



School of Management, Royal Holloway University of London

Working Paper Series

SoMWP-0802

**Moviegoers' Response to Product Placement: A Mise-En-Scene
Analysis**

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July 2008

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ISBN: 978-1-905846-17-7

Published by:

The School of Management,

Royal Holloway University of London

Egham Hill

Egham

Surrey TW20 0EX

Moviegoers' Response to Product Placement: A Mise-En-Scene Analysis

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Abstract

Product placement is a form of marketing promotion which is attracting increasing attention from practitioners and academic researchers. To date, most management research in the field has conceptualized product placement in terms of information exposure which accesses semantic memory, ignoring the media context of dramatic entertainment and its potential influence on the meanings of the brand. This paper offers a new conceptualization of product placement as dramatic entertainment. It takes a holistic approach, adapting a mise-en-scene analytical framework from film theory to draw out the potential meanings of the brand within the movie context. The implications for marketing research practice and for interpretive marketing theory are discussed.

Keywords

Product placement; brand placement; entertainment marketing; mise-en-scene; film theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Product placement is an important and growing aspect of the marketing communication mix and as it grows and continues to integrate itself into mainstream entertainment it is rapidly becoming of increasing sociological importance. The boundaries between entertainment and promotion are being blurred as the practice evolves from earlier methods of just 'showing the can' (Hackley, 2003) to becoming an integral part of the story. It is therefore important to engage with the practice not so much as a marketing device but as a part of the entertainment in which it appears. The problem with previous research is that it continues to conceptualize the audience as consumers and not as moviegoers. Failing to take this aspect into account neglects the most crucial element in the audiences understanding of the brand, which is their experience and understanding of the film.

This is an exploratory and cross-disciplinary study into the practice of product placement which adapts a film theory perspective to deconstruct the dynamic elements of selected scenes of two popular movies. The theory of mise-en-scene (Gibbs, 2002; Leiss et al, 2005) allows for a technical analysis of the elements of any given scene and is a device that should allow the researcher to isolate the elements important to the shaping of the viewers' experience of the film and the brand. It is important to understand the role the film plays in forming the audiences' experience in order to fully understand how the brand comes to have meaning in the film. Film theory can be a useful tool for exploring, in a more natural way than surveys or experiments, how brands come to have meaning in films.

This research refers to two successful Hollywood films and conducts an analysis of one scene from each. This limited approach enables a deeper analysis of each scene to exemplify the possibilities of this method. The findings are presented in the style of a critical film analysis, which encompasses a predominantly interpretivist account of the scene in question and is thus a highly subjective one.

PRODUCT PLACEMENT RESEARCH IN THE MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

In 1982 the exposure of Hershey's Reese's Pieces in the movie *ET: The Extra Terrestrial* was attributed to a 65percent increase in sales of the chocolate snack (Hackley 2006; Reed 1989; Karrh 1998). More recently, after the new BMW Mini was featured in the movie *The Italian Job* the car ran out of stock in the US (Hackley, 2005). The practice of including brands within a film as part of a commercial agreement is usually known as product placement (Balasubramanian, 1994) though can also be referred to as brand placement or, in the USA, entertainment marketing (Hackley and Tiwsakul, 2006).

The term 'paid for' is included in many definitions of both advertising and product placement (e.g. Baker and Crawford 1995; Ford 1993; D'Astous and Chartier 2000; Gupta and Gould 1997) highlighting the American bias of the research. The practice of actually paying for placing brands in film or TV is currently against regulations in the United Kingdom, although the European Commission and UK media regulator OfCom

are reviewing regulations surrounding the practice (Economist, 2005). Having said that, UK TV product placement is often indirectly 'paid for' in the sense that brand clients pay retainers to prop supply agencies so they will push those brands to TV studios as 'free' props (Tiwsakul and Hackley, 2008).

Karrh (1998) points out that there is more than one way to show a brand in an entertainment vehicle. They can be represented at either an audio or visual level and not just in film or TV but also within novels, music, and video games. Friedman (1986) found that there was a 500% increase of brand name appearances in novels between 1940-1970 and Englis, et al. (1993) found that in the US 39percent of music videos contained at least one brand reference. This has important implications for marketers. The success of the alcohol brand *hypnotic* is attributed to it being 'name checked', that is, mentioned in the hip-hop lyrics of 26 different tracks in 2004, so that it went from selling 10,000 cases in 2001/2 to 700,000 cases in 2003/4¹. This underlines the success a well-integrated product placement campaign can have on a brand, and that it should 'complement other techniques holistically in a particular promotional mix.' (Delorme and Reid 1999, p.16).

D'Astous and Seguin (1999) labeled three types of placements as being, implicit product placement, which is when the brand is not referred to in the movie, integrated explicit product placement, which is when the brand is included within the context of the show and is 'formally expressed in some way so that its attributes are explicitly demonstrated' (Hackley 2005, p.45) and non-integrated product placement, which is where the brand is explicitly addressed outside the context of the film or movie. The latter example overlaps with definitions of sponsorship, highlighting the mobile character if product placement as a promotional form which combine elements of other forms, such as sponsorship, celebrity endorsement and advertising (Balasubramanian, 1991; Tiwsakul et al, 2005).

