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Product placement in movies: questioning the effectiveness according to the spectator's viewing conditions.

Etienne Bressoud and Jean-marc Lehu

in: F. Costa Pereira, J. Veríssimo & P. Neijens (Eds.), *New Trends in Advertising Research*, Lisboa: Sílabo, 2008, pp 145-163.

Introduction

One hundred years ago, movie producer Jack Warner (co-founder of the Warner Brothers studios) was already using General Motors cars in his films, on purpose. Not especially because the kind of cars the Detroit automaker built was the *ad hoc* one for the movies, but because the studio had a product placement deal with General Motors. Being sure the cars would be recognized on screen, and receiving them for free in return (Parrish, 1976). In 2007, if actor Steve Carell was driving an old Mercedes in *Dan in Real Life*, if a luxurious Mercedes SLR McLaren is endorsed by actor Dwayne Johnson in *The Game Plan*, or if the American CIA team used brand new Chevrolet SUVs in *The Kingdom*, this was also no coincidence at all. As it was for a UPS express delivery in *Lars and the Real Girl*, Everlast accessories in *Resurrecting the Champ*, Aquafina water in *Transformers*, Nokia and Motorola Cell phones in *The Bourne Ultimatum*, Southwest Airlines in *Ocean's Thirteen* or Doritos and Fritos snacks in *Epic Movie*. Every kind of products or services can be subject to a product placement (paid or not) in a movie. For more than a century now this branded entertainment technique has been used to put brands and products in contact with potential consumers *via* the silver screen (Turner, 2004; Newell and Salmon, 2003). The sole difference between the early years and nowadays is that it is increasing fast (PQ Media, 2005). So it naturally calls for new researches (Russell and Belch, 2005; Hackley and Tiwsakul, 2006).

Indeed, during the past twenty years, many researches already focused on product placement in movies (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2006). They contributed to better understand the technique and to identify clues and conditions to get effectiveness (Karrh *et al.*, 2003; Bressoud and Lehu, 2007a). But a lot remains to be discovered, clarified and checked, especially when it comes to effectiveness. Could the prominent presence of a Rubik's Cube, the famous mechanical puzzle in the 1970s in *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2007) be the ideal media to make younger generations aware of it? Is it because superhero Johnny Storm character drives a Mercedes Coupé in *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (2007), that Mercedes Benz will sell more vehicles? Do those placements have the same impact on all spectators? On what conditions does the effectiveness vary from a spectator to another? In itself, effectiveness is a multifaceted concept and derived return on investment could be very different from a brand objective to another (Lenskhold, 2003). So, most advertisers and product placement agents consider that in the specific case of brand placement, effectiveness is already gained when the brand gets its way and stay in the spectator's memory after he's seen the movie (Lehu, 2007). And as we'll see it, product placement in movies is a field of great interest for advertisers as it offers the possibility to diversify the media, to get in touch with the consumer, and to access to the opportunity to bypass the saturation of traditional media. This, while a majority of viewers approve such product placements (Schmoll *et al.*, 2006).

This chapter proposes fresh insights about the existing relationship between the spectator and a movie, focusing on brand placements. To reach this objective it novelly focuses on the second potential step of exposure: the DVD. The research uses the Spontaneous Day After Recall (SDAR) of brands placed in the movie to state the effectiveness of the placement.

Once again, even, if the advertiser will the more often aspire to see a raise in sales thanks to the placement of his brand, when practicing product placement in movies, his most common goal is first of all to get or to improve brand recall. Considering the tough competition advertisers are involved in and the number of brands usually fighting in the same category and/or business, contributing to penetrate the consumer's evoked set, and if possible to stay in mind is already a great achievement. Moreover, to be able to state new relevant conclusions, this research relies on a sample of 3,532 DVD viewers. They have been used to link the way the movie has been chosen, viewed and appreciated (or not) with a spontaneous brand placements recall, the day after the film has been watched at home in natural conditions.

1 Brand placement in movies

Still today, the motion picture business is often said to be a research field where intuition and tradition prevail most of the time (Kridler, 2006). Brands and products were intentionally placed in movies, long before some research results could be available. But today modalities of the technique are getting better understood.

