A Possible Categorization of Product Placement Based on its Position within the Film or TV Programme

Árpád Papp-Váry

BKF University of Applied Sciences, Hungary
apappvary@bkf.hu

Abstract: We can go to the movies with a bag of popcorn to see a Hollywood film, stare at a new reality show on TV, watch music videos on YouTube, or play with a game console with great enthusiasm, yet they all have something in common – it is not only entertaining content but also brands that appear in them from time to time.

In a certain sense product placement is the TV advertisement of the 2010s. While traditional advertising, and especially 30-second TV spots experience increasing difficulties, this genre is booming.

Marketing literature, however, has only been catching up with practice recently. At this point there are no comprehensive publications on the categories of product placement, or how it could be divided into categories. The author of this article recommends the grouping methods listed below:

– *by the position of the product placement within the film/programme,*

– *by the type of the products placed,*

– *by the position on the product lifecycle,*

– *by the brands placed,*

– *by the financial background of the cooperation.*

The article examines the first way of grouping featured on this list, that is, what types of product placement we can differentiate by their position within the movie or TV programme.

Keywords:product placement, brand placement, TV advertisement

1 Introduction

We can go to the movies with a bag of popcorn to see a Hollywood film, stare at a new reality show on TV, watch music videos on YouTube, or play with a game console with great enthusiasm, yet they all have something in common – it is not only entertaining content but also brands that appear in them from time to time.

In a certain sense product placement is the TV advertisement of the 2010s. While traditional advertising, and especially 30-second TV spots experience increasing difficulties, this genre is booming.

Marketing literature, however, has only been catching up with practice recently. (e.g. see Lehu 2009) At this point there are no comprehensive publications on the categories of product placement, or how it could be divided into categories. The author of this article recommends the grouping methods listed below. (Papp-Váry 2014):

− by the position of the product placement within the film/programme,

− by the type of the products placed,

− by the position on the product lifecycle,

− by the brands placed,

− by the financial background of the cooperation.

The article examines the first way of grouping featured on this list, that is, what types of product placement we can differentiate by their position within the movie or TV programme.

2 Product and brand placement

In the case of product placement the product itself appears in the movie in the reality of its own. Brand placement is a broader term; in such cases they mention the brand name or the logo appears, but the product itself is not displayed. In *Sex and the City: The Movie*, for example, Samantha is seen driving a Mercedes car, but the movie also features an event with Mercedes flags in the background.

The difference between product and brand placement: from the *Sex and the City*

3 Visual, auditive and audiovisual product placement

Impact on our senses may be the simplest way of grouping. In the case of visual product placement we see the brand, e.g. the main character of *Superman 2* is thrown on a Marlboro truck, but then he casts the evil into a Coca-Cola advertising board. We can also mention another superhero movie as a similar example: the main character of the first part of *Spider-Man* jumps on a truck carrying Carlsberg beer. This is also how car placements usually appear: in most cases the character does not state directly what kind of car he/she drives, but we can clearly see it.

On the other hand, in the case of auditive product placement, we can hear the brand name, but do not see the brand. For example, the secret agent of the *James Bond* movies always says "Vodka Martini, shaken, not stirred!" Another example is Danny de Vito's argument in *Other People's Money*: "If I can't count on Dunkin Donuts, who can I count on?" But we could also mention the famous dialogue from *Rain Man*, where Dustin Hoffmann plays an autistic character and tells Tom Cruise that Quantas is the only airline that had not had an accident before. In *Confessions of a Shopaholic* the main character asks his boss „You speak Prada?" – by the way, this sentence also appears in the trailer of the film. Auditive product placement also includes cases when they do not say the name of the brand, but we hear a sound clearly associated with the brand, e.g. the well-known music of the brand, the so-called jingle. An even more special example is when the screenplay includes a kind of anthem for the brand. The movie *The Coca-Cola Kid* has a sales character arriving in Australia straight from the Coca-Cola headquarters in Atlanta – and one of the first things he does is to create a song composed of authentic Australian sound with the main line "Dont't want to go where there is no Coca-Cola."

And finally, in the case of audiovisual product placement, we both see and hear the brand. For example, in the movie *Cast Away*, Tom Hanks' companion is a Wilson-brand volleyball "whom" he calls by the name Wilson.

The difference between visual and audutive placement: from the movie *Cast Away*

In *Back to the Future, Part I* Marty's mother calls him Calvin Klein because it is the brand of his underwear, and in Part III of the series cowboys make comments about the Nike moccasin he is wearing instead of proper boots.