Product placement is not a new phenomenon and in films the paid for inclusion of products can be dated back as far as the 1930's (Fristoe, 2005). However, academic interest in this field is relatively recent (DeLorme and Reid, 1999) and research to date has been predominantly managerial and positivist in character (Hackley and Tiwsakul, 2006). The major thrust of research has concerned itself with three main areas. There are, firstly, descriptive studies which measure aspects of the incidents of product placement. For example, 11 brands per movie appeared in the top 25 US films (Sapolsky and Kinney 1994). Secondly, there are studies into consumer attitudes towards the practice. These are generally positive in most cases except when the brand placement appears too obvious and contrived (Nebenzahl and Secunda, 1993; Gupta and Gould, 1997). Thirdly, there are studies of practitioner's beliefs about the practice. These are very limited in scope, the main finding suggesting that practitioners believe consumer recall of the brand to be the most apposite measure of the success of a product placement incident (Karrh, 1995).

In terms of its role in marketing communication strategy product placement is rarely used in isolation but more usually forms part of an Integrated Marketing Communication strategy (Hackley, 2005). In some cases brands are diverting promotional budget to implicit marketing techniques such as product placement because of increasing consumer cynicism towards conventional advertising (Gupta et al. 2000; Karrh 1998). This growth in consumers' negative attitudes towards conventional advertising is coupled with the proliferation of technology such as digital video recorders that allow them to 'zap'

¹ www.media.guardian.co.uk 11th July, 2005

through the television commercials. Product placement, on the other hand, is not only difficult to ‘zap’ through but its life is prolonged through numerous reruns (Pervan and Martin 2002; Avery and Ferraro 2000).

Despite the growth in the practice and the circumstantial evidence of its success, the literature is divided on both the purpose of product placement and its effectiveness. The positivist managerial literature ends to argue that ‘memory based evaluation is an appropriate way to test the effectiveness of product placement because the increased brand awareness is the primary goal of product placement’ (Nelson 2002 in Hackley, 2005 p.145). Many studies focus on recall of the brand after exposure to a product placement incident (e.g. Baker and Crawford, 1995; Babin and Carder, 1996; Ong and Meri, 1994). But this ignores the fact that many product placements appear to be designed to support positioning strategies rather than reach new audiences. Despite the apparent promise of recall measurements there was only a minor 16% increase found in purchase intention (Hackley, 2005).

It seems then, that high recall rates are not necessarily a reliable indicator of purchase intention. The difficulty in measuring the effectiveness of product placement might therefore invite questions as to the purpose of the practice (Percy, 2006) and is a question that might be resolved by a suggestion made by (d’Astous and Chartier, 2000) who assert that product placement should be measured against the specific objectives of the decision makers. Product placement, like advertising, is not necessarily understood completely by recourse to measures of cognitive response. Rather, it is one of a host of mediated influences on the brand which act together to create long term positioning effects.

A key element of product placement is that its promotional intent is not necessarily clear (d’Astous and Chartier, 2000) and there is no distinction between the placement and the entertainment (Hackley and Tiwsakul, 2006). A shift in research focus is therefore needed to explain the dynamics of consumer engagement with product placements.

Studies which seek to theorize product placement from an experiential perspective are still limited in this evolving field of research and practice (Hackley and Tiwsakul, 2006). Product placement practice has moved from simply displaying the product towards a more subtly integrated approach of weaving the brand into the plot or narrative of the story. Hackley (2003) reports that “current wisdom among Hollywood agents handling brand links in movies is that the portrayal of the brand must tell a story because simply showing the can does not offer a sufficiently powerful narrative context to enhance the brand identity” (p.11). Therefore, a deeper understanding of the way that consumers/audiences engage with product placement experientially in the context of a mediated entertainment experience is needed. This would be consistent with the stream of consumer research focusing on the symbolic, experiential and hedonistic aspects of consumption and the mediated nature of much consumer experience (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy, 1988; Brown, 1995, 1996; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

A study by Delorme and Reid (1999) hinted at the possibilities of this line of research. Focus groups and depth interviews were used in order to gain insights into moviegoers’ experience of product placements and how these props are interpreted into their every day lived experience. Their findings reveal moviegoers actively engage with brand props and that they add to their experience of the film on a variety of levels, which then has implications on their consumer behavior.

Brands in the scenes of entertainment vehicles can help a consumer identify with the characters (Delorme and Reid, 1999) because they feel their prior knowledge of the brand

helps to clarify the identity and personality of the character. If the theory that viewers metaphorically see themselves as characters in films (Hirschman 1986) is correct, then it is possible that the linking of brands and characters can act as a powerful approval message (Avery and Ferraro, 2000). The method adopted in this paper will explore the nature of this engagement from a subjective researcher perspective, with the aim that the conceptual foundation of film theory, novel in this research area, could hint at previously obscured insights.

METHOD: SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS OF MISE-EN-SCENE

Brand communication planners are concerned with discovering the nuanced meanings that occur within different kinds of brand representation in entertainment marketing vehicles (Hackley, 2006). The present paper uses the film theory of mise-en-scene in order to explore how this concept can develop an understanding of brand representation within a film. It does so by using a subjective analytical stance. Subjective personal introspection or SPI (Holbrook, 1995; Brown and Turley, 1998) also known as auto-ethnography (Hackley, 2006, 2007) is a well established approach in consumer research (e.g. Gould, 1991) which locates the researcher's experience at the centre of the analytical frame. The approach taken in this study also reflects that of literary analysis, the use of which has been promoted in marketing and consumer research (Stern, 1989).