1.1 Definition of brand placement

“Placing a product” consists in putting a product and/or a brand into a movie scene where it can be seen and/or its name heard (Karrh, 1994). Conditions (size, duration, location, of the placement...) can vary from a film to another, but also from a scene to another in the same movie, in case of multiple appearances (Karrh *et al.*, 2003). Cheerios cereals could have been seen and praise once in a secondary scene in *Syriana* (2005) while a Bvlgary watch worn by main actor Tom Cruise in *Minority Report* (2002) is a central element to the plot, and supported by many close shots during the movie. The placement can either be paid by the advertiser or being based on a barter deal concerning products and/or services such as logistics facilities (Karrh, 1998). At least, the placement can lead the way to *tie-in* complementary operations (Brée, 1996). It can then be relayed by an advertising campaign and/or a promotional operation. For example, the official hairspray used in the movie *Hairspray* (2007), Shaper from Sebastian Professional salons, took this opportunity to run a national advertising campaign and web promotional contest in the United-States just before and during the movie release. Coined as “hybrid” by Balasubramanian (1994) since it tries to influence the spectator by inserting a brand in a non marketing support, product placement may have positive effect on attitude (Fontaine, 2005), potential impact on brand recall (Brennan, Dubas and Babin, 1999; d’Astous and Chartier, 2000), and even on behaviour (Stewart-Allen, 1999; Daugherty et Gangadharbatla, 2005).

1.2 Practitioners' motivation

The main reason advertisers seem more interested by product placement in movies today essentially comes from the increase of the media offer (Deloitte, 2005) and the corollary fragmentation of their audience (Gupta and Gould, 2007). Opportunities of distraction are growing (Lord and Burnkrant, 1993) and uncertainty of media consumption patterns is becoming a rule (Wyner, 2007). And more recently notably because of growing information and entertaining opportunities developed on the Internet (Picard, 1999; Tewksbury, 2005). In fact, this problem is not entirely new. In 1971 already, Lodish analysed the problem advertisers and communications agencies were facing about efficient media planning. Webb and Ray also warned advertisers in 1979 about the growing clutter of advertising. Also in 1995, Kent pointed out the negative effects the presence of competing brands within the same television program has on viewers' recall. Therefore if this problem has been identified few

decades ago, it is increasing nowadays. The second phenomenon advertisers are trying to avoid inserting their brands in some movies plot, is the zapping and/or the skipping of their commercials (Van Meurs, 1998; O'Neill and Barrett, 2004). Some movies can easily create an immersive process in which the exposure to the brand may be easier than during a traditional 30 second commercial (Daugherty and Gangadharbatla, 2005; Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2006). And third, it is comparatively cheaper to place a brand in a movie compared to buying TV space for a standard commercial (Balasubramanian, 1994; Secunda, 1995; Lancaster, 2005). On this point, working on the DVD second potential exposure step allows comparisons and is also supported by Rotfeld's research (2006) indicating that cinema audience and TV audience are turning to Videotape and DVD rental and to downloads, to avoid commercials.

On the movie side, if directors might be interested in branded products to bring realism to their movie, producers are also interested in product placements because they can contribute to lighten the production costs (Karrh *et al.*, 2003). Approximately on third of global product placements is paid. According to PQMedia, it represented \$4.38 billion in 2007 (PQ Media, 2007) compared to \$3.36 billion the previous year. In a majority of cases, product placements are not paid straight. Advertisers lend or offer products, facilities, logistics means, promotion help and so on in exchange of the presence on screen of their brand and/or their products. In the movie *Transformers* (2007) for instance, the self-animated robots stars transformed from General Motors cars. GM didn't pay Paramount Studios, but contributed \$1 million worth of cars and participated to the movie promotion (Pomerantz, 2007). GM also opened a dedicated website (www.chevyautobots.com) allowing web surfers to play with personalised crafted Chevrolet autobots inspired by the movie mechanical characters.

At least, from the spectator's point of view, numerous research works show that product placement is still well accepted by the audience (Brennan, Rosenberger and Hementera, 2004; O'Reilly *et al.*, 2005; Schmoll *et al.*, 2006), and could even be more efficient than classical ads (Jaffe, 2005). So it explains why every category of products might be subject to a placement opportunity, like for instance in 2007, a Toshiba computer placed in *The Kingdom*, newspapers (New York Post, USA Today, New York Times...) in *Spiderman 3*, Volvo cars in *Reign over me*, a search engine – Google as it happens – in *The Bourne Ultimatum*, or Corona beers in *Knocked Up*...

