2023-10-21

Effects of product placement on consumer preference

Effects of Product Placement on Consumer Preference

Dylan Chow, Yennie Lee, Ciarra Mejia, Jennifer Ramirez, Maria Yussef, Alisa Zhen, Diane Mello-Goldner, Ph.D.
Boston University

Abstract

In a country run on capitalistic venture and revenue, it is nearly impossible to avoid advertisements. But what about more subliminal advertising? Researchers tested 76 participants who watched either a video with a placed product or one without. Researchers hypothesized that products placed in the video would be preferred over products that were not featured in the video. No difference was found in product preference based on whether the participants had been exposed to the product or not. Further, researchers found that consumers preferred the name brand products to the generic products even after being exposed to the generic product in the videos. The results of the study can be further used to explore different advertising tactics and can further inform marketing strategies.

Introduction

Product placement is a technique used in advertising where specific brands of products are shown in a video "without….giving the impression of watching a commercial" (Ruggieri & Boca, 2013). This experiment aimed to determine whether implicit product placement subconsciously impacts consumers' desire to purchase a placed product. It was expected that participants exposed to the video with a placed brand will prefer that brand when shown a picture of it next to a picture of another unplaced brand.

Method

Participants

There were 76 total participants: 37 students from a psychology class at Boston and 39 participants recruited by research members. Of the 76, 65 were females and 11 males.

Materials

Participants were randomly shown one of two videos. Both videos displayed two individuals discussing the controversial topic of abortion. One video contained the product designed by the researchers, while the other video did not contain this product.

Procedure

Participants received a survey link and were instructed to watch a video and count the number of filler words used by the characters in the video. Participants watched one of two videos: one with product placement or one without. After watching the video, participants were directed to a questionnaire about the video containing questions about the behaviors and opinions of the characters as well as questions about the participants' preference for specific products, including the product the researchers designed.

Results

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between product exposure and preference. No difference was found in preference based on whether the participant had been exposed to the product or not, $\chi 2(1) = 0.16$, $p = 0.688$ (see Table 1 for percentages).

Table 1
Preference Percentage by Exposure

	Exposure to Product	
Preferred Product	**Not exposed**	**Exposed**
Placed product	**29.17%**	**25.53%**
Non-placed product	**70.83%**	**76.47%**

Note. The first 35 participants' responses were disregarded because the researchers could not determine which video they watched; the results were based on the remaining 41 participants (17 were exposed to the placed product and 24 were not).

Regardless of exposure, participants preferred the non-placed product over the placed product, $\chi 2(1) = 8.81$, $p = 0.003$ (see Table 2 for percentages).

Table 2
Overall Preference Percentages

Preferred Product	Preference Percentage
Placed product	**26.83%**
Non-placed product	**73.17%**

Participants selected the name brand "Utz" popcorn more often than the generic popcorn "Angie's Boom Chicka Pop", $\chi 2(1) = 13.47$, $p < 0.001$. For the soda, participants selected the name brand soda more often than the generic soda, $\chi 2(1) = 72.05$, $p < 0.001$ (see Table 3 for percentages).

Table 3
Percentages for Soda and Popcorn by Brand

	Product	
Preference	**Soda**	**Popcorn**
Name brand product	**99%**	**71%**
Generic product	**1%**	**29%**

Discussion

Related to Hypothesis

The hypothesis was not supported by the results of the study. While the researchers hypothesized that participants would prefer placed products in the video over non placed products, no significant difference was found in this preference. The results may have been due to several confounding variables:

- When the researchers initially sent out the survey, it was discovered that there was no way to know which video the participant viewed. The researchers quickly fixed this by pausing responses and adding two questions in the survey to track which video the participant watched. The first 35 responses were deleted; the statistical tests were based on the remaining 41 participants.
- Participants also had their own views about abortion that could have influenced their decision making. The male actor who interacted with the product was against abortion in the video. This may have affected results, causing fewer people to choose the placed product.
- Certain colors could also encourage or discourage people from purchasing products. Since the colors from the created placed product were not bright, this could have impacted results. Additionally, the liquid inside the bottle of the product was almost a grey color that could have discouraged participants to choose this product, rather than the product with bright colors and clear liquid.

Limitations

- Each video was only three minutes long, and the actor only interacted with the placed product for a short period of time.
- While researchers tried to make the videos similar, there were slight differences between the two such as the placement of products and the actors not reciting the exact same lines.
- The discrepancy in the choice of popcorn could have been unrelated to brand preference because the two brands were not the same flavor (Utz butter popcorn vs Boom Chicka Pop sea salt popcorn).
- Participants could have also predisposed preferences for certain products. So rather than choosing what they were exposed to, they could have chosen the product that they already decided they favored.

Practical Applications

This study's findings can be used for business sales and marketing. This study revealed that the design of a product, in terms of color and layout, are essential in influencing a consumer's decision to purchase a product. Businesses that want to successfully sell their products would benefit from advertising using specific colors, having a well-known or attractive actor promoting their product, and refrain from having a distracting main topic in the advertisement. Using subtle sales tactics such as product placement, can unconsciously persuade consumers' attitudes towards brands, effectively increasing their purchase intention.