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THE POWER OF FILM:

PRODUCT PLACEMENTS AND THEIR EFFECT ON BUYER BEHAVIOR

BASED ON FILM GENRES

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Focusing on the use of product placements within films, this study’s purpose is to determine the recall capabilities of college students that are exposed to brands within films. In addition, the primary purpose of the study is to determine whether this recall is stronger based on the genre of film, specifically comparing comedy and horror.

Using focus groups, college students from the Rochester Institute of Technology were shown two separate clips, one from a comedy film and one from a horror film. After questioning these students, it was determined that the ability to recall brands was stronger within comedy rather than horror.
Introduction

Product placements have been strategically located within films for quite some time. The bigger the blockbuster the film, the more likely it is to be selling something more than just the actors and the story. However, several questions still float around and continue to bewilder people interested in the placement of products within films. Some of those questions include whether or not a product placement works, how the effectiveness can be measured and if it has ever backfired. If these questions bring back negative responses, then there is a good chance that the act of product placement may need to be handled in a different fashion. Many studies have been completed regarding this topic and a large portion of them has closed in on specific characteristics of the people being studied. What has yet to be answered is if a certain genre has a better chance of creating interest in a certain product more so than another genre. This question will be the central focus of this study. Other factors, of course, will be taken into consideration. In order to make any sort of profit off product placements, this strategy must be analyzed as a way to decode the information returned upon completion of this study.

Rationale

The act of placing products into films is a technique that has been around since the dawn of the medium. As the technology of film evolved, the methods of product placement followed as well. Knowing that this tactic has evolved over time makes one wonder as to whom this information influences the most. Homer (2009) explains, “product placement is no longer considered a novel marketing tactic; rather, it has now reached ‘celebrity status’ as a media form as advertisers seek more effective means of influencing consumers’ attitudes in today’s oversaturated and fragmented advertising/marketing environment” (p. 21). Because of this new
level of importance, product placements must be carefully analyzed and understood with a great deal of care.

One method of understanding product placements in films is to focus in on certain genres that audiences enjoy. By selecting genres that are viewed by a large number of individuals, the reach of the advertising technique is increased substantially. Park and Berger (2010) argue that an important motivation for watching films is the emotional experience they offer. They went on to state that television programs and films have devised a way of introducing powerful and enduring emotions and moods, which have been shown to influence viewer recognition and recall (Park & Berger, 2010). By connecting certain advertisements with specific genres of film, the audience will associate the emotions they feel while watching the movie with the products advertised. Naturally, the effectiveness of the placement itself is brought into question. It is for this reason that product placements within films must be analyzed—to fully comprehend if they are being properly implemented. This study has a direct impact on marketers and advertisers trying to reach out to a certain demographic.

Literature Review

After conducting a great deal of research, certain topics revolving around product placements were discovered to stand out more so than others. Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory held great importance regarding this particular topic. The psychological motives individuals have directly connect to how a product is placed within a film. To add to this, the history of product placements within films has been researched and discussed as a means of understanding where this tactic originated and how it has evolved over time. Finally, an audience for this study is set and analyzed in order to determine the favorite genre held by this
demographic. Since this research will focus on college students, the top two favorite genres for this target market have been researched and selected in order to determine whether one is more effective than the other.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

One major component applicable to this study is the social cognitive theory. The theory suggests that expectations, beliefs, cognitive competencies, and emotions within humans are modified and developed by influences on a social level (Bandura, 1989). These influences convey information and “activate emotional reactions through modeling, instruction, and social persuasion” (Bandura, 1986). This theory can be applied to a series of different topics for a series of different reasons. For this study, the social cognitive theory will be applied directly into the advertising technique of product placements. For the product placements that tend to stand out more within films, the theory itself is shown in action. For example, by seeing an attractive actor in a movie drive a brand new sports car, the audience will think, perhaps indirectly, that if they were to buy a sports car like the actor on screen, they too will become attractive. This feeling is heightened when the actor or actress portrays a wealthy individual who is happy. This is a very basic example and description of the social cognitive theory.

An actual example with a perfect connection to this theory can be found in the 1934 Academy Award winning film *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934). There is a specific scene in this film where Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert are sharing a room together in a hotel. At this time, this was very risqué because the two were not portraying a married couple. To make matters even more suggestive, Gable began to disrobe, preparing to go to sleep for the night. He unbuttoned his shirt and, in taking it off, revealed that he was not wearing an undershirt. Both women and men were impacted by this. Many women were, naturally, drawn
and attracted to Gable, a Hollywood icon. The men, on the other hand, were influenced by him. Because of this scene, sales of men’s undershirts plummeted drastically and never fully recovered (Segrave, 2004). Based on this, men were influenced by Clark Gable. They saw him on the silver screen, an attractive leading man with charm, and wanted to emulate him. If that meant getting rid of all of their undershirts, then so be it. This had a negative impact on the undershirt industry when it came to their financial situation, but it still stand as a perfect example of the social cognitive theory in action. Since people are influenced by what they are exposed to on a social level, it is dire that this theory is understood. By knowing this theory, one can begin to understand the importance it has when the field of advertising is called into question. To further understand the implication of product placements within films, it is important to know how this strategy has evolved simultaneously as the film industry itself.

**History of Early Film Advertising and Product Placements**

As stated earlier, product placements have been located within films for a long time. In fact, they have been present since the dawn of the medium as a whole. According to one account, product placements began in 1894 by the man who was the distributor of Dewar’s Scotch whiskey in America. Supposedly, as he walked down the streets of New York City, he saw a large group of men standing in line to get into a peep show, the big fad in the city. Upon seeing this, he thought to run a peep show that would advertise for Dewar’s Scotch Whiskey (Segrave, 2004). Films were made for Dewar’s Scotch Whiskey, along with Maillard’s Chocolates, Columbia Bicycles, Piel’s Beer, as well as Hunter’s Rye Whiskey. Between 1895 and 1896, these commercials experienced great success. However, this success led to their temporary fading. Since they were so popular, “crowds lined up on the sidewalks to get in and overflowed into the streets, creating a serious traffic problem” (Segrave, 2004). Because of this problem, the
city put a ban on this form of commercial film presentation, Narrative films had not yet been created, so the act of product placement as it is known today had not quite been developed, but was not far away.