Products are consumed not only for utility but also for their capacity to convey symbolic meanings (Wattanasuwan, 1998). Likewise, and completely independent of products, movies are consumed and enjoyed for their capacity to create meaning through story (McKee, 1998). The practice of product placement integrates branded goods and services within the film, thereby adding meaning to an already richly meaningful discourse, a meaning that exists independent of those carried by brands.

An example might serve to clarify these points. In the movie *Lone Star* (1996) there is a sequence in which sheriff Sam Deeds crosses the border into Mexico so that he can question the businessman Chucho in relation to a murder investigation. As the men talk, Chucho stops to draw a line in the sand, an action rich with symbolism in itself. It represents separation on a personal level, yet simultaneously refers to the Texas/Mexico national border. Now take into consideration that the line was drawn with a Coca-Cola bottle, and within the context of the movie this simple action takes on yet another dimension of meaning. It is a film that gives focus to the issues of economic exploitation between America and its neighbors, and by using a symbol of American global economic dominance we are presented with a sequence with multiple layers of meaning.

We have drawn attention to only one element of this sequence, that of the drawing of the line, but the way in which Chucho drew the line, the music, what he was saying and in what manner, the camera angle and other elements are also important in framing the viewer's interpretation of the scene. All these elements and more combine to form what is known as the mise-en-scene, which means 'the contents of the frame and the way they are organized' (Gibbs 2002, pg.5). This I believe, is an important concept that can help develop the marketers understanding of how the brand is portrayed within a movie, as it takes into consideration elements which are central to a viewer's understanding of the movie. We are not so much concerned with the viewer's experience with the film as existential/phenomenological researchers might be, but with understanding the nuanced interaction of cinematic elements that shapes the way in which the brand is shown and consequently their experience.

Two movies have been selected for this purpose, *Hitch* and *The 40-year-old virgin* in order to conduct an analysis of specific scenes within them. There were several reasons for this choice. The comedy genre of films of which they are a part is the most prevalent genre in which product placements occur (Karrh, 1998). In addition, a good deal of cultural knowledge is required to perform an in-depth interpretive analysis of this type and the first author of this paper is of the same consumer segment as the likely audience for these movies and this well-positioned to offer a nuanced interpretation of the scenes.

The movies were also selected for their high number of product placements. *Hitch* contains 62 in all, while *40 year old* contains 40, the highest levels of product placement of any Hollywood movie released in 2005 according to web analyst *Brandchannel*. Another useful feature for this analysis was the fact that they received widespread viewing measured by their gross box office takings, which were US \$74.5million for *Hitch* and US \$37.7 million for *40 year old*. This ranks *Hitch* as the 4th most seen Hollywood movie of 2005 and *40 year old* as the 10th. As previous research (Delorme et al., 1998) has considered films within the top 25 grossing Hollywood films of the year, the selection of the 4th and 10th highest grossing films of the year represents two films that have been viewed by a wide audience.

These figures relate to the US market and therefore do not take into account the global reach that Hollywood films attain. Also, if one takes into consideration that they have been released on DVD and video, and the audiences for these films rise dramatically. These films are therefore important vehicles for product placements and an ideal choice for investigation.

Within each film, the focus of investigation rests on one brand only and a limited number of scenes. The main aim of this study is to reveal the potential of this type of method and the depth of analysis that is achievable is best illustrated by a relatively narrow focus. In the film *Hitch* the analysis focuses on the brand *Lacoste* as it appears in a particular sequence lasting 8:47minutes. In *40 year old Virgin*, the analysis falls on the brand *Ralph Lauren* as it appears in a sequence lasting 9:30minutes. These placements are useful for research for their length of appearance, far exceeding that of a typical commercial. Both sequences have the main character of the film wearing the brand and the length of appearance allows the brand to achieve that Hollywood ideal of becoming part of the story. There is a real possibility that they can have greater influence upon an audience than a brand that appears only for a few seconds, as do many brands such as *Google* or *Blackberry* throughout both movies, and the aim of this study is to explore the way that brand placements might be understood by audiences as part of the story. The analysis undertaken compares each scene to seek a more balanced view than might be achieved by analyzing just one scene in one movie, and the two movies and scene seem to parallel each other in length and type of movie.

The research method used here is novel to the area and so needs to be explained in detail. The fundamental argument is that the meaning of the brand is inseparable from the experience of the film. So that at the simplest emotional level, audiences who positively evaluate a film as being 'happy' will be more optimistic in their outlook towards other things (Karrh, 1999), including the brands that appeared within the film. The elements of mise-en-scene shape the audiences' experience of the film and an understanding of how these elements combine to form their experience may allow light to be shed on how the brand is represented and given meaning within the film.

Mise-en-scene in film theory refers to “the contents of the frame and the way they are organized” (Gibbs 2002, p.5), including the lighting, costume, décor, space, action and performance and position of the camera. The interaction of these elements combines to form a major influence on the viewer. By critically analyzing a film through the theory of mise-en-scene we can arrive at an understanding of how meaning is made through the interaction of these elements, locating the brands role within the scene.

