Product Placement in the Marketing Communications System

Maryana Kohut

Candidate of Economic Sciences,
Associate Professor Department of International Economic
Relations and Marketing,
Lviv National Environmental University, Ukraine
E-mail: maryana.kohut1990@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8275-134X

Abstract. The article outlines the essence and main tasks of product placement in the marketing communications system. Various types and channels of distribution of product placement have been studied, analyzing their effectiveness and appropriateness in different media contexts. The communicative characteristics of product placement as an effective tool in modern marketing communications are characterized. The dynamics of changes in the audience's perception of traditional advertising and the role of product placement as a more delicate method of integrating brands into media content are considered. The article also highlights the diversity of product placement target audiences, covering different age groups, socio-economic categories and specific interests. It describes how behavioral and psychographic characteristics of the audience, including lifestyle and personal values, affect the effectiveness of product placement. Considerable attention is paid to the emotional interaction between the audience and the brand, which can strengthen the relationship and influence purchase decisions. Specific examples are provided to illustrate how product placement can be targeted at specific target audiences based on their unique characteristics and preferences, from youth brands in popular movies to high-end cars in dramas or business series. Thus, the article provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of product placement on modern marketing strategies and its role in forming long-term relationships with consumers who appreciate brand authenticity and values. The article analyzes the concept of marketing alliances, which is critical to the success of product placement, with an emphasis on short-term tactical agreements between corporate marketers and media content creators. The main idea is to exchange advertising resources for mutually reinforcing influence on target audiences. The article examines examples of successful partnerships. The article emphasizes that the success of product placement largely depends on the fine fit between the content, the product and the strategic goals of the brand, as well as on the ability of marketers to find the right points of collision between commercial interests and creative content.

Keywords: product placement, marketing communications strategy, brand integration, native advertising, media platforms.
JEL Classification: M31, M37, M39

1 Introduction

The main task of products and brands is to differentiate them among competitors. In the conditions of modern competition, marketers and researchers are constantly looking for new ways of differentiation. Traditional methods of marketing communications are no longer as effective in attracting the attention of consumers, but television remains an important channel for attracting audiences. Although product placement is an old strategy, just like television, it continues to be actively studied and applied in marketing practice. This approach allows you to integrate brands into content, effectively interacting with consumers.

Due to oversaturation of the information space, the effectiveness of advertising drops significantly. Consumers targeted by an ad can easily change the channel or mute the sound while it is being broadcast. In the conditions of continuous expansion of the number of brands and trademarks, sellers are forced to look for new methods of attracting the attention of consumers and resort to various marketing tools. Traditional methods of advertising, which directly call for the purchase of a product, are losing their relevance.

Marketers today face the challenge of communicating with media consumers who, thanks to technology, can choose how and when to watch

content while avoiding unwanted advertising. This forces advertisers to implement new strategies such as integrated "product placement" as an element of marketing communications. Such methods should be unobtrusive but effective and should maintain lasting positive associations with the brand (Mackay, Ewing, Newton and Windisch, 2009).

In view of this, the main task of the market of communication services is to achieve a deep understanding of the needs and preferences of consumers, going beyond the boundaries of direct commercial messages. It becomes important to use critical thinking, because consumers in the age of information overload quickly react to manipulation and can reject a brand that uses false or aggressive advertising. Consumers need to be offered information in such a way that they have the opportunity to independently evaluate and make a decision, which contributes to the formation of a positive attitude towards the brand without direct calls to purchase.

2 The essence and task of product placement in the marketing communications system

The term "product placement" in translation from English. The main purpose of this placement is not simply to demonstrate or describe the product, but to make the product subconsciously associated with the characters or storylines of the work of art (Romat, E.V., & Mykalo, O.I., 2015).

Product placement is a marketing communication method designed to improve the image of a specific product among a selected target group by eliciting a positive image from positive aspects of selected media such as movies, television series, commercials, theatrical performances, video games, and even school textbooks (Al-Kadi, T., 2013).

This approach aims to fit the product into the plot in such a way that it is perceived as an organic part of the reality being demonstrated. This approach increases brand recognition and stimulates sales.