As the film industry began to evolve, and the narrative storyline developed, product placements too transformed and changed to become more than advertisements. In the early 1910’s, the extremely famous Model T Fords made frequent appearances in the credits of Mack Sennett comedies (Lehu, 2007). The name of the brand was not placed in the films, but rather the products themselves. By doing this, the filmmakers were able to benefit from the vehicles and the free services provided by Ford themselves. Deals were made between studio representatives and carmakers to allow the studio to be equipped with their automobiles and, in return, they would feature the same cars in their films. Deals like these, which, of course, are not limited to the automobile industry, turned out to be true win/win scenarios for all of the parties involved.

According to Segrave, product placements can be defined as the deliberate insertion into the script of an entertainment film of a product, brand name, signage or verbal mention, among other things, for consideration (Segrave, 2004). Based on this definition, Hollywood began utilizing the strategic placing of products in films after noticing how effective it can be. In 1929, Will H. Hays, the head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) at the time, gave an address before the New York Board of Trade. In his address, he stated how according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, a $1 return in stimulated trade was received for every foot of film. On top of that, he noted that “trade follows the film” (Segrave, 2004), meaning film is very influential when it comes to trade. For example, in his address Hays mentioned how an automobile dealer in a Brazilian town reported that his sales of American made cars jumped from four or five cars per month to four or five cars per day based on motion
picture exposure. To sum it all up, Hays encouraged the idea of product placement when it comes to American products. In the end, the American economy would become prosperous if products made within the country were promoted. Around the same time, requests to studios as well as actors to endorse items like cigarettes and chewing gum reached an incredibly high level. These levels reached such great heights that some studios were declining to do deals with firms, big and small (Segrave, 2004).

As the film industry adapted more technology and made many advancements from its origins in the late 19th Century, so too did the advertising industry’s use of product placements within films. A majority of the changes made within product placements has occurred within the past 30 years. In the early 1980’s, a piece was written discussing the sudden surge of product placements. What makes this piece so important is that this could possibly be one of the first instances where the term “product placement” has been used (Segrave, 2004). The sudden increase has often been credited to Robert Kovoloff, founder and president of Associated Film Promotions. At the time of this boost, Kovoloff has stated that his company “succeeded in placing its clients’ products in eight out of every ten films” (Segrave, 2004). As the 1980’s moved forward, product placements were appearing in an extremely large number of films including, but certainly not limited to, Blade Runner with Coca-Cola (Ridley Scott, 1982), Risky Business with Ray Ban Sunglasses(Paul Brickman, 1983), and of course E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial with Reece’s Pieces (Steven Spielberg, 1982). What makes E.T. stand out more so than the others is the “phenomenal results attributed to the placement of the candy Reese’s Pieces in that movie” (Segrave, 2004). The use of this candy was incorporated seamlessly into the storyline of arguably one of Spielberg’s greatest films. The specific scene has even been cited as often as the shirtless Clark Gable scene mentioned earlier.
A great emphasis has been placed on product placements in the 1990’s and 2000’s. In the James Bond reboot of the 1990’s, the automobile company BMW made a deal with the producers of GoldenEye (Martin Campbell, 1995) to feature their new Z3 model. This proved to be very successful; Bond was seen driving BMW automobiles in the two sequels that followed later in the decade. The film industry even came up with creative ways to incorporate product placements, one of which can be found within the film Wayne’s World (Penelope Spheeris, 1992). This form of advertising has even proved to be a significant source of finance for a film. According to the Motion Picture Association of America, the average cost of producing a feature film for a major studio had climbed to $98 million in 2004. However, if you manage to make deals with the right companies, a producer can cut his cost down significantly. A perfect example can be found in another James Bond film, Die Another Day (Lee Tamahori, 2002). Somewhere between $120 million and $160 million was obtained from “the associated brands for the 20 or so placements surrounding Her Majesty’s favorite spy, in both placement fees and in advertising support on the film’s release” (Lehu, 2007).

Product Misplacement

Just because a brand appears on the silver screen and is used by famous or well-known entertainers, it is not guaranteed that its placement will be a success. Sometimes the placement can prove to be too large of a distraction and will take away from the quality of the film. According to Bill Gloede of Mediaweek, marketers feel that the traditional methods of advertising are no longer effective because of, “cost, commercial clutter and a large-scale abandonment of mainstream TV by the young” (Gloede, 2005). He also claims that this has resulted in a “frenzy” of product placements in films and TV shows, regardless of whether the placement fits well with the content. The example he gives is found in the 2005 remake of The
*Longest Yard*. In one scene, a convict pulls a McDonalds burger from his pants as a reward for a fellow football teammate. Although it may have generated a laugh in some viewers, it appears as a rather forced placement.

There are other times in films when a brand is intentionally portrayed in a negative light for the sake of the movie. Take the Ford Pinto, for example. Known primarily as a compact car that became an ongoing joke, the Pinto was discontinued in 1980 due to controversy revolving around its safety. The most common criticism attached to the vehicle dealt with the placement of the gas tank in the rear of the car, which, when involved in a rear-end collision, resulting in deadly fires from the fuel that was spilt. This design flaw would go on to be mocked in the 1984 film *Top Secret!*, in which another car lightly taps the back bumper, causing both automobiles to explode. The automobile was also shown as unreliable in the 1983 film adaptation of Stephen King’s *Cujo*. Although these are two prime examples, negative portrayals extend well beyond the auto industry.

