Understanding the effectiveness of product placement: The roles of placement congruency and information processing

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Understanding the Effectiveness of Product Placement: The Role of Placement Congruency and Information Processing

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Abstract

This project examined the influence of placement congruency and information processing on the effectiveness of product placement in a TV sitcom. In an experiment, we found that compared to an incongruently placed product, a congruently placed product elicited lower level of product recall, but more favorable product attitudes among respondents. Moreover, this attitudinal effect was more pronounced when the respondents engaged in incidental (vs. deliberate) information processing when they watched the TV program.
Product placement 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). Product placement has become a popular marketing communication practice since 1980s (Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan 2006). As of now, over 1,000 U.S. brands are found to use this practice to promote their products, such as Procter & Gamble and PepsiCo (Vranica 2004). As a result, placement is seen in various media, including movies, television, game videos, blogs, popular novels, and even live shows. Television placement grew rapidly and became a $1.88 billion business in 2004, which accounted for almost 50% of the entire placement business (Russell and Stern 2006). Such growth can be partly attributed to audiences’ resistance to the traditional TV commercials by using-zipping and zapping devices (e.g., remote control) or recording devices (e.g., digital video recorders). The purpose of this paper is to examine the effectiveness of product placement in television programs with a focus on sitcoms.

Research on product placement is growing at an impressive speed during the past decade. The effectiveness of product placement is assessed by brand recognition and recall (e.g., Brennan, Dubas and Babin 1999; d’Astous and Chartier 2000; Law and Braun 2000; Nelson 2002), brand attitude (e.g., Russell 2002; Russell and Stern 2006), purchase intention (e.g., Baker and Crawford 1995), and product choice (Law and Braun 2000). These studies have examined various factors, including audiences’ individual factors and type/format of placement (see Balasubramanian et al. 2006 for a comprehensive review). For example, Nelson (2002) studied how game players’ involvement with a

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1 The term brand placement is synonymously used with product placement and is considered by some researchers to be a more accurate description because brands are placed rather than general product categories (Babin and Carder, 1996; Karrh, 1998). In this study, the more commonly used term, product placement, is used.
computer/video game increased their short-term recall of placed brands. Also, Sabherwal, Pokrywcynski and Griffin (1994) studied how different executions of the placement influenced recall. Specifically, they found that when the visual element (logo) of a restaurant was reinforced in the audio script, respondents tended to recall the restaurant better compared to when the visual element was absent in a movie. Brennan, Dubas, and Babin (1999) also compared brand recognition between two types of placement: Creative vs. onset. In their study, on-set placements referred to the placed brand that is a major focus of the scene and/or is endorsed by a major actor. This could be reviewed as a prominent product placement. In contrast, creative placements referred to the placed brand that is in the background of the scene, which can be reviewed as a subtle product placement. Brennan et al. (1999) found that a prominent or on-set placement elicited greater brand recognition than a subtle or creative placement. In addition, d’Astous and Chartier (2000) studied how brand attitude was influenced by congruity with a movie scene, degree of appearance, and association with a movie star. They found that respondents generated favorable attitudes when the product appeared with a movie star, when the product placement was congruent with a scene presented, and when the product was placed prominently.

In this project, we contribute to the growing body of product placement research by examining two important factors: placement congruency and audiences’ processing depth. Specifically, in a setting of watching television sitcom, we study how audiences’ brand recognition, recall, and attitudes are influenced by whether the product placement is reviewed as congruent in its program context and whether audiences process the information of the placed product in a deliberate or incidental mode. The relationship
between the placed product and program context has been studied in terms of whether a placement is well-integrated into the program (d’Astous and Chartier 2000; d’Astous and Seguin 1999) or whether a placement has a high plot connection with the story line (Russell 2002). Both d’Astous and Chartier (2000) and d’Astous and Seguin (1999) studies showed that the better the integration of a product placement in a movie or television show, the more consumers liked it, but the less they remembered it. This finding is consistent with what marketing professionals generally believe, that is, a good placement is only where the product comes naturally in the media program. However, there seems a lack of a theoretical explanation on this finding. In this project, we applied Mandler’s theory of congruity (1982) in consumer behavior research to explain the effects. Moreover, we also examined how audiences’ processing depth (incidental vs. deliberate) might moderate the effects of product placement. We now review the literature on the theory of congruity (Mandler 1982) and information processing (Fitzsimons, 2002; Shapiro et al, 1997) in consumer behavior research.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**Recall and Placement Congruency**