1.3 Literature review

Researches usually focus on spectators' acceptability, or on its effectiveness. Nevertheless, most researches explains effectiveness using the way the placement is made, meaning that the results are related to the influence of the placements modalities on effectiveness. To explain it, three placements modalities are usually differentiated: prominence, audiovisual and plot insertion.

A placement is considered prominent when “the product is made highly visible by the virtue of the size and/or position on the screen or its centrality to the action in the scene” (Gupta and Lord, 1998). The story of the last Disney-Pixar animation movie named *Ratatouille* (2007) take place in an upmarket Parisian restaurant. Well placed in the middle of the screen and with a close shot on them in the first scene, the four US specialized food magazines (*Food&Wine*, *Cuisine at Home*, *Bon Appétit* and *Gourmet*) are prominently shown. Audiovisual modality refers to “the appearance of the brand on the screen” and/or to “the brand being mentioned in a dialogue” (Russell, 2002). In the movie *Snakes on a plane* (2006), eBay website logo is not only seen of screen but also inserted in the dialogues. Finally, plot insertion refers to the degree to which the brand is integrated to the story plot (Russell, 1998; Redondo, 2006). The last one is very important as it usually offer the product and/or the brand multiple exposures, so the more often a prominent placement. In the movie *Mr. Bean's Holiday* (2007), the main character won a Sony camera to shot his holiday. That gives the

brand many opportunities to be seen while the camera is used.

The research about product placement (in movies) is becoming just abundant. Therefore a lot remains to be discovered and confirmed, especially about effectiveness. Even if some works are dedicated totally or partly to effectiveness (Vollmers and Mizerski, 1994; Russell, 2002; Karrh *et al.*, 2003; Bressoud and Lehu, 2007b; Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007), it remains an aspect of the technique for which the attention, the recall and the conviction steps still raise some questions. In 2006 Balsubramanian and his colleagues distinguished different measures of this effectiveness: brand typicality/incidence, placement recognition, brand salience, placement recall, brand portrayal rating, identification with brand/imitation, brand attitude, purchase intention, brand choice, and brand usage behaviour. Already in 2002, Morton and Friedman found that product placement can have a salient effect on message receptivity, recall and even purchase intention.

Because it cannot be fully controlled, there is less contribution about the spectator's exposure conditions toward the movie. But his attitude influences the effectiveness (Johnstone and Dodd, 2000; Fontaine, 2002), and the advertiser could have chosen the movie on the basis of the attitude it was supposed to generate. Movie audiences can be very different from a movie to another, and for very specific genre the movie can lure very particular audience (Lazarfeld, 1947; Srinivas, 2002; Maxfield, 2003). In 2004, Scott and Craig-Lees even linked the audience characteristics to product placement effects. They observed that placements seem to be more effective when the audience is already familiar with the particular product category / brand that is placed in the movie.

2 The research framework

The here above primary analysis lead us to investigate one goal: the influence of the spectator's attitude on the fickleness of the brand placement effectiveness. This goal is reached by using the second life of the movie, *via* the DVD media. Effectiveness is studied according to the videospectator's attitude and behaviour before, during and after the exposition to the movie, using an experiment with several movies.

2.1 Hypotheses

The number of spontaneous day after recall (SDAR) of brand placements seen on screen is used in this research as the measure of brand placement effectiveness. Acting like that, we assume the consumers' side of our work, explaining how many brands a consumer could remember, regarding to his exposure conditions to the movie. In opposition, the advertiser's objective would be to explain the spectator's brand recall regardless the modalities of the brand placement, in order to be sure that the consumer remembers the advertiser's brand.

