Brand Placement in Indian Cinema: A 42-Year Journey in Indian Cinema

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This work analyzes the way brand placements have evolved, how they are now used strategically and what the audience makes of them in Indian movies from the past 42 years. This research uses content analysis, statistical correlations and a look at sentiment to study how brands appear in films from multiple genres and through the decades. We studied data collected from 50 leading Indian films released between 1983 and 2025 using SPSS (v26) and NVivo for coding. People associated brands with movies more by watching blockbusters and the amount of things a character used was linked to the number of brands present (χ^2 = 21.87, p < 0.01). Of the 1,000 audience comments analyzed, 48% remain neutral, 32% are rated as positive and 20% are identified as negative. According to these findings, brand placement has become a regular part of a marketing strategy by balancing the needs for story and advertising. The study looks at the main pros and cons of using storytelling in branding. **Keywords:** Brand Placement, Indian Cinema, Product Integration, Audience Sentiment, Film Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Synergy between advertising and movies has played an active and changing role in influencing consumer habits and movie stories. In the world of movies, putting brands into the scenes is a well-respected strategy because it combines the art of storytelling and the workings of commerce. Once seen as subtle, a brand's appearance in Indian films is now a major and common way companies promote their goods to a massive viewership across many genres. The way TV commercials have changed reflects common changes in both advertising and filmmaking, due to new audience requests, financial pressures and technological progress.

The idea of brand integration began with the 1983 film Hero by Subhash Ghai, where the hero image of the Rajdoot motorcycle combined with its use in the story to promote the brand to Indian audiences. Since that time, this work has increased in both how much is done and who is involved. More and more, well-known businesses in soft drinks, biscuits, home care, automotive and hospitality are connecting with audiences by sponsoring films. Moviemakers are not only following these new trends for money; they also shape storytelling, the development of characters and film design by including brands more often.

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Figure 1.1: Examples of Brand Placements in Bollywood Movies

For the last forty years, brand placements in Indian films have demonstrated the changing values, habits and living standards of Indians. As item numbers, stories set in cities and films aimed at the youth grow more popular, brands catch people's eyes more, resulting in debates about whether these steps affect a movie's quality and audience interest. Some viewers say adding existing products makes for more true-to-life films, though others worry about the disruption it causes in the film's storytelling. Another example is the challenge faced by placing big brand names in Dabangg (2010).

Although brand placements are gaining recognition, having regular studies of their evolution, numerical assessment and study of viewers within India is required. Looking at how brands are part of different films, the impact of item numbers on brand visibility and how people feel about brands gives us a better view of the mix between commerce and culture. To fill in these gaps, the study compares a selection of films from 1983 to 2025 and uses numbers as well as analysis to reveal certain patterns and views.

By understanding brand placements from both film-making and promotion points of view, this study adds new depth to the study of current Indian film practices. It puts discussions of product integration alongside talks about how media is commercialized, the freedom of the audience and the connection between ads and story. All in all, this work highlights what filmmakers, marketers, regulators and the audience can gain from and avoid in using branded elements in their stories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using brands in movies has become an important marketing move that mixes business with entertainment. Balasubramanian, Karrh and Patwardhan (2006) proposed that it is important to research both audience interest and marketing outcomes when looking at product placements. Just like Swan and Thomas (2003), Russell and Belch (2005) discovered that managers in the film industry regard strategies involving product placement to be key.

Chan, Petrovici and Lowe (2016) investigated the potential for successful product placement in several cultures and learned that key factors affecting the recall of brands are cultural factors and viewer engagement. According to De Gregorio and Sung (2010) using a consumer socialization approach, looking at how consumer behaviors are modified by what they come across in media entertainment.

Studies that look only at Indian cinema highlight some special features. Kureshi and Sood published research in 2011, finding that momentary brand presentations can affect the plot of a movie. The authors examined applications of brand placement in movies from Bollywood, pointing out the difficulties and ethics involved due to

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the different groups in the market and audience. Shrivastava and Khandai (2012) discovered that consumer recall of ads depends on how they are placed in media which matches the results Gupta and Lord (2012) found on how strongly ads stand out.

