PRODUCT PLACEMENTS

The Impact of Placement Type and Repetition on Attitude

Pamela Miles Homer

ABSTRACT: The global market for product placement, the practice in which firms pay to place branded products (e.g., brand name/logo, package, signage, other trademarks) in the content of mass media programming, has exploded. A pair of studies test two potential moderating factors that may help account for the lack of attitude change reported in past experimental studies of placement effects. Specifically, this paper examines the effects of repetition of branded product placements in television and movies, comparing those that are subtle/"not in your face" with those that are more prominent/obvious. Findings suggest that the type of placement (subtle/prominent) and repetition (low/moderate) interact to impact brand- and placement-related judgments. Specifically, repetition of prominent placements for known brands has a negative impact on brand attitude. For subtle cases of product placement, however, consumer attitudes are relatively positive and moderate levels of repetition have little incremental impact. In addition, findings suggest that studios ought to evaluate placement options carefully, as repetition of prominent placements may lead to reduced affect for their productions, thereby fueling a decline in their audiences. Theoretical and practical implications are offered.

The global market for product placement, the practice in which firms pay to place branded products (e.g., brand name/logo, package, signage, other trademarks) in the content of mass media programming, exploded to an estimated $7.5 billion in 2006 and is forecasted to reach $14 billion by 2010 (Graser and Stanley 2006). Product placement is no longer considered a novel marketing tactic; rather, it has now reached "celebrity status" as a media form as advertisers seek more effective means of influencing consumers' attitudes in today's oversaturated and fragmented advertising/marketing environment. Not only are marketers spending large amounts of their promotional budgets on these types of efforts, but production studios rely on such deals as a major source of funds (e.g., Bensinger 2008). However, one can't ignore the paradox of product placement: "If you notice it, it's bad. But if you don't notice, it's worthless" (Ephron 2003, p. 20).

In an effort to enhance understanding of the impact of product placements in television and films, two studies purposefully manipulate the *type of product placement* (subtle versus prominent) and *repetition* (low/moderate). It is proposed that these factors interact such that brand attitude decreases when prominent/obvious product placements are repeated, but when placements are subtle, consumer attitudes are relatively positive and moderate levels of repetition have little incremental impact. Additional findings indicate that prominent/obvious placements are perceived to be more distracting, less realistic, and that they interfere with the plot/story line (Atkinson 2003); these adverse effects escalate with repeated exposures.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The increase in product placements in both television and movies has been noted in the popular press and the academic literature (e.g., Auty and Lewis 2004; Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan 2006; d'Astous and Chartier 2000; Karrh 1998a, 1998b; La Ferle and Edwards 2006; Law and Braun 2000; McKechnie and Zhou 2003; Samuel 2004). *Advertising Age,* perhaps the most visible industry publication, has termed the power play between marketing and Hollywood "Madison & Vine," granting frequent coverage to the topic. In addition, commercial enterprises (e.g., Nielsen, IAG) now measure their financial value (Mandese 2004; Schmuckler 2005).

Despite the burgeoning popularity of product placement as a marketing tool (e.g., La Ferle and Edwards 2006), there is limited substantive empirical evidence regarding whether and how it is effective in impacting consumer responses. Studies of the efficacy of placements in movies and television programming tend to be mixed. While initial efforts document that consumers recall and recognize brands featured in television and film (e.g., Auty and Lewis 2004; Babin and Carder 1996b; d'Astous and Chartier 2000; d'Astous and Séguin 1999; Gupta and Lord 1998; Sabherwal, Pokrywczynski, and Griffin 1994)

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The author acknowledges the support of the CSULB Scholarly and Creative Activities Committee and thanks Maria P. Saltzgaver for assistance with video editing (Study 1).

Journal of Advertising, vol. 38, no. 3 (Fall 2009), pp. 21–31.
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ISSN 0091-3367 / 2009 $9.50 + 0.00.
DOI 10.2753/JOA0091-3367380302

and others suggest that consumers often welcome the reality-enhancing properties of product placements (Hirschman and Thompson 1997), support for attitude change is weak (Babin and Carder 1996a; Gould, Gupta, and Grabner-Kräuter 2000; Karrh 1998b). A review of experimental studies of placement effects (most compare exposure to control) reports mild effects on audience memory for placed brands and no evidence of attitude change (Karrh 1998b, pp. 40–41). In addition, past surveys of audience attitudes acknowledge limitations and other factors (e.g., excess repetition, obvious commercial intent, ethically-challenged products) that often lead to increased disdain for product placements that then detract from the viewing experience (e.g., Gupta and Gould 1997). (See Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan [2006] for a comprehensive review of the product placement literature.)

Industry and various academic studies acknowledge the importance of capturing a visual image of the placed product on screen, of mentioning the brand in the dialogue, and of integrating the brand into the plot of the story (Panda 2004; Russell 1998, 2002). Apart from the obvious promotional aspects, product placements are also potential carriers of social information: For example, brand placements have been shown to be more effective when the featured brand is paired with a character who displays one or more desirable traits (Karrh 1998b). This endeavor examines the effects of branded product placements—those that are subtle/"not in your face" versus those that are more prominent (i.e., obvious). The impact of such promotional cues likely depends on the frequency of branded elements; thus, the effect of repetition is also explored. That is, this study tests two potential moderating factors that may help account for the lack of attitude change reported in past experimental studies of placement effects. Specifically, the (subtle/prominent) *type of placement* and *placement repetition* are expected to interact to impact audience/consumer attitudes. Therefore, two bodies of relevant literature are first explored, that dealing with repetition effects and that focused on the effects of vivid/prominent information. Finally, by integrating these literatures, I present and rationalize the guiding hypotheses.

