Brand Personality of Products Placed in Television Programs: The Effect of Involvement with the Product and the Program

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Abstract—A Solomon Four Group experimental design was used to test four hypotheses examining the effect of involvement with the product and involvement with the program on perceptions of brand personality, following exposure to a “product used by character” scenario in a popular television soap opera. One specific instance with a specific brand was investigated. The hypotheses were tested using Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). Results indicated that a used-by-character placement can lead to changes in consumer perceptions of the personality of the brand, with minor adjustments in perceptions of the personality traits of a brand resulting from a single product placement exposure. Results also indicate that this effect is not dependent on a consumer’s level of involvement in the product category. Further, these results were found irrespective of a consumer’s level of involvement in the program itself. This suggests that product placement may be used to facilitate change in perceptions of the personality of a brand across the entire viewing audience, not just those who hold a personal attachment to the program itself.

Index Terms—Advertising, Brand personality, Brand placement, Involvement, Television

I. INTRODUCTION

Product Placement, also known as Brand Placement, has received increased attention in the last two decades as a valuable enhancement to the marketing communications efforts of an organisation (DeLorme, Reid & Zimmer, 1994; Karrh, 1998). Product placement practice is defined as “the paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming” (Karrh, 1998, p. 33). This inclusion can be seen across a broad range of entertainment media, from films and television programs, to computer games, music and music videos, books, and more recently blogs and video sharing websites such as YouTube.

Television is currently the leading placement media, attracting 71.4% of placement spending in 2006 (PQ Media, 2007). Global product placement expenditure was estimated at $3.07 billion in 2006, and is forecast to grow to $7.44 billion in 2010 (PQ Media, 2007). An interesting characteristic of this industry is that some placements are motivated by artistic rather than commercial reasons. Adding the ‘exposure value’ of these unpaid placements, the placement market is estimated to be valued at $13.96 billion by 2010 (PQ Media, 2007).

Although product placement has been the subject of much practitioner and academic interest over the last two decades, few empirical studies have examined the effect of product placement on the personality of the placed brand. This paper reports the effect of product placement on consumer perceptions of the personality of the placed brand.

II. BRAND PERSONALITY

The concept of brand personality is based on the human propensity to attach human characteristics to inanimate objects (Aaker, 1995; Freling & Forbes, 2005). Anecdotal evidence of such a propensity is common, particularly in regards to objects with which consumers have a firm attachment: a computer may be described as ‘temperamental’, a mobile phone as ‘sexy’, and a pair of stiletto shoes as ‘daring’. Early concepts of brand personality were based on the “Big Five” factor model of human personality: Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness (Goldberg, 1990).

More recent development of the construct is based on Aaker’s (1995) formative work in the area. For example, Keller and Richey (2006) discuss the ‘core dimensions’ of heart (passionate and considerate), mind (creative and disciplined) and body (agile and collaborative), and the “interactive effects of these such that the effects of one trait can be enhanced by the existence of another.”

III. INVolVEMENT

Involvement is defined as “a person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values and interests” (Zaichowsky, 1985, p. 342). The involvement could be with a specific product or brand, the product category, or the communication messages relating to these products, brands or product categories. Generalised product categories differ
in their level of involvement, which leads to distinctions in the purchase decision process for these products (Assael, Pope, Brennan & Voges, 2007). A ‘high involvement’ product will lead to a more extensive information search, a more careful and systematic evaluation of alternatives, and increased post-purchase dissonance or uncertainty. High involvement products are typically characterised by high levels of risk and personal relevance. Some individual’s level of involvement reflect their current need or consumption situation (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985), but others may hold an enduring involvement with a product category, leading to heightened levels of attention to information about products within that category and regular communication with others about the products (Richins & Bloch, 1986).

Involvement with a viewed television program motivates consumers to increase their level of attention to the information presented, and their subsequent comprehension of that information (Celsi & Olson, 1988). Television program involvement has been examined in the advertising literature in relation to whether a consumer’s involvement (and arousal) in a television program is maintained during commercial breaks in that program, and the effect this has on processing of the advertising messages shown (Lloyd & Clancy, 1991; Lord & Burnkrant, 1993; Tavassoli, Shultz & Fitzsimons, 1995).

