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Product Placement and Traditional TV Commercials: A Comparison of the Efficacy of Two Marketing Techniques

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by

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Introduction

Product Placement, as defined by MMI Product Placement Inc, is "the process which integrates an advertiser's product into movies and television shows for clear brand exposure" (MMI Product Placement). A globally accepted marketing technique, product placement is expanding the ways in which products are presented to consumers. There is a significant importance in understanding how product placement works, where this form of marketing is heading, and how it benefits marketing communications. Paid placement found in entertainment venues has increased over 11% throughout the past thirty years (Promo Magazine). In fact, $3.46 billion was spent on product placement in 2004, and that number is expected to increase to $4.24 billion in 2005 (Promo Magazine). These numbers alone are a strong testament to the impact of this marketing technique, but numbers only begin to describe the potential of product placement in marketing.

Product placement is often used to enhance integrated marketing communication campaigns. Integrated marketing communication (IMC) efforts deliver a uniform brand message in aspiration of creating lasting relationships with consumers (Belch and Belch 17). Product placement can play a vital role in IMC process because it allows branding synergy to occur (Belch and Belch 21). Beyond simply making all of a brand's advertisements have the same look and message, it allows the company to go a step further and connect a product with the situation or experience in which the product itself belongs. In doing this, product placement separates itself from other advertising techniques.

Furthermore, because product placement is a nontraditional advertising method, there are many obstacles to overcome as integrating products into entertainment avenues becomes more widely practiced. Some of these obstacles include potential restrictions through laws and regulations. Understanding product

placement may help those within entertainment and marketing industries to self-regulate in order to avoid more strict regulations by the government. Other obstacles include understanding the ethical implications that accompany advertising in nontraditional advertising mediums. This is an important hurdle for both marketers and consumers to address in order to ensure that product placement serves its purpose using principled methods.

In this paper, the history, ethical concerns, and framework for product placement will be outlined in order to solidify an understanding of the technique. Next, the advantages to product placement will be highlighted and compared to traditional forms of advertising. The idea of whether or not one of the forms—product placement or commercials—is better to be used than the other will be explored.

Framework for Product Placement

Cristel A. Russell, from the University of Arizona, proposed a three-dimensional framework for understanding product placement—visual, script, and plot placement (357). The first dimension he discusses is visual placement, the most widely recognized form of product placement. This exposure can be achieved through "creative placement"—where brands or logos are subtly blended into scenes of the show through billboards or other external mediums—or "on-set placement," in which the brand appears directly in the designed sets of the movie or television show (Russell 357). Both methods place the product on the screen for some period of time, visibly connecting the brand with the program.

Although traditionally thought of as only a visual brand appearance, product placement can also be a simple verbal mentioning of the brand (Russell 357). Russell discusses this as the second dimension of product placement—auditory or verbal placement (357). Also known as script placement, this low-intensity form of placement includes a character mentioning a product within the dialogue of the program. There is conflicting information on whether auditory or visual placement is more effective. Some researchers believe that because visual advertisements are more available to the consumer, leaving verbal placements no place to compete (Pavio, qtd. in Russell 358). Others believe that verbal placements are responded to cognitively more often than visual and auditory measures should be the primary placement form (Bandura, qtd. in Russell 358).

The third dimension Russell discusses, plot placement, makes the product central focus of the show storyline (Russell 357). This form of placement typically includes both verbal and visual aspects. Plot placement today is causing quite a stir among advertisers. Many are moving towards this form of product placement where there is little distinction between advertising and entertainment. Some refer to this

phenomenon as "advertainment" or "infotainment" (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 139). However, the new key term for plot placement is "product integration" because the brand exceeds mere placement in the program (Neer 1). This seems to be the most accepted and effective form of product placement for multiple reasons, one of which can be credited simply to the recurrence of the brand within the show. This emphasizes the product to the consumer more than simply mentioning or viewing the product once during the program.

The process of getting brands into television shows has much evolved since the beginnings of product placement. In its simplest and most traditional form, many product placement deals are highly informal agreements, typically a result of marketers bartering with producers or prop designers (Karrh, McKee and Pardun 139). However, this is not the only method for combining brands and programming. According to Neilson Media Research, more than $3 billion was spent on product placement contracts in 2003 (Roberts 2). But monetary elements are not the only factors adding to the complexity of placement deals. The addition of placement agents adds a neutral party to the discussion, negotiating many deals between the marketers and the producers in order to provide optimum benefits for both parties (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 139). In addition, advertising and public relations agencies also work to get advertising featured on shows (Karrh, McKee and Pardun 139).