When it comes to alcoholic beverages shown in films, a fine line is drawn that differentiates between positive portrayals and negative depictions. A recent example of how alcohol can cause a company uneasy feelings is found within the film *Flight* (Robert Zemeckis, 2012). Starring Denzel Washington as an alcoholic airline pilot, *Flight* tells the story of his character as he saves almost all aboard a flight that crashes en route to Atlanta. He wakes in the hospital only to find out that there were traces of alcohol and cocaine in his system. Throughout the film, Denzel consumes a great deal of alcohol, including Budweiser and Absolut Vodka. From a filmmaking perspective, showing the audience how much alcohol is consumed shows that this is a troubled character, indeed. From a brand’s perspective, it is not ideal to show that your product is the preferred drink of an alcoholic. Anheuser-Busch, the brewing company of
Budweiser, asked Paramount Pictures Corp. to remove its logo from the film. Understandably so; one scene in particular features Denzel Washington sipping on a Budweiser while behind the wheel of an automobile.

Despite the negative portrayal of the brand, there is little that can be done by Anheuser-Busch. According to Daniel Nazer, a resident fellow at Stanford Law School’s Fair Use Project, trademark laws “don’t exist to give companies the right to control and censor movies and TV shows that might happen to include real-world items” (McCartney, 2012). Nazer continued by saying that since filmmakers are paid by companies to include certain brands in their films, it leads people to believe that they will have control. “That’s not a right the trademark law gives them,” said Nazer. Despite pleas to have the Budweiser brand removed, the logo remained in the film. No legal action could have been taken since films are able to include brands for creative purposes and are protected under federal “fair use” laws.

It is thanks to these laws that films are able to creatively use certain brands, despite negative connotations. The film *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) uses this legal protection to comment on American consumerism at the end of 20th Century. In an early scene from the film, Edward Norton’s unnamed character comments on his lifestyle, while graphics appear that pinpoint his many possessions purchased from IKEA, almost as if the audience is flipping through a catalogue. The film contains a series of messages and dialogue focused on consumerism and the value system of advertising. Including the IKEA brand helps convey the themes of the film, but is certainly not intended to sell more IKEA products.

**Realism in Films**
From a filmmaking perspective, including certain products within a film may not necessarily be intended to sell said product. According to van der Waldt, Du Toit, and Redelinghuys, “the use of generic products in a film can draw attention away from the film’s message” (2007). In other words, using a made-up or generic product can give the film a fake vibe that viewers assess as unrealistic. By using real branded products, the audience is able to form a strong connection with and further relate to the character on screen. A certain realism is evoked that places the character on screen into a world that is not manufactured in Hollywood, but rather found in the homes of the viewers. To emphasize the realistic qualities found in the film, using specific brands and products can strengthen a character’s background and make them even more believable and relatable.

Elements of product placements have grown to become more than just the selling of a product. Filmmakers and producers often seek out, or “cast”, specific products to be featured within their films. According to Tony Hoffman, former director of product placements for Walt Disney Productions, “Placing consumer products in a film lends a more natural environment. Generic products can look very silly on the screen and undermine the aura of authenticity” (Gluckson, 1985). By being selective and choosing the right brands, a more realistic environment is evoked. An excellent example can be found in the film Cast Away (Robert Zemeckis, 2000). The main character, portrayed by Academy Award-winning actor Tom Hanks, is a systems engineer for Federal Express. The character emphasizes the vitality of time and how important it is to stay on schedule. Seeing as FedEx shares this ideology, the brand is a perfect fit for the story. When the main character finds himself stranded on an uninhabited island in the Pacific Ocean, the theme of time that he set earlier in the film comes back in a major way. This
strengthens the connection between the brand and the film, allowing for viewers to embrace the realism found within the story.

Going back to alcoholic beverages, a classic scene in David Lynch’s 1986 Blue Velvet makes a specific reference to two separate brands of beer; Heineken and Pabst Blue Ribbon. With the former being consumed by the film’s callow hero and the latter being the drink of choice by the psychopathic antagonist, it is tempting to refer to this scene as product misplacement, but since it is a signature scene in the movie, it owes itself to realism. According to an article from the A.V. Club, these separate brands are, “smart pieces of characterization, helping to establish the distance between the characters” (Adams, Cruickshank, Dyess-Nugent, Handlen, Keller, Robinson, Semley, and Tobias, 2013). Heineken represents a sense of security and sophistication, explaining why it is the drink of choice of the innocent hero, portrayed by Kyle MacLachlan, Pabst Blue Ribbon represents the opposite; it is cheap, drink to get drunk beer. Being the preferred beer of Dennis Hopper’s vicious psychopath, Pabst Blue Ribbon matches with what we know about the character. The film isn’t trying to sell any brands; it’s trying to build these characters into realistic people. These separate brands help it do just that.

Occasionally, films will specifically call out product placements to add commentary at what has become of this marketing practice. Usually used in a comedic environment, jokes about product placements have been made that show certain brands in a humorous light while also mocking this strategy. Most notably, the Mike Myers comedy Wayne’s World (Penelope Spheeris, 1992) mocked the practice by having the main characters claim that they refuse to “bow down” to corporate sponsors, all while enjoying products from brands including Pepsi, Doritos, and Pizza Hut. Another example can be found in the 1998 film The Truman Show (Peter Weir) starring Jim Carrey. The film tells the story of Truman Burbank (Carrey) and how his
entire life, aside from his reactions and mannerisms, is fake and aired on global television, unbeknownst to him. Several scenes feature characters mentioning products and describing just how great they are. Although they are not real products, their presence not only adds to the fabricated feeling his environment conveys, but they also detail how product placements can be used ineffectively, to the point that Truman notices that something is wrong.