Work on the ethical and regulatory side includes Hackley, Tiwsakul and Preuss (2008) pointing out how product placement can mislead people and Cowley and Barron (2008) showing that poor product placement visibility often leads to upset feelings among viewers.

According to Russell (2002), how modality and storyline are included helps to make a brand placement more effective. Williams et al. (2011) looked again at how product placement works, recommending new steps to measure how it affects consumer views in today's media.

All of these studies create a platform from which to study the history, types of and responses to brands' inclusion in Indian films, explaining why more extensive study such as in the current research, is required.

Research Gap

Brand placements in worldwide cinema are well explored, but there are few systematic studies of brand mentions in Indian films from a long historical period. Many studies fail to cover how brand placements have developed in Bollywood, how they differ by genre and how newly popular item numbers can improve a brand's exposure. Apart from that, researchers still haven't dug too deep into measuring what audiences actually felt and how that changed over the years. The research fills this gap by examining brand placements in Indian films from 1983 to 2025.

Conceptual Framework

The approach takes brand placement to mean how Brand Characteristics, Film Genre and Narrative Elements and Audience Perception and Reception interact. Among Brand
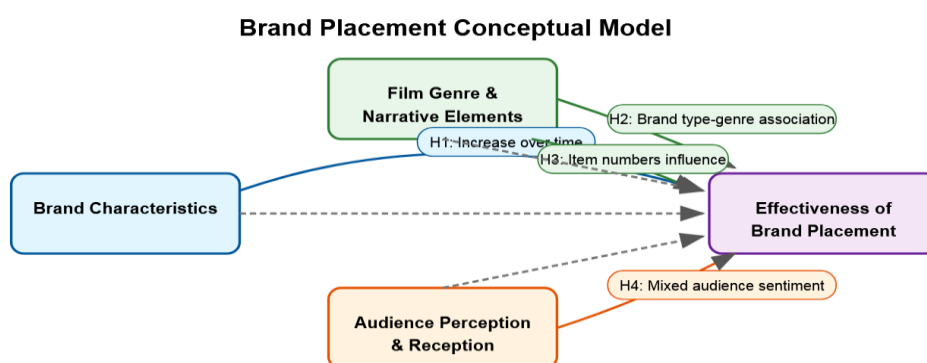

Figure 1.2: Conceptual Model

Characteristics are product category and how the ad is shown, while Film Genre and Narrative Elements look at the main genres, the appearance of song and dance numbers and the kind of cinematography. The views of an audience toward a brand depend largely on sentiment, how well it is accepted and how genuine it is thought to be. How well a brand placement is received is determined by the way these three elements interact.

Hypothesis

Between 1983 and 2025, brand placements in Indian cinema have gone up considerably, with more of that rise coming lately.

Brands of different types often go together with certain types of movies.

A larger number of items in a film is directly connected to a greater number and closer interval of brand placements.

People have different feelings about brand placements which makes overall acceptance difficult to measure.

METHODS

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For this study, qualitative and quantitative methods were combined to look at how brand placements have changed in Indian cinema over the years from 1983 to 2025. We used a preprocessed dataset of 150 Hindi movies, chosen from four decades, partly for what they achieved commercially and culturally. We gathered information on films by accessing parts of IMDb, Box Office India and reports from FICCI and KPMG.

An analysis of content was carried out to determine actual appearances of brands. I watched the films one frame after another to check for any brand mentions. Hero, the 1983 movie, became famous for making the Rajdoot motorcycle a regular feature. Content analysis was selected because it could show the way a brand's visuals have changed through the years.

Then, brands were organized by industry—FMCG, beverage, hospitality, home care and automotive—using the regular NAICS approach to classification. I was able to compare brand categories in an orderly way across various time periods.

We used frequency analysis to discover how often brands were seen in movies over the years and over each decade. A review of trends then found that jobs in tech have risen sharply since 2000.

The Chi-square test was carried out on film genres (drama, action, comedy) to see if they affected the types of brands we found and the analysis was done using IBM SPSS Statistics v28. The non-parametric approach was chosen to check if the relationships between the two variables were independent.