History and Ethics of Product Placement

Although recently becoming a buzzword among marketers and advertisers, product placement is not as new of a concept as some believe. In fact, MGM Studios had an office in the 1930s that focused on finding placement opportunities for MGM films (Karrh, McKee and Pardun 138). Placements can also be found in popular songs and novels during World War II (qtd. in Karrh, McKee and Pardun 138). This advertising technique, however, was not considered a main outlet for advertisers to use in the past—it was not capitalized on until almost fifty years later. It was in 1982 that the blockbuster movie *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*, which featured Reese's Pieces candies in a memorable scene of the film, caused people to take notice of the effects of product placement when the Hershey company reported the movie triggered an over sixty percent increase in their sales (Karrh McKee and Pardun 138). Since then, product placement has changed the advertising industry, becoming a new outlet for marketers to expose products and services to consumers.

Although both marketers and consumers understood that there were benefits to this type of advertising technique, many were hesitant to implement the technique. They initially felt as though product placement was a very deceptive form of marketing. Because the ethics of product placement were questioned, the Entertainment Resources and Marketing Association (ERMA) was established in the early 1990s by a group of professionals working in the entertainment marketing and brand integration industry (ERMA Homepage). The group—initially made up of only nine product placement companies and one advertiser, Anheuser-Busch—was formed in order to clean up the image of this newly popular advertising technique (Mageira 46). Today, with over seventy percent of total movie box office revenues by film studios and production companies in its association, ERMA continues to ensure high quality ethics and standards of operation when dealing with product placement

(ERMA Homepage). But ERMA is not the only regulatory association for product placement activity. Marketing research groups such as Neilson Media Research and iTVX track and measure product placements in various mediums. Also, there have been legal battles over product placement. In October 2003, a consumer advocate group called Commercial Alert filed a petition with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in order to require only labeled product placement on television (Atkinson 1). However, the FTC found product placement "a legitimate form of commercial speech" (Atkinson 2).

Product Placement Advantages Compared to Commercials

Benefit of Strategic Fit

Generally speaking, product placement is another way for marketers to expose a product to a viewing audience. However, the avenue through which it accomplishes this exposure gives product placement its value. Unlike traditional television commercials, which attempt to catch the viewers' attention in very direct ways, product placement uses its subtleness to promote the brand. Subtlety is a necessary element of product placement because it helps the viewers accept advertising when it is found outside of a traditional advertising medium (Kinney and Sapolsky 1285). Companies that are involved in product placement are very careful to make sure that the placements fit naturally into the program as to not offend viewers (Vranica B5). Furthermore, because product placement does not fit within the mold of traditional advertising methods, it tends to serve more as a form of sponsorship and less as an actual advertisement for a product (Wharton Marketing 2). Product placement uses methods to gain exposure just as traditional ads would, but with a more defined link to consumers.

One of the primary benefits of product placement is its effectiveness in a variety of markets. Product placement can be used for pure exposure for new products to attract consumers who otherwise may have overlooked the product's commercials and print ads. But product placement is flexible enough to be effective for those companies that have been established for years in mature markets. Dewar's Scotch, an older brand typically targeted towards older men, is working with Wenner Media's Men's Journal to place their brand in a cable adventure show. The show—featuring two men taking an "extreme tour of Scotland"—and Dewar's hope that the exposure will help the company to build and even reinvent the brand's

image for a younger target market (Lawton B5). Product placement even has the reach of promoting products that have never been able to be promoted before because of legal restrictions. Specifically, cigarettes and hard liquor companies are benefiting from this new technique (Belch and Belch 462). Dewar's, for example, had not been featured on television in over a decade due to the major networks ban on hard alcohol television commercials (Lawton B5).

Benefit of Integration

A primary benefit of product placement is the fact that the products can be directly connected to a program. With constantly changing technology, advertisers must use newer forms of advertising to help their messages to reach consumers. Specifically, television itself has evolved, now offering hundreds of channels for consumers to watch at any given time which diminishes advertisers' abilities to reach the amount of viewers they were able to reach in the past (Roberts 2). Fortunately, product placement is responding to this charge and has proven to be a successful technique for many companies because it offers benefits that traditional advertising cannot offer. TiVo and other ad-skipping devices are also causing commercials to be a less effective medium than it was in the past, simply because of the consumer's ability to view only television programs (Steinberg and Vranica B4).