IV. HYPOTHESES

H1: An individual exhibiting a high level of enduring involvement with a product category will report a different perception of the personality of a brand from that category, placed in a television program, than an individual exhibiting a low level of enduring involvement.

H2: An individual’s level of involvement with a product category will influence that individual’s perception of the personality of a brand (from that category) placed in a television program.

H3: An individual’s involvement with a television program will influence that individual’s perception of the personality of a brand placed in that television program.

H4: An individual’s involvement with a television program will influence that individual’s intention to purchase a brand placed in that television program.

V. METHODOLOGY

A. Experimental Design

The hypotheses were examined using a Solomon Four Group experimental design. The Solomon Four Group is a robust experimental design which involves selecting four test groups, two are administered the treatment, and two act as the control groups (Solomon, 1949). The design is illustrated in Table 1.

This design controls for interactive testing effects of administering the pre-test, and provides evidence of the interaction between the action (or treatment) and observed effect through the use of control groups, as the data can be examined for effects of both the treatment and pre-treatment survey. The design also enhances external validity, controls for extraneous variables and increases the ability of the researcher to infer that a resulting relationship between the dependent and independent variables is caused by the experimental treatment (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2000). The design also allows for smaller sample sizes due to the ability to combine the post-test survey groups in meta-analysis (Braver & Braver, 1988).

Table 1

Solomon Four Group Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
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B. Sample

The participant pool was drawn from undergraduate students at a large metropolitan university. Student samples have been utilised in the majority of empirical studies on consumer perceptions of, and reactions to, product placement to date (Cowley & Barron; 2008; Gould, Gupta & Grabner-Kräuter, 2000; Gupta & Gould, 2007; Hong, Wang & de los Santos, 2008; Law & Braun, 2000; Lee & Faber, 2007; Nebenzahl & Secunda, 1993; Russell, 2002; Sung & de Gregorio, 2008; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007). In addition, student samples are often used in experimental designs due to the homogeneity the student group offers (level of education, receptiveness to participating in research, and experience with the product category of the placed brand). For this experiment, random allocation split pairs design was used, where participants are paired on the basis of exhibiting similar characteristics, (in this case, gender and perceived approximate age), and then randomly allocated to the four groups.

C. Measures

Brand Personality

An earlier study was undertaken to reduce Aaker’s Brand Personality Scale, resulting in a 21-item scale reduced from the original 42-item scale. The measure uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Not at all descriptive” to “Extremely descriptive” (Aaker, 1995). Some traits included in the scale include: Honest, sincere, real, trendy, cool.

Enduring Involvement

The Enduring Involvement Scale (EIS) measures the motivating factors of enduring involvement: self-expression and hedonics (Higie & Feick, 1989). The EIS consists of ten 7-point semantic differential items: five pertaining to each of the two sub-scales – hedonic involvement and self-expression. Higie and Feick reported high reliability for the scale with co-efficient alphas of .88 and .91 for the hedonic and self-expression subscales respectively, and a combined alpha of .89 (for the product category of computers, used in this study).

Television Program Involvement

Involvement with the Television Program was measured using the revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII) (Zaichowsky, 1994). The scale consists of ten 7-point semantic differential items. Reliability scores of .91 to .96
were demonstrated for products and ads, with its ability to discriminate between high and low involvement groups in application to involvement with advertisements also reported (Zaichowsky, 1994). Some adjective pairs were Boring/Interesting, Uninvoking/Invoking, and Worthless/Valuable.

D. Method

A brief excerpt of a script for the television program “Home and Away” was developed specifically for the purposes of this research. Participants were asked to read this excerpt, which included a “used by character” inclusion of a branded product (a Dell laptop computer). On return of the completed questionnaire, respondents were advised that the script excerpt provided was a mock excerpt, developed exclusively for the purpose of the research study.

The type of placement used in the treatment prompt was a visual used-by-character placement. These placements, while exhibiting lower levels of cognitive processing than more prominent placements, may still hold affective and behavioural outcomes (Auty & Lewis, 2004; Russell, 2002), through the peripheral route to persuasion in the Elaboration Likelihood Model. Associating a brand with a character may infer a subtle endorsement of the brand by the character (Balasubramanian, Karrh & Patwardhan, 2006; Russell, 2002; Russell & Stern, 2006). Computers, motor vehicles, mobile phones, fashion items and grocery products frequently appear as visual only used-by-character placements in television programs, with no associated verbal script reference or overt demonstration of product related attributes. Visual used-by-character product placements therefore warrant further investigation in product placement research. Furthermore, as visual only used-by-character placements are less expensive than their more prominent counterparts, identifying whether an affective outcome may result from this type of placement has significant implications for product placement practitioners.