Repetition Effects

Due to lower ratings across all media, it now requires more spots to achieve a GRP (gross rating point) goal. For example, "in 1980, 100 ratings points per week took about 10 spots to reach. Today with the mix of broadcast and cable, it takes well over 100 spots" (Ephron 2003, p. 20). Thus, advertisers are forced to raise their frequency (i.e., repetition) goals. Previous studies on repetition effects in advertising tend to support that repetition is nonmonotonically related to persuasion, that is, increased exposures from low to moderate levels enhance persuasion, but at high repetition levels, wear-out and tedium lead to declining liking of that stimulus (e.g., Anand and Sternthal 1990; Batra and Ray 1986; Berlyne 1970; Campbell and Keller 2003; Malaviya 2007; Sawyer 1981). The underlying premise is that increasing exposure from a low to moderate level provides greater opportunity to elaborate on the content of the message, to become more familiar with the stimulus, and to scrutinize relevant details and characteristics of the message, thus facilitating retention in memory. At higher levels of exposure, however, the message recipient becomes fully habituated to the stimulus and boredom/irritation and satiation tend to result in message reactance, increased counterarguing (e.g., Cacioppo and Petty 1979), and viewer wear-out (Calder and Sternthal 1980).

In spite of convincing theory and empirical evidence for this perspective, the literature also includes studies that fail to confirm a repetition effect (e.g., Belch 1982; Rethans, Swasy, and Marks 1986). In response, social scientists have explored a number of factors believed to moderate the relationship between repetition and message effectiveness, such as message complexity (Cox and Cox 1988), ease of message processing (Anand and Sternthal 1990), message involvement (Batra and Ray 1986), message variation (Haugtvedt et al. 1994; Schumann, Petty, and Clemons 1990), program content (Singh and Cole 1993), brand familiarity (Campbell and Keller 2003), and advertising context (Malaviya 2007). This study proposes that the impact of repeated product placements within a movie or television program will vary depending on the type of product placement (subtle versus prominent), that is, the type of placement moderates the relationship between repetition and placement effectiveness.

The Impact of Placement Prominence and Vividness

Two streams of research in the literature on attitude change offer insight and support for the proposition that subtle versus prominent product placements will differentially impact consumer attitude. The subtle versus prominent type of placement resembles previous vivid or prominent cue manipulations (cf. Gupta and Lord 1998; Kisielius and Sternthal 1984, 1986), suggesting that those literatures are critical. Advertisers have typically believed that vivid or prominent stimuli (e.g., visual advertising elements) are more attention getting with more imagery-evoking power than nonvivid stimuli, and therefore are likely to enhance attitudes toward the target object (e.g., Finn 1988). However, past empirical research into the attitudinal effects of prominent/vivid information is inconclusive. While some studies report no vividness effect for attitudinal judgments, others find effects that may be attributable to other factors, and a third group of studies find that the vividness effect materializes only under certain conditions (Kisielius and Stern-

thal 1986). Conditional factors tested and found to interact with vividness include message difficulty (Chaiken and Eagly 1976) and communicator credibility (Andreoli and Worchel 1978; Chaiken and Eagly 1983). In addition, the direction of the vividness effect may vary, that is, it may promote favorable judgments in some instances and may undermine persuasion in others (Kisielius and Sternthal 1986). Kisielius and Sternthal (1986) offer a good summary of the vividness literature and propose that an availability-valence explanation is able to account for many of the inconsistent findings reported in past studies. For example, applying that framework, the audiovisual (prominent) presentation used by Andreoli and Worchel (1978) enhanced cognitive elaboration of source-related information. When the source was perceived to be credible, elaboration of favorable information enhanced persuasion. When the source lacked credibility, however, the audience processed unfavorable information that undermined persuasion.

The *subtle* versus *prominent* product placement manipulation used here likens past vividness and placement presentation mode manipulations (e.g., Gupta and Lord 1998; Kisielius and Sternthal 1986; Russell 2002; Sabherwal, Pokrywczynski, and Griffin 1994), as well as D'Astous and Séguin's (1999) distinction between *implicit* versus *explicit* product placements, the latter distinguished by its formal program mentions. That is, subtleness is manipulated here via visual and audio cues (cf. Gupta and Lord 1998). The subtle placements include only visual images of the placed products (i.e., McDonald's and Dell) with no direct verbal conversation in the script. In contrast, the prominent/obvious placements include similar visual images along with direct verbal references to McDonald's (or Dell Computers) in the script dialogue. Compared with visual information, auditory information is typically regarded as more intrusive, with increased attention-getting properties (Gupta and Lord 1998; Posner, Nissen, and Klein 1976). More recently, Russell (2002) argues that auditory cues are also inherently more "meaningful" and therefore processed more deeply than visual cues. Thus, because the auditory elements that accompany prominent/explicit placements are intrusive and difficult to avoid (Russell 2002), they are more vulnerable to negative responses from the audience. Such adverse reactions may be stimulated by perceptions that overt placements are revenue-generating marketing opportunities rather than mere props to set the stage (Gupta and Gould 1997). In addition, I argue that in general, product placements are a promotional tool, and like other forms of marketing/advertising, they lack credibility compared with more objective sources of information.

