Context Matters: Modeling the Impact of Context Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Brand Placement

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1   Introduction

Brand placement, the paid incorporation of brands and products in mass media content (Karrh, 1998), is an increasingly popular marketing communications tool. Previous research into the nature of this phenomenon, has revealed that its effects may vary depending on characteristics of the placement (e.g., Dens et al., 2012), characteristics of the individual consumer (e.g., Lehu and Bressoud, 2008) and contextual factors (e.g., Van Reijmersdal et al., 2010). However, not all these elements have received the same amount of academic attention. In particular, research concerning the impact of consumers' context related perceptions on brand placement effectiveness has been sparse. This is surprising because brand placements are embedded in media content and often linked to the context in which they are represented (Russell, 1998). Although prior research has established that viewers' responses to the context are of paramount importance in determining their responses to placed brands (e.g., Russell and Stern, 2006; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2010), there is still a lot of ground to be covered in this area.

Wiles and Danielova (2009) point out that a potential key factor in determining placement success is the perceived fit of the placed brand with its context (e.g., the movie in which it is placed, the endorser to which it is linked, etc.). The first contribution of the present study is that we examine how perceived fit between the placed brand and its context (fit with the movie itself and the associated character) impacts consumer responses towards brand placement in a movie context.

Our second contribution is that we propose and empirically test a model that integrates multiple contextual perceptions (attitude toward the character, fit with character, fit with movie and movie liking) with placement characteristics (prominence and plot connection) (Figures 1 and 2). Extant literature boasts only a few studies that explore the simultaneous impact of, and relationships between different context related perceptions in determining consumers' responses to brand placement (e.g., Russell and Stern, 2006). Moreover, researchers have yet to answer the outspoken need for frameworks that integrate context factors with characteristics of the placement itself (Balasubramanian et al., 2006). Our study extends this research by examining how brand responses are

influenced by multiple contextual perceptions, placement characteristics and their interaction.

2   Literature Review and Hypotheses

The impact of context-related attitudes on responses towards traditional print and television advertisements is well-documented. For these traditional forms of advertising, context appreciation has been shown to enhance brand recognition (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002). Hedonic contingency theory explains this relationship (Côté, 2005). The positive state of mind caused by context appreciation improves people's willingness to process information and store it in memory, because people are more confident of a positive outcome (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2010). These findings may transfer to brand placements. Two studies (Bressoud et al., 2010; Johnstone and Dodd, 2000) demonstrate that attitude towards the movie is positively associated with the salience and brand recall of brands placed in that movie. As predicted by hedonic contingency theory, people with higher levels of appreciation for the movie will be more willing to process information (e.g., brands or branded products) and store it in memory, which should positively affect brand recognition. Therefore we hypothesize that:

H1a: Viewers' movie liking positively impacts brand recognition for placed brands.

Advertising studies in traditional media find that context-related evaluations, such as liking or attitude toward the program spill over to evaluations of brands that are embedded in the content (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002). Through the process of classical conditioning, affective responses to contextual elements of a movie or program can be associated with objects (e.g., brands and products) that appear in the movie or program (D'astous and Chartier, 2000). More recently, the spillover principle has also been validated in a brand placement setting. For instance, a study by Van Reijmersdal et al. (2010) finds that viewers who evaluated a television program positively were more likely to positively change their brand attitudes after seeing the brand placement in that program. In accordance with these findings, we postulate the following hypotheses:

H1b: Viewers' movie liking positively impacts brand attitude for placed brands.

In terms of brand placements, "context" not only refers to the program or movie itself, but also to the character(s) in the movie that are associated with the placed brands. As viewers become involved with the movie and the characters, they will develop attitudes towards the characters. Prior research indicates that the attitudes towards the characters associated with the placed brands positively

affect how brands are processed and stored in memory (Russell and Stern, 2006). A positive relationship between the viewer and the character instigates an upward social comparison process in which the character is perceived as a referent other whose behaviors (e.g., consumption patterns) are aspired to by the viewer (Karrh, 1998; Russell and Stern, 2006). This process raises the viewers' attention for brands that are placed around the character. This increased attention makes the placed brands more accessible in memory, and thus more easily retrievable.

H2a: Viewers' attitude towards the character associated with the placed brand has a direct positive impact on brand recognition.