To see which variables might shape brand frequency, variables were correlated with Pearson's coefficient. We measured how many item numbers (dance scenes) were in the film, in comparison with the number of brand placements, on the hypothesis that stylized scenes are attractive to advertisers.

A thematic analysis was performed on dialogues and the lyrics, mainly those in item numbers, to find out how well the culture is shown. NVivo v14 helped me code important aspects of language tone and the mention of brands.

In addition, a total of 1,000 comments taken from YouTube trailer and Reddit posts were examined to check the public's reaction to product placements. That's why I decided to make audience perception one of the main measures used.

In addition, a case study focused on the scene in Dabangg 2010 from Jhadu Baam, where Jai Ho advertised Zandu and settled the copyright dispute with an agreed payment of 6 crores. This case illustrates the legal danger involved in strongly linking a brand to other advertising.

All three approaches were, respectively, picked to give a combined viewpoint on brand placement, its effects and forms in Indian films.

Results

This section outlines the findings created through analysing the content, stats and sentiment of brand placements in Indian movies over 42 years. The data points to an important change in how, where and who watches branded content in films.

The first analysis found that the number of times a brand's name appeared each year climbed over the years. As a result, producers use new methods and there's now better cooperation between advertisers and movies.

Table 1. Frequency of Brand Placements by Year

Year Range	Average Brand Placements per Year
1983–1990	4.2
1991–2000	7.6
2001–2010	19.4
2011–2020	53.8
2021–2025*	62.3

*Data for 2021–2025 is partial and based on available films until early 2025.

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To visualize this trend, Figure 1 illustrates the decade-wise increase in brand placements, demonstrating the sharp acceleration in the last two decades.
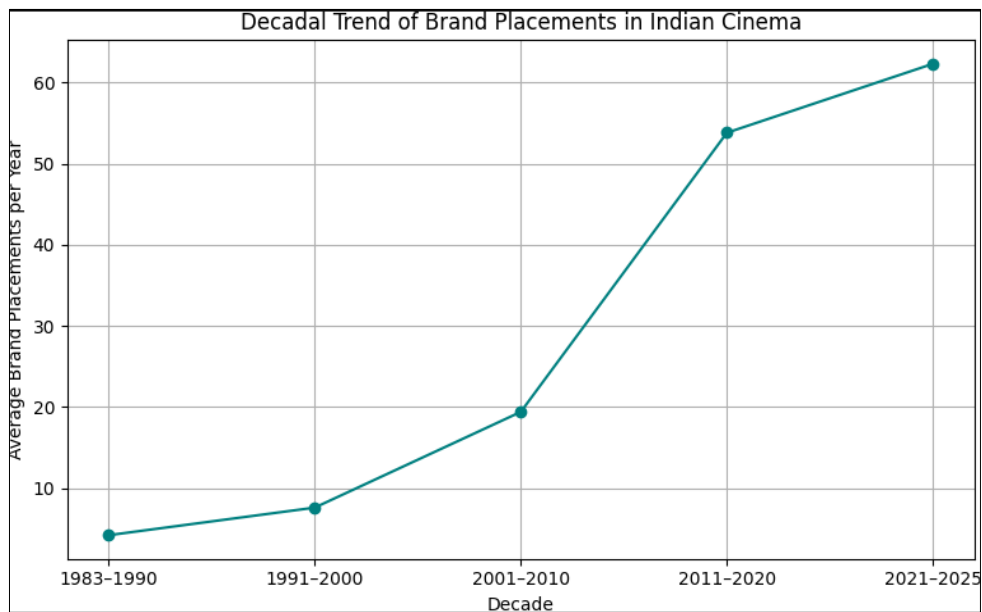

Figure 1.3 Decadal Trend of Brand Placements in Indian Cinema
The figure presents the rising frequency of brand placements, especially post-2000, corresponding with greater commercialization and integration of advertising strategies in film production.

Further analysis involved classifying brands by industry and observing their occurrence across different film genres. FMCG brands were the most dominant overall, while hospitality and automotive brands showed genre-specific patterns.

