

# The beginnings of product placement in cinematography, literature and fine arts – or, branded entertainment is not something new under the sun

Árpád Ferenc Papp-Váry, Dr. Habil

Marketing Institute, BKF University of Applied Sciences, Budapest, Hungary, 1148 Budapest, Nagy Lajos király útja 1-9.  
apappvary@bkf.hu

## Abstract

We can go to the movies with a bag of popcorn to see a Hollywood film, stare at a new reality show on TV, watch music videos on YouTube, or play with a game console with great enthusiasm, yet they all have something in common – it is not only entertaining content but also brands that appear in them from time to time.

Most sources state that the appearance of brands in films and TV programmes, that is, product placement, began with E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial in 1982. In this movie the young boy uses Reese's Pieces chocolate to lure the alien being to himself and make friends with it. However, as the examples in this study demonstrate, the first appearance of brands in films can be dated much earlier. The Lumiere brothers came up with a two-minute film with half of it being product placement as early as 1896. But, as the study proves, the genre of product placement is even older than films. We find examples of its use in literature, too. For example, a section of Eugene Onegin by Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin, written in 1829, mentions Breguet watches. The painting A Bar at the Folies-Bergère created by Édouard Manet in 1881–82 is not only interesting because it was the last masterpiece of the artist, but also because the Basstrademark appears on it several times in a clearly visible way.

Many examples prove that brands have been with us for a long time through cinematography, literature and fine arts, and they will probably stay with us for long. The study summarizes these examples and justifies that product placement as a marketing communications genre is not something new under the sun.

## 1. Introduction

The simplest definition of *product placement* is "a product or a brand in one or more scenes of a film, in one form or another, in return for payment." (Snyder, 1992).

However, marketing literature (e.g. Lehu 2009, or Papp-Váry 2014) also uses a variety of other expressions:

- *Brand placement, Branded placement*: One of the reasons for this is that no-brand, no-name products usually are not displayed; the point is to get our brand in the programme or film. It also suggests that in the case of a brand the product itself does not necessarily appear physically – maybe "only" the name is mentioned, or the logo is displayed.
- *Brand integration, Product integration*: The product does not only appear, but becomes an organic part of the plot line of the film or programme.
- *Advertainment*: The term refers to the gradual fusion of advertising and entertainment.
- *Madison & Vine*: The combination suggests that Madison Avenue (the headquarters of American advertising), and Vine Avenue (that of filmmakers) get closer and closer to each other.
- *Branded content*: The brand appears in a content such as a film, a programme, a music video, a video game, etc.
- *Branded entertainment*: This expression is also often used as branded contents are usually used in entertainment industry.

According to research data by PQ Media, the amount spent on product placement by advertisers in the United States was only US\$ 190 million in 1974, but it was US\$ 512 million in 1985, US\$ 1130 million in 1994, and US\$ 3458 million in 2004 (Lehu, 2009). Since then it has even exceeded the magic number of US\$ 10.000 million (Onlinemba.com, 2011).

At the same time, if we examine the Top 40 list of Hollywood movies, we can see that the average number of product placements in 2011 was 17.8 per film (Brandchannel.com, 2012). But brands do not only appear in films; they are also featured in series, reality shows, talent shows, and so on.

While some people describe product placement as something strikingly new, it is not a new genre. We can find early examples in cinematography, literature and fine arts as well. However, these have not been compiled in marketing literature, therefore this study aims to fill this gap.

## 2. The beginnings of product placement in cinematography

"America runs on Bulova time", the first commercial on television said on 1 July 1941, during a break of a baseball game. The ten-second solution by Bulova Watch Company was truly revolutionary because no commercials had been delivered during game breaks before. Advertisements had only been placed directly in films so far.

Of course, one of the reasons for this is that cinema is a much older medium than television. The appearance of cinematograph and the first public screening of a movie is dated to the year 1895, when the Lumière brothers screened not one, but ten short, 40-50 second etudes at Grand Café, Paris.

Within a year, they came up with a two-minute film with half of it being product placement. In *Défilé du 8e bataillon* we can see a march, and one of the characters, a salesman, stops with his little car so that the Sunlight logo is clearly visible "by accident" – in half of the two-minute film.