For brand placements, we expect that the attitude toward the character associated with the placed brand, can spill over to the brand as well (Russell and Stern, 2006). In advertising, Mccracken (1989) explains this process as a meaning transfer. Movie characters derive meaning from their environment and how they interact with it, and this meaning can be transferred onto brands and products that are part of the environment or that are used by the characters. This reasoning is consistent with associative learning theory (Till and Shimp, 1998). While consumers watch a movie, they learn about the characters from how they act in different social situations. Based on these experiences, viewers automatically build a network of associations around the character, which will reflect in their attitude towards of the character (Teichert and Schöntag, 2010; Till and Busler, 2000). By linking a brand to the character, the character's associative network becomes a source of information about the brand (Till et al., 2008). Consequently, moviegoers' character evaluations may have a strong impact on their perceptions of the placed brands.

H2b: Viewers' attitude towards the character associated with the placed brand has a direct positive impact on brand attitude.

A contextual factor that remains unexplored in a brand placement context is the perceived fit between the brand and the context in which it is embedded (Wiles and Danielova, 2009). Consumers learn to attach meaning to brands by observing their relationship with the movie context (Cooper et al., 2010). Congruence or fit between the movie context and the placed brands is likely to facilitate this process and result in more favorable brand responses (Till and Busler, 2000). This idea is consistent with literature on celebrity endorsement in advertising, which generally finds that a perceived matchup between the endorser and the brand results in better brand recognition (Erdogan, 1999). Schema congruity theory (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989) can explain this. A schema is a cognitive representation of associations and knowledge structures relating to the at-

tributes of a certain stimulus (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989). Schemas structure the process of encoding, retaining and retrieving information. People acquire context-relevant schemas when confronted with attitude objects (e.g., movies, characters, brands, …). When a brand or a product is placed in a movie, its schema can be implicitly compared to that of the movie itself. Similarly, when a brand is associated with a certain character, the schemas of the brand and the character are compared. Schema congruity theory predicts that information that is congruent with existing schemas is more easily remembered (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989). If a placed brand or product has a high perceived fit with its context (i.e., the movie or the character), the congruity between the schemata of the brand and of the movie/character is likely to benefit information processing and the storing of new information in memory, resulting in better brand recognition (Misra and Beatty, 1990; Mittelstaedt et al., 2000). We expect that:

H3a: The perceived fit between a placed brand and the movie positively impacts brand recognition.
H3b: The perceived fit between a placed brand and the character positively impacts brand recognition.

Apart from their attitude towards the movie and the character, consumers may also make inferences about the brand based on its fit with the character and the general context of the movie or program (Bhatnagar et al., 2004). Empirical findings confirm that a positive perceived fit between the brand and its context increases brand attitudes (e.g., Amos et al., 2008; Ohanian, 1991; Till and Busler, 2000). Although this existing research is primarily set in the field of celebrity endorsements in traditional advertising (Erdogan, 1999), it can be extended to brand placement. Because of its integrated nature, brand placement forges a cognitive link between the placed brands and their context. Schema congruity theory predicts enhanced brand attitudes when the brand's schema is congruent with the schemas associated with the character and the movie (Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Misra and Beatty, 1990; Till and Busler, 2000). Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H3c: The perceived fit between the brand and the movie positively impacts brand attitude.
 H3d: The perceived fit between the brand and the character positively impacts brand attitude.

In the absence of consumer behavior data, researchers approximate such response behavior using self-reported behavioral intention measures. Purchase intention is a frequently employed effectiveness measure in both consumer and

advertising research (Spears and Singh, 2004). Previous research firmly established that (brand) attitudes are important determinants of behavioral (purchase) intentions (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1974; Spears and Singh, 2004; Van Ittersum, 2012). Consequently, we expect that brand attitude will significantly predict purchase intention:

H4: Brand attitude has a positive impact on purchase intention.