Product placement is a form of indirect advertising that involves showcasing products, services or brands in various media contexts. This method can be traced back to the 1970s in the US, when after the ban on tobacco advertising, marketers began paying actors to smoke certain brands of cigarettes in movies. This was done so that smoking was associated with positive images: strong and expressive men.

Product placement, on the one hand, opens up new opportunities for brands to integrate into popular content, but on the other hand, raises the issue of ethics in advertising. It is important to be transparent about the advertising nature of the content, as well as to avoid misleading the consumer. Particularly strict requirements apply to product placement in content aimed at children, where the possibility of influencing the unformed consciousness is high. In addition, it is prohibited to advertise products that may harm health, such as alcohol or tobacco products, in contexts that may be associated with attractiveness or positive characteristics. Ethical norms of product placement require from companies and marketers not only a legal, but also a morally responsible approach to the selection of content and the way of its presentation.

Product placement is a popular marketing strategy, but its success depends on certain factors. Among them, it is worth noting the quality of the product, the context of the product's use in the media, and the attitude of the audience, which may contain their awareness and perception of the product. The effectiveness of this strategy can also be enhanced by choosing the right moment to introduce the product and its relevance to the story or content in which it appears, which helps create a more natural and engaging experience for the consumer (Polinkevich O. M., 2018).

Product placement legislation varies by country and media environment. In the European Union and the United States, there are regulations that oblige viewers to be informed about the presence of product placement through special symbols on the screen or mentions in the program description. In children's programs, product placement is prohibited, as well as advertising of tobacco, alcohol, drugs and gambling. Product integration should not be intrusive or induce a purchase.

In the United States, product placement is regulated by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), which issues detailed guidelines. In the EU, the regulation corresponds to Directive 2007/65EC, in particular Article 17a section 2, which requires programs with product placement to be marked with special symbols at the beginning, end and after commercial breaks. Sponsorship information should also be clearly indicated (European Union, 2007).

Ethical and honest product placement is critical. Details should be clearly defined in agreements between all stakeholders, including content creators and brand owners. Failure to follow the rules may lead to legal consequences. Such consequences can include fines, requests to remove content, and may also have a negative impact on the brand's reputation. It is also important to ensure that product placement does not interfere with the overall quality of the content and the audience's perception of it.

3 Types and distribution channels of product placement

Product placement can be divided into several different types depending on the context and the way the product is presented. Each of these types has strengths and weaknesses, and the best results can be achieved by combining them in a way that suits the story and the target audience. The final choice of type depends on many factors, such as the type of product, the environment in which it will be placed, and the target audience. The main types of product placement are:

1. *Visual placement* – in this case, the product or brand logo appears visually on the background or in the hands of the characters. It is not the main element of the scene, but it is prominent enough for the audience to notice it.

2. *Verbal placement* – the product is mentioned in the dialogue between the characters. It can be subtle, like "Would you like a Coke?", or more direct, like "I like to drink Coke."

3. *Use of the product in action* – the work is an integral element of the plot. For example, if a character uses a certain model of smartphone to solve a puzzle, we are talking about using the product in action.

4. *The product as a character* – less often, but sometimes the product becomes a real character in the plot.

5. *Cultural placement* – a product or brand is presented in a cultural context, usually through music, language, clothing, etc. It is more subtle and aims to associate the product with a certain culture or lifestyle.

6. *Advertising in advertising* – the characters of a film or TV series watch an advertisement for a product. It is a form of product placement that refers to metacommunication and can be used to evoke irony or humor.

7. *Product placement in music videos* is a relatively new and rapidly growing field. Music videos often have a huge reach, especially on websites like YouTube. They are a great platform to promote a variety of products, from clothing to beverages to electronics. Because music videos are shorter and usually less narrative, product placement can be more direct and obvious.

8. *Product placement in a computer game* is a relatively new phenomenon, but it is gaining more and more popularity. The possibilities of interaction and immersion, characteristic of this environment, are especially used. For example, players can use specific brands of cars in racing games or drink energy drinks to restore health in action games. The virtual environment allows for very creative forms of placement, and the interactivity of games makes players more involved, potentially increasing the effectiveness of this type of advertising (Hudson S. & Hudson D., 2006).