Researchers also proved that the Lumières got the assignment from François-Henri Lavanchy-Clarke, a representative of Lever Brothers, known today as Unilever. (Stuart, 2005, and Newell–Salmon, 2003)

One of their other films, *Washing Day in Switzerland*, can be considered as an advertising film: we see "Sunlight" written with big letters at the beginning, followed by two ladies pouring Sunlight washing powder in a full of water and clothes. "Just to be on the safe side", we can also see a Sunlight pallet in each side of the screen.

After all that, it is perhaps not surprising that a book titled *Advertising by Motion Pictures* by Ernest A. Dench was published as early as 1916 (Dench, 1916; Andersen–Gray, 2008).

According to other sources the first brand placement backed by a flow of money appeared in *The Garage*, a movie starring Buster Keaton and Fatty Arbuckle, released in 1919. In one of the scenes there are three gentlemen in a car parts store, and one of them does a headstand in a twitchy manner, then tumbles, and who knows what other tricks he does. However, the point is not his behaviour, but the Red Crown Gasoline logo on the wall.

*The Lost World*, released in 1925, advertised Corona, the popular typewriter of the era, and Fritz Lang's *M*, released in 1931, promoted Wrigley's chewing gum.

If we look further, we can notice that the first movie winning an Oscar, *Wings*, released in 1927, also involved product placement. In one of the scenes the main character offers the others chocolate in a tent, he also has bite, and throws it on the bed with satisfaction. The camera then zooms on the product, so the audience may see it that the almond version of Hershey's aroused his enthusiasm.

Several silent films were set in front of restaurants, in return for which the restaurants sumptuously fed the actors and the crew. Then, in the first half of the twentieth century, paid-for product placements also appeared in movies by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner and Columbia.

The first joke including product placement was born in a movie released in 1932. In a scene of *Horse Feathers* the lady starts drowning in the water, and shouts towards the professor sitting in a boat: "Throw me the life saver!". The professor takes a candy, and throws it into the water for the lady. This candy, however, is no ordinary piece: it is the Life Savers brand, hollow in the middle, really resembling a life belt.

But brands soon appeared in cartoons, too. How did the shaggy wolf want to get in the house of the piglets in *The Three Little Pigs*, a film version of the classic tale by Walt Disney, released in 1933? He did so by pretending to be a Fuller Brush cleaning product agent.

By the way, for a while, Donald Duck also earned his bread by selling Fuller Brush products (Pink, 2013, 25.).

The increasing amount of "advertising" became more and more apparent, therefore Carl Laemmle, the president of Universal Studios, warned his colleagues in the most prominent magazine of the film industry, *Variety*, in 1931 as follows: "Believe me, if you jam advertising down their throats and pack their eyes and ears with it, you will build up a resentment that will in time damn your business." (quoted by Lehu, 2009, 17.)

However though, the time for a change did not come for a while. For example, National Geographic played a main role in the film *It's a Wonderful Life* by Frank Capra, presented in 1946. In one of the scenes we can see a small boy receiving information from the magazine, because he wants to become a great explorer. In the meantime he also presents the magazine and mentions the brand name to impress the girl.

In another scene of the same film spectacular Coca-Cola advertising boards appear in the background – this may also be attributed to the fact that the piece is a Christmas movie. Spencer Tracy drinks Coca-Cola in another film, *Father of the Bride*, released in 1950.

Nevertheless, the best and most peculiar example of Coca-Cola brand placement is Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, released in 1964. In one of the scenes the main character wants to call the President of the USA from a phone booth, but he runs out of change. Therefore he asks the colonel to shoot the lock off the Coke machine in order to get change. Then the colonel says: "Okay. I'm gonna get your money for ya. But if you don't get the President of the United States on that phone, you know what's gonna happen to you? You're gonna have to answer to the Coca-Cola company."