A simple vividness effect would suggest that prominent placements are more persuasive (in terms of attitude change) than subtle product placements due to their attention-getting power, but this ignores much of past empirical evidence and the possibility of a "backlash" effect, that is, that "in your face" (obvious) forms of promotion can inhibit persuasion if they are perceived to be distracting, irritating, distasteful, or self-serving. The idea that prominent audiovisual placements will be a persuasion liability relative to subtle visual-only placements is consistent with Andreoli and Worchel (1978) and Kisielius and Sternthal's (1986) argument that the presentation mode (type of placement) manipulation induced variation in cognitive elaboration. That is, vivid information inherently stimulates elaboration, establishing complex networks of associative pathways, whereas pallid information generates low levels of elaboration with few associative pathways (Kisielius and Sternthal 1986). Vivid information jeopardizes persuasion when it generates thoughts of opportunism and questions of intent—which is expected when the information comes from a low credible source (e.g., advertising). Such adverse effects on attitude should escalate with successive repetitions.

The Interaction of Repetition and Placement Type

In summary, I propose that repetition of product placements within a movie or television program will have a differential effect on subtle versus prominent types of placements, that is, the direction and magnitude of the type of placement effect is qualified by repetition. First, the tedium/boredom and irritation effects (i.e., persuasion liabilities) discussed previously are more likely to materialize when product placements are prominent/obvious or vivid (versus subtle). Furthermore, for prominent placements that include audio mentions, increased repetition will undermine attitude, as respondents will be more aware that the products are "placed" for commercial gain rather than being used circumstantially as props. That is, more prominent visual and verbal references motivate elaboration as they raise suspicion of the underlying reason for the product placement, thereby producing less favorable attitudes, especially when these placements are repeated. In contrast, subtle (visual only) placements elicit little elaboration and less suspicion, irritation, and counterargumentation, as they are more readily viewed as props rather than marketing-driven/persuasion mechanisms, thereby producing a positive impact on viewer attitudes consistent with past repetition effects reported in the literature. In addition, subtle (visual only) placements will be less noticed/attended to (Gupta and Lord 1998; Panda 2004), and thus any repetition effect, while positive, will be nonsignificant. Thus:

> *H1: Repeated exposure of prominent/obvious product placements leads to a decrease in brand attitude (cell 1 > cell 2). For subtle product placements, moderate repetition has little (positive) impact on attitude (cell 3 = cell 4).*

(See Table 1.)

TABLE 1
Experimental Design

	Repetition level	
	Low	**High**
Type of placement		
Prominent	Cell 1	Cell 2
Subtle	Cell 3	Cell 4

STUDY 1

Method

The main experiment in Study 1 (S1) utilizes a 2 (subtle/prominent placement type) × 2 (low/moderate placement repetition) between-subjects factorial design. Four movie clips slightly less than 15 minutes long were edited from the same G-rated movie, *Mac and Me,* chosen because it best met all study criteria. That is, it was unfamiliar to the sample participants; did not contain any erotic, violent, or offensive content; and possessed numerous scenes with branded product placements, some subtle and others prominent/obvious. Contrary to Russell's (2002) method of comparing visual versus auditory brand placements within a scripted situation comedy (aimed to maximize internal validity), these studies use a more "validity-balanced" approach. That is, in an effort to enhance realism and thus generalizability (external validity) while maintaining sufficient internal control, placement type is manipulated via visual and audio elements shown within a video clip edited from a professional movie.

The subtle placements include only visual images of McDonald's products (e.g., food and drinks, employee uniform worn by one character), store signage, and restaurant interior with no direct verbal conversation in the script. The prominent/obvious placements include direct verbal references to McDonald's along with the visual images (e.g., product shots, interior shots of a McDonald's restaurant). To manipulate repetition, two movie clips positioned a (subtle or prominent) product placement segment once at about the midpoint, and the remaining two movie clips showed three (subtle or prominent) product placement segments positioned evenly throughout the clip. All four clips were created from the same general section of the movie, to prevent confounds due to content. Specifically, all four movie clips center around the story line where a group of children try to protect an alien character who is sought by adult characters. Considerable effort was devoted to the editing process to ensure that the final 15-minute movie segments made sense to viewers without a verbal "set-up" and that all edit transitions were relatively seamless.

Pretest

An independent sample from the same general student population used for the main experiment (n = 70) was recruited from two undergraduate classes for a pretest designed to verify that the product placement type manipulation would behave as intended. One class of students viewed a clip with the subtle placements and the other class viewed a clip containing the prominent placements. As desired, those exposed to the prominent placements were more aware that the references to McDonald's were product placements, $F(1, 68) = 6.51, p = .01$, $M_P = 6.63$ versus $M_S = 4.67$, and judged them as less "subtle," $F(1, 68) = 29.71, p < .001$, $M_P = 2.92$ versus $M_S = 5.72$, and more "obvious," $F(1, 68) = 29.80, p < .001$, $M_P = 7.50$ versus $M_S = 4.46$, than the subtle placements. Respondents also indicated similar levels of agreement with statements that the movie clip was "entertaining," "well-written," and "easy to understand" (all $p > .20$). Thus, the manipulations were deemed successful to proceed with the final editing tasks for the main experiment.