Audiences are then first and foremost viewers, and not consumers, and this paper will engage with them as such in the assumption that a richer understanding will emerge. An understanding of the mechanisms operating behind the experience in evaluating the role product placement plays in contributing towards this experience, both for its own sake, as it is an interesting avenue of exploration and for the sake of marketers, for whom this method of research might be interesting for more practical implications, specifically that they might place products with more efficiency and success.

Mise-en-scene is associated with the film critic Bazin who held that it was the crux of the film and the techniques of mise-en-scene ‘allow the spectator to participate more fully in the experience of the film’ (Monaco 1981, pg.336). An elaboration on the elements of mise-en-scene will now be provided. This is the way in which the various elements were explained in the film studies texts reviewed for this paper and is an approach consistent with the theoretical study of film.

THE ELEMENTS OF MISE-EN-SCENE:

LIGHTING

Firstly, lighting can affect the tone and mood of a film and focus attention on certain aspects of the scene. Therefore ‘the organization of light, actors and camera make possible a series of suggestive readings.’ For example, in the film *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1946) Devil (Cary Grant) is a silhouette with his back towards the camera while the other actors are fully lit. This gives the impression that he is a member of the audience, emphasizing the nature of his character as that of a detached onlooker.

COSTUME AND COLOUR

Costume is simply the choice of clothes worn by the characters in the film. This element carries particular significance in relation to this enquiry, along with that of color. Colour is an important expressive element for filmmakers, and is often mobilized by means of costume that has the distinct advantage of being associated with a particular character (Gibbs 2002). Different colors might have different meanings in semiotics, the color red for example can signify anger (Danesi, 2006) or it can be associated with rebellion (Gibbs, 2002), therefore color is an element that can carry significant meaning.

PROPS

Props are any physical items used in the film (Monaco, 1981) such as chairs, tables, books or pans. They can gain significance in a film through their use within the narrative and a character’s interaction with them. We refer here to generic props not branded props, but the relationship between the generic and branded props is now changing so that the majority of props are now branded and carry with them their own meaning which have arrived fully formed and largely independent of the meaning imposed on them through the film.

DÉCOR

Décor refers to the setting of a scene and the stylistic arrangement of the space. The expressive ability of décor is noted in an analysis of a scene from Jean Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu* (1939) where the impact and effect of the scene is attributed to the décor.

ACTION AND PERFORMANCE

The action and performance of the scene is central to the audiences understanding of the narrative film since a great deal of meaning and significance can be 'bound up in the way in which a line is delivered, or where an actor is looking at a particular moment' (Gibbs 2002, p.12). For example, in previous managerial research in product placement the recall of a brand was said to increase when it was positively evaluated by a character (Karrh, 1999), but this is a broad statement that fails to capture the dynamic quality of an actor's performance, whereby the raising of an eyebrow, for instance can convey significant meaning (Gibbs 2002, p.13).

SPACE

Space is a vital expressive element and is concerned with the personal space between performers and the relationships which are expressed by the positioning of the actors. Proximity then becomes an important sub-element of space and is concerned with how close the actor is to the audience, whether they are in the foreground or background and in relation to the scene. For example, the closer a subject the more important the character can seem (Monaco, 1981).

CAMERA POSITION

To talk about space is to implicitly think about the position of the camera (mise-en-scene). The position of the camera is one of the most important elements of mise-en-scene and, therefore, of the way in which the brand is to be perceived. As Gibbs (2002) notes, "the position of the camera is going to determine our understanding of the scene. It will, for example, profoundly affect the way we experience a performance. It is one of the most important means by which the nature of our relationships with the characters is defined" (p.19).

The following are definitions of the various camera shots that will be used in a film, and although it is not an exclusive list, they are the terms to which we will refer in the analysis of the films.

SHOT: A single piece of film, however long or short, without cuts, exposed continuously.

ESTABLISHING SHOT: Generally, a long shot that shows the audience the general location of the scene that follows, often providing essential information and orientating the viewer

CLOSE UP: a shot of the subject's face

MEDIUM SHOT: a shot intermediate between a close up and long shot

LONG SHOT: includes the full figure of the subject

TRACKING SHOT: any shot in which the camera moves from one point to another, either sideways or in and out

POINT OF VIEW: a shot which shows the scene from the point of view of the character

CAMERA ANGLE: the angle at which the camera is pointed at the subject, low, high or level

These elements of mise-en-scene, lighting, costume, space, décor, position of camera and action and performance are not mutually exclusive but it is their interaction that provides the effect of a given scene. Although mise-en-scene is concerned with the meaning of the arrangement of these elements in a single scene, any critical analysis of a scene should take into account the film in its totality (Perkins, 1972). Therefore, a scene's interpretation is important in the context of the film and in relation to the story of the film. Taking this into account, the analysis of the scenes from the selected movies will be grounded in the film as a whole and as such a more coherent and relative interpretation will ensue.

We will be focusing on product placement within a particular scene, analyzing and interpreting its meaning in the context of the scene while also bearing in mind the role that the scene plays in the film as a whole. Perkins (1972) stresses that 'in order to comprehend whole meanings...attention must be paid to the whole context of shot, sequence and film' (p. 83). While the analysis is hinged on individual elements of scenes it is very important not to lose sight of the holistic perspective, a *sit were*, the Gestalt of meaning which resides in the moviegoer's experience of the movie.