The two first hypotheses concentrate on the spectator's attitude toward the movie before viewing it. They are related to the choice of the movie. Some movie viewers do choose their movie (while going to a theatre or renting a DVD) because of the movie director (Ainslie, Drèze and Zufryden, 2005). In 1997 already, Fischhoff and his colleagues demonstrated that the choice of a movie because of its director reveals congruency between the director's and the spectator's gender and race. The purpose of this hypothesis is not to measure a contingent impact of the director's fame on the SDAR. It is just a matter of potential higher attention. We assume that director movie fans might be more vigilant for a reason or another to the direction, the set and/or the acting to form their choice of film. Their supposedly higher attention when choosing the movie should also occurs while watching it. Then, this could lead to a better number of SDAR for brand placements. Based on this supposed direct effect due to vigilance, we presume that:

Hypothesis 1: Choosing a DVD movie because of the director improves the extent of brand placement SDAR.

Movie studios are constantly trying to figure out what genre is the most expected by potential large audiences, even if audience's taste may diverge over time (Lee, 2006). In 2005, Desai and Basuroy explained that identifying the most relevant genre at a certain time may allow the studio to lighten the budget for other production costs like star actors, by not looking for the most famous (with higher wages). Movie genre has been analysed before, and different researches state that it is a factor of importance if not the most important for certain spectators to choose their film (Austin and Gordon, 1987; De Silva, 1998). Does this importance make spectators pay more attention to movie for which they like the genre, and then better remember brand placement? Garza & Callison (2005) analysed that comedy genre does not outrank the other genres on brand recall; science fiction seemed to be more successful. Appreciation of the movie is shown to have an impact on attitude change after a brand placement exposition (Fontaine 2002). If liking the movie can only be known after viewing the film, liking the genre of the movie is usually one of the reasons of the choice, and therefore is known before watching the film. It could also be a kind of help choosing it amongst the manifold films offered each week. Finally, we assume that:

Hypothesis 2: Liking the genre of the chosen DVD movie increases the extent of brand placement SDAR.

The third hypothesis concerns the behaviour of the viewers during watching the movie. Our empirical study is based on DVD viewers, which can eventually be more disturbed while viewing the movie than theatre's viewers. In a cinema, the collective viewing, the fix orientation of the seats and the darkness of the theatre implicitly invite the audience to focus on the screen and to remain silent while the film is showing. Attention during exposition is a well-known factor of recall of product placement research (Karrh *et al.*, 2003). Nevertheless, we wanted to test hypotheses that could also be applied on the two ways of watching a movie. In a theatre as well as at home, one major source of disturbance while watching a movie could be speaking with someone else. So we supposed that it could be logical to believe that the videospectator could then be less watchful. That's why we propose the hypothesis stating that:

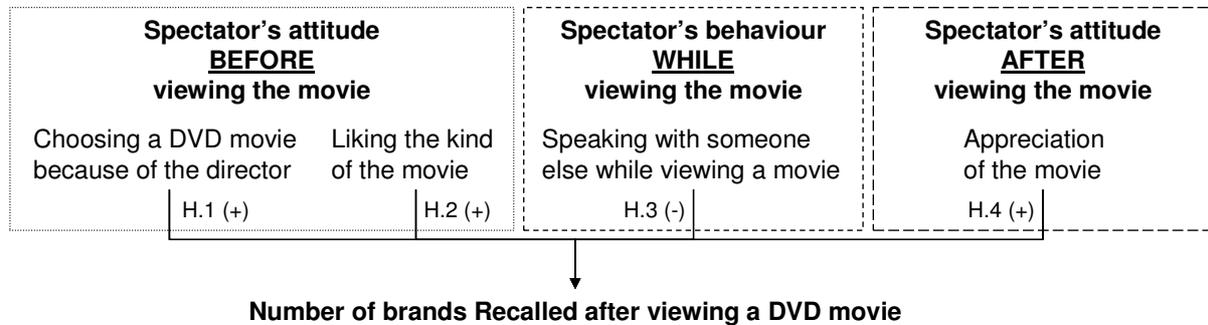
Hypothesis 3: Speaking with someone else while viewing a movie the extent of brand placement SDAR.