The Preference of College Students

All of this information presented thus far is incredibly important, as a whole and individually. Product placements have proven to be both successful and unsuccessful in separate occasions. For the sake of this study, it was decided that college students would be studied in order to obtain results that can be used for further research as well as the factor of convenience. A major source for this study is found within the 2010 study “Understanding Attitudes Toward and Behaviors in Response to Product Placement” by Federico de Gregorio and Yongjun Sung. In this study they proposed the research questions that studied both attitudes and behaviors towards product placements, Several variables were studied which included gender, ethnicity, age, education and income. When it came to behavior, males were more likely to engage in behaviors, or actually make an effort, to purchase products shown. For ethnicity, African-Americans showed higher results for behavior, as did younger individuals between the ages of 19 and 25, and people of lower income (less than $15,000) per year. The only variable that obtained no solid response regarding behaviors toward product placement was that of education. This study was conducted in a fashion that was very appealing and sparked an interested within the author of this specific study to complete more research. Upon researching college students and their feelings toward film, another study was discovered that featured a list of favorite movie genres among college students. In the top five genres on this list were Comedy films and Horror
films (“Horror isn’t just,” 2011). Based on this, an idea was born for the present study. The research questions that are proposed for this study focus on how college students digest and decipher product placements within certain genres.

**Research Questions**

Gathering research is certainly a difficult task without having a set idea of what you intend to find or without having several questions you intend to answer. While researching product placements within comedy and horror films and its impact on college students, one can devise questions revolving around the topic area in attempts to come to some form of a conclusion. The questions must be crafted in a unique way so that marketers and advertisers will be able to use the research gathered within their own plans and campaigns. Although this research helps to understand how people feel about product placements on an emotional and psychological level, it also helps to understand how effective this advertising tactic truly is and whether or not it is worth all of the time and effort.

Specifically dealing with the recall abilities of college students, this research aims to discover how well this unique demographic is able to remember certain brands shown through product placements within specific genres of film. Comparing comedies to horror films, the students that will be used for this qualitative study will reveal how aware they were when exposed to examples of product placements in each genre. It is extremely important to understand how this demographic views this advertising tactic for several reasons. First, it determines if the target audience is aware of what they were just exposed to. Secondly, if one film proves to effectively utilize the method of product placements more so than the other film, this study will provide vital information to marketers and advertisers alike. If physical evidence
proving that a comedy uses product placements more effectively than horror, or vice versa, then marketers will be able to deploy this tactic with greater care to the consumers’ needs. Knowing these potential implications, the following research questions have been constructed to guide this study.

RQ1: To what extent are viewers able to recall brands in a comedy film?

RQ2: To what extent are viewers able to recall brands in a horror film?

Methods

In order to properly conduct this research and ensure that a relevant response is received, several qualitative measures have been taken. These measures have been carefully constructed and well thought-out as a means of answering the research questions that have been proposed. Certain elements of bias have appeared in the research gathering process, but those were addressed individually as they came up. Knowing that this study is geared towards college students, the sampling has been taken from students at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The source of the information obtained from this study has been taken from two separate communication classes. Each class contains approximately 30 students, but only a total of 51 attended both sections the day this data was collected. Since the period for this study is limited and the reach in terms of different colleges is low, the results must be taken from a convenience sampling.

After the sample size was determined and the participants were selected, an experiment was conducted. In this experiment, the individuals present were shown two separate clips from two separate movies. One clip was taken from a comedy and the other clip from a horror film. For comedy, a clip was shown from the 2010 film The Other Guys and for horror, a clip was
shown from the 2012 film *Paranormal Activity 4*. Each of these clips will also contain at least one example of product placement. In *The Other Guys*, the brand present is Bed Bath and Beyond and in *Paranormal Activity 4*, the brands present are Kit Kat and Dots. All of the participants have been exposed to the same two clips, therefore removing any need for a control group. This experiment took place in a classroom setting during the allotted time for each section. This allowed for privacy and a decrease the chances of a scheduling conflict for the participants. After the video clips were viewed, several different methods were put into place.

Several focus groups were conducted immediately after both video clips were viewed. The students were split evenly into two separate groups, making a total of four separate focus groups. Two groups were taken to another classroom across the hall while the other groups remained in their present location. This allowed for a more intimate experience that heightened the chances of participant interaction. In the first batch of focus groups, the candidates were asked a series of questions revolving around what they have just seen. All of the students were asked the same questions, but the discussions were held privately among the groups. To capture the data that was gathered in the focus groups, audio recorders were used and examined after the focus groups concluded. On top of the audio recorders, notes were taken that covered what was discussed in the different groups. The questions were formatted in a semi-structured fashion. Specific questions were created first, but a conversational flow was implemented in the focus groups which allowed for other topics revolving around the study to be discussed. Some of the questions asked include, “Which video clip was your favorite?” and “Why was it your favorite?” The questions then flowed into the participants’ attitudes, asking, “How do you feel about product placements?” and “Did you feel a certain way about the brands you were exposed to?”
The focus groups that were conducted in the second section of the communication class were asked the same questions in the same format as the first focus groups.

When it came time to analyze all of the data, separate categories were made in order to obtain a general idea of how the participants felt. These categories included which clip the respondents favored more, whether they thought the product placement was used effectively, or even the specific emotions that were felt in response to the video clips shown. There are certainly many ways to analyze this data. The most important form of research categorizing that was used revolved around the positive attitudes held towards the specific genres as well as the recall ability of the participants. If the attitudes towards product placements within a certain genre are more positive than the other, then at least one of the research questions proposed will return positive results that can be used by marketers and advertisers alike.