In the first part of *Transformers* (2007) we can hear the remark "Nokias are real nasty. You've gotta respect the Japanese." with the riposte "Nokia's from Finland."

However, the most typical example is probably a scene from *Yes Man* when Jim Carrey gets out of the car with Red Bull cans falling on the ground around him, then he gets hopped up, and performs a lengthy monologue about Red Bull to please his (future) girlfriend:

– We hit a couple of raves last night. It was totally off the hook.

– Yeah, you seem a little hyper.

– I had a couple Red Bull's. Have you ever had a Red Bull? I'd never had a Red Bull before but I had one last night and I really like Red Bull. I got a new necklace. It glows in the dark, but you can't really see it right now unless you do this.

– That's really something. Doesn't Red Bull make you crash pretty hard?

– No, no, no. No, no. I don't think so. No! Hey, after we jog we should get a Red Bull. You could get a Red Bull and I could get a Red Bull. We could share a Red Bull.

– Okay that would be really...

– Red Bull.

– That sounds g ...

– Red Bull.

– I think I'd r...

– Red Bull. Reeeeed Buuuull. Reeeeed Bull.

– Okay, a lot of energy. I like it.

4   Front and background product placement

In the first case the brand can be seen in the foreground. In the latter case it is only displayed in the background; for example, when a boxed product is placed on a shelf, or let's say the brand name is printed on a poster. Of course, when the camera goes from wide shot to close up (or, to put it simply, zoom on the object), positioning in the background can easily be converted into positioning in the foreground.

5   Active and passive product placement

Active product placement means that the character is using the product, for example sipping his/her drink or writing an SMS using a smartphone, while in the case of passive product placement. we see a vending machine selling soft drinks or a bar with drinks, but the product itself is not being used. Ideally, active placement also plays a dramaturgical role, but at least it has to be credible. Passive placement usually involves the brand as an accessory. In the movie *Fantastic Four* Burger King is placed passively several times. We can see Bacardi logos everywhere in the first part of *Underworld*, filmed in the underground in Budapest.

A study conducted by Synovate in 2005 proved that the active solution has a greater effect on viewers (Jhaveri, 2011). At the same time advertisers must be more careful in such cases – they must not not go over the top by creating placements that are too "advertising-like".

6   Full and partial product placement

Product placement is full if the product/brand/logo is completely visible in a physical sense; for example, if we see a soft drink bottle with a logo on it. Product placement is partial if only a part of the product is displayed; for example, if only half of the bottle or the logo can be seen, and the brand is not clearly recognizable.

7   Picture in picture or ad product placement

This is a rather rare occurrence of product placement meaning that a movie or a TV programme incorporates another programme (in several cases, an advertisement).

In *Minority Report* Tom Cruise is passing a Guinness video advertisement among others. In *Analyze This*, Robert de Niro is watching a Merryl Lynch life insurance commercial¸ then bursts into tears wondering why does not have a quiet life. In *Jack and Jill* Al Pacino performs Dunk Acino in a Dunkin Donuts advertisement.

In *Rocky III* we see advertisements where Rocky, the protagonist recommends Nikon, Harley-Davidson, Budweiser, Maserati, Gatorade and American Express. In *What Women Want*, a film set in an advertising agency, they screen a preliminary version of a Nike commercial created by the company, being presented to the client by Mel Gibson.

Examples from Hungary include the soap opera *Szomszédok* ("*Neighbours*"), where Uncle Taki interrupts a conversation by pushing a button on the remote control, saying "I'm watching TV". Then the music of the series starts up. He switches it off and says "I'm not watching TV".

8   Creative (plot) and non-creative (on set) product placement

Just like advertising or marketing communications in general, product placement is also more successful if it is creative. At the same time, creative placements require much more background work, too. A typical example for on set (non-creative) placement is when characters engage in a conversation at the bar, and we can see what brand of beer they are drinking.

A creative drink placement can be seen in *Spider-Man* when the main character is practicing his net shooting skills with a can of Dr. Pepper. Another example is *Wall Street* released in 1987, which depicts Charlie Sheen presenting Fortune magazine with a photo of Gordon Gekko, a stockbroker played by Michael Douglas. He even states that the magazine is the Bible. Home Depot was also placed in a creative way in the reality show *Survivor*: competing tribes had to put a roof over themselves using products from the home improvement retailer. In the series *Sex and the City*, Samantha's model boyfriend appears on the posters of Absolut vodka, and the brand plays an important role in the dramaturgy, too.

Therefore this kind of placement is also called product integration (Tóth, 2006). However, in the case of non-creative (on set) product placement, the role of the product is more of an accessory; therefore it is also colled non-integrated placement.