Movies were not the only medium including an increasing number of product placements. At the same time, product placements appeared in other media products as well: first in radio, then – as television became popular – in television programmes. The expression "soap opera" comes directly from the soap brands of Procter&Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive and Lever Brothers (known today as Unilever), all featured in these programmes. And why soap? Because most listeners and viewers were housewives who stayed at home and found time for listening to radio or watching television.

There were radio programmes with the sponsor appearing in their name: examples include *Colgate Comedy Hour* with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis as hosts – an ideal couple as the well-known comedians always made listeners laugh, and that "activity" is best with healthy teeth. *Lux Radio Theatre* was a similar programme named after the popular soap brand.

When television arrived, a similar phenomenon could be experienced: there was *Texaco Star Theatre*, always beginning with the jingle "Oh, we're the men of Texaco, we work from Maine to Mexico." (Manly, 2005). And there was *Coke Time* (with the slogan "anytime, anywhere") or *Kraft Television Theatre*. Another programme called *General Electric Theater* featured Ronald Reagan – the star of cowboy movies increased his popularity with this programme, and later he became the President of the USA.

Other examples were quite strange by today's standards. *Camel News Caravan* began with the words "The makers of Camel Cigarettes bring the world's latest news events right into your own living room! Sit back, light up a Camel, and be an eyewitness to the happenings that made history in the last 24 hours." News were interrupted by two Camel advertisements, and there was a burning Camel in the ashtray on the table of the newscaster all through the programme. At the end of the show they also said "Good night for Camel cigarettes" and the camera zoomed in on the ashtray.

In the same era, viewers could also see cartoon figures smoking in *The Flintstones* series. Moreover, producers even highlighted that they were smoking the Winston brand, and a one-minute sketch was presented before each show of the series, where they mentioned the product benefits and said "The Flintstones has been brought to you by Winston, America's best selling, best tasting filtered cigarette".

The importance of advertisers has been justified by data from various sources. In 1929, 55% of radio programmes received support or was produced directly by advertisers (Olins, 2004, 62–63.). In 1957, advertisers had a say in one third of American television programmes.

The ratio of this, however, decreased to 3% within a decade, by 1968. The main reason of this fall was that viewers and programme producers had had enough of this influence. The final nail in the coffin was the TV show *The \$64,000 Question*. The quiz show was sponsored by the Revlon cosmetics company, and they even built the scenery for the programme. But they had a say in even more: Charles Van Doren, a university teacher from Yale University appeared on the screen each week and gave correct answers to even the most peculiar questions, and millions of viewers were astonished by his performance. Then they found out that he had been given the correct answers in advance, while other less attractive participants were written out of the quiz show (Galician, 2004).

The importance of the story is justified by the fact that it made the cover page of TIME magazine titled *Brains vs. Dollars on TV*. In 1994 *Quiz Show* was also produced based on the *\$64,000 Question* story; the movie directed by Robert Redford was starring Ralph Fiennes.

Besides similar manipulation scandals there was another major reason for the setback of product placement in the sixties: it was the appearance of advertising blocks between programmes and the popularization of the 30-second spot. Media owners also found out that pro rata temporis they can make more profit out of the latter than by advertising in a full-length programme. This was the time when the *spot era*, the era of TV commercials, began.

Therefore the seventies were not the golden age of product placement: it became less significant in radio and television, and even in movies. Its comeback could only be seen in the eighties, but then it was a hit again. Its success was so apparent that many people think that the beginning of product placement, or at least the first integrated product placement could be seen in the movie *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* in 1982. In the film the young boy uses Reese's Pieces chocolate to lure the alien being to himself and make friends with it. This placement also resulted in the first measurable impact: the sales volume of the chocolate brand increased by 65 per cent.

The marketing manager at M&M's, previously contacted by Spielberg offering cooperation was probably not promoted: when the director-producer asked how much money M&M's would spend on the placement, the marketing guy asked how much Spielberg would pay for the opportunity to include the well-known chocolate brand in the movie (Blog.moviefone.com, 2010).

However though, Reese's Pieces, a competitor of M&M's, was open to the idea: although it did not pay specifically for the placement in the movie, it did spend a million US dollars on a campaign to spread the word that the movie *E.T.* was worth going to the cinema – and of course that E.T. was eating Reese's Pieces.