VI. RESULTS

A. Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 suggested that an individual’s involvement with the product category would impact on that individual’s perception of the personality of a brand from that category. Data for the two enduring involvement subscales (Hedonics and Self-Expression) were summed and divided by the number of items, resulting in a continuous involvement score for each of the subscales. Mean scores for each of these subscales were: Hedonics M=5.19, Self Expression M=4.03 and the summed subscale variables were recoded as High/Low Involvement. The hypothesis was then tested using MANOVA; the dependent variables were the five brand personality dimensions, while the independent variables were the two High/Low involvement subscale variables. Results of the analysis revealed there to be no significant difference between high and low involvement consumer’s perceptions of the personality of DELL computers: hedonic involvement: Wilks’ Lambda .858, df =6, 74, p>.05, self expression: Wilks’ Lambda .879, df =6, 74, p>.05. Between-subjects effects are shown in Table 2.

Examination of between-subjects effects reveal a difference in perception of the brand personality of DELL between high and low involvement consumers on the Excitement dimension (for both the hedonics and self-expression involvement subscales). Analysis of the mean scores for high and low involvement consumers (for each of the subscales) on perceptions of DELL on the personality dimension Excitement indicated that high levels of hedonic involvement with computers resulted in perceptions of greater Excitement than for low involvement consumers, while the opposite results occurred for self-expression. Mean scores for the two involvement subscales on perceptions of the Excitement dimension are reported in Table 3.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Type III Sum of</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>.707</td>
<td>.403</td>
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<td>7.586</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sophistication1</td>
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<td>.097</td>
<td>.756</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rupegedness1</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.790</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Producenent1</td>
<td>1.483</td>
<td>.485</td>
<td>.488</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self/Expre(H/L)</td>
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<td>4.022</td>
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<td>Producenent1</td>
<td>6.517</td>
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Table 3

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<th>Subscale</th>
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<td>Hedonics (High Inv)</td>
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<td>Hedonics (Low Inv)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-expression (High Inv)</td>
<td>2.708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression (Low Inv)</td>
<td>2.876</td>
</tr>
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B. Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 proposed that an individual’s level of involvement with a product category would interact with an individual’s perception of a brand from that category placed in a television program. In other words, it was expected that the difference in perception of the personality of DELL between the stimulus and non-stimulus groups would be moderated by an individual’s enduring involvement in personal computers. Dependent variables were the five brand personality dimensions and the independent variables were whether or not the respondent received the stimulus, and the High/Low involvement subscales measured discussed above. MANOVA results indicated there was no interaction of either of the involvement subscales on the effect of product placement on perceptions of the personality of the placed brand (Stim Y/N*Hedonic involvement: Wilks’ Lambda .946, df =6, 96, p>.05; StimY/N*Self Expression: Wilks’ Lambda .942, df =6, 96, p>.05). Table 4 reports the between-subjects effects in this analysis. Hypothesis 2 was rejected.
C. Hypotheses 3 and 4

Hypothesis 3 proposed that involvement with the television program would interact with the effect of product placement on perceptions of the personality of a brand placed in that television program. This hypothesis was tested using MANOVA, with the dependent variables being the five brand personality dimensions and purchase intent, and the independent variables being whether or not the respondent was exposed to the treatment prompt, and the two involvement subscales, recoded as high (greater than the mean scores of 2 and 2.39) and low (lower than the mean scores) involvement rankings.

The analysis found no interaction effect for either subscale, (ProgramInvA/Hi/Lo*StimY/N: Wilks' Lambda .935, df=6, 97, p>.05; ProgramInvB/Hi/Lo*StimY/N: Wilks' Lambda .879, df=6, 97, p>.05), therefore Hypothesis 3 was rejected (see Table 5). The results of this analysis also indicate that there was no interaction effect between the respondents’ level of involvement with the television program, and their intention to purchase a brand placed in that program. Thus Hypothesis 4 was also rejected.