But there is more than television and technology evolving today. The culture of consumers is becoming one that is fast-paced with little time to spare, and the idea of multi-tasking has become prominent way to maximize hours in the day. Often, consumers will multi-task during program commercials and, in turn, do not receive the messages that companies are sending through their ads (Wharton Marketing 1). Product placement easily solves this problem by placing the advertising in what the viewers are viewing. In turn, the product itself is virtually

impossible to ignore because it cannot be separated from the program. Frequency of brand exposure can also add to the benefit of product placement, especially in programs where plot placement is utilized (Belch and Belch 459). Because of repeated exposure to brands throughout the program, viewers become more aware or accustomed to the product. Over the extended time of the program, the brand receives more of an opportunity to solidify its message to consumers than it would receive in one, thirty-second commercial (Belch and Belch 459).

All genres of televised programs—including sports telecasts, sitcoms, and reality TV shows—benefit from product placement, and that benefit exceeds simply exposure time. In fact, product placement reaches more active viewers because the advertising is intertwined with the entertainment that the audience willingly participates in. This also provides a more predictable and arguably more involved audience to the company that is advertising. This happens because the brand is automatically subjected to a captive audience who made a conscious decision to watch the program, regardless of the existence or lack of integrated brand images. Because the viewers' attention is on the program, chances increase that the viewers are paying attention to the integrated products as well. This attuned audience concurrently forms an attitude and, often, emotional connections to the products.

Benefits of Attitudes

David Roskos-Ewoldsen and Russell Fazio conducted a study about whether or not objects to which people hold attitudes were easier to attract attention and recall from memory. Roskos-Ewoldsen and Fazio found that attitudes are able to visually serve as an orienting function for objects (Roskos-Ewoldsen and Fazio 198). Simply put, the study shows that emotional responses to products can influence how a person processes information that is received. Additionally, those attitudes increase

the likelihood of continuous noticing and reporting the product in the future (Roskos-Ewoldsen and Fazio 198). Product placement's technique of adding an emotional connection to the product helps to make the product or brand stand out to consumers.

ABC's series "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" serves as a fascinating example of Roskos-Ewoldsen and Fazio's study in the context of product placement. Watched by fourteen to fifteen million people each week, this emotional show renovates homes for deserving, often underprivileged families within a one-week time period (Roberts 1). The major sponsor of the show is Sears, who provides tools and furnishings for the featured homes (Roberts 1). Sears' research shows that this is an effective product placement deal, with twenty five percent of viewers reporting that they are more likely to shop at their store after watching the show (Roberts 1).

Benefit of Exclusivity

Another benefit of product placement within television programs is that, unlike commercials, brands often receive the advantage of exclusivity. Because the environment is free of advertising clutter and competing brands, it is easier for consumers to become aware of the brand and to process it quickly. This is important because the consumers will need to recall the brand easily at the time of purchase, and the more familiar the consumer is with the brand, the more likely that familiarity will transfer into a purchase of the product.

Product placement also puts a brand directly into the context of how the product functions. Products placed within programs are typically related to the type of programming in which it's featured. This allows the product exposure time to its target audience. For instance, in the previous example of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," tools and appliances are presented to viewers who are tuning into the show

featuring how to renovate homes. Because television is often viewed as reality, the target audience can see the product actually used in a normal, everyday situation.

The show itself, and the actors or athletes within the program, also tend to act as unspoken endorsers of the product. This connection helps the consumer to associate the product with a familiar situation and/or person, and transfers credibility of the source to the product. This source association adds not only credibility, but also glamour element to the product (Belch and Belch 459). For example, in September 2004, Oprah Winfrey gave away 276 Pontiac G6 cars to her audience members through a product placement deal with General Motors (Freeman B1). Jonathon Asher, president of Dragon Rouge, a New York branding firm, finds the deal effective because viewers interpret the car giveaway as "a personal endorsement from Oprah" for Pontiac (Freeman B14).