In studies of advertising, *congruency* is defined in terms of expectancy of information about the product in the advertisement (ad) with respect to an evoked ad theme (Heckler and Childers 1992). Congruency or expectancy means that the product information falls into the predetermined pattern evoked by an ad to a greater degree, whereas incongruency or unexpectancy means that the product information falls into the predetermined pattern to a smaller degree (Lee and Mason 1999). Studies have shown that compared to congruent
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information, incongruent information elicited higher information recall (Heckler and Childers, 1992; Mandler, 1982). For example, in Heckler and Childers (1992) study, they created four ads that had both visual (picture) and verbal (copy) elements. Across the four ads, the copy detailed the brand name, product attributes, and benefit statements. The pictorial element in the ad was manipulated as either congruent/expected or incongruent/unexpected with the copy. Their results showed that unexpected pictorial element, in the form of incongruency, was found to be more easily recalled than expected pictorial element in the form of congruency. They used Mandler’s theory of congruity (1982) to explain the results. That is, congruent items are relatively not noteworthy and therefore are unlikely to prompt extensive cognitive elaboration. On the other hand, incongruent items are relatively eye-catching because of their novelty, which leads to greater attention and elaboration.

Congruency was also used to describe to what extent a specific product fit into the generic product category, and how the different congruency levels affected product recall (Heckler and Childers 1992). For example, Slice is advertised as a soft drink product. When the soft drink category is mentioned, people will generate soft-drink-related thoughts, such as, carbonation, slightly sweet, packaged in cans, etc. Slice, however, is also labeled as real fruit juice, which is incongruent with the perception of a soft drink. Consistent with the theory of congruity, this study showed that Slice was better recalled when it was labeled as a fruit drink product (incongruent condition) than when it was labeled as a soft drink product (congruent condition).

Congruency vs. incongruency can be well understood in the context of product placement. Congruent product placement means that perception about the product is
consistently with the story plot, such that, the product is expected to appear in a particular scene or situations. For example, in an episode of *Will & Grace*, Will and Grace talk about shopping, and mention Barneys as a good place to shop for clothes. Both characters are portrayed as upscale single New Yorkers in this sitcom, therefore, mention of Barneys comes as expected, naturally. Such a placement is qualified as a congruent product placement. On the other hand, incongruent product placement means that the perception of the product placed in the plot is less consistent with the plot, such that the product is not expected to appear in the program or not to be used by characters. For example, in one of the episode of *Friends*, Joey is portrayed as owning a Porsche. However, given the fact that Joey is constantly unemployed as an actor, he cannot even afford a Porsche. Such placement is qualified as an incongruent product placement. Consistent with the past research that incongruency leads to greater recall of the ad or product information, incongruent product placement is expected to elicit higher recall of the product compared to congruent product placement. Hence, we hypothesize that

\[ H1a: \text{The type of product placement has a main effect on product recall, i.e., incongruent product placement tends to elicit higher product recall than does congruent product placement.} \]

**Recall and Information Processing Depth**

In addition, recall of congruently vs. incongruently placed products might also relate to the information processing depth of the audiences. Two types of information processing have been identified in consumer research: Deliberative and incidental (Fitzsimons, 2002; Shapiro et al, 1997). Under the deliberate mode, consumers are assumed to process information in a conscious and deliberative manner. For example, when they read the
articles in a magazine, they tend to pay attention to and spend their cognitive resources on the articles. The article reading in this condition is their primary task, which is processed deliberately. Under incidental processing of information, consumers are assumed to process information in an implicit, or unintentional or unconscious manner. For example, while concentrating on their primary task – reading articles, their cognitive resources could also be spent on advertisements placed next to the articles. The processing of the ad in this case is their secondary task, which is processed incidentally.

Evidence has accumulated that these two different modes of information processing lead to different levels of recall (e.g., Janiszewski 1990; Shapiro et al 1997). Janiszewski (1990) tested if the non-attended material in a newspaper, and therefore incidentally processed, would have any influence on the attended material (information that is deliberately processed). He found that the non-attended material competed with the attended material for subconscious resources and in turn influenced the comprehension and memory of the non-attended material. This study suggested that when a consumer attends to certain elements of a message, the reminder of the message (unattended) is not ignored and in fact, can be recalled later. Another study (Shapiro et al, 1997) also demonstrated such influence using memory-based consideration sets. A memory-based consideration refers to the information that is not externally available for consideration and has to be retrieved from memory. In their study, participants were asked to read an article on the computer screen. This article was filled with target ads designed to receive readers’ minimal attention. To test the memory-based consideration set, the participants were provided with a buying scenario and asked to list products as they wish without referring to
the previously shown ads. Their results showed that participants listed more products under the incidental ad exposure condition than under the deliberative processing condition.

