

Full Length Research Paper

Product placement: exploring effects of product usage by principal actors

D. L. R. Van der Waldt*, V. Nunes and J. Stroebel

Department of Marketing and Communication Management, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of Pretoria, Republic of South Africa.

Accepted 23 June 2008

The use of product placements has evoked interest by marketers for many years. Yet, little research has been done on this medium within the South African context; therefore the purpose of this study is to investigate consumer attitudes towards prominent product placements and the principal actor using the brand in the film or broadcast programme. Product placements are seen as a subtle means of advertising that should be used in conjunction with the traditional mass media. It has been used for many years and can be defined as the compensated inclusion of a branded product or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means within mass media programming (films and broadcast programmes) for promotional purposes. The survey method entailed that respondents had to observe a series of scenes from a film clip containing product placements; thereafter they were required to complete a questionnaire. Two hundred respondents, between the ages of 18 to 24 participated in this survey. Results indicated that their ability to recall prominently placed products is greater than their ability to recall subtly placed products. It further indicates that a principal actor using a brand in a film or broadcast programmes does not necessarily influence consumers' affective behaviour. It is suggested that product placements will become a strategic and viable marketing option in the mobile environment for targeting specific groups. Advertising companies seek more venues for products. From these findings it can be concluded that if marketers and advertisers consider product placements as an integrated marketing communication vehicle, they must request that their brands are placed prominently in a film and broadcast programmes to ensure maximum exposure and greater awareness among consumers. The results also provide useful insight to media planners as to whether product placement is effective when the principal actor uses it.

Key words: Prominent and subtle product placements, brand awareness, recognition, recall, aided/unaided recall, related selectivity.

INTRODUCTION

Product placements have received renewed attention in recent years (Nelson and McLeod, 2005) and this tendency is still continuing. According to an American report by PQ Media (CBC Arts Online, 2006) placement of products in films, television, video games and songs will triple by the year 2010. Source Watch (2006) indicate that two thirds of advertisers employ "branded entertainment" - product placement - for targeting a specific group. British celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver received £15

000.00 from *Heinz* as part of a product placement deal in which he agreed to include an up-market version of baked beans on toast on the menu at his restaurant (Accessed: 2006-08-28). This is an indication that product placements are not limited to film and broadcast programmes, but it is also relevant in other media. The application of product placements in the digital and mobile environments present new marketing challenges.

In the broader Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) context, all the elements of the marketing mix need to be integrated and co-ordinated to achieve both the marketing and organisational objectives, in targeting a specific market. Van der Waldt (2005) contextualised product placements in film and broadcast programmes as

*Corresponding author. E-mail: delarey.vanderwaldt@up.ac.za.
Tel: (012) 4203415. Fax: (012) 362 5085.

a communication vehicle within IMC. Product placements should therefore be regarded as part of the organisation's over-arching IMC strategy, and have evolved from an average tactic into a deliberate strategy (CBC Arts Online, 2006).

There are three ways in which a product may enter a film script: companies can request film studios to place their product in exchange for a fee; film studios may approach companies to use their products in a film; or independent product placement firms may finalise placement deals between the film studio and the company (Gupta et al., 2000). The product may be placed as an integral part of the film, requiring the actors / actresses to use the product (real placements) or it may be inserted using digital technology (virtual placements).

Management often question the effectiveness of their organisations' advertising and marketing efforts. Du Plessis et al. (2006) have identified five ways of measuring effectiveness of an advertising campaign. These include recognition and recall, emotional reactions, persuasive impact, physiological arousal (did the consumers' pupils dilate when viewing the featured brand?) and sales response (did the consumer purchase the featured brand after viewing it in a film or broadcast programme?).

In order to measure the effectiveness of product placements in film and broadcast programmes, one needs to compare the results of this promotional tool to the research objectives set. In this study, emphasis will be placed on recall of the featured products in a film clip. To enhance the effect of product placements in film and broadcast programmes, it should be used as an IMC vehicle to support the primary above-the-line-media (television, radio, newspaper, magazine and cinema) in the marketing strategy. Product placements as the only vehicle in the communication strategy will have a limited impact.

