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Australasian Marketing Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/amj

So many things to do! How multitasking affects memory and attitude for product and brand placements



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 April 2014

Revised 7 September 2014

Accepted 8 September 2014

Available online 3 October 2014

Keywords:

Product placement
Distractor devaluation
Multitasking
Distraction

ABSTRACT

The majority of current product placement research is predicated on a cinema setting and assumes a rather captive audience. Little is known, about the effect of audience multitasking on product placements. As multitasking activity is most prevalent in the home, an understanding of this activity is critical to developing product placement techniques. This initial study investigates the effects of multitasking on both subtle and prominent product placements. The results indicate that less familiar, prominently placed brands suffer from significantly less recall and valuation within multitasking situations. Product placement within a multitasking situation serves to devalue the placed brand, as the placement is perceived as a distraction from other tasks being performed.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

目前, 大多数植入式广告的研究前提都是剧院式的场景设置, 即假定对象是非常专注的观众。从事多重任务的观众对植入式广告有何影响, 此方面的研究尚待开展。在家中人们普遍同时从事多重任务活动, 了解这一活动特点, 对制定植入式广告的投放方式至关重要。本研究探讨了多重任务活动对含蓄的植入式广告和直白的植入式广告的影响。结果表明, 在多重任务活动中, 观众对不熟悉但直白的植入式广告的记忆和评价明显不高。多重任务活动中, 植入式广告会降低投放品牌的价值, 因为投放的广告被当成是其它任务活动的干扰。

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The use of product placements and branded content is becoming increasingly popular within contemporary media. Recent media forecasting data for 2012–2016 suggest a yearly increase of more than 10% of the US\$8 billion that is currently spent globally on movie and television product placements (PRWeb, 2013).

Academics and practitioners alike recognise the advantages that product placement can give a brand (Karrh, 1998; Karrh et al., 2003). As audience reaction to a product placement diminishes, viewers find the placements less intrusive than typical advertising breaks and they can even enhance the viewing experience by adding realism (Balasubramanian et al., 2006; McCarty and Lowrey, 2012). Product placements can also present an opportunity to talk about entertainment formats and embedded brands (Nguyen and Romaniuk, 2014).

The main vehicle for product placements is entertainment media such as movies and television shows (Hudson and Hudson, 2006), but video games (Nelson and Waiguny, 2012), books and even theatre

can feature product placements (Lehu, 2008). The majority of spending, however, is within the domain of movies and television shows. Considerable research has been undertaken to understand the recall and recognition effects of placements within movies assuming a captive audience in lab studies, using real cinema settings or simulating cinema settings (e.g.; Dens et al., 2012; Kamleitner and Jyote, 2013; Redondo, 2012).

Most current product placement studies, that report both positive and negative effects, assume that viewers are being exposed to the placements for the first time and are predisposed to focusing their attention on the entertainment medium within which the brands are embedded. Thus, these studies have considered the effects upon a captive audience, but have not considered the differences in viewing behaviour in the television-viewing context.

The modern, everyday consumer of entertainment media seldom gives their full attention to such media; an attentive audience is more the exception to the rule within contemporary culture (Jayasinghe and Ritson, 2013). Some reports suggest that more than 50% of consumers fulfil other tasks while watching television (Brasel and Gips, 2011). Sources of distraction while watching television can include cooking, caring for children, telephone conversations or

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multitasking with other media such as eBooks or smart devices. Within the television screen itself headlines or breaking news can compete for viewers' attention. However, only a small number of studies have considered the relationship between some form of distraction and product placement in games and movies.

The focus in these studies has been on the effect of increased cognitive load. Lee and Faber (2007) showed that within video games, the central placement of brands appears to give rise to greater memory recall in a high game involvement condition. Waiguny et al. (2012) find that within advergames, over- and under-challenged children have a less favourable view of placed brands than that of optimally challenged children. Yoon et al. (2011) demonstrate that cognitive load that is externally created, and not the result of consuming the media, negatively affects the viewers' recall of, and attitude towards, the placed brands, but positively affects their attitudes.

However, Rosen (2008) notes that multitasking is more than pure cognitive load increase. When multitasking, attention and visual focus is distributed and allocated to the tasks that are deemed the most important. As a result, various visual and manual tasks compete and divide attention. Our research extends the insights (Yoon et al. 2011) by adding another, visual, task to the cognitive load. Thus, our research question is "How does multitasking (in terms of increased cognitive load and competing visual tasks) affect recollection, attitudes and behavioural intentions towards brands placed within movies?" To explore this question, the theoretical background and previous empirical findings are first discussed. The subsequent hypotheses are tested within a 2 × 2 mixed-design experiment, and the implications of our findings on further avenues for research, as well as product placement practices, are discussed.