Our fourth and last hypothesis is about spectator's attitude toward the movie after watching it. The purpose does not tend to evaluate and/or judge the audience's taste (Holbrook, 2005), neither to link it with a possible movie success explanation. Lots of researches have already been conducted on the origins of a movie success. Especially about the critics' role. Reinstein and Snyder (2005) for instance studied the influence some critics may have on consumer's choice and then appreciation. Focusing on product placement, Fontaine (2002) showed that movie's appreciation has a positive impact on attitude change after a brand placement exposition. Similar findings have been obtained by Tsai, Liang and Liu (2007) who investigated the case of the famous movie E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial (1982). We think that this result is still accurate on recall and then we presume that for a videospectator who likes his watching, details might be better perceived and then better recalled. This hypothesis is also inspired by Johnstone and Dodd's works (2000) stressing the fact that placements could increase brand salience, and even more specifically if the audience liked the movie. Consequently:

Hypothesis 4: *The more the videospectators appreciate the movie, the more they spontaneously recall the placed brands.*

Figure 1 resumes the all set of hypothesis.

Figure 1 – The research model



2.2 Data collection

The final used sample includes 3,532 videospectators questioned about one of the following 11 American movies (*Men in Black II*, *Minority Report*, *Analyze that*, *Banger Sisters*, *Fashion Victim*, *Austin Powers in Goldmember*, *Johnny English*, *Intolerable Cruelty*, *Mr. Deeds*, *Hardball* and *Paycheck*) used for this research. First of all, we chose American movies because they represent 55% of 2003 France DVD market share in volume, and 69% in value (C.N.C., 2005). Those particular 11 movies have been selected for several reasons. First, because they were new DVD releases. It means that we could expect heavy rentals during the data collection process. Second, because the movies were successful. The box office success is clearly an indicator followed by video renting shop managers to decide the number of copies they will get. A box office blockbuster usually means that there will be many copies available in the shop which facilitate the data collection. And third, essentially because the placements were easily and clearly recognizable. All the brand placements identified and used in this research were strictly isolated, meaning that it was undoubtedly possible to link a SDAR with a specific placement. Following this strict condition, each brand placement, used for the research, occurs just once in every considered movie. On the 156 placements of the 11 movies, 99 have been considered.

The data collection process took place from January 2003 to February 2005 focusing on the selected “just released” DVDs described as here above. The questionnaire was systematically submitted to every available renter of one of the DVDs subject to the research. A very important specificity of the research is that every respondent had freely chosen the movie he wanted to watch, the day before. So no influence occurred in the renters’s choice. The were just questioned when returning the DVD the day after. Renters were asked to participate to a study on the movie they’ve just seen the day before. Due to the small size of video clubs, due to their proximity and due to the appeal of the research subject, only 6 persons refused to answer the questionnaire, and only because clear lack of time. This “extraordinary” low rate finds its explication in the fact the questioning took place inside videoclubs where the proximity with the manager on the one hand, and with the renters on the other hand, allow a natural and sociable contact when the renters returned their DVDs. Moreover, the questionnaire was relatively short, asking just a few minutes to the responder. It has been administrate each day of a week at various time of the day, on a CAPI mode.

2.3 Methodology

Since the four hypotheses are not independent, we decided to test all of them in the same model rather than testing them individually. Hypotheses are validated using an ANCOVA, which allows us to study the simultaneous impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Analysis has been run with XLstat software. The SDAR of each placement was aggregated to compute the number of SDAR from one respondent to one movie, *i.e.* the dependant variable. Independent variables are each mentioned in the four hypotheses here above. Respondents have been questioned on the reasons of their DVD choice, which has been recoded in “director; yes or no”. They were also questioned on a dichotomous scale about liking or not the kind of the movie and if they had or not a discussion with someone else during viewing the film. At least, the appreciation of the movie was evaluated on a 0 to 20 scale (0 for dislike and 20 for an absolute liking).

The summary of statistics for these variables is given in table 1. Real exposure conditions show here two limits compared to an experimental research design. First of all the dependant variable, “Number_SDAR”, has a weak mean, furthermore regarding to its standard deviation. Secondly, excepting the variable “Like_Genre”, proportions between the modalities of qualitative variable are not well balanced.

Table 1 – Summary Statistics

Variable	Observations	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Number_SDAR	3532	0,000	8,000	0,708	1,222
Evaluation_Rank	3532	0,000	20,000	12,132	4,043

Variable	Categories	Frequencies	%
Discussion	No	3233	91,535
	Yes	299	8,465
Like_Genre	No	1887	53,426
	Yes	1645	46,574
Choice_Director	No	3166	89,638
	Yes	366	10,362

Because the number of different identified placements varies from a movie to another (indeed from 4 to 22 in the considered movies), we first validated that the mean number of SDAR is not correlated with the total number of brand placements (Pearson correlation test; p-value >0,05), which means, that a profusion of brand placements in one movie does not increase artificially the number of brands recalled.