The advantages of product placements in film include high viewer attention and involvement; successful films attract large audiences thereby providing an advertising message with exceptional reach; and product placement represents a natural, non-aggressive, non-persuasive way of promoting a brand or company (d'Astous and Chartier, 2000). Long shelf life of the advertising message is an additional benefit once the film is released on video and digital-video-disc (DVD) as it is an efficient investment in terms of cost per thousand (Morton and Friedman, 2002).

Possible disadvantages are addressed by Van der Waldt (2005): a product placed in the wrong film and broadcast programme could damage the image of a product and it may not reach the intended audience; if the product is used or placed in an inappropriate context within the film and broadcast programme it may damage the products reputation; consumers' attitude towards pro-

duct placements may be negative and their actions may be harmful to the organisation marketing the product; and lastly, if not prominently placed, viewers may not see the product and the marketers efforts would be futile.

Russell (2002) contends that how product placements are implemented remains an open empirical question. Wiles and Danielova (2006) state that little evidence exist that product placements are worthwhile and literature provides little insight about which placements are the most effective.

Research problem and objectives

Previous research has restricted attention to only a few measures of message effectiveness and greater emphasis has been placed on the memory-related measures as opposed to attitudinal measures with regards to the impact of product placements on consumers (Gupta et al., 2000). Within the South African context few studies exist on this topic as indicated on the following two search engines: EpscoHost (<http://innopac.up.ac.za/validate/http%3A%2F%2F0-journals.ebsco.com.innopac.up.ac.za%3A80%2FHome.asp>) and Emerald, (<http://innopac.up.ac.za/validate/http%3A%2F%2F0www.emeraldinsight.com.innopac.up.ac.za%3A80%2FvI%3D994161%2Fcl%3D84%2Fnw%3D1%2Frpsv%2Fcg-bin%2Femeraldft%3Faction%3Dnew>).

Recent literature indicate that product placements in film and television programmes received little attention and that there exist a need for proving the obvious – the more prominent and the longer a principal actor uses the product the bigger the effect on the consumers would be. The necessity for research based findings on product placements in film and broadcast programmes are emphasised by the recent focus on product placements. Van der Waldt (2005) argues that source association is an advantage of product placements. When film attendees see their favourite film star using the product, the impact of this exposure could be high. However, little evidence exists on the use of product placements by the principal actor. Van der Waldt et al. (2007) warn that in order to avoid the bias introduced by individual recognition, future research should investigate utilising a research design where association between placement exposure and reported behaviour is framed more definitely. They further argue that placements on Mobile Communication Media (MCM), with its physical small size and clear images, reception of undistorted visuals, marketers and advertisers should ensure prominently placed brand names. This aspect has also received little attention.

Van der Waldt et al. (2008a) content that there is little evidence that a film attendee's intention to purchase a

evidence that a film attendee's intention to purchase a product once it has been viewed in a film, is related to the exposure to the product. Van der Waldt et al. (2008b) further warn that not all views are positive towards product placements in film and broadcast programmes. Some critics refer to these messages as "hidden, but paid" or "masked communications". To fully analyse these changes and implement marketing strategies thereof, benchmark studies are needed (p.17). These are important issues that remain unexplored or need further validation within the South African context. The objective of this article is to determine if:

- I. The prominence of a product placement affects consumers' recall.
- II. A principal actor using the brand influences affective behaviour of the consumer (intention to purchase the featured brand).