Participants and Procedure

Undergraduate students enrolled at a large state-supported Western university received course credit for participation (n = 108; 59% female, median age = 22, relatively diverse with 34% white/Caucasian). (Analysis of the demand characteristic questions showed no evidence that participants knew the underlying purpose of the experiment.) First, participants read the instruction page including a statement of the cover story for the experiment, "Consumer Research Study." They were merely told that this study dealt with their opinions about certain brands. Participants then answered questions designed to assess prior attitudes toward four well-known fast food establishments, including the targeted one, McDonald's. Following a short distracter task unrelated to the current study, participants were instructed "to watch a short movie segment" in a small theater setting (designed to mimic a natural movie-viewing environment). They then completed the questionnaire containing the key dependent measures at their own pace. All experimental treatments were administered randomly by an administrator who was blind to the treatment assignments and research hypotheses.

Dependent Measures

Consistent with the cover story, the first series of measures assessed preexisting attitudes toward four fast food establishments (i.e., McDonald's, Burger King, In and Out, Wendy's; nine-point negative/positive scales). The critical dependent measures were collected after the movie clip viewing: brand attitudes, placement-related judgments, manipulation check

TABLE 2
Summary of Treatment Cell Statistics*

	Subtle placement, low repetition (*n* = 28, 40)*	Subtle placement, moderate repetition (*n* = 27, 39)*	Prominent placement, low repetition (*n* = 25, 37)*	Prominent placement, moderate repetition (*n* = 28, 39)*
Study 1				
Brand attitude	4.59 (1.99)	4.70 (1.99)	4.74 (2.21)	3.46 (1.76)
Distraction	4.25 (1.77)	3.52 (2.31)	3.08 (1.63)	6.09 (2.17)
Realism	4.38 (1.14)	3.67 (1.78)	4.63 (1.41)	2.57 (1.40)
Interfered w/story	3.50 (1.62)	3.37 (2.17)	3.12 (1.81)	4.50 (2.15)
Study 2				
Brand attitude	6.08 (1.15)	6.18 (1.40)	6.06 (1.19)	5.37 (1.60)
Show attitude	6.33 (1.96)	6.65 (1.65)	7.14 (1.73)	5.92 (2.56)
Distraction	3.38 (1.97)	4.47 (1.98)	3.58 (2.16)	6.06 (1.98)
Realism	5.82 (1.26)	6.08 (1.66)	5.70 (1.57)	4.78 (1.95)
Plot connection	4.15 (1.60)	4.51 (1.36)	4.56 (1.68)	3.95 (1.72)

* Means (standard deviations). Cell sizes for S1, S2.

assessments, product knowledge (four items; α = .75), brand familiarity, demand effect assessments, age, gender, and ethnicity. "Filler" items were intermixed with the key dependent judgments so as to help disguise the true purpose of the study.

The resultant construct scales were reliable: brand attitudes (unfavorable/favorable, dislike/like, disagreeable/agreeable; α = .93), distraction-related beliefs (not distracting/distracting, not disruptive/disruptive; Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient = .91), realism-related beliefs (not realistic/realistic, agreement with "The use of McDonald's made the movie more realistic"; Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient = .70), and plot interference (agreement with "The references to McDonald's interfered with the story line"). (Note: All items in both studies were measured via nine-point scales unless otherwise indicated. The appropriate measures were averaged [summed and divided by the number of items] to create construct scales for the critical concepts.)

Results

Manipulation Checks and Potential Covariates

As desired, those exposed to the prominent placements judged them as less subtle and more obvious, $F(1, 104) = 1.83$, $p = .001$, $M_P = 6.38$, than the subtle product placements ($M_S = 4.74$). There were no significant differences across treatments for product knowledge and brand familiarity, and these variables did not impact the analyses of variance (ANOVAs) reported below; thus, they are not discussed further. To account for preexisting attitudes towards McDonald's, prior attitude was incorporated as a covariate in all tests of H1. (Note: prior attitude did not vary across treatments [all effect *p*s > .50].)