2.1 The Mediating Role of Brand Recognition on Brand Attitude Formation

Past brand placement research demonstrates that explicit memory measures are poor predictors of persuasion (e.g., Law and Braun, 2000; Russell, 2002). Consistent with the mere exposure principle, researchers argue that the impact of brand placement on brand attitude formation is rather implicit (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). The mere exposure principle predicts a positive attitude resulting from a brief exposure to a brand, without explicit recognition, based on a misattribution of the increase in accessibility (implicit memory) for the brand as liking (Cowley and Barron, 2008; Zajonc, 1968). However, the recent findings of Dens et al. (2012) shed new light on the role of recognition in attitude formation. Their experiment on the effectiveness of brand placements in movies demonstrates a positive link between brand recognition and brand attitude. Furthermore, their study shows that recognition partially mediates the impact of placement characteristics (i.e., plot connection) on brand attitude. In order to explain their results they invoke the accessibility-diagnosticity framework (Herr et al., 1991). This theoretical framework argues that the likelihood that a piece of information is used to form judgments is a function of its accessibility in memory and its diagnosticity (Ahluwalia and Gürhan-Canli, 2000). As argued above, we expect that positive context evaluations will augment the accessibility of brand placements in memory, making it more likely that the placement's information will be used to make a judgment about the placed brand. Furthermore, the greater the shared associations between the brand and the context, the more diagnostic the info about the context will be for making judgments about the brand (Skowronski and Carlston, 1987). Thus, positive context perceptions can stimulate both the accessibility and diagnosticity of brand placements. According to this reasoning, the recognition of the brand in the movie is likely to trigger a more positive reaction to the brand if its context is positively evaluated. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H5: Brand recognition mediates the impact of movie liking, character liking and perceived fit between the brand and the movie/the character on brand attitude.

2.2   *The Moderating Impact of Prominence and Plot Connection*

Previous research has identified a number of placement characteristics that influence how people respond to brand placements (e.g., Gupta and Lord, 1998; Homer, 2009). Two factors whose effects are well-established in literature are prominence (e.g., Cowley and Barron, 2008; Gupta and Lord, 1998; Van Reijmersdal, 2009; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2012) and plot connection (e.g., Dens et al., 2012; Russell, 2002). Prominence relates to how noticeably a brand is represented on screen. In sum it can be defined as the extent to which the brand placement possesses characteristics designed to make it a central focus of audience attention (Gupta and Lord, 1998). Prior research has operationalized prominence in many different ways, e.g., the relative size of a brand on the screen, its centrality in the screen, time on screen or the number of mentions, modality (visual, auditory, audiovisual) or character interaction (is the character shown using or handling the brand or actively mentioning the brand name?) (e.g., Cowley and Barron, 2008; Gupta and Gould, 2007; La Ferle and Edwards, 2006). Regardless of how prominence is operationalized prior studies that assessed its effects find that it positively influences brand recognition and brand recall (e.g., Bressoud et al., 2010; Gupta and Lord, 1998). We expect prominence to reinforce the workings of hedonic contingency and associative learning. Because they are more noticeable, prominent placements could benefit more from positive context appreciation. We hypothesize that:

H6a: The direct impact of movie liking, character liking and perceived fit between the brand and the movie/the character on brand recognition will be greater for prominently placed brands than for subtly placed brands.

Prominence is shown to significantly boost brand memory, while it can be detrimental to brand attitude (Van Reijmersdal, 2009). This placement characteristic can interact with context related perceptions in determining consumers' responses to brand placement. Cowley and Barron (2008) show that prominent placements, as opposed to subtle placements, yield less favorable brand responses with people with high levels of program liking. They argue that prominent brand placements may disrupt the engaged viewer from its ongoing interaction with the program and trigger skeptical thoughts toward the advertiser, which results in less favorable brand attitudes. The skepticism evoked by prominent brand placements might also reflect on context related perceptions. For example, overly prominent placements could reduce the overall liking for the movie, or lead to a lower attitude toward the involved characters, which can subsequently spill over onto attitudes toward the placed brands. Therefore we hypothesize that:

H6b: The direct impact of context perceptions on brand attitude will be greater for subtly placed brands than for prominently placed brands.

Based on the accessibility-diagnosticity framework, we expect the indirect effects of context perceptions on brand attitudes through brand recognition to be positively influenced by prominence. As we hypothesized in H6a, we expect prominence to reinforce the positive impact of context perceptions on brand recognition. In turn, higher accessibility of the brand increases the likelihood that the adopted placement information will be used in attitude formation. In other words, brand information from prominent placements is more likely to be used in the brand attitude formation process. Consequently, we expect that:

H6c: The indirect impact of context perceptions on brand attitude through recognition will be greater for prominently placed brands than for subtly placed brands.

Plot connection is the degree to which a placement is connected with the plot or storyline of the movie or program in which it is embedded. Strongly plot connected brands are part of the narrative structure and story of movies and television programs and characterize a dimension of meaning (Russell, 2002). Plot connection implies a stronger link between the brand and the context in which it is placed. Consistent with associative network theory, highly plot connected brands benefit from a stronger network of context relevant associations than lowly plot connected brands, which facilitates the retrieval of these brands from memory (Dens et al., 2012). Indeed, studies find that a high degree of plot connection improves brand recognition (Brennan et al., 1999). In the light of these findings, we expect plot connection to strengthen the impact of context perceptions on brand recognition.