In the context of product placement, incidental learning of product placement means that product placement receives minimal attention while other more relevant information, e.g., TV program, storyline, is being processed intentionally. For example, in the popular sitcom *Friends*, audiences see Chandler and Joey playing fuzeball all the time. They do not watch *Friends* with the intention of learning the game but it could quite be possible that they learn some basic moves about playing fuzeball when they mainly keep tack with the stories about Chandler and Joey. Hence, learning about how to play fuzeball is a secondary task, which occurs incidentally. On the other hand, deliberative processing in the context of product placement means that product placement receives maximum attention even though other information, that is the show itself, is being deliberately processed too (Shapiro et al 1997). For example, while watching a show, some audiences might be particularly interested in what products their favorite characters are using. As a result, the processing of the products could be deliberative and intentional. Consistent with Janiszewski (1990) and Shapiro et al (1997) studies, we hypothesize that

\[ H1b: \text{Information processing depth has a main effect on product recall, i.e., incidental processing tends to elicit higher recall than does deliberate processing.} \]

As H1a states, when a product is incongruently placed in the program, the product is expected to be better recalled compared to when it is congruently placed in the program. Further, the information processing type might moderate such effect. When people engage in deliberative information processing, they are more likely to scrutinize the presented product information with a fair amount of effort. Such cognitive effort might overshadow
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the differences between congruent and incongruent product placement in eliciting product recall. In this regard, the main effect of placement type on recall would be stronger under the incidental information processing. Hence,

\[ H1c: \text{The effect of placement (congruency vs. incongruency) on recall is moderated by the information processing type. The incongruent product placement elicits higher recall than the congruent product placement and this effect is stronger under incidental processing condition than under deliberative processing condition.} \]

**Attitude and Placement Congruency**

Studies have shown that compared to incongruent information, congruent information leads to the formation of favorable attitudes toward the product (Mander, 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989; Lee and Mason, 1999). Mandler (1982)’s theory of congruity argued that congruency between product and product category leads to a favorable response because people like objects that conform to their expectations and allow their predictability. Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) studied the influence of congruency between product category and attributes on product attitudes. The product was described as sweet, carbonated and canned. Therefore, categorizing the product as soft drink was congruent with the product attributes. Accordingly, categorizing the product as an all-natural drink was not congruent with the product attributes. Their results showed that participants favored the product when it was described as a soft drink than when it was presented as an all-natural drink. Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) further explained that when processing incongruent information, respondents tended to generate greater elaboration, and insert extra effort solving the incongruency. This cognitive effort could
lead to their frustrations about the information and make them reduce their favorability toward the product.

Consistent with the past research that congruency leads to favorable attitudes towards the ad or product information, congruent product placement is expected to elicit more favorable attitude towards the product compared to incongruent product placements. When the products are congruently placed in the program, consumers are more likely to associate the products with the characters in the plot or the storyline of the plot. As a result, extensive processing of information is not needed. This would create attitudes that are more favorable. Hence,

\[ H2a: \text{The type of product placement has a main effect on product attitude, i.e., congruent product placement tends to elicit more favorable product attitude than does incongruent product placement.} \]

**Attitude and Information Processing**

Due to the situational constrains and/or individuals’ cognitive efforts, consumers process incoming information either incidentally or deliberately. This message processing mode has been shown to affect consumers’ product attitudes. For example, when consumers were exposed to advertising messages or product placements incidentally or without a “warning,” their attitudes toward the ads or products were negative (Balasubramaniam 1994; Gupta and Gould 1997). Balasubramanian (1994) explained the results stating that the product placement hits the consumers when they do not expect it or when they are unaware of such commercial intents. Consumers tend to perceive the product placement as deceptive or unfavorable. For example, Gupta and Gould (1997)’s survey with over 1,000 college students indicated that when product placement is viewed as an obvious
commercial motive to persuade unaware consumers, this marketing practice became less acceptable. Moreover, their attitudes toward the placed products in the program also became less favorable. In the context of this study, incidental processing condition promotes a context in which consumers are unaware of product placement. Thus, their attitudes will be less favorable compared to the deliberative processing condition in which consumers are aware of product placement. Therefore, we hypothesize that

\[ H2b: \text{Information processing depth has a main effect on product attitudes, i.e., incidental processing tends to elicit less favorable attitudes than does deliberate processing.} \]