It is also worth mentioning product placement depending on the type of media. In this case, product placement is most common in movies, television, music videos, and video games. In movies, product placement is one of the most well-known and used methods of promotion. This could be subtly placing a brand in the background of a scene, using a product by one of the characters, or even building a plot element around a particular product. Its effectiveness depends on the naturalness of the introduction to the plot and the appropriateness of the context of the film. Examples include the use of the Apple brand in various films or James Bond driving an Aston Martin (Lee M., & Faber R., 2007).

On television, product placement often appears in soap operas, entertainment programs, and even news. If in movies it can be called a one-time event, then in series you can build a long-term relationship with the viewer, which can increase the effectiveness of placement. However, legal regulations can be a limitation.

4 Communicative characteristics of product placement

Product placement is becoming increasingly popular as a marketing communications strategy because it offers a number of benefits for increasing brand awareness and popularity. The main idea is not only to simply place the product in popular content, but to integrate it naturally into the plot. This method allows you to associate the product with your favorite characters and moments, thereby strengthening the positive perception of the brand. This method contributes not only to increasing recognition, but also affects the behavior of consumers, motivating them to buy thanks to an emotional connection. In addition, product placement is effective in positioning the brand, showing it in the context of sophistication, innovation or reliability, which is especially important for international expansion. Additionally, this strategy fosters a mutually beneficial partnership between brands and media content creators, ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship.

Product placement is a unique marketing tool used to organically integrate brands, products or services into various types of media content. This strategy provides a number of communicative characteristics that distinguish it from traditional forms of advertising. Let's consider some of the key communicative characteristics of product placement in Table 1 (Romat E.V., & Mykalo O.I., 2015).

Table 1 Communicative characteristics of product placement

Characteristic	Essence
Unobtrusiveness	Product placement allows you to advertise products or brands without direct advertising aggression. It looks natural in the context of the plot of a movie, series, video game or other media product, which reduces advertising resistance of the audience.
Emotional involvement	Through organic integration into the story, products can be associated with positive emotions caused by the content, which contributes to a better perception and memory of the brand.
Increasing brand awareness	Product placement can significantly increase brand awareness through its visibility in popular and widely discussed media. Relevant content can help a brand become more recognizable.
Target audience	Product placement allows you to precisely target specific audience segments, especially when a brand is associated with content consumed by a specific demographic.
Repeat interaction	Brand engagement through product placement can drive repeat viewings or continued discussion among viewers, resulting in lasting brand engagement.
Authenticity	Introducing a product into realistic situations in the media can help increase the perception of its authenticity. Consumers who see the actual use of a product in context may perceive that product as more reliable and valuable.
Differentiation	Using product placement can help a brand differentiate itself from competitors who use more traditional advertising strategies.

Source: compiled by the authors based on Romat E.V., & Mykalo O.I., 2015

Thanks to these characteristics, product placement is a powerful tool in the modern marketing arsenal, capable of creating deep and meaningful connections between brands and their target audience.

5 Audience product placement

The audience is becoming increasingly critical of traditional advertising, considering it often too intrusive. In this context, product placement is a more delicate method of integrating brands into content, making them look more natural and less intrusive. Brands focus on strategic product placement deals that align with content and target audience, enhancing authenticity and deepening engagement with viewers.

In today's world, consumers are increasingly looking for brands that reflect their personal values. Product placement can be used to demonstrate a brand's commitment to environmentally friendly production methods or socially responsible initiatives. This not only improves the brand image, but also resonates with a growing number of consumers who value environmental and social responsibility. Such actions contribute to the creation of a positive brand reputation and the maintenance of long-term relations with the target audience, which increasingly strives for sustainability in its consumption.

The audience of product placement can be quite diverse depending on the context in which the product or brand is placed. Depending on the product, product placement may target specific age groups, genders, socioeconomic statuses, or interests. It is also important to take into account behavioral and psychographic characteristics, such as the lifestyle and values of the audience, which allows for a more emotional perception and connection with the brand. This can enhance emotional returns and influence purchase decisions. Product placement is often designed to evoke certain emotions or associations, so it is important that the audience reacts emotionally to the content. For example, a brand may appear more attractive if it is associated with a favorite character from a movie or TV series (Romat E.V., & Mykalo O.I., 2015).

It is worth considering several examples of typical target audiences for product placement in Table 2.

These examples show how product placement can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the context and target audience. Understanding these target audiences helps marketers and brands more effectively plan and execute product placement strategies to maximize exposure to the right consumers.