H7a: The direct impact of context perceptions on brand recognition will be greater for highly plot connected brands than for lowly plot connected brands.

From the perspective of the viewer, it is easier to link context and brand specific cognitive schemas of highly plot connected brands, as opposed to lowly plot connected brands. In other words, it is easier to learn about the brand from its context when the placement is highly plot connected. Plot connection fortifies the link between brand and context, facilitating the transfer of context perceptions on brand attitudes through classical conditioning. Therefore we hypothesize that:

H7b: The direct impact of context perceptions on brand attitude will be greater for highly plot connected brands than for lowly plot connected brands.

Connecting brands to the plot or the story of a movie increases their relevance. A highly plot connected brand can be considered as "primary information" (important information which is closely related to the story), whereas a weakly plot connected brand rather represents secondary (less important, peripheral) information, which is normally not retrieved from memory as well as primary information (Dens et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 1996). Because of its contextual relevance, information from highly plot connected brand placements is also of higher diagnostic value (Ahluwalia and Gürhan-Canli, 2000). As plot connection increases both the accessibility and diagnosticity of brand information, we expect that:

H7c: The indirect impact of context perceptions on brand attitude through recognition will be greater for highly plot connected brands than for lowly plot connected brands

3   Method

3.1   Procedure and Sample

Our study was performed during two separate editions of 'Ladies at the movies', a monthly women-only event organized in several movie theatres in Belgium. During this event a preview of a Hollywood blockbuster is shown. The movies shown on the night of the study were *Bride Wars* and *The Women*. Using a coding instrument based on La Ferle and Edwards (2006) and Ferraro and Avery (2000), both movies were content analyzed beforehand by two independent coders to categorize the brand placements according to their levels of prominence and plot connection. Intercoder agreement on prominence level was 91.8%, agreement on plot connection level was 93.9%. Cohen's Kappa for the overall categorization was K = .755 (+ 1 indicates perfect agreement, 0 indicates no agreement other than expected by chance) (Cohen, 1960; Perreault and Leigh, 1989). E-mail addresses were collected just before the movie, and a web link containing the questionnaire was mailed a few days after seeing the movie. This yielded 187 completed questionnaires for *Bride Wars* (response rate: 39.6%) and 103 for *The Women* (response rate: 45.6%). To be able to control for pre-existing brand attitudes (see discussion in Webb, 1979), a survey was also conducted with a control group of women ($N = 85$, movie: *Last Chance Harvey'*) to measure attitudes towards the selected brands in a group that had not been exposed to either of the two test movies.

3.2   Measures

First we measured respondents' movie liking on a 7-point Likert scale consisting of 7 items ($\alpha = .93$). Second, the attitude toward the characters linked to

the placements was measured using a 9 item 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = .95$). An exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation confirmed that the items belonging to each construct loaded on the same factor, thus evidencing the constructs' discriminant validity. In order to mitigate multicollinearity in our path models, we use the factor scores as input. Next the respondents completed two 4 item 7-point scales that measure their perceived fit between the brands and the movie ($\alpha = .93$), and the brands and the character ($\alpha = .93$). Again, the expected factorial structure was confirmed, and we use the factor scores in the analyses. Subsequently, respondents were asked to mark the brands they recognized in the movie from a list that contained the brands placed in the movie and filler brands. The proportion of respondents who correctly recognized the brand after being exposed to the placement in the movie was reduced by the proportion who falsely remembered seeing the brand in the other movie (which in that case served as a control group), to arrive at a facilitated brand recognition score. This technique allows to control for false recall (cfr. Dens et al., 2012). Brand attitude (A_b) and purchase intention (Pi) were measured by means of a 4-item 7-point semantic differential scale ($\alpha \geq .858$). Brand attitude and purchase intention toward these brands were also measured in the control group, for the eight brands under study ($\alpha \geq .883$). For each brand, the control group's mean A_b and Pi scores were subtracted from each individual's post-exposure scores in the main group. This resulted in both A_b and Pi difference measures that are used in subsequent analyses.