Results

After conducting the separate focus groups, a great deal of data was collected that helps to answer the questions proposed earlier. Four focus groups were conducted, resulting in a grand total of 51 participants. The 51 focus group-participants were broken down into four separate groups. The first group consisted of 14 students, the second of 15, and the third and fourth of 11 each. Each group had certain consistencies as well as several differentiating factors. In order to fully comprehend the information collected, it is important to break the research down into the unique groups.

In the first focus group, eight students had previously viewed The Other Guys while only one person had previously viewed Paranormal Activity 4. When asked favorite genre, 12 participants stated comedy was their favorite while the remaining two selected horror. For the
clip from *The Other Guys*, everyone was able to recall the jokes made, especially the TLC references. When the participants were asked about the setting, the group remembered that the first “scene” took place in a police station, while the second location was in a Bed Bath & Beyond and the third was at some sort of “crime scene.” The students were easily able to remember the Bed Bath and Beyond brand. To further heighten the participants’ ability to recall this brand, when asked what about the film reminds them of their own life, someone mentioned that Bed Bath & Beyond reminds them of shopping for items needed in a dorm room. This makes sense, given the fact that this type of shopping is a recent memory for the participants.

When asked if there was anything appealing about *The Other Guys*, the group agreed that it was “the characters and the actors.” They said they found the characters to be humorous and enjoyed the banter they shared on screen. Everyone in this group claimed to be fans of Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg. This helps one understand why this clip was the unanimous favorite among this particular focus group. The students viewed the clip as fun and stated that the “star power” is certainly a big draw.

For the clip from *Paranormal Activity 4*, the students were able to recall that the characters were trick-or-treating. Specific aspects of the plot were noticed as well, including how new neighbors had just moved in on the street that the main characters lived. The documentary-inspired style of filmmaking was specifically called out and noted as well. On top of this, the character implied as the brother within the family was not seen until the very end of the clip due to the fact that he was behind the camera for a majority of the scene. When asked about the setting and the scenery, the students noticed that the scene started outside in the early evening, went back inside the family home, and eventually went back outside again after the sun had set. When asked if anything from this scene reminded them of their own lives, someone mentioned
that they had a cat much like the one shown in the clip. Trick-or-treating was a common response for most of the group as well. The group came to the consensus that they were all anticipating a scare. They are familiar with this type of film, since the *Paranormal Activity* films have been big money-makers for several years.

When it came to the actual brands that appeared in the clip, the participants were unable to recall it without any prying. Eventually, the students were asked what kind of candy was being eaten. Once asked, they instantly responded with “Kit-Kat.” When they saw the candy poured onto the kitchen table, it blended together and they were unable to distinguish what type of candy was present. However, they remembered that Kit-Kat’s were mentioned several times throughout the scene by the brother, or cameraman, who kept asking if he could have one. After discussing this brand, the students went on to state that they viewed the clip as a “transitional scene” within the movie and that not much occurred. This also partially explains why the clip taken from *The Other Guys* was preferred over the scene from *Paranormal Activity 4*.

In the second focus group, seven people stated that they have previously seen *The Other Guys* while two had seen *Paranormal Activity 4*. Despite this, all of the students claimed that they have seen enough of previous films in the franchise to be familiar with the style of filmmaking that they contain. Eight students stated that they prefer comedy films while the remaining three individuals favored horror films. When asked what stood out most to the students in the comedy video clip, the TLC references came to mind first. Other answers that stood out focused on the presence of Will Ferrell, the “peacock” scene, and “Marky Mark.” The setting for this clip was easily answered by this group; it took place in a police station, a Bed Bath and Beyond, and a crime scene.
When asked what about this clip reminds the students of their own lives, the first response referred to the pop culture references. One participant specifically mentioned that they make references like the ones found in this clip frequently. This allows people to “relate to the characters on screen in a stronger way.” The second response focused on the glasses that Will Ferrell’s character wore and how they were large and “dorky.” The third response, however, mentioned Bed Bath and Beyond specifically. The participants stated that this part of the clip stood out in a unique way. The setting was very familiar, like the viewers had been there before. It was also mentioned by two participants that it seemed this particular scene was filmed in an actual Bed Bath and Beyond. The reason for this is the fact that they noticed no brands or products were turned around or blurred out of the picture. Everything was presented in a way someone would expect when actually walking into the store.

The focus group then went back to discussing the film itself. It was clear to them that Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg were the stars and that they worked well together. Of the 11 people present in this focus group, 10 claimed to be fans of Will Ferrell while eight said they were fans of Mark Wahlberg. It was agreed upon amongst the group that if these two actors were not in the movie, and they were replaced by other lesser known actors, then they probably would not be interested in seeing the film. They also stated that the star power gets them into the theaters and draws them to the film.

For the clip from Paranormal Activity 4, the participants first noticed that the scene took place on Halloween while the main characters were trick-or-treating. The documentary style of filmmaking was also one of the first things that the group noticed together. The group also assumed that the clip was taken from an early scene in the movie because “very little happened.” On top of this, students mentioned that “it wasn’t that scary.” They anticipated being scared,
which kept them on the edge of their seats through the duration of the clip. As for the setting, the students recalled that it took place in a suburban neighborhood. They commented on the fact that these characters have a nice house with a large kitchen that is found on a typical street of houses. When asked what they noticed about the background, the students in the group stated that what stood out was “front and center.” Adding on to this, it was stated that the audience only noticed what the camera intended for them to notice.