We should emphasize that we have not established the commercial relationship of the brands discussed to the movie production company in these scenes. In entertainment today it is usually naïve to suppose that a brand featured heavily in a scene, script or plot is not there by commercial arrangement of some kind, though that possibility cannot be ruled out. It is far more likely, especially in a big budget Hollywood movie, that brands featured have engaged in a transaction with the movie producers. However, as Hackley (2003) notes, this does not necessarily mean that the brand client was given editorial control over the precise way in which the brand was used in the scene. Such arrangements do occur, though we have no means of knowing whether that was the case in the following scenes. Rather, we are conducting the analysis to understand the brands' meaning in the context of these scenes as exemplars of this technique and illustrations of the semiotic possibilities for product placement.

FINDINGS

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SCENES OF, RESPECTIVELY, THE 40 YEAR OLD VIRGIN AND HITCH

ANDY IS TAKEN TO A NIGHTCLUB BY HIS WORKMATES TO MEET WOMEN

The scene begins with Andy (the main character) observing himself in the mirror. He's screen left and in the mirror's reflection are his three workmates, all getting ready to go out. The four men are standing side by side, engaged in conversation. Andy asks "Cal,

what do you think, is this too yellow?” as he buttons up the bright yellow Ralph Lauren Polo he is wearing. We are presented with Andy’s need for peer reassurance that his clothes are socially acceptable. The brand is not explicitly referred to, he doesn’t ask ‘is this Ralph Lauren Polo too yellow?’ but attention is drawn to the polo nonetheless. However, it will possibly be evaluated on the terms with which it was mentioned, its color. Andy’s question and insecurity over his appearance is conveyed in the meekness of his tone of voice and is contrasted by the casualness of the other characters, both in their postures, clothes and tone of voice. Cal takes this opportunity in responding to the question, to make a joke about the color of the shirt, he returns a question with a question, asking ‘what’s curious George like in real life?’, which is an intertextual reference to a cartoon monkey character who sports yellow shirts. The character Cal is wearing a white *Nirvana* t-shirt (a now defunct but influential rock band with a deceased lead singer), which serves the purpose of entrenching the contrast between the two characters. Cal is sarcastic and from his choice of clothes we might assume that he listens to the rock band *Nirvana*, he is relaxed and embodies a social poise that by comparison, the preppy Andy clearly lacks. The juxtaposition of these two characters, sharing the screen in a medium shot creates a gap in personalities, made prominent through their clothes, tone of voice and performance.

This particular shot, which lasts only 15 seconds, reenacts the ritual of getting dressed before a night out; the brand is portrayed as it would normally be used in real life. The scene is reminiscent of the shopping experience, whereby trying on clothes and evaluating oneself in them precedes the actual decision to purchase them. Peer advice is often sought to reinforce one’s own opinion and is an important element of consumer behavior which is successfully and comically reproduced in this scene.

We cut to the interior of a nightclub, a tracking shot sweeps through the crowd, lingering on women dancing and kissing, establishing the context of the scene. Music plays with lyrics of sexual innuendo and the camera stops at the three characters standing with their backs to the bar looking into the crowd. It is a medium shot with Andy in the centre, his body language signaling his insecurity in contrast to the other two characters who appear cool and relaxed. The music, the bright colors (green, yellow, blue, orange) of the nightclub, the shots of the women dancing and kissing provides the context in which we are to view the interaction between the characters. It is relevant to the action in the scene because the eponymous Andy is indeed a virgin and is clearly overwhelmed in this hedonistic enclave. The yellow polo, which he wears tucked into his trousers further symbolizes his social ineptness, as his style of dress makes him stand out from the crowd. The structure of this scene progresses in a linear fashion, which allows the audience to focus more closely on one storyline, and we are immersed in the action of the story as it unfolds.

The camera shoots the characters at eye level and as they speak the camera cuts back and forth between them at the end of each sentence. The camera can be said to be operating in a natural manner, so that it does not draw attention to its own artifice but it replicates for the audience the illusion of actually being there. The angle of the camera along with its cutting back and forth between each character during conversation is a technique that enhances the audience’s connection with the narrative of the scene. The Ralph Lauren Polo (Polo) logo is always present in the screen and is again implicitly referred to when Andy interacts with Cal, who again with a sarcastic aside lampoons Andy’s choice of a bright yellow polo. The brand is not mentioned but attention is drawn to it, therefore the placement in *The 40-year-old virgin* is thus made more explicit by the

combination of audio and visual placement. The performance of the actors is a crucial element of the scene. The actors themselves play a role in the formation of the audience's experience, forming an integral part of the context in which the brand appears.

HITCH PREPARES ALBERT FOR HIS DATE AND WE WITNESS THE RESULTS

From the beginning of the film, Will Smith's character Hitch establishes his authority through the cinematic convention of the voice-over. Hitch's narrative is presented over scenes in which he is not present. At other times he addresses the camera directly, as if he is talking directly to the audience, breaking the artifice of the camera and establishing a bond between the character and audience. This is supported by the extreme close up, when we are as close to him as is only experienced within an intimate context with someone that you are familiar with. His tone of voice exudes confidence over his subject matter; we are inside his world, and he is our guide.