2.4 Results and discussion

Results contribute to strengthen the professionals’ interest for the technique, and complete the academic knowledge already known on the topic (Karrh *et al.*, 2003). Nevertheless, those results are not strong enough to explain the complete variation of the number of SDAR (see table 2) and independent variable are correlated (Khi-Square Test; p <0,05) except “Discussion” with “Choice_Director” and with “Evaluation_Rank”.

Table 2 – Goodness of fit statistics

Observations	3532,000
Sum of weights	3532,000
DF	3527,000
R ²	0,102
Adjusted R ²	0,101

By the way, the analysis of variance, and more specifically the Fisher's F test, allows us to conclude that the explanatory variables bring significant information to the model (see table 3).

Table 3 – Analysis of variance

Source	DF	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F	Pr > F
Model	4	535,468	133,867	99,706	< 0,0001
Error	3527	4735,411	1,343		
Corrected Total	3531	5270,880			

Computed against model $Y=Mean(Y)$

At least, table 4 presents the model parameters of the ANCOVA which explains the number of SDAR of a spectator, regarding to our four hypotheses. A hypothesis is validated when the relationship between the studied independent variables and the dependent variable produces the expected mean of the value and if the relationship is significant, *i.e.* p-value is less than 5 per cent.

Table 4 – Model parameters of the ANCOVA

Source	Value	Standard error	t	Pr > t	Lower bound (95%)	Upper bound (95%)
Intercept	-0,020	0,064	-0,312	0,755	-0,145	0,105
Choice_Director-No	0,000	0,000				
Choice_Director-Yes	1,016	0,065	15,734	< 0,0001	0,890	1,143
Like_Genre-No	0,000	0,000				
Like_Genre-Yes	0,107	0,039	2,721	0,007	0,030	0,185
Discussion-No	0,000	0,000				
Discussion-Yes	0,000	0,070	0,001	0,999	-0,137	0,138
Evaluation_Rank	0,047	0,005	9,703	< 0,0001	0,038	0,057

Results about choosing a DVD because of the movie director validate hypothesis 1 (“Choice_Director-Yes” parameter > 0; p-value < 0,0001). It means that the 366 respondents who have chosen the movie because of the director have seen significantly more brands than the 3,166 respondents who have not chosen their DVD because of the movie’s director.

The 1,645 respondents who liked the genre of the movie have seen and recalled significantly more brands too, than the 1,887 respondents who did not like it (“Like_Genre-Yes” parameter > 0; p-value < 0,05). Validation of hypothesis 2 is consistent with the validation of hypothesis 1, because it also concerns the videospectator’s attitude before viewing the film. We may assume that if a videospectator was in a good mood because the movie he watched has been shot by the director he was looking for, and because he liked the genre of the movie, then he was more receptive to its details, including the brand placements.

If the 299 respondents who declared to have spoken with someone else while watching the movie recalled a smaller mean number of placements, the difference is not significant

(“Discussion-Yes” parameter = 0; p-value > 0,05,). Then hypothesis 3 is not validated. The small number of viewers who declare to have spoken while watching the movie can be one reason of this result (see table 1). Another explanation can be found regarding the topic of the discussion. Whether the respondent was talking about the movie or not about it, could influence the link between “Discussion - Yes” and the “Number_SDAR”. We could hardly believe that the nature of the discussion influence the attention of the videospectator. The more the videospectator is talking about the movie while watching it, the more he should pay attention to it, the more he should recall brand placements. This is the inverse relation of the tested link. Then if hypothesis 3 is not validated, it should be due to the distribution between respondents that had or not a discussion about the movie they watched. Unfortunately, this information has not been collected.