VII. DISCUSSION

A. Involvement with the Product Category of the Placed Brand

It was hypothesised that an individual with a high level of enduring involvement in a product category would report a different perception of the personality of a brand from that category than an individual exhibiting low levels of product category involvement.

This hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) was tested using Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). The involvement scale was split into the two sub-scales of hedonics and self-expression. The mean of each of these sub-scales was then obtained, and the respondent sample was recoded into two groups: those exhibiting higher levels of involvement than the ‘average’ respondent, and those exhibiting lower levels. These two groups were treated as independent variables; the dependent variables were the five personality dimensions as outlined earlier in this chapter. Results of this analysis revealed no significant difference in perceptions of brand personality between the two groups, however analysis of between-subjects effects indicated the presence of an interaction effect between both the hedonic and self expressive involvement factors on perceptions of the ‘Excitement’ dimension of the brand’s personality.

Examination of the mean scores showed that respondents who exhibited a high level of hedonic involvement with personal computers perceived the brand DELL as more exciting than those who showed lower levels of hedonic involvement in the product category. However, those who showed lower self-expression scores perceived the brand as more exciting than those with higher levels of self-expressive involvement in computers. This is a logical outcome. Individuals with high levels of product category involvement may perceive the brand as being more exciting than those with lower levels of self-expressive involvement in the product category by nature of their interest in the category itself.

The data was also examined to identify if an interaction effect was present between the effect of the stimulus, and consumer involvement with the product category on perceptions of the personality of the placed brand. MANOVA results did not indicate the presence of such an effect. Hypothesis 2 was rejected. This is an interesting result. It appears from this research that a consumer’s level of involvement with the product category of the placed brand did not interact with their perception of the personality of the brand post-exposure to the brand placement prompt. Regardless of whether or not the participant was highly involved with personal computers, no difference in perceptions of the personality of DELL between the two groups was identified following the placement exposure.

B. Involvement with the Television Program

It was hypothesised that an individual’s level of involvement with a television program would interact with that individual’s perception of the personality of a brand placed in that television program. This hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) was tested using MANOVA, with the involvement scale split into the two subscales of importance and interest; those exhibiting higher than the mean scores on each scale were classified as highly involved in the program, and those exhibiting lower involvement scores than the mean on each scale were classified as having low involvement in the program. The summed and recoded
subscales were treated as the independent variables, with the five personality dimensions (as previously discussed) and the purchase intention item treated as the dependent variables. Results of the analysis indicated no interaction effect to be present, therefore the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 contended that an individual’s level of involvement with a television program would interact with that individual’s intention to purchase a brand placed in that television program. Results indicated that no interaction effect was present, therefore this hypothesis was also rejected.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Results indicated that a used-by-character placement in a television soap opera can lead to changes in consumer perceptions of the personality of the brand. It appears from this research that minor adjustments in perceptions of the personality traits of a brand can result from a single product placement exposure. Results also indicate that this effect is not dependent on a consumer’s level of involvement in the product category. Further, these results were found irrespective of a consumer’s level of involvement in the program itself, suggesting that this effect is present for both casual viewers and fans alike. Thus it appears that product placement may be used to facilitate change in perceptions of the personality of a brand across the entire viewing audience, not just those who hold a personal attachment to the program itself.

A limitation of this research is that this result may be due to the treatment prompt utilising only a single instance of a used-by-character placement. It is suggested that future research seek to identify whether a similar finding would emerge with multiple placement exposures, and more overt or plot integrated placement types. Future research could also consider examining the interaction of product category involvement on product placement brand effects across different product placement types, to determine whether the results identified here is specific to the type of placement operationalized in the study.

Further research could also determine whether the presence of an interaction effect between both the hedonic and self expressive involvement factors on perceptions of the ‘Excitement’ dimension of the brand’s personality is specific to the brand under investigation. The outcome in terms of self-expression may be more indicative of consumers’ true perceptions of the personality of the brand. It may be the case that consumers who exhibit greater self expressive involvement with this product category are more discerning about the level of excitement they attach to the brand when considering it as means of self-expression than those who hold lower levels of self-expressive involvement with the product category.

References


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