9 Product placement integrated into a movie as a whole (embedded marketing)

This is a special sort of product placement with a brand interweaving the whole movie or TV programme. The story of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* is set around a Coca-Cola bottle. In the film *The Hunt for the Hidden Relic* (original German title: *Das Jesus Video*) (2002) a Sony camera appears, and in the first part of *Matrix* (1999) Neo always receives calls on a Nokia telephone. In *Knight Rider* Michael Knight is pulled out of trouble by Kitt, that is, a Pontiac Trans Am. In *Cast Away* great emphasis was placed on the brands FedEx and Wilson.

In *Evolution* (2001), a sci-fi comedy film starring David Duchovny, several attempts are made to fight off aliens (who are evils in the movie), but the only solution is a component of the Head & Shoulders shampoo. Moreover, a mini-advertisement appears at the end of the movie: as the actors say, the fight against extraterrestrials is just as tough as to keep our hair well-groomed, shiny and dandruff-free. Therefore it is always good to keep some bottles of Head & Shoulders at hand...

A mini Head & Shoulders shampoo advertisement appears in the movie *Evolution*

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants, an American comedy released in 2005, was a perfect opportunity for the placement of a jeans brand. According to a description by port.hu (2013), a Hungarian entertainment website, the movie features "four friends spending the summer without each other. When they find a pair of jeans in a second-hand shop that suits all of them perfectly, they decide that each of them will wear it for a week, see if it is good luck, and then forward it to the next girl. Altough several kilometres separate them, the four girls experience

life, love and loss during the summer together, which proves to be an unforgettable experience for all of them." The depiction of jeans created an excellent advertising opportunity, and the brand taking it was Levi's. The brand was also displayed on the poster of the film as the back pocket of jeans with the unique red Levi's symbol was photographed for it.

10 Brands featured in film titles

The inclusion of a brand in the title of a film/programme is an even rarer example of brand placement, but there are a number of examples. A silent film released as early as in 1916 had a suggestive title that declared what car brand women desired – its title was *She wanted a Ford*. Hotels have also been placed in titles. *Night at the Ritz*, released in 1935, featured a night and the Ritz Hotel, and *Dinner at the Ritz*, released in 1937, featured a dinner and the hotel. Then, in 1961, Audrey Hepburn advertised a luxury jewellery shop in a movie titled *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Examples from the 1980s and 1990s include *The Coca-Cola Kid* (1985), *Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man* (1991), and *The Adventures of Ford Fairlane* (1990).

In the 2000s Harold and Kumar visit a White Castle fast food restaurant in *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004). The posters of the movie, of course, were placed in the restaurants of the chain (all 392 of them), and there was a booth on Hollywood Sunset Boulevard, too. It is true, however, that two guys smoking marijuana and having fun might have not had a positive effect on the reputation of the family-run fast-food restaurant after all.

In the movie originally titled *Because of Winn Dixie* (2005) Winn Dixie is a dog – and in reality it is a well-known supermarket chain. The title of *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) refers to the TV programme *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, which is the focus of the story. The lawyer works mostly on the back seat of his Lincoln limousine in *The Lincoln Lawyer* (2011).

When the brand appears in the title: *The Lincol Lawyer*

There are peculiar cases, too. The Philip Morris tobacco company was not necessarily happy with the movie *I love you Phillip Morris* (2009) with its story about a gay couple. The erotic movie *Electra Luxx* (2010) may have caused difficulties for Electrolux. McDonald's was pilloried by the documentary *Super Size Me* (2004). The intertitle *The Children of Marx and Coca-Cola* appeared in a movie produced in French-Swedish cooperation.

But let us get back to less convoluted examples. *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) is definitely the most well-known piece from the past years with a brand in its title. The same brand appeared in another movie, *From Prada to Nada* (2011), too:

It happens less often that a slogan is incorporated in the title of the film. *You've Got Mail* (1998) starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan was named after the slogan of AOL.

11 Placement in a trailer

It is often important for brands to appear not only in the movie itself, but also in its introduction, the so-called trailer. Coca-Cola Light is placed in the trailer of the French animated film *Renaissance*, set in 2054. We can see the FedEx and Wilson brands in the trailer of *Cast Away*.

12 Placement within films and related campaigns

Surprising though it may seem, brand placement outside movies or TV programmes is also possible. It is used in films where it would be strange to display the brand itself because the plot is set in another era, e.g. the middle age or the space age. The brand may also support the campaign of the movie with co-branding or cross promotion agreements.