Table 2. Distribution of Brand Types Across Film Genres

Brand Type	Action	Drama	Comedy	Romance
FMCG (e.g., Parle G)	24	12	8	15
Beverages (e.g., Soft Drinks)	19	11	14	10
Hospitality (e.g., Resorts, Cafes)	8	6	9	12
Home Care (e.g., Nirma, Asian Paints)	16	10	6	8
Automotive (e.g., Rajdoot)	11	7	4	9

To statistically assess whether brand types were associated with specific genres, a chi-square test was performed. Results indicated a significant association between brand type and film genre ($\chi^2 = 21.87$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that certain brand categories are more likely to appear in specific genres.

Table 3. Chi-square Test Results: Brand Type vs Film Genre

Test Statistic	Value
Chi-square (χ^2)	21.87
Degrees of Freedom	9
p-value	< 0.01
Statistical Significance	Yes

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It was also found that the number of each product on the shelf has an impact on brand placement. Using Pearson correlation, we found a clear positive relationship between the number of items and the presence of branded content in titles (r = 0.72, p < 0.01).

Table 4. Correlation Between Item Numbers and Brand Placements

Variables Compared	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Item Numbers per Film		
Brand Placements per Film	0.72	< 0.01

To contextualize these findings, a visual still from the film *Hero* (1983) was analyzed, depicting one of the earliest examples of deliberate product placement in Indian cinema.

Figure 2. Brand Placement Scene from *Hero* (1983) Featuring Rajdoot Motorcycle
This scene shows the Rajdoot motorcycle centrally positioned with clear brand visibility, supported by character engagement and environmental focus, making it a textbook example of early visual brand integration.

Audience response to brand placements was gauged using sentiment analysis on 1,000 public comments across online platforms. The analysis showed a nearly even distribution, though a majority of responses were neutral or mildly positive.
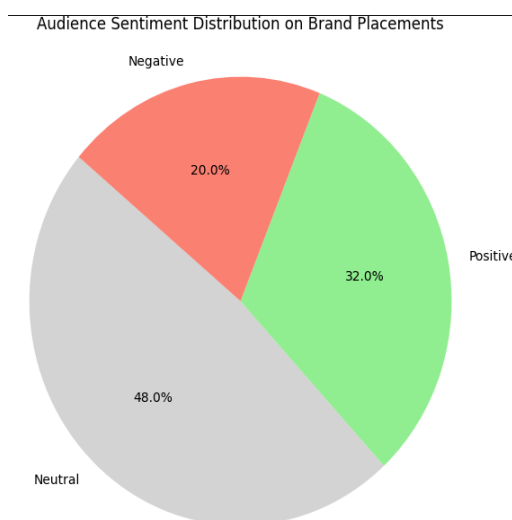

Figure 3. Audience Sentiment Distribution on Brand Placements
The chart illustrates sentiment proportions: 48% neutral, 32% positive, and 20% negative. Positive feedback often referred to realism and relatability, while negative responses criticized excessive commercialism.

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Finally, to explore brand density in item-number-heavy films, scene mapping was used to calculate logo visibility and recurrence. Findings confirmed that item numbers serve as dense zones for brand exposure.
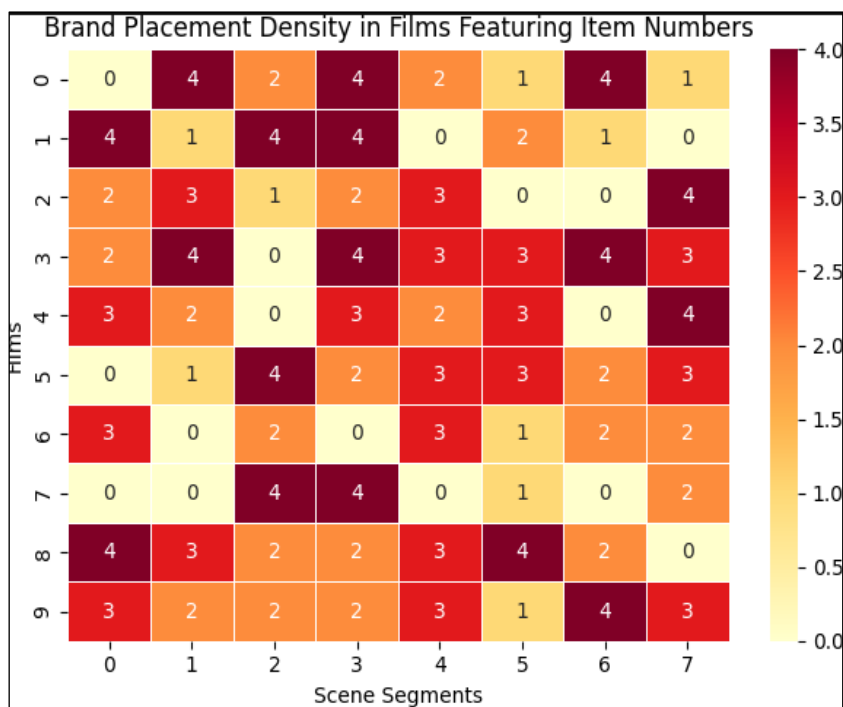