At least, hypothesis 4 is validated: the appreciation of the movie improves the number of brand the viewer recalled (“Evaluation_rank” parameter > 0; p-value < 0,0001). This validation can also be a support for the DVD as a media for the second life of a placement. Buyers or renters can be people who have seen the movie before (in theatre or even on TV for old movies). If they buy it or rent it again, we may assume that they like it. In our case, 17 % of the renters did have seen the movie at least once before watching it again on DVD. Hypothesis 4 is still validated if tested only on these 17% of renters, as well as it is if tested on the 83% of the renters that did not have seen the movie before (Kendall Correlation Tests for the two non normally distributed variables; p-value < 0,0001). Then, we can assume that this fourth hypothesis is validated independently of the repetition due to a first viewing of the movie, and even if repetition have a positive impact on recall (Lehu and Bressoud, 2007a).

Table 5 – Standardized coefficients of the ANCOVA

Source	Value	Standard error	t	Pr > t	Lower bound (95%)	Upper bound (95%)
Choice_Director-No	0,000	0,000				
Choice_Director-Yes	0,254	0,016	15,734	< 0,0001	0,222	0,285
Like_Kind-No	0,000	0,000				
Like_Kind-Yes	0,044	0,016	2,721	0,007	0,012	0,075
Discussion-No	0,000	0,000				
Discussion-Yes	0,000	0,016	0,001	0,999	-0,031	0,031
Evaluation_Rank	0,156	0,016	9,703	< 0,0001	0,125	0,188

2.5 Limits and further possible research

This research offers new insights on product placement. But even if the used sample sounds large compared to those usually used, the external validity of this research remains naturally limited. Moreover, it has been conducted in France, and several previous researches about product placement in movies taught us that disparity may sometimes occur, when comparing results coming from different countries, (Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Kräuter, 2000; McKechnie and Zhou, 2003; Devanathan *et al.*, 2003; Brennan, Rosenberger and Hementera, 2004). Furthermore, if choosing real movies as the material for the research offers of course a much greater realism of the study, because respondents didn’t know they could be questioned when choosing and watching their movie, so they supplied us with more natural answers, it also implies a natural structural limit. As a matter of fact, we have no control at all on the used material. It is then difficult to control the balance between the different modalities of the variable amongst the selected respondents. And of course, we had no way to change a scene and/or the conditions of the placement. This means that not every movie can be used in such an experiment. As there is no possibility to modify the appearance of the product and/or the brand (because the shooting and the editing are already done of course), movies used for the

present research have been very carefully chosen to offer clear and not arguable brand placements. We still believe that the strength of the results, given by the use of real movies and the fully natural conditions for watching them, partly compensates the limits of such reduced control.

Some might hesitate to accept the validation of hypothesis 4 about the liking of the movies to some kind of interest for the producers. Just because the exact success of a movie can never be foreseen. Not only because modelling would be very complex, despite the existing models (Bressoud, 2007), but also because characteristics of successful movies are changing over time (Smith and Smith, 1986). Nevertheless, Litman was among the first to develop a sophisticated multiple regression model to track the roots of a financial success (Litman, 1983; Litman and Ahn, 1998). Favourable critics can surely have a positive impact on the movie gross (Eliashberg and Shugan, 1997). Terry and his colleague estimated that a 10% increase in critic approval could add approximately \$7 million to box-office revenue, and that an Academy award nomination is valued at \$6 million dollars per nomination (Terry *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, upstream, when the movie is at the pre-production stage, the unerring recipe of success is still to be discovered, even if it's well known that production budget (Prag and Casavant, 1994), genre of the movie (Zufryden, 1996), and previous box office of actors (Litman, 1983; Prag and Casavant, 1994) and director/producer (Coulot and Tébout, 1986) are part of it. The best evidence is that if the ingredients of hit movie was known, box-office failures wouldn't exist anymore. In fact, even if all the cited components may appear to produce a high quality combination during the pre-production, numerous movies still end to be what professionals call a disastrous "bomb". Nevertheless, this limit explicitly enlightened, liking of the movie still sounds very interesting to us, because of the rise of digitally inserted product and brand placements. Some placements can now be elaborated, replaced or even erased, after the movie has been shot (Brown, 2003; Sivic and Zisserman, 2004) and even more easily if they have been shot digitally. In a near future, this could lead to a more systematic use of previews to analyze the relevance of integrating or not a brand; not right from the outset but after watching the final edited motion picture. It could then allow some sort of a pre-testing step with elaborate concrete material, the kind traditional advertising already offers. Of course, this approach does not fit with all kind of placements (especially the ones that are deeply inserted in the plot and heavily used for some purpose by the characters). But for a long time now some producers use the audience's liking during a preview test, to determine some aspects of the editing, the movie length and/or the nature of its end. The same kind of testing could easily be used to determine to *ad hoc* marketing brand placements. Those adaptations already occur for regional better congruence, switching a placed brand for another. In the movie *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) for instance, a fighting scene is taking place in front of a TV screens wall. The used TV screens were LG branded, but those same screens bared the Zenith brand logo when the same scene was edited for the second time for the version of the movie planned for the American domestic market (Lehu, 2007).

