform for promoting the brands.

Global researches show that advertising is losing its credibility, and hence the brands are always looking for new ways to promote their product and services successfully. Therefore, in film brand placement is a perfect platform to promote brands. This research-based on the

experience of the respondents that they shared by answering a questionnaire circulated through Google form rather than experimentation based on their impulses, which gives more room for research reliability. Nevertheless, then also it is apparent that the strategy of in-film branding is very successful in creating strong brand recognition and recall. The study was limited only to the respondents of Kolkata and Hindi films. Further researches see how the brands are using vernacular movies as a platform to increase their reach among rural consumers.

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