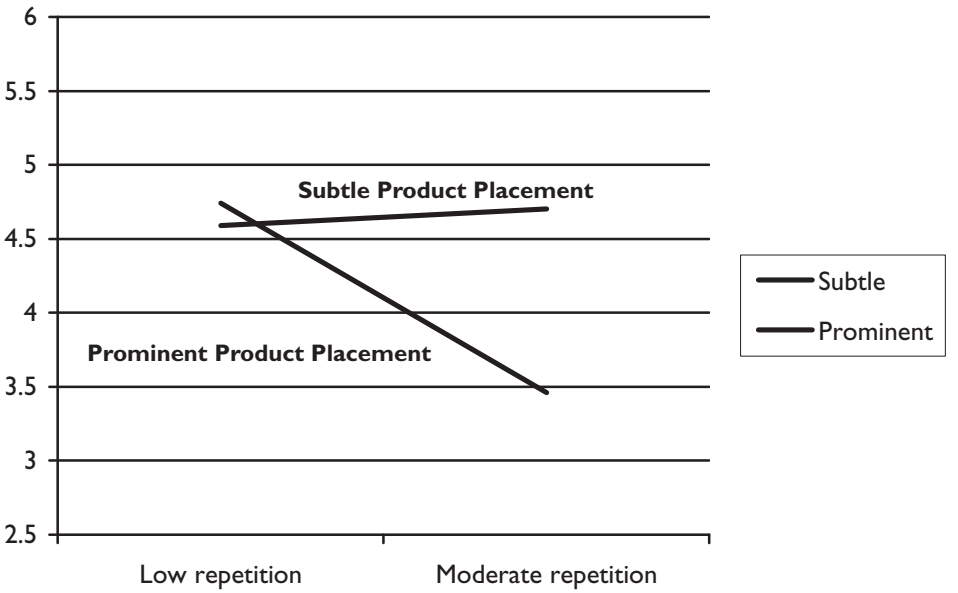
Hypothesis Tests

For the key persuasion construct, brand attitude, the significant placement type × repetition interaction is consistent with H1, $F(1, 103) = 6.04$, $p = .016$. Specifically, planned contrasts (Duncan 1955) indicate that moderate repetition of prominent product placements produced a substantial decrease in attitude ($M_{PM} = 3.46$ for prominent repeated exposures versus $M_{PL} = 4.74$ for prominent low/single exposure). In contrast, repeated subtle placements led to only a slight, nonsignificant increase in attitude ($M_{SL} = 4.59$ for subtle low repetition versus $M_{SM} = 4.70$ for subtle moderate repetition). (See Table 2 and Figure 1 for details.)

A similar placement type × repetition interaction emerged for the placement-related judgments described above: distraction, $F(1, 103) = 23.31$, $p < .001$, realism, $F(1, 103) = 5.50$, $p = .02$, and plot interference, $F(1, 103) = 3.86$, $p = .05$. As expected, repetition of prominent branded placements resulted in increased judgments of distraction/disruption ($M_{PM} = 6.09$ versus $M_{PL} = 3.08$), reduced judgments of realism ($M_{PM} = 2.57$ versus $M_{PL} = 4.63$), and increased judgments of plot interference ($M_{PM} = 4.50$ versus $M_{PL} = 3.12$). In contrast, planned comparisons (Duncan 1955; $p < .05$) indicate that moderate repetition has a nonsignificant effect on judgments toward subtly placed products ($M_{SM} = 3.52$ versus $M_{SL} = 4.25$ for distraction, $M_{SM} = 3.67$ versus $M_{SL} = 4.38$ for realism, and $M_{SM} = 3.37$ versus $M_{SL} = 3.50$ for plot interference). Repetition main effects were also evident for two of these judgment scales: Increased repetition of product placements led to increased distraction, $F(1, 103) = 8.62$, $p < .01$; $M_M = 4.83$ versus $M_L = 3.70$, and decreased realism, $F(1, 103) = 24.02$; $p = .001$; $M_M = 3.11$ versus $M_L = 4.50$.

Generalization is cautioned as Study 1 (S1) tests a single brand featured in one movie. In addition, the set of measures

FIGURE 1
Brand Attitude Scores: Study 1



is rather limited. Thus, a second study (S2) was designed to determine the robustness of effects identified in S1 (using a different stimulus) and to expand on those findings with a more comprehensive set of measures and hypotheses.

STUDY 2

Method

As noted above, a more comprehensive set of dependent measures allows us to explore additional hypotheses. First, in addition to brand attitude, attitudes toward the television program are assessed, with similar expectations.

H2: Repeated exposure of prominent/obvious product placements leads to a decrease in attitude toward the show (cell 1 > cell 2). For subtle product placements, moderate repetition has little (positive) impact on show attitude (cell 3 = cell 4).

Recall that S1 finds that prominent placements are perceived to be more disruptive/distracting, less realistic, and that they interfere with the plot: These adverse effects escalate with repeated exposures. Similarly, S2 tests that:

H3: Repeated exposure of prominent/obvious product placements leads to an increase in distraction/disruption (cell 2 > cell 1). For subtle product placements, moderate repetition has little (positive) impact on distraction/disruption judgments (cell 3 = cell 4).

H4: Repeated exposure of prominent/obvious product placements leads to a decrease in plot connection perceptions (cell 1 > cell 2). For subtle product placements, moderate repetition has little (positive) impact on plot connection perceptions (cell 3 = cell 4).

H5: Repeated exposure of prominent/obvious product placements leads to a decrease in realism perceptions (cell 1 > cell 2). For subtle product placements, moderate repetition has little (positive) impact on realism judgments (cell 3 = cell 4).

Overview and Stimulus Development

Study 2 employs the same 2 (subtle/prominent placement type) × 2 (low/moderate placement repetition) between-subjects factorial design used in S1. In the same spirit as S1, a professional television program was used to enhance realism and thus generalizability (external validity) while maintaining sufficient internal control. An episode of *Monk* (USA Network), a television show unfamiliar to participants, featuring brand placements for Dell notebook computers, was edited to create the necessary placement type and repetition effects. For example, all verbal mentions of Dell computers were erased from the two subtle placement type clips and some shots of a Dell notebook were edited out to create two clips with single brand placements. As in S1, the subtle placements include only visual images of Dell notebook computers with no direct verbal conversation in the script. The prominent/obvious placements include direct verbal references to Dell along with the visual images (e.g., product shots). The edits did not impact comprehension or program "flow" and all edit transitions were relatively seamless. Participants watched the entire program and thus the (murder mystery) story line remained intact.