6 Examples of product placement

In addition to integrated marketing communications, it is important to consider the concept of marketing alliances (the theory of advertising cooperation). This theory is key to effective product placement and achieving maximum results. It is important to understand that "alliance" here does not refer to long-term strategic partnerships between businesses, but rather

Table 2 Target audiences of product placement

Audience	Characteristic	Examples
Young	Popular movies, TV shows, video games, and online content are often targeted, especially if the products are related to fashion, technology, sports, or entertainment.	Use of youth brands of clothing or accessories in popular youth films or series, such as Converse, Vans, Nike, Adidas. Integrating brands like Red Bull or Monster Energy into sports and action games where they can be associated with energy and activity.
Adults	High-end or luxury goods, such as expensive cars, watches, and high-quality clothing, are often promoted through movies or television shows that target an affluent audience.	The use of high-end car brands such as Mercedes-Benz, BMW or Audi in dramas or spy films where they are associated with luxury and status.
Families	Products aimed at families, such as cars, appliances, food or entertainment services, may be featured in family films, shows or children's programmes.	Integrating home appliance brands like Whirlpool or Samsung into kitchen scenes in family movies or TV shows.
Professionals and business audience	Luxury goods, professional equipment, electronics or services that target business consumers may be included in content that reflects a professional environment or business theme.	The use of business suits, such as Hugo Boss and other famous brands, in series and films that depict business meetings or office environments. Placement of professional equipment and tools in presentations aimed at business audiences (Apple, HP).
Fans of a specific genre	For example, fans of sci-fi or adventure movies can be a target audience for product placement of products that fit those genres, such as specialized gear, clothing, or technology.	Integrating sports equipment and clothing into adventure or travel films and series (Columbia).
Supporters of a healthy lifestyle	Products that promote a healthy lifestyle, such as organic foods, fitness trackers, or sports equipment, can be featured in health and fitness-oriented content.	Placement of sportswear, fitness bracelets or health products in fitness videos or health reality shows (Reebok, Puma, Nike).

Source: compiled by the authors based on Romat E.V., & Mykalo O.I., 2015

indicates short-term, tactical agreements with clearly defined frameworks. Such a promotional alliance is usually temporary and is aimed at a specific advertising campaign.

The basis of effective product placement is the creation of an advertising alliance, which involves cooperation between the corporate marketer of the product and the creator of advertising content (film producer). Through this interaction, both parties exchange advertising resources. This allows you to unite target audiences and increase each other's influence. As a result, in product placement, as in any form of cooperation, both parties must strive for "tactical fit" to achieve the desired results, as illustrated in Fig. 3 below.

The partnership between Aston Martin and James Bond is a model of product placement, demonstrating a mutually beneficial relationship that spans over fifty years. The elegant Aston Martin cars have been a key part of the James Bond franchise since their appearance in the 1964 film Goldfinger. This long-term collaboration emphasizes the luxurious image of the brand and the sophistication of the secret agent. As a result of this association, Aston Martin strengthened its recognition on a global level, and the legendary DB5 gained the status of one of the most iconic film cars, inspiring the release of limited editions and replicas (Gould S.J., Gupta P.B., & Grabner-Kräuter S., 2000).