4   Results

The hypothesized relationships were tested by means of a path model using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Movie liking does not have an impact on brand recognition ($\beta = .016$, $p = .958$) and brand attitude ($\beta = -0.014$, $p = .653$). Hypothesis 1a and hypothesis 1b are thus not supported. As predicted by hypothesis 2a, viewers' attitude toward the character has a significant effect on brand recognition ($\beta = .070$, $p < .001$). However, we observe no significant impact of attitude toward the character on brand attitude ($\beta = .010$, $p = .741$), which disproves hypothesis 2b. Consumers' perceived fit between the movie and the placed brand significantly impacts both brand recognition ($\beta = .103$, $p < .001$) and brand attitude ($\beta = .176$, $p < .001$). Our results are thus in full support of hypothesis 3a and hypothesis 3b. In contradiction with hypothesis 3c, the perceived fit between the character and the placed brand does not have a significant influence on brand recognition ($\beta = .009$, $p = .671$). In support of hypothesis 3d, it does significantly impact brand attitude ($\beta = .095$, $p = .004$). The path between brand attitude and purchase intention is also significant ($\beta = .679$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 4 is thus confirmed.

4.1   The Mediating Role of Brand Recognition

Brand recognition has a positive significant impact on brand attitude ($\beta =$ .141, $p < .028$). Contrary to what we expected, the indirect effect of movie liking on brand attitude is not significant ($\beta = .001$, $p = .958$). In line with our predictions the indirect effect of attitude toward the character on brand recognition is marginally significant ($\beta = .010$, $p = .050$). Perceived fit between the brand and the movie exerts a significant indirect effect on brand attitude , through brand recognition ($\beta = .014$, $p = .038$). The indirect impact of perceived fit between the brand and the character on brand attitude was not significant ($\beta =$ .001, $p = .676$). Our findings partially support hypothesis 5.

4.2   The Moderating Effect of Prominence and Plot Connection

To gauge the moderating effect of prominence and plot connection on the relationships within our model, we performed a multigroup analysis using the structural equation modeling module in JMP 10 Pro.

With respect to prominence, our results support H6a for movie liking only. We found that the effect of movie liking on brand recognition is significantly greater for prominently placed brands ($\beta = .067$) than for subtly placed brands ($\beta = -.077$, $t = 2.218$, $p = .027$). Hypothesis 6b predicted that the direct impact of context perceptions on brand attitude would be greater for subtly placed brands than for prominently placed brands. In support of this hypothesis, we found that the effect of perceived fit between the brand and the movie is more positive for subtly placed brands ($\beta = .235$), than for prominently placed brands ($\beta = .106$, $t = 1.961$, $p = .050$). We found no support for hypothesis 6c. Prominence did not moderate the indirect effects of context perceptions on brand attitude, through brand recognition.

Table 1: Results of the multigroup analysis

			Prominence			Plot connection				
			Subtle (n = 388)	Prominent (n = 568)	*p* diff.	Low (n = 388)	High (n = 568)	*p* diff.	Total sample	*p*
Brand recognition	H1a	Movie liking	-.077	.067	.027	.097	-.082	.005	.016	.958
	H2a	Att. character	.127	.076	.402	.218	.116	.106	.070	<.001
	H3a	Fit movie	.170	.198	.658	-.032	.214	<.001	.103	<.001
	H3b	Fit character	.003	.089	.186	-.088	-.021	.301	.009	.671
Brand attitude	H1b	Movie liking	.021	-.039	.361	-.040	-.006	.607	-.014	.653
	H2b	Att. character	.009	.018	.892	.011	-.002	.836	.010	.741
	H3c	Fit movie	.235	.106	.050	.154	.174	.751	.176	<.001
	H3d	Fit character	.061	.074	.843	.108	.086	.746	.095	.004
Indirect effects on brand attitude	H5	Movie liking	-.007	.006	.085	.013	-.002	.064	.001	.958
	H5	Att. character	.012	.007	.562	.030	.003	.027	.010	.050
	H5	Fit movie	.016	.017	.895	-.004	.005	.458	.014	.038
	H5	Fit character	.001	.008	.309	-.012	.001	.097	.001	.676

Our analyses for plot connection shows two significant multigroup differences (see Table 1). Firstly, in support of hypothesis 7a, we find that the impact of perceived fit between the brand and the movie on brand recognition is more positive for highly plot connected brands ($\beta = .214$) than for lowly plot connected brands ($\beta = -.032$, $t = 3.847$, $p < .001$). Secondly, we observe that the effect of movie liking on brand recognition is stronger for lowly plot connected brands ($\beta = .0097$) than for highly plot connected brands ($\beta = -.082$, $t = 2.795$, $p = .005$). This contradicts hypothesis 7a. Plot connection did not moderate the effects of context perceptions on brand attitude. Hypothesis 7b is thus rejected. The indirect effect of attitude toward the character on brand attitude is stronger for lowly plot connected brands ($\beta = .029$) than for highly plot connected brands ($\beta = -.003$, $t = 2.210$, $p = .027$). As this result is in contradiction with our expectations, hypothesis 7c is rejected.