Participants and Procedure

A total of 155 undergraduate students enrolled at a large state-supported Western University received course credit for participation (47% female, median age = 22, relatively diverse with 35% white/Caucasian). (Analysis of the demand characteristic question shows no evidence that participants knew the underlying purpose of the experiment.) First, participants read the instruction page, including a statement of the cover story for the experiment, "TV Programming Study." Specifically, they were told, "This is a study about TV programming, including plots and story lines, actor talent, character development, etc." Following the television program, all participants completed the questionnaire containing the key dependent measures at their own pace. Experimental treatments were administered randomly by an administrator who was blind to the treatment assignments and research hypotheses.

Dependent Measures

Consistent with the cover story and to identify potential suspicious subjects (cf. Russell [2002]), participants were first asked to "write down all the thoughts that they had while watching the TV episode" (cf. Russell 2002), and to judge the five main actors in terms of "performance and talent" (nine-point scales ranging from poor performance/not talented to good performance/talented). These scale judgments were followed by measures of brand attitudes, attitudes toward the television show, and belief-type items (nine-point disagree/agree scales) designed to assess various program characteristics (i.e., professionalism, creativity, easy-to-follow, entertainment).

The final pages of the questionnaire included manipulation checks, an adaptation of Gupta and Gould's (1997) product placement instrument (nine-point disagree/agree scales that included the three plot-connection items used by Russell [2002] and other more general statements about product placements used to create the product placement attitude and plot connection constructs detailed below), experience-related judgments (cf. Russell 2002; nine-point bipolar scales: boring/interesting, not enjoyable/enjoyable, dull/exciting, fake/real; α = .97), product knowledge (two items; Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient = .80), brand familiarity (single nine-point scaled item), task involvement (single nine-point scaled item), prior exposure to this particular episode of *Monk,* past frequency of watching *Monk,* demand effect assessments, age, gender, and ethnicity. (As in S1, "filler" items further served to disguise the true purpose of the experiment.)

The resultant construct scales were reliable: brand attitudes (unfavorable/favorable, dislike/like, disagreeable/agreeable; α = .86), show attitudes (unfavorable/favorable, dislike/like, disagreeable/agreeable; α = .97), product placement attitudes ("I object to studios' increased use of product placements in TV shows," "Using brand name products in TV shows is OK with me," "I don't mind seeing brand name products in TV shows as long as they are realistically shown," "TV shows should use fictitious brands rather than existing brands"; α = .76), distraction-related beliefs (not distracting/distracting, not disruptive/disruptive; Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient = .89), realism-related beliefs (not realistic/realistic bipolar scale, agreement with "The scenes that included Dell computers were realistic" and "The use of Dell computers made the movie more realistic"; α = .69), and plot connection (Russell's [2002] three items ["The known brands seen in the TV show were well-connected to the storyline/plot," "Dell products played an important role in the story," and "Without references to Dell, the story would be different"], plus "Dell computers were an integral part of the plot" [Gupta and Gould 1997]; α = .70).

Results

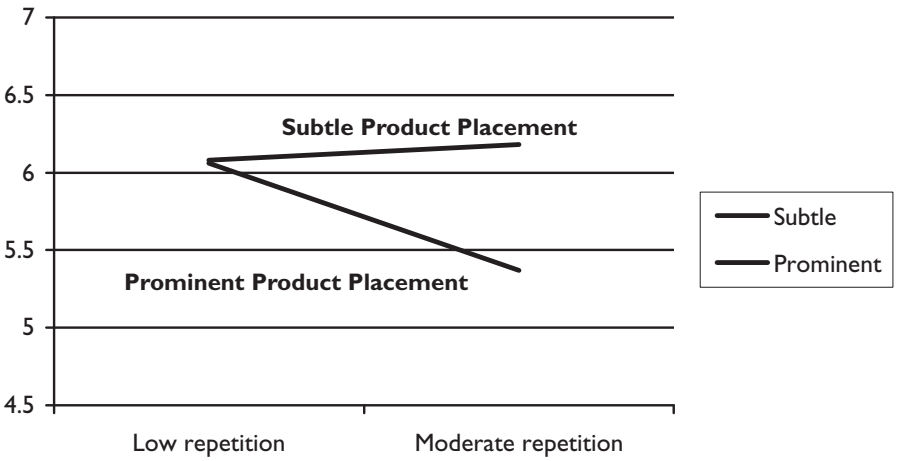
Manipulation Checks and Potential Covariates

As desired, those exposed to the prominent placements judged them as less subtle, $F(1, 151) = 14.40, p < .001, M_p = 3.97$, and more obvious, $F(1, 151) = 26.59, p < .001, M_p = 7.81$, than the subtle product placements ($M_S = 5.35$ and 6.22, respectively, for the two scales). The four program videos were judged to be equally professional, entertaining, creative, easy to follow, and entertaining to watch. There were no significant differences across treatments for product knowledge, brand familiarity, show awareness, general product placement attitudes, attitudes toward the experience, or task involvement, and these variables did not impact the ANOVAs reported below. Thus, they are not discussed further.