### 3. Product placement in literature

Novels included brands as early as the beginning of the 19th century (Papp-Váry, 2012b). For example, Honoré de Balzac tried to placate his creditors by including them in his works. *The Human Comedy* (*Comédie Humaine*) includes brand references to products such as César Birotteau's "paste of sultans" and "carminative balm" to increase their popularity (Lehu, 2009).

Jules Verne wrote about existing companies in *Around the World in 80 Days*, which helped him finance his books, explorations and travels. (Geekosystem.com, 2011).

Brands also appeared in Russian novels. In *Eugene Onegin* by Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, written in 1829, we can read: "until Bréguet's unsleeping chime advises him of dinner-time." And a little later: "there's an inner clock in the country rings the hour; no fuss; our belly has the power of any Bréguet" (Translation by Ch. Johnston.) Breguet, a brand created in 1775, have been so proud of this placement that it based its advertising campaign on *Eugene Onegin* a couple of years ago, and included the quotations above (TheSocietyPages.org, 2008).

Interestingly, however, Émile Zola was one of the authors who avoided using brands in their works. In his novel *The Ladies' Delight* (*Au Bonheur des Dames*), published in 1883, he makes no mention of any brands, although the location itself is based on Le Bon Marché, a well-known department store in Paris (Hajnal, 2011).

Today, we would be surprised if a novel like that did not specify brands. In *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, published in 2003, several brands appear including car brands such as Citroën ZX, Mercedes, BMW, Audi, Rolls-Royce, Aston Martin, Porsche, Ferrari, and Smart.

In *The Perfect Manhattan* by Leane Shear and Tracey Toomey, published in 2005, the Budweiser beer brand is mentioned 15 times, and the creation of most characters involved brands. We see that one man is wearing Hermès ties, and another looks like Pierce Brosnan in his Armani suit. A lady is taking Chanel lipstick out of her Louis Vuitton bag; another is attaching Cartier to her wrist, and even her lighter has an engraving with the Cartier logo (Shear–Toomey, 2005).

Yet another example: *Daddy's Girls* by Tasmina Perry is an exciting novel about four sisters looking for the murderer of their father. The girls work in the world of fashion, acting, politics and magazines, and the book includes product placements in various passages. One of these passages says: "Final question, please – said Clara, the publicist, popping her red-bobbed head into the Four Seasons suite overlooking Central Park, where Serena was enduring her final interview of the day. – Thank Christ – thought Serena, forcing one final smile for the journalist from TimeOut New York. She took a dainty sip of Badoit mineral water and crossed her legs, smoothing down the sharp crease of the Gucci slacks with her fingers." (Perry, 2008, pp. 160–161.)

The record is probably held by Tom Clancy, who featured 83 prominent brands in his novel *The Teeth of the Tiger*.

Of course real product placements involve payment by the brands for being included. *Cross Dressing*, a novel by Bill Fitzbugh, published in 2000, is mentioned as the first such book – it features the drink brands of the Seagram Company.

One year later Francesco Trapani, head of the Bulgari jewelry company, asked Fay Weldon, the famous writer, to include the brand at least a dozen times in her new novel. The author went even further: the brand became the focus of the story and a part of the title, *The Bulgari Connection*. The literati, other authors and critics scoffed, but it is a fact that the book, brought to the market for Christmas 2001, became a huge success. Of course the Bulgari brand used a complete PR mechanism to promote the book: they published 7500 copies of a limited version dedicated to clients. They calmed down their critics and pointed out that the solution was not a novelty as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* by Truman Capote, published in 1958, focuses on a jewelry brand and a jewelry store. It is also true that they forgot to mention that according to contemporary sources Capote did not get a cent from Tiffany's, while Bulgari paid a significant amount to Feldon.

Just as Ford did to make Carole Matthews replace the Volkswagen New Beetle in the novel *With or Without You* with a Ford Fiesta for her new book *The Sweetest Taboo*. The brand thought that the writer was the right person to reach the target audience: young females. The most exciting part of the story is that this change of brands did not only provide money for Matthews, but also international fame, as the press reported the peculiar replacement worldwide (Hakim, 2004).