Theoretical background

There has been considerable research on the way product placements are perceived and processed, and most findings suggest that placement prominence has a positive influence (Brennan and Babin, 2004; Dens et al., 2012; Gupta and Lord, 1998; Karrh, 1998). Our research includes examining the effect of placement prominence along with the effects of multitasking.

Placement prominence

Most of the research on product placement considers issues of where and how to place a brand within a movie or television show. The assumption is that viewers focus their attention on the main characters and the parts of the movie, or television show, where the storyline is developing. Brands placed within those areas are likely to be more easily recalled (Gupta and Lord, 1998). In addition to the viewer paying more attention to the verbal and demonstrative interplay between the product and the main characters (Brennan and Babin, 2004), a dual coding of information occurs, strengthening the creation of such associations (Clark and Paivio, 1991). Thus, the majority of current research finds a positive relationship between placement prominence and memory variables such as recall and recognition.

Most research has found there is a difference between subtle and prominent brand placement (Gupta and Lord, 1998). Such placement is also been described as 'explicit' and 'implicit' (d'Astous and Chartier, 2000) or 'focally' or 'peripherally' placed (Lee and Faber, 2007). Subtle placements typically have only a visual appearance (Dens et al., 2012), without plot integration or high congruence within the storyline or content (Russell, 2002). A typical application of this is the use of brand logos in the environment the actors enter or interact within (e.g. a Starbucks café or a Shell petrol station). Conversely, prominent placements are typically in the focal area of the storyline or content (Lee and Faber, 2007) and are often men-

tioned verbally (Homer, 2009). They may also be integrated within the plot and character interactions as well as congruent with them (Russell, 2002; Russell and Stern, 2006), to enhance realism, acceptance and memory recall (d'Astous and Seguin, 1999). The next section examines how multitasking and these two types of placements interact.

Multitasking

Multitasking, originally a term from computer science, describes a splitting of the working memory for different procedures. It has been adopted into the common vernacular as a behaviour or skill to be mastered by individuals. It is generally understood that a person who is multitasking tries to fulfil more than one task at a time (Hembrooke and Gay, 2003). Thus, their information processing is split between each task and their cognitive load is increased by the presence of more stimuli competing for their attention (Rosen, 2008). Due to this higher cognitive load and divided attention, recall and recognition of specific content is often reduced (Hembrooke and Gay, 2003). More importantly in a multitasking situation, visual attention, or perception, is divided as the person's eyes switch between the different tasks (Brasel and Gips, 2011).

In the area of product placement, so far only cognitive load has been investigated. Yoon et al. (2011) showed that under conditions of higher cognitive load, the viewer's attitude towards a placed brand is more favourable than their attitude to a competing brand that would normally perform better in an unloaded condition. We seek to extend these findings by also examining eye-switching behaviour, which indicates that visual attention is divided. Both factors constituting multitasking, divided visual attention and cognitive load, have an effect on people's memories and attitudes.

Multitasking and the effects of product placements on memory

Drawing on findings from psychology, we understand that this memory effect is related to cognitive load while consuming media messages (Lang, 2000, 2006, 2009) plus 'inattention blindness' (Simons and Chabris, 1999), which are both caused by multitasking. Focusing on a specific visual task causes inattention blindness. Simons and Chabris found that non-task-related stimuli, such as the appearance of a woman with an umbrella or a man in a gorilla costume, were not noticed by more than two-thirds of a visual-target-focused audience.

Imagine the following short scenario: *Paul and Hanna arrive home and are preparing their dinner. They turn on the television, which is broadcasting an episode of 'Malcolm in the Middle.' Malcolm is getting a can of Red Bull out of his locker and is talking about consuming it. However, many other things are happening at the same time in Paul and Hanna's house: Paul is also checking his iPad; Hanna is cutting up some onions; and at the foot of the television screen, a headline with the latest America's Cup results catches Paul's attention. Hanna says: "Ugh, there are product placements everywhere now." But Paul just responds: "What you are talking about? I just saw Team New Zealand beat Oracle in the third race."*

In this scenario, because Paul was more motivated to read and process the headline than the other content offered, his processing capacity was dedicated to this task and his capacity to remember other messages, such as the product placement, was reduced. According to limited capacity models for mediated messages, we dedicate our attention to the most important tasks and omit other tasks, or dedicate only a little attention to them (Lang, 2000, 2006). Furthermore as his eyes focussed the newscast, he was also 'blind' (Simons and Chabris, 1999) to the can of Red Bull.

We also assume that the prominence of the product placement moderates these effects, particularly with the proximity of the other task to the placements. Lee and Faber (2007) note that as well

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