5   Discussion, Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Our findings show that a good fit between the brand and the movie in which it is placed enhances both memory for the brand and consumers' brand attitude, and subsequently purchase intention. These effects can be explained by schema congruity theory. A strong congruence between a brand and the context in which it is embedded leads to an overlap in their respective cognitive schemas. This process facilitates information processing and storage (Misra and Beatty, 1990), and the shared set of associative links creates a sense of belongingness that drives positive brand evaluations (Till and Busler, 2000).

The attitude towards the character that is associated with the placement positively impacts brand recognition, but not brand attitude. These findings indicate that a positive attitude towards the character can raise attention for brands that are associated with that character. Because the viewer evaluates the character positively, an upward social comparison process is triggered that makes the viewer more mindful of the character and its environment (Russell, 1998; Russell and Stern, 2006). Consequently, brands that appear near the character are processed more attentively, resulting in better brand recognition. Contrary to our expectations, however, attitude toward the character does not spill over on brand attitude. The character is thus not used by movie viewers as a source of information about placed brands. Possibly, it is more important to look at the perceived fit between the movie, the character and the brand, and how this influences brand attitude formation (Russell and Stern, 2006). Our results suggest that in a movie context, placement effectiveness is rather influenced by perceptions of fit between placed brands and their context than general evaluations of this context.

Through multigroup analysis we studied whether context effects differ across two placement characteristics: prominence and plot connection. We observed that the effect of movie liking on brand recognition is significantly

stronger for brands that are more prominently placed. Hedonic contingency theory predicts that a higher level of movie liking predisposes viewers to more willingly process information (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002). Yet, the positive state of mind created by movie liking only leads to better brand recognition when the brand is placed prominently. Remarkably, we found that the effect of movie liking on brand recognition is significantly negative for highly plot connected brands, whereas it is positive for lowly plot connected brands. Possibly, this is because people with high levels of liking for the movie are more absorbed by the context (Cowley and Barron, 2008), which can diminish their direct attention for stimuli that are an integral part of the context. Lowly plot connected brands are less integrated in the storyline and plot of the movie, and can thus distract viewers' attention and direct it to the brand.

In terms of brand recognition, highly plot connected brands benefit more from good fit with the movie than lowly plot connected brands. Highly plot connected brands are an integral part of the story and define the context of the movie (Russell, 2002). This level of integration effectuates the formation of a strong match between the cognitive schemas of the brand and the movie. Thus, plot connection further facilitates the processing and storage of information related to these brands.

In addition, as shown in previous research, overly prominent brand placements are likely to cause negative attitudinal reactions (e.g., Dens et al., 2012; Van Reijmersdal, 2009). Our study demonstrates that placement prominence interferes with the transfer of positive matchup effects between the brand and the movie to attitude towards the brand. This adds weight to the argument that placements should be carefully managed and preferably be subtle (Cowley and Barron, 2008; Dens et al., 2012).

Our study also holds a few limitations that can be taken into account by future research. Both movies were romantic comedies and our audience consisted of women. Gender differences with regard to the reaction to the placement of, for example, ethically-charged products have been established by Gould et al. (2000). The present study should thus be extended to other demographic segments and other genres (e.g., action movies, thrillers, alternative cinema) to see to what extent the results of this study can be replicated under different contexts.

Lastly, brands placed in movies are often well-known, and are thus familiar to the moviegoer (Brennan and Babin, 2004). This is also the case in the present study. Familiar brands exhibit stronger associations with their product categories (Lee and Sternthal, 1999), making them more accessible in memory (Nedungadi, 1990). This may inflate recognition scores in general (Babin and Carder, 1996). At the same time, attitudes developed toward familiar brands may be relatively stable, and not easily changed by a single occurrence in a movie (Stammerjohan et al., 2005). Future research could study to what extent

brand placement techniques have different effects for familiar and unfamiliar brands.

6   References

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