Hypothesis Tests

For the key persuasion construct, brand attitude, the significant placement type × repetition interaction is consistent with H1, $F(1, 151) = 3.25, p < .10$. More important, planned contrasts (Duncan 1955; $p < .05$) indicate that repetition of prominent product placements produce a decrease in attitude ($M_{PM} = 5.37$ for moderate repetition of prominent placements versus $M_{PL} = 6.06$ for low repetition of a prominent placement). In contrast, repeated subtle placements had essentially no impact on brand attitude ($M_{SL} = 6.08$ for subtle low exposure versus $M_{SM} = 6.18$ for subtle repeated exposures). Results for show attitudes (H2) behaved similarly, with even stronger effects. The predicted interaction, $F(1, 151) = 5.72, p < .02$, was supported via planned comparisons ($M_{PM} = 5.92$ was lower than $M_{PL} = 7.14$, yet $M_{SL} = 6.33$ was comparable to $M_{SM} = 6.65$). (See Table 2 and Figure 2 for details.)

FIGURE 2
Brand Attitude Scores: Study 2



The same placement type × repetition interaction emerged for the placement-related judgments described above: distraction, $F(1, 151) = 4.53$, $p < .05$; realism, $F(1, 151) = 4.99$, $p < .02$; and plot connection, $F(1, 151) = 3.59$, $p < .10$. As expected (H3 and H5), Duncan (1955) tests confirm that moderate repetition of prominent branded placements results in increased judgments of distraction/disruption ($M_{PM} = 6.06$ versus $M_{PL} = 3.58$; $p < .05$) and reduced judgments of realism ($M_{PM} = 4.78$ versus $M_{PL} = 5.70$; $p < .05$). However, the hypothesized planned comparison for plot connection did not attain significance, thus yielding only directional support for H4 ($M_{PM} = 3.95$ versus $M_{PL} = 4.56$). In contrast, planned comparisons ($p < .05$) indicate that repetition has a nonsignificant effect on the measured judgments toward subtly placed products ($M_{SM} = 4.47$ versus $M_{SL} = 3.38$ for distraction, $M_{SM} = 6.08$ versus $M_{SL} = 5.82$ for realism, and $M_{SM} = 4.51$ versus $M_{SL} = 4.15$ for plot connection). A repetition main effect is also evident for the distraction judgment scale: that is, increased repetition of product placements led to increased distraction, $F(1, 151) = 30.34$, $p < .001$; $M_M = 5.27$ versus $M_L = 3.48$. Finally, prominent product placements induced decreased judgments of realism, $F(1, 151) = 7.30$; $p < .01$; $M_P = 5.25$ versus $M_S = .95$, and increased levels of distraction/disruption, $F(1, 151) = 7.63$; $p < .01$; $M_P = 4.82$ versus $M_S = 3.93$.

DISCUSSION

While several past experimental studies report that product placements have little impact on brand attitudes, many practitioners maintain that placements can produce "home runs," especially when certain guidelines are met (e.g., when the product is "connected" to the story line). The primary goal of these studies was to investigate two potential moderating factors that may help account for the lack of attitude change reported in past experimental studies, that is, the type of placement (subtle versus prominent) and placement repetition. Data confirm that brand attitudes decrease when product placements are prominent/obvious, especially when such obvious product mentions are repeated. For subtle cases of product placement, consumer attitudes are relatively positive and repeated exposures have little incremental impact. These findings are robust across the two formats (movie and television) tested here. Study 2 shows a similar pattern of effects for attitudes toward the media vehicle (i.e., the featured television program). Consistent with media survey reports of consumer reactions to the intrusion of advertising into television and film content (e.g., Atkinson 2003), prominent placements are perceived to be more disruptive/distracting, less realistic, and that they interfere with the plot: These adverse effects escalate with repeated exposures. These findings have both theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretically, results provide further evidence that the impact of placement repetition is not a simple phenomenon, but rather that effects are qualified by other moderating factors, including placement type. Increased processing brought on by repetition and prominent placements lead to more negative attitudes. Furthermore, repeated prominent placements appear to motivate viewers to consider the inappropriateness of these promotional tools, seeing them as distracting and interfering with the story line. It is safe to assume that these adverse effects are likely accompanied by perceptions of opportunism and profit-based motives. Findings are consistent with past evidence (1) that message repetition can enhance or undermine persuasion, depending on the favorableness of individuals' cognitive responses (Cacioppo and Petty 1979), and (2) that tactic inappropriateness mediates the effects of ad repetition on message effectiveness (e.g., Campbell and Keller 2003). As a result, repetition of prominent brand placements in movies and television programming can have undesirable

consequences. In contrast, for subtle placements, the influence of moderate levels of repetition is in the opposite (positive) direction, and the effect is nonsignificant.

The findings also contribute to the extant research on vividness and cue prominence effects. The combination of effects is consistent with and perhaps best explained by an availability-valence explanation (e.g., Kisielius and Sternthal 1984, 1986). According to that perspective, "the favorableness of the cognitive elaborations induced by vividness manipulations determines the direction of the vividness/prominence effect" (Kisielius and Sternthal 1986, p. 429). In this situation where vividness/prominence is manipulated via subtle versus prominent product placements, the prominent placement stimulated elaborative processes that undermined persuasion. In contrast, reduced elaboration of more favorable information conveyed by the subtle placements enhanced attitude. While the prominent (i.e., more vivid) placements tested here gained attention, viewers also regarded them as more distracting and interfering with the story line. In addition, it appears that the increased attention captured by the prominent placements motivated counterargumentation and thoughts of tactical inappropriateness, thereby leading to more negative attitudes. Unlike the prior research dealing with memory effects of pictorial and verbal information (e.g., Childers and Houston 1984) and the literature related to vividness effects that tend to use attention-getting visual images/pictures, the current study used audio cues to enhance vividness/prominence. (Recall that subtle placements used here were visual-based and the prominent placements included verbal brand-related dialogue along with visual product cues, that is, prominence was enhanced via the addition of auditory elements.) As a result, the undesired inferences (e.g., tactical inappropriateness, distraction) and negative attitude were most likely audio-driven, suggesting that writers must be especially careful when inserting brand-related dialogue into movie and television scripts. Visual vividness may be more acceptable to viewers than obvious verbal references to branded products.