The beginning of the movie establishes Hitch as perfect matchmaker and we trust his opinions because they turn out to be correct. He has words of wisdom. His appearance asserts his dominance; he is clean shaven and wears nice suits. His voice is of a friendly companion who seems generally concerned with helping his clients, he is good-natured and charming. Will Smith's performance as the character Alex Hitchens is possibly the most important element of the mise-en-scene that will affect the audience's experience of the film and, by implication, its interpretation of the brand *Lacoste* which Hitch wears prominently throughout the chosen scene.

Hitch as guide / teacher is a theme from the very beginning. His voice over is present as we watch scenes of his clients on their dates. He is speaking for the audience's benefit, reciting the instructions he has given to the client earlier, which is integrated with perfect timing as they put them into practice. We hear this as a couple is walking through the contemporary sophistication of a picture gallery. Everyone is in elegant dresses and suits. The man and woman stop in front of a painting to admire, when Hitch's voice says "if she lingers at a photograph, move on". As he says 'move on', the man spins around and moves away, leaving the woman at the painting. Hitch is not so much guiding him through but appears to be a sort of voice inside his head, reassuring him. The scene oscillates between the teaching and its implementation, and the notion of Hitch as teacher is reinforced through his use of a chalkboard. As he scores a white line through a key word, repeating that word with a certain amount of emphasis, we are reminded that he knows something that we don't, or at least that the men who have come to him for help don't.

We believe in his advice because it works for the characters in the film and so a certain amount of trust has developed between the audience and his character. The various elements of mise-en-scene such as *position of the camera, action and performance*, and *space* help to create this positive evaluation of Hitch and create an ideal environment for a product placement.

Hitch, to the audience, is ever present and available. But in the world of the film, he is dismissed by Sarah Milas (Eva Mendes) as an 'urban myth' who doesn't exist. His identity as date doctor is known to us, but hidden to her, even when they meet at the club. We are presented first with Hitch in his professional capacity, but we can see that he embodies this persona which we bestow on him as a 'ladies man' when he is able to

confidently approach and impress women for himself. So, our belief in him is strengthened, because he practices what he preaches.

At one level, he represents, our ideal self, and so we identify with him at an aspirational level, as a teacher, much like his clients/students in the film. Yet, if he were to seem too perfect, therefore too unreal, inhuman in a sense, then it is quite possible his character would be viewed as an unattainable ideal, and be seen as more of a construct of imagination as apposed to a flesh and blood person. It is therefore important to show his flaws. This is achieved through the cinematic convention of flashback, a device which allows us to move through time and space, effortlessly transporting us through the past to the present. Hitch as always is omnipresent, able to provide the monologue to his own past, therefore controlling in a sense his own past, ascertaining dominance over events much in keeping with the way he does with his clients.

We are taken back to college, and to a scene of Hitch walking up a flight of stairs, dressed in clothes that recall the stereotypical 'nerd'. He stumbles and drops all of his books, he has overly large glasses and a 'fade' style haircut which was a mainstay of African American hairstyle in the 80's and early 90's. Viewers familiar with Will Smith, the actor, might notice the resemblance to his character in the show *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. This element of intertextuality serves a dual purpose, that of authenticating the scene as residing in the past, and framing it in a nostalgic era as the audience recalls their early experiences of Smith, at the same time as Smith the character is reminiscing about his own past experiences. This sequence powerfully connects the audience and character, drawing empathy and by the juxtaposition of Hitch's past misfortunes and hurdles with his present success This conditions the audience further in believing his power of transformation. The transformational character of brand product placement has been noted by (Russell, 2002), and is one which aligns itself particularly well with product placement in movie scenes.

Hitch was just like the people he is helping, he glosses over painful memories that provide us and him with the rationale behind his chosen profession. He is a date doctor and 'it's an education I feel obliged to pass onto my fellow men' he says, echoing and reinforcing the theme of teacher/student that prevails throughout the movie. So whatever Hitch does or says, we are predisposed to evaluate in a positive light, one which we accept without question. This is a powerful context in which to represent a brand. We are being taught, or we are learning to accept what the movie and Hitch is saying to us. Having established the importance of the performance in this context we will now explore in more detail the scene that contains the *Lacoste* product placement.

The sequence begins with an establishing shot outside of a building on a busy street with cars and pedestrians. Before we cut to the inside of the building, we hear Smith's voice drowning out the noise of the street 'now just keep it simple, just like we practiced' and then we cut to the inside of an apartment without pause in speech and find Smith leaning comfortably over the counter with a phone in his hand.

This is a tight shot, with very little space between Smith and the other character in the scene, Albert. It's an intimate shot. Smith is on the left hand of the screen facing the audience, and Albert has his back turned to us as he listens to Smith (reverse angle shot). Beside Smith on the counter are the deep green leaves of the '*bird of paradise*' plant. The camera lingers for a moment as Smith dials a number into the phone, whilst in a tone of calm reassurance explains to Albert what he has to do. His tone of voice signifies that he is in control of the situation and his coolness is borne from his authority with the

subject matter, which is talking to women. His need to adopt such a tone tells us that the other character is nervous without us even having to see him.