When comparing the clip to their own lives, the consensus was that everyone has gone trick-or-treating at some point in the past. One female participant recalled a part of the clip where the father character, after seeing his teenage daughters Halloween costume, asks “Where is the rest of your costume?” She claimed that this type of scenario is common among fathers and daughters. Mentioning this piece of dialogue brought the group to discuss the dialogue that was used in the clip. They felt that the playful dialogue seemed more natural and allowed the audience to view these characters as real individuals rather than actors. Despite the playful dialogue, the students felt bored by the clip, leading to everyone in the group saying that they prefer humor over horror. Although the group stated that they enjoy comedy more, they agreed that they may have a different opinion after seeing Paranormal Activity 4 in its entirety. It was not until the closing minutes of the focus group that anyone noticed the candy itself. An individual stated that Kit Kat was mentioned several times by the cameraman, but was uncertain if it was actually shown on screen. Everyone else noticed the repeated mentions of Kit Kat, but only after it was discussed in greater detail.

In the third focus group, eight people stated that they had seen The Other Guys prior to being shown the clips from the film while five people had previously seen Paranormal Activity 4. When the separate genres were discussed, nine students stated that preferred comedies while
the remaining six favored horror films. The topic of discussion was what stood out to the participants. Again, the first answer was the TLC references. What caught the audience’s attention was Will Ferrell and the humor of the video. The first mention of Bed Bath and Beyond came earlier in this focus group, but for a different reason, A woman in the focus group spoke up and stated her confusion as to why Michael Keaton was in an apron that had the brand’s logo on it. She stated that he clearly was the police captain based on the scene shown just before this one, so his sudden change into this apron did not make sense to her. She said, “He obviously worked there, but that made no sense to me.” Other people that had not seen the movie prior to this expressed confusion over this detail as well.

When asked about the location of the scenes, the responses were the same as before; a police station, a Bed Bath and Beyond, and a crime scene. When asked what led them to assume that these were the settings of the scenes, small details were mentioned about the office environment, but also the environment of the Bed Bath and Beyond store. Michael Keaton’s apron gave it away, but the participants commented on the way the store was laid out as well. It was a very familiar environment that the students recognized from their own lives. As the discussion continued, the participants mentioned how Mark Wahlberg was the most appealing part of the clip. Several people expressed a disinterest in Will Ferrell’s style of comedy, but enjoyed the work of Mark Wahlberg.

The conversation turned towards Paranormal Activity 4, in which the participants noticed the filmmaking techniques used, specifically the documentary style of filming. Another aspect of the clip that the group was easily able to recall was the scarecrow that popped out and startled the cameraman. The Halloween costumes stood out to the participants, especially the daughter’s costume and how the father commented on it, saying that she should put on more clothes,
Several students also noticed the cookies that were being made by some of the characters. The frosting being used looked tasty to the group. Following the discussion about the cookies, an individual spoke up saying that they noticed the repeated mentions of the Kit Kat candy bars. Following this, the setting of the scene was discussed. One individual stated that, “the families are always wealthy.” This is referring to horror films and how, at least with the *Paranormal Activity* franchise, the plot revolves around a wealthy family in a large house. The other students commented on the big house as well as the nice, suburban neighborhood. The only element that reminded the group of their own lives was the trick-or-treating.

What appealed most to this group was the neighborhood as well as the living environment. This family lives a comfortable lifestyle that the students found inviting. One participant stated that the video clip “leaves you wanting to know more of what’s going to happen, whereas the first clip is a comedy movie with Will Ferrell. You don’t need to watch the whole thing in order to find it funny.” On top of this, another student mentioned that with horror films, you want to pay attention and pick up on all of the details. This is not as important with certain comedies. Group members that favored comedy films stated that they did not care for the style of filmmaking used in the horror clips. It made them feel uncomfortable, as if they were in the scene themselves when they do not want to be.

In the fourth focus group, five people claimed that they had seen *The Other Guys* prior to being shown these clips while three people had already seen *Paranormal Activity 4*. While discussing the comedy clip, the students were easily able to recall all of the TLC references. The group commented on how these references were made during different emotional situations. This tied in to their responses when asked what they could recall about the setting. The group identified that the first scene took place in a police station, the second in a department store, and
the third in some sort of office, They acknowledged that the first setting had a more relaxed, comedic vibe while the second was tenser and the third was more dramatic. The comedy was maintained throughout, but different emotions were seen from the characters.

When asked if people could recall what department store the second scene took place in, six out of 11 people identified it as Bed Bath and Beyond. One person thought it was The Home Depot. The participants that had seen the film before recognized the brand due to its use as a comedic device. Those that had not seen the film were more confused by its appearance in the film. One individual claimed that the “Bed Bath and Beyond apron didn’t seem important.” The conversation then turned towards what from this clip reminds the participants of their own lives. The major response focused on the TLC songs and the use of pop culture references. What was found most appealing about this clip was Michael Keaton, Group members claimed to enjoy him and his work, saying that they are fans of comedies and have enjoyed his work in the film industry.

When it came time to discuss Paranormal Activity 4, most of the responses were the same as the ones collected from the earlier focus groups. The participants commented on how they were expecting to be scared and were anticipating something to jump out and startle them. The group claimed to be familiar with the style and structure of the Paranormal Activity films. Having said that, the people in the group stated that they wanted more from the clip in terms of story. They assumed that this was a clip from earlier in the movie due to the lack of action and onscreen conflicts. While discussing the setting of the clip, the group mentioned how it started outside, worked its way inside, and went back outside at the end. Several individuals commented on how the inside shots seemed more intimate due to the family interacting with each other.
Based on the house and the way the kitchen looked, the group assumed that this was a standard, white middle-class family.