Literature review

Previous research on product placements have not specifically examined whether the impact of associating a product with a principal actor will lead to purchase intent, although celebrity endorsement has interested consumer researchers. D'Astous and Chartier (2000) tested whether product placements in which the principal actor is present will be better liked and remembered than product placements in which it is not. Their findings revealed that the presence of the principal actor is likely to increase brand awareness, but not necessarily the consumers' liking of the brand. One of the first published studies of general attitudes toward brand placements was from Nebenzahl and Secunda (Karrh et al., 2001) who conducted an attitudinal study revealing that most consumers do not object to product placements in films and view it as an effective communication medium. Consumers prefer it to other forms of on-the-screen promotional activities because consumers feel that traditional advertisements are worn out and they would prefer less obtrusive forms of marketing communication (i.e., well-integrated product placements). Those who object to product placements mostly based their decisions on ethical grounds.

Gupta and Gould (1997) provided additional findings regarding attitudinal studies of product placements in films. It indicated that both consumers' attitude towards the advertisement and their attitude towards the brand are influenced by their attitude towards advertising of products in general. Consumers' who like or dislike advertisements both have a positive attitude towards product placements in films, as they feel that it makes the film more realistic. Similarly research suggest that consumers' who have a more positive attitude towards advertising in general, will have a more positive attitude

toward product placements in films (Gupta et al., 2000). Recent focus on product placement research consists of interdisciplinary approaches: moral, legal, regulatory and trade implications by Schejter (2004), ethical considerations by Hornick (2006); the impact on the organisation's market value by Wiles and Danielova (2006) and virtual placements in mobile technology by Cohen (2006).

Product placement

Product placement, and more specific, brand placement, is the compensated inclusion of a branded product or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means within mass media programming (films and broadcast programmes) for promotional purposes (Babin and Carder, 1996; D'Astous and Chartier, 2000; Morton and Friedman, 2002).

Prominently placed products

Product or brand recognition depends significantly on the nature of product placements as identified by D'Astous and Chartier (2000). They also state that the recognition of branded products depends on subtlety, length of exposure, and the integration of the placement within the scene of a film, personal judgement, brand awareness and the verbal mention of the brands name within the film by actors.

Gupta and Lord (1998) propose a two-dimensional approach to categorising different types of product placements that influences a consumer's recall (brand awareness). The first category is the *mode of presentation*. There are three modes namely: visual only (involves screening a product or some other visual brand identifier without any related message or sounds on the audio track which draw attention to the product); audio only (involves the mention of a brand name or an actor conveying brand-related messages in audio form, without presenting the product on the screen); and combined audio-visual (involves screening a brand and at the same time mentioning the brand name or conveying a brand-relevant message in audio form). Visual is the most widely used mode to place products in films, but consumers may not recall the product's presence if it is not aided by audio reinforcement (Gupta and Lord, 1998). Audio-visual has been identified as having a higher average recall, thus overcoming the problem experienced in visual alone, but unfortunately at a large cost (Balasubramanian, 1994; Gupta and Lord, 1998). The *level of prominence* thus forms the second category. Prominent placements are "those in which the product or other brand identifier is made highly visible by virtue of size and/or position on the screen or centrality to the action in the scene" (Gupta and Lord, 1998).

Subtle placements are “those in which the brand is not shown prominently (small in size, a background prop outside of the main field of visual focus, lost in array of multiple products or objects, low exposure time)” (Gupta and Lord, 1998).

The above mode of presentation and the level of prominence of a product placement are important criteria to consider for marketers and advertisers alike as it influences the consumer’s level of recall.

For the purposes of this article, a prominently placed product is viewed as one that is more in the forefront with a longer exposure and that is highly visible in the film scene. A subtle product placement is regarded as one that is not in the forefront, with a shorter exposure and is not highly visible in the film scene.

Brand awareness, recognition and recall

Simple exposure of a product in a film may enhance brand awareness. Brand awareness varies on a continuum ranging from recognition to recall and allows the consumer to identify the product or brand to purchase. Recognition can be defined as “the form of memory that simply requires one to differentiate or discriminate the previously encountered stimulus from a set of distracting stimuli, which would be easier than recall” (Babin and Carder, 1996). Recall on the other hand is “the form of memory that requires one to reconstruct the stimulus itself since the stimulus is not present at the time of recall” (Babin and Carder, 1996). Recall is considered to be a crucial gauge of a product placement’s effectiveness and according to Balasubramanian (1994) proprietary studies often use recall statistics to assume a placement’s value to its sponsor.

