

PRODUCT PLACEMENT AS A FORM OF ADVERTAINMENT

I. B. CHIŢU¹ A. S. TECĂU¹

Abstract: *Nowadays, one of the big issues advertisers on television face is the consumer's (viewer's) ability to "zap" advertisements, as the public is increasingly tired of commercials. Advertainment is a form of communication that combines the elements of advertising and entertainment and is designed to overcome the tendency, especially among television viewers, to change channels or mute the audio during standard advertising commercials. This paper tries to give a brief overview of a method that belongs to advertainment, product placement, and how it is used by companies.*

Key words: *traditional media, advertainment, product placement.*

1. Introduction

Advertainment represents the merge of entertainment programming with brand messaging, direct promotions and public relations.

In many cases, making movies would be impossible without product placement contracts between companies and movies producers. Product placement involves the sponsor's product being used during the programme and being deliberately shown to the audience. Inscript sponsoring is a specific form of product placement. [5]

2. Literature Review

As traditional media have become more and more expensive and audiences more and more fragmented, many advertisers now seek new ways to reach their customers. Several types of alternative media, like videotapes, cinema advertising, and product placement, are potential viable options. [1] *Regarding videotapes*, advertisements are

placed on the videocassette boxes, on movie video; a third type of video advertising is the video brochure, which advertisers produce and mail to customers and prospects. *Cinema advertising* is a growing but controversial practice, but studies shows that 77% (the case of USA) of viewers recall theatre ads the following day, compared to 20% for TV ads. Some movies theatre chains prohibit filmed advertising for fear of offending their audience, for instance, Walt Disney Studios no longer allow US theatres to run commercial before any of its movies. *Product placement* is another way to reach movie audiences (producers pay a fee to have their products in the movies). Increasingly, product placement in the multibillion-dollar movie industry has become an important advertising medium. [1, 5] By getting their brands appear in movies, companies benefit from the association with top films and big-name actors. Products can also be placed on TV shows, on the Internet and in computers games. [5]

¹ Department of Marketing, Tourism and International Relations, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

3. Product Placement in Romania

The Code of Advertising Practice drawn up in accordance with the article 21 of Law no. 148/2000 related to advertising by the Romanian Advertising Council (independent self-regulatory body, founded in order to support the advertising industry within the relations with the Romanian authorities and consumers), has been conceived in order to use the Romanian advertising field to correctly, honestly and decently inform the public opinion, complying with the national laws and with the advertising and commercial communication practice principles internationally recognized both in form and content, formulated by the International Chamber of Commerce.

Within this code, the article 25 stipulates a series of regulations related to product placement, respectively: Article 25.1 – The practice of product placement recognizes and accepts the following methods of using products: background, handling (actors touch the product), implicit exposure (actors use the product), wardrobe (actors wear the product), verbalizing (actors mention the product), verbalizing and handling (actors mention and touch the product); article 25.2 – The verbalization does not include references to brand or its identifiable features; article 25.3 – The total length of time used for the product placement within independent television productions may not exceed 2 minutes out of the 30 minutes of the show.

Product placement within movies, TV productions, video games, video clips and books may be cheaper and more efficient than a traditional advertisement, taking into consideration especially the fact that the audience is over-saturated with advertisements, in general, regardless of the way they are transmitted.

Product placement is an advertising technique which brings incomes of billions in the USA; within our country, it extended upon the launching of the first Romanian serials. The product placement practice began in Romania together with the first Big Brother production in 2003, and it seems to have achieved the highest extension 2 or 3 years ago thanks to the local productions developed by Pro TV and Intact groups. This technique is still used at a very low level comparatively to the whole TV market and significantly fluctuates according to the degree of advertisers' interest for the respective productions.

With international experience, the Coca Cola Company was among the first companies which used such a form of promotion in Romania. Beside the product presentation, the décor of the TV show under consideration included a red couch in the shape of the traditional Coke wave. [2]

The "Numai Iubirea" soap opera was been the first serial where the technique of product placement was used by companies such as Coca-Cola, Dove, Domestos and Knorr. The film production companies, Promance International for instance, developed even a sales department which dealt with product placement and selected the customers in accordance with the production's profile. The companies' representatives state that they usually select products which are guided to the general audience.

Within the "La bloc" serial, there are appearances of brands like Timișoreana (beer), Halls (drops) and Domo (home appliances supplier), while Skoda, Delma (margarine) and LG (home appliances) appeared in serials broadcasted by ProTV.

Product placement may be done either upon the producers' request, who select the TV productions according to their audience, or upon the film producers' selection of products manufactures

according to the specificity of the serial. The arrangements may take the form of barter agreements as well.

The product placement technique is used in Romania not only in television, but also in books. Thus, in 2008, "Gazeta Sporturilor" launched the volume "Inimi la Beijing", about the Olympic Games from the capital of China. The promoted product is the Fujitsu laptop used by the newspaper's journalists, which became a novel character.

Product placement may be done also within video games. For instance, in the "Crazy Taxi" video game, customers ask the player to take them in places like Pizza Hut or KFC. [2] According to an article published in "USA Today", product placement in video games has been used ever since the '80s, when Sega introduced advertising panels promoting Marlboro within its car racing games.

Media specialists [7] consider that it is very difficult to compare the costs of product placement with those of traditional advertising. The issue consists in the lack of a common unit of analysis, because it is very difficult to compare ten seconds where a favourite character consumes/uses a product with a ten seconds spot. Within the process of product placement, both the customer and the creation agency are much more involved, because, in fact, not only the audience is taken into consideration, but also the "message" communicated. For product placement, the measure unit is represented by the length of exposure and less by the audience. However, it is obvious that the audience and the quality of the show where a product is placed represent important variables taken into consideration when the decision of placement is made; otherwise, the "creative" effort does not reach the audience.

Just like any other message, the efficiency depends in the case of product placement also on the values that the

company succeeds to communicate, an extremely important role being held by the fact that it benefits from the show audience (and its emotional state). There are also methods of media evaluation, namely the audience of the respective moments, but they do not represent the main criterion. Last but not least, the evaluation comes from consumers' perception and their behaviour.

Consequently, a simplistic way to determine the effectiveness of a product placement project could be considered, according to specialists, the audience of the respective TV show. Nevertheless, such a project is often a part of a much more extensive communication program.

On a market significantly developed in the field of television production, product placement may be done in fact for most of the products, although those of consumer goods are on top.

The product placement practice represents a mixture of media placement and non-traditional advertising. Therefore, besides the audience and affinity to the respective show, the brand's value shall also be considered. Moreover, the points of intersection with the values induced/built by the respective TV show or star are also extremely important.

In the specialists' opinion, [3] the stages throughout which a product placement project is carried out are: establishing the brand and media indicators in order to determine the potential of the association; agreeing with the show producers' team upon the way of placement/integration of the respective brand; the project's implementation; the evaluation.

Regarding the product placement in Romanian films, it seems that, despite the international success registered lately by the Romanian cineastes, few brands have chosen such a form of promotion until now. Some specialists think that this situation is due to the films topics, which are not favourable for product placement,

i.e. hopeless situations, war's horrors, the companies' sordid decisions etc.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, taking into consideration the advantages offered by advertising in general, and especially by product placement, and also due to the continuously low public attention to the traditional forms of promotion, we consider that these non-conventional methods of promotion will be used more often by the promotional messages senders; the internal market of product placement is growing and it will continue to develop in a close relation with the local production capacities.

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