It was at this point that an individual mentioned that they had noticed how Kit Kat’s were mentioned in the clip. Not only did this person notice it being mentioned, but they assumed it was some sort of product placement due to how many times the name was said. Once this person spoke up, seven other individuals claimed that they noticed the repeated mentions of the candy. Several participants commented on how they felt that these repeated mentions were irritating. The conversation then shifted towards what reminded the students of their own life. The first response centered on trick-or-treating. The participants in the group were “sentimentally drawn to the Halloween aspect,” claiming that it reminded them of their childhood. This led them to mention how the child at the beginning of the clip was running and excited to be trick-or-treating. Nostalgia was felt among the students participating in the focus group. Aside from the trick-or-treating, there was nothing else that the participants claimed to find appealing about the video. Several people claimed that they were not interested in horror because it seems so real. On top of this, two people mentioned that they were not interested in the handheld camera style.

**Discussion**

Based on all of the information and data that has been collected, interesting findings have been made. Both genres of film have returned data that is certainly useful to marketers as well as researchers that intend to continue collecting data in order to expand on these findings. Before analyzing what has been collected, it is important to keep in mind the research questions that have led to this stage in the process.
To what extent are viewers able to recall brands in a comedy film?

In every focus group, the participants recalled the TLC references, the running joke within the clip. The humor stood out the most to all participants and everything else that was discussed branched off from this point. Without any sort of prying or excessive digging, the focus groups were able to recall the Bed Bath and Beyond brand with great ease. One of the most intriguing aspects about the students’ ability to recall this brand focused on its appearance in their own lives. In the first focus group, a student had spoken up and stated that this brand reminded them of shopping for items needed in a dorm room. Considering that the participants are all college students, shopping in stores like this is a recent if not common action. What is most exciting about this detail is the opportunity for brands to be recognized among the college demographic. All college students, as well as soon-to-be college students, need to prepare for their post-high school academic career. Aside from tasks like enrolling in classes and buying books, dorm room shopping is an activity that almost all students partake in prior to beginning a college career.

Another trend that was discovered among the focus groups is centralized on star power. When asked what they found most appealing about the comedy clip, common responses dealt with “the characters and the actors,” how well these actors work together, and any previously held opinion based on them. In the second focus group, for example, the general consensus was that Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg worked well together on screen. They were clearly the stars, simply based on the video clip they were exposed to. The individuals in this group went on to state that the star power of these actors gets people into the theater seats and draws them into the film. If unknown actors were in the starring roles, people would be less inclined to pay the ticket price to see the film. With people like Ferrell and Wahlberg on board, viewing the film
becomes a greater source of entertainment. The students were even drawn in by the presence of Michael Keaton in the video clips.

What makes this an exciting find is how this information can be utilized to further strengthen product placement usage. By connecting a brand effectively with certain stars or celebrities, more people are likely to be exposed to brand’s message. This ties back into Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1986) and how celebrities or social icons are able to influence people by their actions, In The Other Guys, the Bed Bath and Beyond brand is not defamed in any way, but rather shown in a humorous light by having Michael Keaton portray a strict police captain that moonlights as a chipper employee of the home goods store. This conveys an inviting image of the brand that shows how committed its employees are to the job as well as how they can be playful at the same time. No specific product is trying to be sold to the audience. Instead, the Bed Bath and Beyond experience is shown in a way that blends in with and supports the film. By showing Michael Keaton, Will Ferrell, and Mark Wahlberg conversing in this store, people will be more likely to embrace the brand.

Another note that must be made revolves around the positive feelings that come from a comedy. By associating the proper brand with a style of comedy, people are more inclined to connect the positive feelings that originated from the initial viewing of the film with said brand. It must also be mentioned that the addition of this brand cannot be an obvious marketing tactic. It is the realism within films that allows audiences to become engulfed within the story and captivated by the characters. In two of the focus groups, participants that had never seen the film before expressed confusion as to why the Bed Bath and Beyond brand was present in the video clip. The other students that had seen the film prior to this understood that it was part of a joke that focused on Michael Keaton’s character. When a brand appears in a film for no clear reason,
people are going to question its presence and reject any positive feelings that could be held regarding the brand. When discussing *The Other Guys*, the Bed Bath and Beyond brand is ingrained into the script and is used to help define Michael Keaton’s character.

To what extent are viewers able to recall brands in a horror film?

In every focus group, the first thing noticed about the video clip from *Paranormal Activity 4* was the fact that it took place on Halloween. The shots of children trick-or-treating was easily remembered, especially due to the nostalgic feelings that all of the groups claimed to hold. It is this factor that most of the participants cited as a reminder of their own lives. Everyone is familiar with the tradition of Halloween and the little aspects that go along with it. For this reason, the students were able to form some sort of connection with the characters seen on screen. Another element that helped make the characters even more realistic was the playful dialogue. This natural way of speaking did not seem contrived to the audience, which allows them to accept these characters as real people. On top of this, the documentary style of filmmaking aided in bringing about a more realistic environment. Despite this, several individuals within the focus groups expressed a disinterest towards the cinematography used in this clip. Students stated that the camerawork made the viewer feel uncomfortable as if they were in the scene when they did not want to be. These feelings of discomfort can prove to be a drawback when deciding whether to include a certain brand within the film or not.

A common trend among the focus groups dealt with the students’ attention to detail. When asked to recall what they can about the video clip they had just seen, the participants went into great detail describing the scenery and the setting. Attention was given to where the main characters lived. The students were able to recall the size of the house, even describing how they
had a large, luxurious kitchen. The cookies that the mother character was seen making were even discussed in detail in the focus groups. An interesting observation, this attention to detail is brought about simply due to the fact that it is a horror film. In this genre, everything seen on screen is important and will usually relate to the story somehow. One student commented on this, saying that they only noticed what the camera intended them to notice. When you are expecting to be scared, you are cautious and attempt to predict where the scare will come from. Knowing how the *Paranormal Activity* films are structured, the students focused on everything shown on screen, digesting it and trying to decode what was important and what was not. This explains why some participants felt that they were disappointed by the video clip, claiming that they were bored by the action. No major scare was offered, thus “letting down” the viewers of the video clip.