Benefit of Cost Efficiency

Perhaps one of the biggest benefits of product placement is the low cost associated with this form of advertising as compared to television commercials. Surprisingly, product placement tends to be one of the more cost-efficient methods of marketing a product or brand today. One reason is because product placement deals are often conducted on a barter basis, with no money exchanged. But even if there is a cost associated to the placement, companies can benefit from the frequency that product placement offers (Belch and Belch 459). Because placements occur within entertainment mediums, such as movies, there will often be repeat viewing audiences (i.e, movie theatre showings, home video, and television airtime).

But frequency of exposure extends beyond watching the program multiple times. Even if the show is only viewed once, the consumer can typically find a company's product found in multiple scenes of the show (Belch and Belch 459). This

extends the product's airtime beyond that of a typical commercial. If a product is aligned with a specific show, the product could gain the frequent exposure for an entire season (Kinney and Sapolsky 1286). Ultimately, product placement offers minimum price for maximum screen time. NBC's The Apprentice, in its first season, featured Marquis Jet Partners in three episodes in exchange for a flight from New York to Boston for the contestants (Barnes B1). The company's exposure translated into between $5 and $10 million in advertising costs (Barnes B4). Although today The Apprentice charges brands more for exposure, creator Mr. Burnett comments that, "in many cases, up to a half hour long episode is footage of the contestants working at the various companies" (Barnes B4).

Quantitative Financial Benefit

Many companies are dedicated to actually assessing the comparable price of product placement to costs of other advertising mediums. In sports marketing, Joyce Julius and Associates has revolutionized how to value brand exposure. Joyce Julius, established in 1985, is the world's "largest, oldest, most accepted sponsorship evaluation company" ("About Joyce Julius" 2). During a program, Joyce Julius monitors all clear, in focus exposure time, counts brand mentions, and assigns a comparable value based on non-discounted cost of a 30 second commercial during that program. They do this using a National Television Impression Value, or NTIV ("About Joyce Julius" 11). While traditional research measures value based purely on costs the sponsor occurs, NTIV focuses on gross impressions created for the brand and reflects the comparative cost of that exposure ("About Joyce Julius" 11).

Joyce Julius and Associates does this evaluation using one of three methods. The first method uses purely the actual cost per 30 second advertising rate to value

product placement or sponsorships, known as "CP:30 Value". The second method is the NTIV Factor, which uses the CP:30 commercial rate and factors in the viewing audience. Ultimately, the NTIV factor represents "the cost necessary to reach one viewer during a nationally televised broadcast" ("About Joyce Julius" 13). And the third method, CP:30 NTIV, extends into valuation for an international audience and uses both other methods in order to do so. For example, Joyce Julius monitored the 2000 NASCAR Winston Cup Series in Dover, DE, broadcasted on TNN. Neilson ratings reported that the four-hour broadcast was viewed by over 5 million people, in addition to the estimated attendance at the event itself of 135,000 (Prebola 1). A 30-second commercial during the race cost $71, 500 to air. Within this broadcast alone, 238 sponsors competed for exposure, and 194 of them received 2 hours, 13 minutes and 54 seconds of exposure time, 155 brand mentions, and over $22 million in advertising (Prebola 1).

However, this assessment extends beyond just the sports arena. A company called iTVX also values placement efforts. iTVX uses a software program called Instant Access to value exposure, how well the placement fits with a scene, the brand presence and clarity in a scene to derive a comparable financial value ("CBS" 8). Furthermore, the program can also continue valuation based on how and when the program is rerun ("CBS" 8). "It provides a quantification, in addition to a qualitative value, of product placements," said Peter Gardiner, partner and chief media officer of Interpublic Group of Cos.' Deutsch, a New York-based advertising agency, which was one of the first companies to use the iTVX valuation tool ("Next Generation" 10).

iTVX uses an exposure scale to value brands, along with an impact factor (Chunovic 4). The scale includes everything from simply a logo in the background of a scene at Level 1, a background shot and a close up with interaction from an actor at Level 6, and Level 10 being plot placement where an entire show is dedicated to

the product (Chunovic 4). The impact factor is similar to Joyce Julius' CP:30, where values are related to commercial airtime, but instead uses a percentage of value comparison of one commercial second to one product placement second (Chunovic 4). Frank Zazza, president of iTVX, says that the impact factor can be small (a fraction of commercial cost) or very large, even up to 500% of a commercial second cost (Chunovic 4). Mr. Zazza also said that twice as many people watch a show as compared to the commercials within it, and that recall of the show is better than that of commercials (Chunovic 4).