We are therefore primed for Albert's reaction, which we anticipate to be in direct opposition to Smith's composed demeanor. Smith is placed in extreme left of the screen; we are eye level with him. That we can only see his face encourages familiarity and suggests the intimacy of a personal conversation. The bright green *Lacoste* shirt is perhaps reflective of his general demeanor, and at the moment it's juxtaposition with the green of the plant conveys a certain naturalness, which Albert so comically lacks. Albert is wearing an unbranded light blue shirt and stands nervously on the opposite side of the counter to Hitch. Albert speaks on the telephone to Alegra Cole, his putative date, whilst taking advice from Hitch on what to say. The camera cuts from Albert to Hitch and then to Alegra who is walking along a city street, talking on her mobile phone. The use of color is important to this scene as it creates the theme of 'nature'. Therefore, Hitch wears a lime green shirt and is positioned besides the deep green leaves of a bird of paradise plant. Within the vase that holds the plant are blue beads that mirror the color of the light blue shirt Albert is wearing. The juxtaposition of these colors is not a coincidence but a choice, as every object or prop on the movie set does not appear in the scene naturally but must be placed there. The theme of 'nature' is extended by the shots in which Alegra appears. As she walks along the street she passes and is surrounded by yellow sunflowers and other bright yellow plants that she brushes aside to make her way. The triangulation of green, blue and yellow are important visual signs which are perhaps not obviously striking but nevertheless bathe the scene in the hues of summer colors that conveys freshness and vibrancy. And amongst this backdrop the audience will experience the brand as part of the scene and 'nature'.

Albert, with Hitch's assistance successfully obtains the date with Alegra and the scene immediately cuts to this date at a New York art exhibition. Alegra Cole is a celebrity and there is a red carpet and paparazzi and the theme of glamour and sophistication dominate this scene. Although Hitch and the brand are not directly placed within the scene, they are linked by repeated cuts between the art exhibition (night) and the apartment (day). Also, there is the device of voice over and as we follow Albert through the gallery the audience can hear Hitch's advice to Albert. There is also upbeat music playing in the background and at certain times dominating the scene so that together with the glamorous setting, places the brand within a positive aspirational environment.

The technique of transcending time and space through cutting the scenes together from different locations allows for all of the characters to be within the audience's attention even if they are not spatially connected. The effect is important in terms of the brand's representation because it allows the Lacoste brand that Hitch wears to appear directly besides the glamorous setting of the art gallery. Therefore, the audience is invited to make the connection between the sophistication and glamour of the art exhibition and the brand Lacoste. The suggestion being that the Lacoste brand embodies the sophistication and style that a New York art exhibition connotes. There are several main elements of *mise-en-scene*, such as *position of the camera*, *color* and *action and performance*, which combine to represent the brand in a positive light.

DISCUSSION

The ways in which the *Lacoste* and *Ralph Lauren Polo* brands are represented in the respective scenes offer some interesting contrasts. In the first, Andy's Polo shirt is mentioned explicitly, not by the brand name but by reference to his rather garish choice of colour and uncool style of tucking it into his pants. In *Hitch* in contrast, the placement is subtler as no explicit reference is made to the clothes being worn. However, it would be wrong to assume that the brand placement in *40 Year Old Virgin* implies negative things about the brand. The fact that the Andy character was able to wear a brand which everyone knows is regarded as prestigious and fashionable, and yet he makes it the opposite, enhances both his characterization and the positioning of the brand. We know that this is a case of Andy's uncool-ness being so extreme that he can even wear a Polo shirt and fail to get a date. In the case of *Hitch*, in contrast, while the brand references are less explicit, the implication that *Hitch* is the epitome of cool and his *Lacoste* clothing fits that image is subtle but powerful nonetheless.

Another parallel between the scenes and movies is that in both films it is notable that the two Caucasian men are socially awkward characters who seek and are given advice from two African American characters who are models of social success, at least on a superficial level, with women. There is perhaps a socio-political current running through these scenes where African-Americans who have historically been underrepresented and misrepresented in Hollywood films, and often portrayed as subservient to Caucasians, frequently in the role of gangster or criminal. Here, on the face of it, we have a reversal of this phenomenon. This apparent reversal is far from exclusive to these films, but the similarities between the two were striking enough to warrant closer examination. However, these scenes still rely on the stereotyping of cultures. In *Hitch* the joke is that white men can't dance, and in *40 year old Virgin* white men have a major problem being cool, unlike even elderly black men who find urban cool comes naturally and effortlessly.

There is more context needed to understand these representations. The actor Will Smith, who plays the character Alex Hitchins in the movie *Hitch* is known for his political correctness. Outside of films he records hip hop records most notable for their exclusion of swearing in a musical genre characterized by the use of expletives. The characters he plays in other films (e.g. *Independence Day*, *Wild Wild West*, *Bad Boys*) share the common thread of his own personality; funny, charming, loud, even violent but always respectable and never indecent. Will Smith plays Will Smith and he is a brand in his own right. Comparing his character in *Hitch* to Nate in *40 year old* is to witness Hollywood's stereotyping of African Americans. Nate in *40 year old* represents the 'urban' or 'ghetto' African-American and we can see this in the clothes he wears (jeans, tracksuit top, gold necklace worn outside shirt). We see it in his speech, his choice of language, so that he refers to woman as 'bitches' and refers to Andy in the vernacular 'dawg' when addressing him. *Hitch* respects women, even if the plot of the movie places this under some doubt until the movie's denouement. In contrast we are left in no doubt that Nate clearly does not respect women.