From a practical perspective, findings of attitude change suggest that brand managers not currently using product placements should reexamine their promotional strategies and consider allocating funds to these potentially lucrative, attitude-enhancing mechanisms. This may be reinforcing news to studios that currently count on such funds to bankroll their productions. However, studios also need to be concerned about the potential reduction in movie- or program-related attitudes due to continued prominent product placements, as they may lead to a decline in movie attendance or television audience size, which may not be offset by the income generated by placement deals. The critical factors seem to be "subtlety" and integration—consumers do not respond positively to obvious, forced, incongruous placement strategies (e.g., Atkinson 2003). As studios and advertisers negotiate deals and delegate executions to script writers and directors, all parties should consider that based on the data presented here, well-placed visual product images appear to be more important than verbal dialogue in the script, as the latter can be perceived as too obvious and "in your face." The popular Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos,* HBO) made a rather quick commercial plug as he put his nose up to the bed sheets and said, "a *Downey* moment"—which may have gone unnoticed by many fans. However, the WB "missed the mark" with a conversation between two key characters (who had not seen each other for a while) in the *Everwood* series (April 2006) that centered on a Mercury car. The dialogue—"It's beautiful! I can't believe my mom bought me a new *Mercury Milan.* I love the headlights. Aren't they the coolest shape ever? Yes, they're very stylish."—seemed out of place and unlike any in past episodes of this show, which was known for its mind-provoking and heartfelt stories. All parties (studio, sponsor) might have been better off with a less "forced" verbal dialogue.

While the primary purpose of these two studies was to examine the promotional power of branded placements in movies and television, it is important to understand that placements are inseparable from program content and they may therefore convey useful information about characters, scenes, and story development (cf. Karrh 1998b). This further highlights the importance of "integrating" brands with program content, which is frequently noted by both academics and industry experts, but ignored by some advertisers and scriptwriters. Coining the term "lovemarks," Kevin Roberts (2007) emphasizes that when using product placements, the goal should be to make an emotional "connection" with the consumer to tap into the "Attraction Economy." Slapping one's brand on the big screen in a haphazard manner will yield disdain, not engaged consumers. For example, viewers and commentators alike did not respond well to the misguided plastering of products (e.g., Coors beer, Mitsubishi SUV) in NBC's 2003 reality series *The Restaurant.*

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

These studies sought a balance between internal and external validity: For example, exposure setting and the data collection process were controlled, and known brands were used rather than fictitious ones (see, e.g., Klink and Smith 2001; Winer 1999). Contrary to Russell's (2002) method of comparing visual versus auditory brand placements (with primary concern for internal validity), in the interest of enhanced realism and generalizability, placement type was manipulated via visual and audio elements. Few advertisers would be willing to pay for verbal references in a movie without also having the visual impact of seeing their product on the big screen. However, future research might manipulate visual and audio components to determine the most effective visual/audio combination.

Manipulating placement type and repetition within one movie and one television program (unfamiliar to study participants) served to control potential threats to internal validity. Future research using other types of movies and programming are encouraged to determine the extent to which findings are generalizable.

Judgments of distraction, realism, and plot interference attributed to the product placements were measured, not attendance/program-viewing intentions and behaviors. Thus, studies that specifically assess movie attendance and television-viewing behaviors are suggested to formally test whether increased distraction and reduced realism associated with certain product placement strategies/tactics lead to reduced theater attendance, television program audiences, and/or DVD sales/rentals. If such adverse responses do in fact impact movie and television production profits, studios may be faced with one more profit-threatening nightmare, much like the media piracy situation. Findings were found for two well-known brands (McDonald's and Dell), which are established elements in the domestic landscape and icons of sorts in pop culture. Perhaps still unknown is whether the negative associations and unwanted attitude decline reported here are robust across brands with varying degrees of familiarity. Perhaps less familiar brands can survive blatant forms of promotion, that is, they may benefit if repetition facilitates initial awareness and knowledge.

Cultural differences are also worthy of exploration. For example, placement is a controversial issue in the United Kingdom, where "the practice is seen as sneaky advertising" and where many believe that obvious paid placements would be rejected and viewers offended (Hall 2007). In the United Kingdom, branded products are typically used and supplied free by prop companies as a means of reducing production costs. Before paid placement can take off in the United Kingdom, however, producers will have to find a way around the requirement that viewers must be informed every 20 minutes on which products have been placed in a show. The movie industry has had an easier time skillfully placing brands with logical script connections, such as James Bond's Aston Martin and the use of Eurostar trains in *The Da Vinci Code.* (For a comprehensive discussion of directions for future product placement research, see Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan [2006].)

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