We could see such activities when Pepsi facilitated the introduction of new *Star Wars* versions by appearing on movie posters, and Star Wars figures were printed on Pepsi soft drinks. Of course it was impossible to place a car brand in *Luther*, a historical film set in the middle ages. However though, main characters were wearing civilian clothes for the film premiere, which BMW took advantage of, and provided cars for each of them, then the press published reports on this.

Placement in related campaigns: *Star Wars* themed Pepsi cans

13 Product placement added in post production digitally

The cost of placing a brand in a programme or film in the post-production phase is still relatively high, but using digital technology for this purpose will become cheaper and cheaper in the future. A logo can be printed on a pizza box, a coffee brand name can be put on a mug, and walls can display various advertisements after the film has been produced. We can also place products afterwards, for example by parking new car models on the street. Is it hard to believe? It has become reality, just watch the works of MirriAd agency.
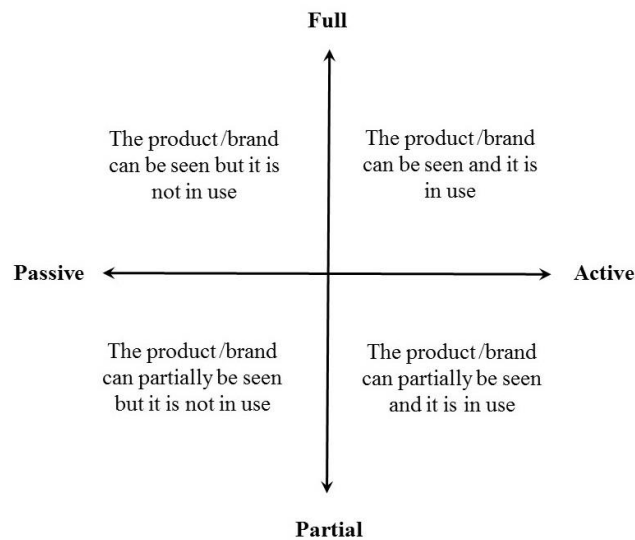

Various digital advertisements can be put in to films in the post-production phase

14 Product placement and anti product placement

It may seem strange at first glance, but there are cases when product placement is not allowed in movies or TV programmes. In such cases it must be ensured that there is no possibility of brand placement; for example, there may be no billboards along the streets, and characters must drink soft drinks without a clearly recognizable brand in nonbrand fast-food restaurants. Of course this is limited primarily for legal reasons. In Hungary, for example, it was forbidden to include product placements in film series between 1996 and 2010. Therefore specialist teams were set up to develop methods to hide or remove brands: to rotate products so that they would not be recognizable, decrease the depth of field, or digitally remove the brand name, and so on.

15 Conclusions

Of course there may be several other possible approaches besides the groupings described above, and these groupings can also be combined with each other, creating various matrixes (Mihálszki 2011). This is exemplified by the figure below, which is used both in Hungary and worldwide.

Full

The product/brand can be seen but it is not in use

The product/brand can be seen and it is in use

Passive ← → **Active**

The product/brand can partially be seen but it is not in use

The product/brand can partially be seen and it is in use

Partial

The above-mentioned groupings can also be combined with each other. This is one of the most frequently used matrix for the measurement and assessment of placements.

References

[1]   Jhaveri, Rosni (2011): Effectiveness of product placement, http://escape-velocity-blog.com/2011/06/13/effectiveness-of-product-placement/, published: 13 June 2011.

[2]   Lehu, Jean-Marc (2009): Branded entertaiment – Product placement & brand strategy in the entertainment business (Kogan Page, London–Philadelphia)

[3]   Papp-Váry, Árpád (2014): Márkázott szórakoztatás – A termékmegjelenítés nemzetközi és hazai alkalmazása ("Branded entertainment – The use of product placement in Hungary and worldwide", Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2014)

[4]   Mihálszki, Zsuzsa (2011): Álruhás reklámok nyomában ("In the traces of disguised advertisements", Kreatív – Márkázott tartalom konferencia ["Kreatív – Branded Content Conference"], 20 September 2011.)

[5]   Mirriad.com (2015): Mirriad – Advertising for the skip generation (www.mirriad.com, download: 12 April 2015)

[6]   Port.hu (2013): Négyen egy gatyában ("The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants")
http://www.port.hu/negyen_egy_gatyaban_the_sisterhood_of_the_traveling _pants/pls/w/films.film_ page?i_film_id=73774, download: 17 March 2013.

[7]   Tóth, Kristóf (2006): A filmekbe integrálják a reklámokat ("Advertisements are integrated into movies"), http://www.sg.hu/cikkek/ 41955/a_filmekbe_integraljak_a_reklamokat, published: 12 January 2006.