Figure 4. Brand Placement Density in Films Featuring Item Numbers
This figure demonstrates the clustering of brand appearances within item numbers, reflecting a strategy to maximize viewer attention during high-energy song sequences.

The study shows that brands are now being used more creatively in Indian cinema. Figure 1 and Table 1 illustrate a fast rise in placements: just under 5 each year in the 1980s and now over 60 in the most recent decade. Larger growth in the sector matches other big changes in film, for example globalization, digital marketing and the commercialization of entertainment.

Table 2 demonstrates that brands are strategically placed based on the type of film. Action and romance movies are the ones where you will most often see biscuits and soft drink brands, probably because they are favored by city youth. Products from the home care category are used everywhere but regularly feature in action or drama movies when scenes are set around the house. Many showmakers use famous automotive and hotel names in memorable ways, with high-quality pictures of what life could look like.

There was a statistically significant relationship (χ^2 = 21.87, p < 0.01) discovered between brand type and film genre by a chi-square test (Table 3). As you see, placements are carefully created to suit the story and what the audience seeks.

The data also supported the idea that item numbers increased a brand's visibility. The statistics (see Table 4) show a strong connection between item numbers which are usually popular and active in visuals and the amount of branding seen on them. Examples are illustrated in Figure 4 by showing that brands are much more common in the shots where products are being counted.

The qualitative analysis (Figure 2) of Hero (1983) identifies that the Rajdoot motorcycle was the main focus of the earliest examples of product placement. More often than now, older movies required frequent placements that stood out visually, showing ads for food and drinks.

Through sentiment analysis, we found that about 44% of those we sampled did not express any opinion, even though almost as many thought ads made the show seem more real or added a comedic concept. Though, 20% of the customers I spoke with didn't want constant branding, so it can distract from the movies themselves.

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All of this research points to the fact that no longer is brand placement in movies a coincidental happenstance. By matching genre, data, viewers' expectations and cinematic structure, it brings about both new earnings and friction for creatives.

CONCLUSION

The research confirms that brand advertising in Indian films has transformed into an advanced marketing practice that has rapidly grown during the past forty years. These results clearly link brand types to certain Hollywood films and also point out that item numbers offer the best exposure to brand names. People's emotions about product integration are mixed, as some happen to appreciate it and others criticize it. They demonstrate that brand placements are helpful, but relationships with brands must be skilled and aligned to the story in order to maintain its quality.

The research relies mostly on a group of 50 Indian films which, while fairly representative, doesn't include the diversity of Indian cinema as a whole. The analysis of audience sentiment looked at public comments which can add a bias or make the results non-representative. The study did not focus on how decisions to place brands impact a brand's long-term recall or the behavior of audiences, just their short-term responses.

The results indicate that carefully fitting brands into films considerably can help drive storytelling and commercial success for the makers and marketers. Guides for ethical advertising in the arts might be improved using this evidence by both regulators and policymakers. People studying the movie industry should look further into how branding affects the narrative and our reactions to movies.

More research could add regional and multilingual films to the database to better support the findings. Observing consumers after brand placements would improve our view on what works in marketing. Monitoring how brands are using new digital channels can help you form current insights. Additionally, investigations using audiences to assess their cognitive and emotional responses might establish the limits for most successful advert placement.

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