What is most interesting about all of this is the fact that the participants had trouble recalling the brands that were presented in the film. Two brands, Kit Kat and Dots, were both present. Kit Kat was mentioned verbally three times whereas Dots were seen in a shaky close-up on one occasion. Although the students were eventually able to recognize the presence of each of these brands, it took a great deal of prying to get them to open up about this information. Knowing this, the most logical explanation about the students’ inability to recall the Kit Kat brand falls on the fact that this clip was taken from a horror film. With the participants focusing on smaller details and attempting to anticipate where the scare will pop out from, it is likely that they simply overlooked the brands, knowing that the scare would come from another source.

Considering all of this information, the collected data shows that the recall ability of product placements among college students is greater in a comedy film rather than a horror film. From the participants used, comedy proved to be the favored film genre as well as the genre that
emitted the most consistently positive feelings in terms of mood. Horror films, on the other hand, proved to capture the audience’s attention and keep them engaged, but did not carry strong recall characteristics when discussing brands. One element that has helped increase the recall abilities of the students in regards to the comedy clip is the presence of well-known actors like Will Ferrell, Mark Wahlberg, and Michael Keaton. The appearance of these big-named Hollywood individuals helps the audience tune in to what they have to say, no matter what is being said. If done properly, then connecting a brand to people like these will likely influence the viewers of the film to buy into the brand. With lower-budget horror films like *Paranormal Activity 4* that do not have big-named actors or actresses, it is more difficult to influence viewers into supporting a certain brand. For this reason, more creative ways of ingraining product placements into horror films must be constructed.

**Limitations and Weaknesses**

After conducting the four focus groups and analyzing all of the data, several limitations were recognized. Although the data that has been collected is strong and can be used to guide further research, it is important to acknowledge and discuss exactly what drawbacks this study has encountered. These drawbacks can be found in both clips that were shown to the students as well as within the participants themselves. Further research can benefit by formatting the data collection to address these weaknesses.

The video clip taken from *The Other Guys* technically contains three separate scenes, all of which are connected by the running joke found within the TLC references. Considering that these references are repeated in the three separate scenes, this allows for the joke to be recalled with a great deal of ease. The study could potentially benefit from the usage of one, continuous
scene that does not jump around to different parts of the film. In this case, only using the Bed Bath and Beyond scene in its entirety, rather than a portion of it mixed with two other scenes, might create an opportunity for more reliable feedback and responses to be collected. To add on to this, the audience had no frame of reference that would explain exactly why Michael Keaton was wearing a Bed Bath and Beyond apron. The participants understood that he portrayed the police captain that gave orders to Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg’s characters, but seeing him in this outfit caused some questions to be raised among the students that had not seen this film prior to these focus groups. An earlier scene in the film clearly shows that his character moonlights as an employee in this home goods store. With this in mind, it could benefit future research if the entire film is shown, regardless of what film is selected. After all, people are more likely to see a movie in its entirety, from beginning to end. If time is of the essence, then future researchers should consider showing several clips from different movies in a particular genre instead of just one scene from one film. This would remove any potential confusion from not having seen the film in its entirety.

Certain limitations were also encountered with the scene taken from Paranormal Activity 4. The most important limitation, at least in this circumstance, dealt with the fact that the brand present in this scene was merely mentioned rather than seen. Although the Dots candy brand was seen briefly, Kit Kat was discussed in greater detail despite not being actually shown in the scene. By not being visually present, the inability of the participants to recall the brand without prying is understood. A video clip that actually shows the brand as prominently as The Other Guys did with Bed Bath and Beyond could potentially strengthen the recall among the students. In addition, many students in the focus groups claimed that the clip taken from Paranormal Activity 4 was boring and uneventful. Knowing that most of the participants are at least somewhat
familiar of the structure of the *Paranormal Activity* films, sudden scares were expected, but were never delivered. This “let down” disappointed the members of the focus groups, even those that are not fans of horror films to begin with. This disappointment could have negatively impacted the results that were gathered from asking the students about this video clip. As stated earlier, a possible remedy for this could be found within showing the film in its entirety. Again, if time is a factor, a more engaging scene that contains some of the horror elements that this franchise carries could return more precise results.

Aside from the video clips used in the focus groups, some setbacks came from the participants. The two classes utilized for the focus groups contained a combined total of over 60 students. Unfortunately, several students were absent the day that these focus groups were conducted, lowering the number of eligible participants. To overcome this obstacle, giving some sort of incentive for the students to attend the focus group could benefit the researcher by potentially acquiring a larger number of participants to be used in the study. On top of the students that were absent, several students entered the classroom past the start time. Introductions and the viewings took place promptly at the start of each class, which meant that any latecomers missed important directions as well as background knowledge. In addition, there were individuals that came in after a clip had been shown in its entirety, meaning that no frame of reference was available to them. These latecomers were not included in the focus groups due to the fact that they did not hold the necessary knowledge required to give worthwhile feedback. To overcome this problem, a later start time should be used to allow for any students that are running late to participate in the focus groups. Another possible solution is to conduct the focus groups at a time when even more students can attend. As always, larger incentive should be given to motivate students to partake in the research collection.
Conclusion

The completion of this study signifies that product placement can be used effectively to enhance recall capabilities. Following the extensive research that aided in structuring this study, the methods were carried out to the best of their ability given the resources available. The most important take away from this is the fact that, with the proper amount of time and resources, this study can easily be duplicated to provide further marketing research that can assist future researchers as well as marketers. Despite the limitations, the results of this study provide interesting information that can lead to better product placements within films that not only help promote a brand to a certain demographic, but also become ingrained within the story, allowing the narrative to move forward in a better and stronger way. At the end of the day, the quality filmmaking techniques are what effectively promote the brand.
Resources