What this analysis does is draw attention to the cultural context in which the brands are portrayed. Each brand serves the function of representing the personality of the given character. But in *Hitch*, the *Lacoste* brand personality of up market cool is complemented by Will Smith's own personality, and can be viewed as a straight forward celebrity endorsement. The polo Andy wears sends a different message, it represents his social ineptness in a way that is now being challenged by the advice of the African American

character. The audience is therefore presented with a passive scene in which the brand merges into the subtext of the scene, and one where the shirt is an active participant in supporting the tension of the scene.

Therefore, we might assume that due to the more explicit nature of the brand placement in 40 year old the intention of the brand planners was to generate awareness for the brand by weaving it into the storyline of the film. Unlike the film *Hitch*, in which the placement is simply visually presented, and we might in this instance assume the desired effect is one of synergy between two personalities, a triangulation between Will Smith, Alex Hitchins (the character he plays) and the brand *Lacoste*.

As noted, the theoretically informed analysis in this research is a subjective one undertaken by the lead author. It might be useful to also reflect on the likely audience engagement with these scenes. It is reasonable to suppose that this will be less analytical, and more involved with the story rather than with the separate elements of mise-en-scene. This would be expected since elements of the scene such as *space* and *décor* and camera movement aim to be 'natural' and reflect the action as the audience would perceive it. In short, despite the effort that goes into the scene, it is important that this be invisible and form part of the audience's experience (Perkins, 1972). This raises the question that if the audience mainly engage with the story in the scene then what is the importance of the mise-en-scene in relation to their experience of the movie? Does the space between the actors or the position of the camera actually matter to their experience of the film? However, one must assume that in order to arrive at certain assumptions of the scene it is necessary to be influenced by certain elements of the mise-en-scene.

For example, as noted in the analysis, there is a close up of Hitch as he gives advice to Albert and this creates a very intimate relationship between the character and the audience, since it evokes the familiarity you assume with friends when in close conversation. This is a positive atmosphere for the brand to appear in, with elements of intimacy, purposeful yet casual conversation with its connotations of motivational speech, suffused with an easy humor, means that the audience will presumably react favorably to the brand. This assumption is based on previous research that finds that subtle, well integrated brands are appreciated (Delorme and Reid, 1999) and the placement of the brand is suffused naturally into the scene and is not referred to in the dialogue.

The ability of the film to transcend time and space played an important role in the construction of the sequence in which the brand appears. The advice Hitch gives to Albert at home is immediately put into action on his date at a nightclub with Alegra. The scene moves back and forth between the domestic environment of an apartment by day and to the glamorous surroundings of a New York nightclub at night. This device of cutting between time, day and night, is a necessary condition of film, which must operate under its own very stringent time frame because there is only two hours to tell a story that spans two weeks. Therefore, this collapsing of time through cinematic technique provides the audience with a sense of instant gratification, there is no wait between cause and effect, it happens instantaneously and progresses with an ease not present in daily reality. So film offers both reality, in the sense that audiences recognize scenes, situations and brands in scenes, and unreality, in the sense that the narrative form and content of a movie is almost dream-like compared to experiential reality. Audiences engage with film, then, at an imaginative level, and they imagine the possibilities of what their life would be like if it were like in the film. This offers an ideal psychological setting for product placements, reflecting both known reality and imaginative aspiration simultaneously.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This research has demonstrated the use of a novel analytical approach drawing on literary and film theory and reflecting consumer culture theory research themes of interpretation and researcher subjectivity, onto a research field predominantly studied hitherto within the positivist and managerial paradigm. However, this does not mean that the research is without managerial implications. Brand planners could, through such an analysis, become more knowledgeable about the implications for brand positioning of particular product placement incidents in given movie scenes.

Success in product placement strategy can be difficult to define, and may depend ultimately on the objectives of the marketing decision makers, yet this has not deterred measures of recall and awareness dominating research into product placement until recently. The limits of recall and awareness however are apparent and a move away from such research is needed to capture the dynamism of this 'hybrid' form of marketing communication. As McLuhan (1964) has noted, the medium is the message, and this paper seeks to understand the medium in order to better understand the message.

Researching the practice of product placement through the film theory of mise-en-scene has allowed a richer understanding of the elements that combine to form the audience's experience of the brand. It was found that various cinematic techniques such as the *cut* in the film *Hitch* allowed for the brand's presence to be felt in scenes in which it did not physically appear. The use of *color* was found to be a major influence over the tone and atmospherics of the setting of a scene and one that could be employed to influence the audience's interpretation of the brand. However, it appeared that although various elements of the mise-en-scene could substantially affect the way in which the audience would engage with the brand, the actual story and action of the film appeared to matter more. This was somewhat expected as the elements of the scene are not constructed to be noticeable (Perkins, 1972) but are there to convey the story of the film, therefore the audience would be less aware of the elements of color, position of the camera, space and décor. Nonetheless, such elements are an essential, though unconscious part of the audiences' understanding of the film, and therefore of the brand.

We have noted that managerial implications of this research but these do depend on the nature of the contractual relationship between brand client and movie studio. The final decision on how to shoot a scene and how the elements of mise-en-scene will be employed is normally at the discretion of the director. Therefore, an understanding of mise-en-scene might not allow for the brand planner to directly influence how these elements are shaped on screen, but might equip the brand planner with the suitable terminology so that a more thoughtful dialogue with the director might ensue.

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