Apple's partnership with the Mission: Impossible franchise has become a model of strategic product placement in technology. Tom Cruise's character, Ethan Hunt, often uses Apple products such as iPhones and MacBooks. This placement characterizes Apple products as effective tools for solving complex tasks, associating them with sustainability and innovation. The effectiveness of this product placement is practical: Apple products are presented as reliable, easy-to-use, and high-performance tools perfectly suited to the character's dynamic world.
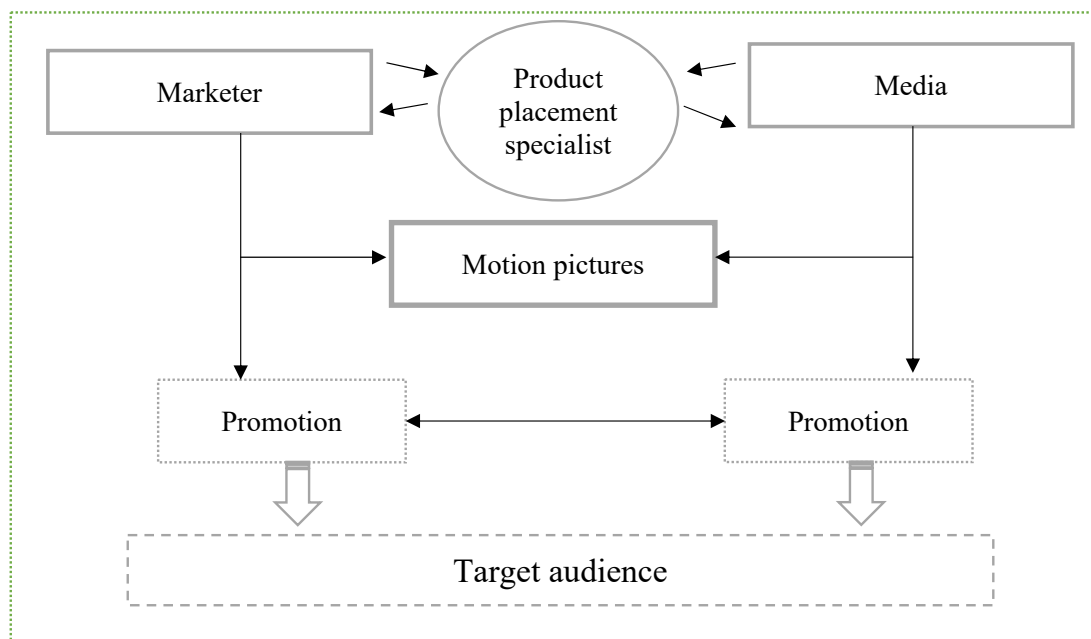
Figure 1 Product placement process

In the Netflix series "Emily in Paris", the constant presence of Starbucks caused an active discussion and became a trend on social networks. The main character, Emily, an American marketer working in Paris, often orders an iced coffee from Starbucks, which contrasts with traditional Parisian drinks like espresso or latte.

However, the product placement in the series went further than a simple demonstration of the logo. It stimulated discussion of cultural differences, international travel experiences, and personal preferences in coffee choices. These conversations deepened audience engagement and embodied Starbucks' association with the youthful, cosmopolitan and stylish vibe that young audiences value.

The film "Iron Man" not only launched the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but also became a model for innovative product placement with Audi. The Audi R8 doesn't just appear in the film, but actually appears as one of the characters alongside Tony Stark. The use of computer graphics to recreate this car emphasized its futuristic design, perfectly complementing the technological atmosphere of the film.

Audi R8 organically fit into the visual world of "Iron Man", appearing on the screen together with real cars. Such appearances were calculated to ensure maximum impact, but at the same time not to distract the viewer. The presence of the Audi R8 gained special importance in key scenes, for example, during the public debut of Tony Stark

as Iron Man, demonstrating a strategic approach to product placement (15 Movies With Excessive Product Placement, 2023).

7 Conclusions

Product placement in popular media content opens up access to a wide target audience, which can significantly increase brand awareness and popularity. This approach is particularly effective for new brands or those seeking to expand their presence in new markets. In addition to increasing awareness, product placement can also contribute to positive brand perception when associations with favorite characters or stories build trust and loyalty among consumers. Therefore, it not only increases brand awareness, but can also increase sales through the emotional involvement of an audience that feels connected to the brand through the context of its media use.

Product placement is becoming increasingly popular as a marketing communications strategy with significant potential to engage audiences that are increasingly selective in their advertising consumption. The philosophy, which can be expressed as "advertising should be invisible, but memorable", responds to the needs of marketers in a balanced approach to communication with customers. Product placement creates a valuable and affordable platform for promoting brands. At the same time, it gives consumers the opportunity to freely choose to accept or ignore an advertising message without feeling pressured.

It allows marketers to communicate delicately and advertise effectively, while providing a good return on investment and a significant increase in brand awareness.

When a product is integrated into a TV show or movie, viewers tend to continue watching their favorite programs and become part of the integrated advertising audience. They often believe that products or services integrated into media content or endorsed by celebrities have a higher value compared to those advertised in other forms of media. However, there are persistent criticisms regarding the ethics of product placement, risks of uncontrolled influence and possible negative associations that may arise as a result of such placement.

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