Related selectivity

Du Plessis and Rousseau (2003) illustrate that brand awareness (recall and recognition) is influenced by a consumer’s related selectivity. According to them there are four kinds of related selectivity among consumers. These include *selective exposure* (what consumers’ choose to listen to, view and read in the film); *selective attention* (greater awareness for a brand that consumers’ support and avoidance of brands that are contradictory to consumers’ beliefs); *selective comprehension* (involves interpreting discrepant information so that it is consistent with consumers’ beliefs and attitudes); and *selective retention* (process of remembering the information (brand placed within the film or broadcast programme) that is relevant to the decision (purchase decision) and/ or conforms to existing beliefs and attitudes). Related selectivity is relevant in this study as it is a sub-discipline of consumer behaviour. This related selectivity influences consumer

brand awareness (consumers’ recognition and recall) of the featured brand and will ultimately determine if the product placement was effective or not.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated for this study:

H₁: Consumers will better recall a prominently placed product in a film than a subtly placed product in a film.

H₂: Usage of the product by the principal actor using a brand in a film influences affective behaviour of the consumer.

The constructs of H₁ were tested using a multiple choice multiple-response scale which provided a list of products that are prominently and subtly placed in the film clip as well as other well-known brand names not featured in the film clip (aided recall) to test the respondents’ recall.

An open-ended question (unaided), requesting respondents to list all the brands they recall seeing in the film clip was used to determine if the level of prominence affects the respondent’s recall. The aided questions were given separately to respondents to ensure that these responses to the unaided recall questions were not influenced by the aided recall questions. The level of measurement for these constructs was nominal and ratio.

The construct in hypothesis two was measured using a five-point, multi-item Likert-type scale (Karrh et al., 2001) that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Questions and statements related to seeing the brand being used by the principal actor were asked to determine if the actor influences consumers’ affective behaviour (the intention to purchase the featured brand). The level of measurement for these constructs was interval.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The focus was on undergraduate students between the ages of 18 to 24 who enjoy watching films. The samples age range was appropriate given the fact that this category is frequently the primary target audience of film attendees which producers target (Morton and Friedman, 2002). The sample was selected from a tertiary institution in the eastern suburbs of Pretoria and non-probability sampling was used to select the students. A total of 200 participants completed the questionnaires.

Questionnaire

After a pilot survey of 20 respondents was done the questionnaire was refined. The questionnaire was based on the film clip observed. Compilations of various scenes

Table 1. Results of prominently versus subtly placed products*.

Prominent products	Percentage	Subtle products	Percentage
Dell	2.5%	Jack Daniels	17%
Wonder bra	40%	Nike	14.5%
Caprisun	10.5%	Reebok	9%
Lucozade	4.5%	Advil	9%
Coke	49%	People magazine	4.5%
Porsche	51%	Colgate	4%
Adidas	67%	Vodacom/fone	2%
Heineken	41%	Dr pepper	1.5%
McDonalds	47.5%	Sony	1%
Pepsi	16.5%	Ford	0.5%
Mini cooper	66.5%	Snicker	0%
Gillette	53.5%	Playstation	0%
GQ magazine	40.5%	Amstel	0%
Motorola	6.5%	Sprite	0%
Apple Mac	4.5%	Master card	0%
G-shock	0.5%	Tabasco	0%

* Respondents were asked to list the products or brand names they recalled

** The researchers classified the products according to prominently versus subtle

from the following feature films were made: *Swordfish*, *Bend it like Beckham* and *Gone in Sixty Seconds*. A selection of prominent and subtle prominent placements as well as placements where the principal actor uses the product was selected. Scenes were then edited on a DVD to be used as a stimulus material. The film clip was shown to the respondents prior to the completion of the questionnaire.