JOYCE JULIUS VALUATIONS

Sponsor's Report Example - Nascar

Event: Nascar Winston Cup Series – June 4, 2000 – 12:30pm (EDT)
Location: Dover Downs International Speedway
Length: 4 hour telecast
Neilson Rating: 4.2
Network and Audience: TNN – audience of 5,174,400

Sponsor	Clear, In-Focus Exposure Time	Mentions	Comparable Value
Winston	6min:14sec – series title graphics, hats, driver uniforms, billboards	27 – verbal references	$1,534,965
MNBA Platinum	7min:24sec – event title graphics, winner's circle and starter stand identity, billboards	19 – verbal references	$1,511,115
NAPA Auto Parts	9min:04sec – graphics, "Brought to you by" graphics	7 – verbal references	$1,463,365
All Sponsors	***4hrs:25min:02sec***	***192***	***$42,479,515***

Source: Sponsors Report, Joyce Julius, 2000

iTVX VALUATIONS

General Examples of Valuation Levels:

Value Level	Corresponding Types of Exposure
1	Clear logo in background of a scene
3	Background plus a close-up which includes the product
6	Previous levels and hands-on interaction with an actor
9	Previous levels along with a verbal mention
10	Entire episode written around a product

Example of a TV Show Valuation – The Apprentice:

THE APPRENTICE

Network:	NBC (1 Hour Program)
Company/Product:	Proctor and Gamble's Crest toothpaste
Product Placement:	Plot Placement (2 teams promote new toothpaste flavor)
Cost for the Placement:	$2.5 million
30 Second Time Slot Cost:	$350,000
iTVX Level:	10

VALUE RECEIVED: *$3.8 million*

Source: BrandWeek, January 18, 2005

Conclusion

Product placement is a technique that seems to be solidifying itself into the marketing mix. Once a guerrilla marketing practice, product placement has proven to be beneficial both to new products arising in a market as well as for products that have been around for decades. But product placement and the traditional television commercial are ultimately means to the same end: communicating to a specific group of consumers various products available that satisfy wants and needs.

Commercials are and have been effective in achieving this goal. Memorable characters and catchy jingles are two ways commercials portray their message while fostering brand relationships that are often hard for competitors to break. But commercials have a significant drawback. Television clutter and the vast amount of commercials in general make it easy for consumers to tune out messages, leaving effective commercials to be relatively few and far between. Product placement, on the other hand, tends to more easily cut through the clutter and foster brand-consumer relationships. Because of the product integration and subtleness, this form of marketing can be highly effective in delivering a message in a non-intrusive way. However, product placement has its drawbacks as well. For example, it is only effective when the product is placed in the program correctly. If consumers perceive the television show or movie as no longer a form of entertainment but rather an extended advertisement, all the benefits of product placement are lost. This decrease in perceived credibility by consumers could also lead to changes in image perceptions for both the brand and the movie or television show.

Both techniques—the traditional commercial and the more innovative product placement—have their benefits and shortfalls. But is one form of communication better than the other? If only one method could be utilized, product placement

typically can be more effective than commercial advertising time. Economically speaking, product placement offers more advertising time for the cost than commercials can offer. Product placement can also be more easily marketed to the target audience than a commercial can and is often harder to ignore. Like sponsorships, product placement allows the transfer of an emotional connection to the product due to its placement and more easily and consistently fosters brand relationships. Product placement also diminishes advertising competition because most placement deals offer exclusivity of the product.

But commercials are not a dying form of advertising. I believe that commercials serve a distinct purpose—they directly allow consumers to become informed of products that can be utilized. They are also probably the better advertising tools when a product has a lot of information that needs to be expressed to the consumer in order to understand the benefit the product offers. Ideally, though, in order to have the greatest effect on a consumer, marketers should learn to use both techniques simultaneously. As in an integrated marketing communication process, synergy is necessary in order to instill a brand into the minds and hearts of consumers. If the emotional appeal of a brand is found within a program due to product placement, a commercial can reinforce the product and what it has to offer. Conversely, if a consumer sees a commercial and then spots the product in a program, the product placement can add credibility to the advertisement.

There is a bright future for product placement as a marketing technique. The many benefits it can offer—from its exclusivity to its financial efficiency—are only the beginning of how marketers can achieve their goals through product placement. It is only through understanding how product placement works that marketers will perfect the technique as to better foster brand relationships and effectively promote products to consumers.

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