Now, it would be interesting to extend this research to a greater number of movies and to different countries in order to validate that liking a director, a certain genre of movie and the movie itself have the same influence across countries. The welcome of the same movie released at the same period can hugely differ from a country to another. Also a more balanced sample could also be used to be sure that speaking with someone else has no influence on recall, especially if the talk concerns or not the movies and/or its placements. And at least, another contribution could be made by explaining brand placement recall according to individual characteristics validated in this research and to brand placement characteristics already found to be relevant; as research already found some specificities amongst children (Autie and Lewis, 2004), adolescents (Nelson and McLeod, 2005) or baby-boomers (Schmoll *et al.*, 2006) for instance.

3 Conclusion

The main results gathered with this original exploratory research support the advertisers' choice in favour of potential blockbusters and/or confirmed directors (or at least sufficiently well-known to be a factor of choice for the spectator). Those results add to the knowledge base by exploring effectiveness as a result of a relationship between a videospectator and a movie. At the first sight, this is maybe not good news for small budget films. But in fact, it just means that major brands will more spontaneously go to major film projects. In the 2007 four Oscars winner *The Departed*, a film by Martin Scorsese, more than 50 different brand placements can be detected (from Adidas to Wonder bread, going through Dell, Coca-Cola, Belstaff, Chevrolet, Tag-Heuer, Motorola, Sun-Maid, Bayer, Samsung, Heinz, Sprint...). With US\$ 289.84 million as total grosses (132.38 domestic and 157.56 international according to MoJo BoxOffice) to date, it is undoubtedly the example of a so-called blockbuster. With an important budget (US\$ 90 million according to *Variety* magazine) from a major studio (Warner Bros.) and a famous director (nominated 7 times for an Oscar from 1981 to 2007), this film is the typical example of an obvious choice for placing a brand today, while limiting the risk. Appreciated by most of its viewers (IMDB movie reference website's users gave it 8.6/10 – 119,600 voters registered September 1st 2007) it also confirms its potential to generate an important awareness for its placements. Released for the first time in 2006, the film was even re-released in the US and in several countries in 2007 mainly because of the Oscar enduring potential (Terry *et al.*, 2005), and despite the fact he was already available on DVD; thus multiplying the brand placement exposure opportunities.

Facing problems to breakthrough the communication clutter and keep consumers' attention, numerous advertisers are already convinced about the potential effectiveness of product placements in movies, if handled strategically. Sony which has the advantage of being also a movie producer takes it into action for its in house productions. In the 2005 movie *Zathura* produced by Columbia studios (a Sony's subsidiary) for instance, actor Tim Robins is using a Sony Vaio laptop computer, while one of his sons is playing on a Sony Playstation videogame console using a Sony TV set; and a Sony portable radio set can also be noticed in a scene taking place in the bathroom of the house.

Now, movies are not the only medium used for this brand new kind of branded entrisism. Product and brands are embedded in many different entertaining media, like television series or shows, theatre plays, songs, videogames, novels... (Avery and Ferraro, 2000; Kretchmer, 2004; Moser, Bryant, and Sylvester, 2004; Nelson, Yaros and Keum, 2006; La Ferle and Edwards, 2006). Product placement may not be systematically as effective as traditional advertising in generating brand awareness (Daugherty and Gangadharbatla, 2005), but it seems to be a very interesting complementary opportunity to consider for the brand to communicate nowadays. So the past twenty years of academic research might just be the beginning to better understand a potentially powerful crossbreed evolving technique of communication.

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