The participants were not informed of the research objectives before completing the questionnaire but were aware that research was being conducted. An open-ended question (unaided), requesting respondents to list all the brands they recall seeing in the film clip will also be used to determine if the level of prominence (prominent versus subtle) affects respondents' recall. Reliability assessments were conducted to determine the Cronbach alphas for all the items related that measured prominently placed products as well as on the items that measured the influence a principal actor have on the consumer's specific behaviour. A Cronbach alpha value of 0.7 or more indicates that the questionnaire is internally consistent (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). The items concerning consumers' attitude towards prominently product placements in films obtained a Cronbach alpha value of 0.77. The items concerning the influence a principal actor has on consumers' specific behaviour obtained a Cronbach alpha value of 0.84. These items include: When a principal actor that I like uses a product in a film, I am more likely to remember the product; I have looked for a product in the store after seeing it being used by a

principal actor in a film; I buy brands I see principal actors using or holding in films; I have stopped using a brand after seeing it being used by a principal actor in a film; I wanted to try a brand after seeing it being used by a principal actor in a film, and I pay special attention to the brands being used by my favourite principal actor in a film.

RESULTS

Descriptive as well as inferential analyses were conducted on each item in the questionnaire followed by the relevant hypotheses tests at a significance level of 0.05. Respondents were requested to list all the brands they recalled seeing in the film clip (unaided recall question). Table 1 indicates the percentage of respondents who recalled the various prominently and subtly placed products that were featured in the film clip.

The mostly prominently placed products were more visible and according to the above table the percentages of recall were higher than those products that were subtle placements.

The aided questions were handed out separately to ensure that participants' responses to the unaided recall question were not influenced by the aided recall question. A list of various prominently placed, subtle placed and fake products were given to the respondents. On this list they were asked to whether they could recall any of these brand names. Table 2 reveals the recall percentages of the respondents for prominently placed products, subtle

Table 2. Results for the aided recall* question.

Number	Type of product placement	Products / brands	Percentage
1	Prominent	Gillette	94.5%
2	Prominent	Adidas	90%
3	Prominent	Mc Donald's	84.5%
4	Prominent	Coke	79.5%
5	Prominent	Caprisun	47%
6	Prominent	Apple Mac laptop	45.5%
7	Prominent	G-shock – Casio watch	13.5%
8	Subtle	Jack Daniels	62%
9	Subtle	Nike	36%
10	Subtle	Colgate	26%
11	Subtle	People Magazine	20%
12	Subtle	Ford	17.5%
13	Subtle	Tabasco	4%
14	Fake, product did not appear	Samsung	28%
15	Fake, product did not appear	Nokia	19.5%
16	Fake, product did not appear	Smirnoff vodka	18.5%
17	Fake, product did not appear	Swatch watch	13%
18	Fake, product did not appear	Marlboro cigarettes	10%
19	Fake, product did not appear	Cosmopolitan	8.5%
20	Fake, product did not appear	Nestle	5.5%

These brand names were given in the questionnaire.

placed products and unplaced products.

Table 2 above indicates the percentage of respondents that recalled the particular brand. Both prominently and subtly placed products, which appeared in the film clip as well as well-known brands that did not appear in the film clip (aided recall question) were mentioned in the questionnaire. Brands/products numbered 1 - 7 are brands that were prominently placed in the film clip, brands/products numbered 8 - 13 are brands that were subtly placed in the film clip and lastly brands/products 14 - 20 are brands that did not feature in the film clip. It can be deduced that the percentages for recalling prominently placed products are significantly higher than the percentages for subtly placed products.

Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis one

The Wilcoxon rank sign test was used to test hypothesis one. Table 3 represents the results of the Wilcoxon Rank Sign Test. The following was found: the one-tailed p-value was 0.00, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the difference between consumers' ability to recall prominent versus subtle placements in films is statistically significant. The null

hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis and it is concluded that consumers' *recall of prominently placed products are better than the recall of subtly placed products in films.*

The Wilcoxon rank sign test confirmed the alternative hypothesis namely that managers who consider product placements as a promotional tool, should ensure that their products / brands are placed prominently in a film. This will provide maximum effect on consumers' recall and will increase consumers' awareness of the brand.

Hypothesis two

The respondents had to respond regarding seeing the brand being used by the principal actor to determine if the principal actor has an influence on consumers' affective behaviour (the intention to purchase the featured brand). The mean score for this scale is 2.88 indicating that consumers are relatively neutral towards the principal actor using the brand. The One sample t-test was used to test hypothesis two. Table 4 reveals the results of the t-test. The mean was 2.88 and this value is very close to the benchmark (3), indicating that null hypothesis is not rejected. It can therefore be concluded that *the principal actor using a brand in a film does not influence consumers' affective behaviour.*

Table 3. Prominently and subtly placed products in the communication strategy

TOTSUT - TOTPROM		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Negative Ranks		184(a)	94.47	17383.00
Positive Ranks		2(b)	4.00	8.00
Ties		14(c)		
Total		200		
a TOTSUT < TOTPROM b TOTSUT > TOTPROM c TOTPROM = TOTSUT				
Z		TOTSUT - TOTPROM		
P-value		-11.843(a) .00		
a Based on positive ranks. b Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test				

TOTSUT – total subtle product placements
TOTPROM – total prominent product placements

Table 4. Principal actor’s influence

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Total influence principal actor has on consumers’ affective behaviour	200		2.88	.77	.055	
	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Total influence principal actor has on consumers’ affective behaviour	-2.233	199	.027	-.12200	-.2297	-.0143

One-tailed p-value = 1 – (two-tailed p-value / 2) = 0.9865

Limitations

Participation of this study was restricted to university students between 18 - 24 years in Pretoria only. Results may differ if other segments of film audiences are studied, as it is possible that students reflect more positive attitudes toward product placements than the rest of the population.

Similar to the research by D’Astous and Chartier (2000) the product placement stimuli were presented outside the cinema context: "Viewing several placements in isolation is quite an artificial situation and it is not clear that the effects observed in this research would be replicated in a real movie-viewing context". Finally, the subjective selection of product placements in the film clip by the researchers could also have skewed the results in this study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Marketers and advertisers, who consider product placements as an integrated marketing communication vehicle, should ensure that their products/brands are placed prominently in a film. This will provide maximum effect on consumers’ recall and will increase consumers’ awareness of the brand. Although the principal actor using a brand in a film did not influence consumers’ affective behaviour, managers should be cautious when making decisions regarding the actors with whom they want to associate their product with.

Evidence found in this research indicates that prominent product placement is an effective IMC vehicle with regards to consumers’ ability to recall brands placed in a film or broadcast programmes. This recall increases brand exposure and therefore giving marketers an addi-

tional tool when targeting their desired market. Recent focus on virtual product placements (Cohen, 2006) should also receive attention in the transitional South African consumer context. Mobile video and mobile entertainment is in its infancy stage with new developments and possibilities. It is suggested that product placements marketing option in the mobile environment for targeting specific groups. Advertising companies seek more venues for products, as CBC Arts Online (2006) stress. Products are embedded from song lyrics to books to video games in what is called: "seamless brand integration" (Accessed: 2006). This seamless brand integration contributes to the portrayal of reality that necessitates research on the impact thereof. As Wiles and Danielova (2006) content there is a general need to investigate which film product placement strategies maximize shareholder value. It is evident in the present article that prominently placed products and brand names as well as the emphasis of the usage thereof by the principal actor strengthen the impact on consumers. The question remains how big this impact is and does it motivate television viewers or film attendees to buy the product?

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