

Brand Placement Prominence: Good for Memory! Bad for Attitudes?

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This article presents two laws about the effects of brand placement on audience reactions. Brand placement is the compensated inclusion of brands or brand identifiers within media programming. The first law states that brand placement prominence has a positive effect on brand memory. This effect has been found for placements in audiovisual media. However, placement prominence has a negative effect on brand attitude under specific circumstances. The second law states that brand placement can affect attitudes and behavior without memory of the placement. This means that brand placement can have implicit effects. Implications of these brand placement laws are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Brand placement is defined as "the compensated inclusion of brands or brand identifiers through audio and/or visual means within media programming" (Karrh, 1998). Placement prominence knows several definitions, but generally a placement is prominent when the brand is at the focus of attention (Gupta and Lord, 1998).

The literature on brand placement in audiovisual media (film, television, and games) has shown that placement prominence is positively related to brand memory (Babin and Carder, 1996; Brennan, Dubas, and Babin, 1999; Cowley and Barron, 2008; D'Astous and Chartier, 2000; Gupta and Lord, 1998; Law and Braun, 2000; Lee and Faber, 2007; Nelson, 2002; Schneider and Cornwell, 2005; Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007).

The overriding message: the more prominent the brand placement, the better the audience's brand memory.

Although brand placement prominence has positive effects on memory, under specific circumstances it can have *negative* effects on brand attitudes (Cowley and Barron, 2008; Matthes, Schemer, and Wirth, 2007). One study, in fact, demonstrated that prominent brand placement (i.e., repeatedly placed brands) resulted in high mem-

ory scores, but in negative brand attitudes for viewers who showed awareness of the deliberate brand placement and had low involvement with the program (Matthes, Schemer, and Wirth, 2007). By contrast, prominence did have a positive effect on brand attitudes of viewers who were highly involved with what they were watching, but had little awareness of a deliberate brand placement and little brand memory. Another survey showed that prominence had a negative effect on brand attitudes of viewers who liked the program and a positive effect on viewers who were not as supportive of the programming (Cowley and Barron, 2008).

Such dissociative effects of prominence can be explained: a prominent placement is more deeply processed and that leads to increased memory. But, in some cases, a prominent placement also may activate awareness of deliberate brand placement and cognitive defenses against persuasion (Friestad and Wright, 1999; Nairn and Fine, 2008; Russell, 2002; Wright, Friestad, and Boush, 2005).

When they encounter prominent brand placement, casual viewers or people who do not like what they are watching may realize that the brand is present only for reasons of persuasion — a response that may trigger such cognitive defenses

EMPIRICAL GENERALIZATIONS

Prominent brand placement affects memory positively, but affects attitudes negatively when audiences are involved with the medium vehicle, when they like the medium vehicle, or when they become aware of a deliberate brand placement (selling attempt). Brand placement can affect audience attitudes and behavior, without memory of the placement.

as creating counterarguments (Friestad and Wright, 1994; Russell, 2002). As a result, these viewers remember the brand, but do not like it.

In sum, the effects of prominence on brand memory are straightforward and positive. But, the effects of prominence on brand attitude depend on audience involvement with — and approval of — the medium vehicle and on the audience's awareness of the brand placement.

EG1: Prominent brand placement affects memory positively, but affects attitudes negatively when audiences are involved with the medium vehicle, when they like the medium vehicle, or when they become aware of the deliberate brand placement (selling attempt).

PERSUASION WITHOUT BRAND-PLACEMENT AWARENESS

Several brand-placement studies have shown that audiences can be influenced without awareness of the placement. With respect to brand choice, several studies demonstrated that adults' and children's brand preferences changed after seeing brand placement, regardless of their memory of the brand placement (Auty and Lewis, 2004; Law and Braun, 2000; Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007).

With respect to brand attitudes, a brand's placement had a positive effect on brand image and attitude, even when people

did not remember seeing the brand (Matthes, Schemer, and Wirth, 2007; van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit, 2007). In other words, without explicit memory of brand placement, effects on brand associations, brand preference, and brand choice can occur — a phenomenon known as implicit (or low-attention) processing (Heath, 2000; Schacter, 1987).

The literature shows that traditional advertising can be processed implicitly as well (Heath, 2000; Holden and Vanhuele, 1999; Krugman, 1977; White, 2006). Implicit processes seem to play an important role for brand placement, however, because brands are integrated into editorial content (Law and Braun, 2004; Russell, 1998, 2002; van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit, 2007). Especially when brands are subtly placed, implicit processing is likely to be activated because attention is drawn to the editorial content or story line, and not to the brand itself (Schneider and Cornwell, 2005; Zack, 2006).

These findings have vital implications for our understanding of brand-placement effects and the measurement of brand-placement effectiveness. Traditional explicit-effect measures (for instance, brand recall and recognition) do not show the full effects of brand placement. Whereas previously one would have concluded that brand placement was not effective when there was no explicit memory of the placement, these insights show that audience responses still may be influenced by brand placement.

EG2: Brand placement can affect audience attitudes and behavior, without memory of the placement.

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