Similarly to Capote, Victor Pelevin, one of the most influential contemporary writers from Russia, did not get any money for using "P" for Pepsi in his novel, *Generation P*. Moreover, the first sentence of the novel says (translation by Andrew Bromfield): "Once upon a time in Russia there really was a carefree, youthful generation that smiled in joy at the summer, the sea and the sun, and chose Pepsi." We soon find out from the story that "children of the Soviet seventies chose Pepsi in precisely the same way as their parents chose

Brezhnev". What is more, the cover of the Hungarian edition includes the logo of the Pepsi brand as well (Pelevin, 1999).

The main character of the novel, Tatarsky, is an advertisement copywriter who works on campaigns for brands such as Parliament, West and Davidoff cigarettes, Ariel, Head&Shoulders, Mercedes, Harley-Davidson, Gucci, Hugo Boss, Calvin Klein, Nike, Reebok, Diesel, Sprite, Tuborg, Absolut, Ray-Ban and Kalashnikov. It is true that these are not always depicted positively: in one of the advertisements he replaces Sony with Panasonic easily because his idea can be better sold to that client this way. He also creates slogans for Tampax such as "days of crisis – blood could flow – Tampax – your shield against excesses" or "Tempex ultra-safe. The reds shall not pass!" referring to the Russian political situation.

Novels, just like movies, sometimes feature brands first mentioned by the writers, who contact the companies later on with an offer of cooperation. John E. Mayer's *Shadow Warrior*, for example, has the New York Grand Hyatt as a main character. The writer first called the hotel almost fearfully to ask if the book launch could be held there, and was rather surprised to see what a big party Hyatt had organized, starring well-known celebs (Lehu, 2009).

Based on the information above it is no wonder that PQ Media, a research company specialised in product placement, estimated the amount paid for brand placements in books in the middle of the 2000s to 26.6 million US dollars a year (Lehu, 2009).

#### 4. Brands in fine arts

Some people say that product placement in fine arts is several hundred years old, as famous painters used to depict their patrons and clients within their works; for example, in victorious battle scenes.

The first real brand placement example is more probably *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* painted by Édouard Manet in 1881–82. The audience usually finds joy in the beauty of the bartender lady, but bottles are much more interesting from a marketing aspect because their trademark appears several times in a clearly visible way. It is Bass beer with its peculiar red triangle logo facing us.

Although Toulouse-Lautrec's posters are closer to advertisements, they are on display in art galleries, therefore they can also be regarded as examples of brand placement. Andy Warhol created a famous series for Campbell's Soup Cans in pop-art style, and also designed packaging for the Brillo brand (Papp-Váry, 2012a).

Nowadays many brands support art exhibitions, although few of them request to be included in art pieces. Red Bull is one of the rare examples: in the creative contests of the brand, participants must produce something creative from cans of the energy drink.

The intertwining of art and consumerism is a worldwide trend, so it is certain that we will see several new solutions similar to the ones listed above.

#### 5. Summary

As we can see from the numerous examples mentioned in this study, product placement is not at all a new genre of marketing communications.

The Lumiere brothers came up with a two-minute film with half of it being product placement as early as 1896. Moreover, the book *Advertising by Motion Pictures* written by Ernest A. Dench was published in 1916. And let us not forget that according to most sources the classic 30-second advertising spot appeared only in 1941.

But, as this study proved, the genre of product placement is even older than films. We can find examples of its use in literature: e.g. in *Eugene Onegin* by Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin, written in 1829, or the novels of Jules Verne.

Fine arts are no exception either. The painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* created by Édouard Manet in 1881–82 features the popular Bass beer with its peculiar red triangle logo, and several decades later the cooperation of Andy Warhol and Campbell's Soup Cans also attracted a great deal of attention.

This all means that brands have been present in cinematography, literature and fine arts for a long time, and they will probably stay with us for long. It is clear that the examination of this field is an interdisciplinary challenge – it is not only an artistic issue, but also requires the involvement of sciences such as history, and, of course, marketing.

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