As stated in H2a, when a product is congruently placed in the program, attitudes toward the product are expected to be more favorable compared to when it is incongruently placed in the program. Further, the information processing type may moderate such effect. Similar to our discussion above, when people engage in deliberative information processing, they are more likely to scrutinize the presented product information with a fair amount of effort. This cognitive effort might overshadow the differences between congruent and incongruent product placement in eliciting product attitudes. In this regard, the main effect of placement type on product attitudes would be stronger under the incidental information processing. Hence,

\[ H2c: \text{The effect of product placement (congruent vs. incongruent) on attitude is moderated by the information processing type. The congruent placement elicits more favorable product attitude than does incongruent placement and this effect is stronger under the incidental processing condition compared to under the deliberative processing condition.} \]
METHODS

Study Design

This study used a 2 (Product Placement: Congruent vs. Incongruent) x 2 (Information Processing: Incidental vs. Deliberative) between-subjects design. Ninety seven college students (mean age= 20.5; 55% females) participated in the study in exchange for extra credit. They were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: incidental processing-congruent placements, incidental processing-incongruent placements, deliberative processing-congruent placements and deliberative processing-incongruent placements.

**Congruency vs. Incongruency.** With professional help, two original episodes of *Seinfeld* were edited together to create two 15-min video clips. These two clips were used to introduce two types of product placement: Congruency vs. incongruency. Episode 12 in Season 2 (Revenge) has a story line about doing laundry at Laundromat, and there is an exiting product, *Tide*, congruently placed in the episode. Episode 4 in Season 3 (The Library) has a story line about returning a book to a public library. In this episode, *Dentyne* chewing gum is mentioned causally by the character. In creating the clip for this study, the laundry story was kept as the main strong line and was intermingled with the returning-book story line. In the congruent placement condition, *Tide* was edited into the episode whereas *Dentyne* was not. Conversely, in the incongruent placement condition, *Dentyne* was edited into the episode whereas *Tide* was not. To resemble real life experiences, each clip also included commercial breaks similar to a sitcom episode played on TV. In addition to the focal products in the congruent and incongruent placement conditions, other
products, for example, *Master Card, Seltz soda, Nike shoes and Diet Coke* that were already in the show were also kept and treated as filler products.

**Incidental vs. Deliberate Processing.** Two separate sets of instructions were given to participants to elicit either incidental processing or deliberative processing of the placed products in the episode (see McQuarrie and Mick 2003 for similar manipulation). In the incidental processing condition, participants were asked to pay attention to the plot and the conversations of the episode. This instruction was expected to make the participants spend most of their cognitive resources on the plot, the primary task of watching the episode. In deliberative processing condition, participants were asked to pay attention to the plot of the episode as well as products placed in the episode. This instruction was expected to make the participants spend most of their cognitive resources on the placements.

**Procedure and Measures**

Fifteen 30-min experimental sessions were conducted with each session being randomly assigned to one experimental condition. As a result, there were 26 participants in the 4 sessions of the incongruent placement-incidental processing condition, 23 in the 4 sessions of the congruent placement-deliberative processing condition, 24 in the 3 sessions of the incongruent placement-deliberative condition, and 24 in the 4 sessions of the congruent placement-incidental processing condition.

The participants in the deliberative processing conditions and incidental processing conditions received their respective instructions. To ensure that this manipulation would take effect, these instructions were repeated twice, at the beginning of the session and right before they watched the episode. Participants then watched the 15-minute episode.
end of the clip, participants were given the questionnaires and were asked to answer all the questions honestly as there was no right or wrong answer. Specifically, participants first indicated their understanding of the episode, completed the recall and attitude measures for focal products, and rated manipulation check items. Toward the end, they also indicated their familiarity about the sitcom *Seinfeld*, general attitudes toward product placement practice, and demographic information. Participants were debriefed upon the completion of the experiment.

Specifically, recall was measured in two fashions: free or unaided recall and aided recall. For free recall, the participants were given two minutes to list all the products they remembered seeing/hearing from the episode. For aided recall, participants indicated their awareness, with a ‘Yes’, ‘No’, or ‘Not shown/heard’, for the focal product. Then, participants used a 5-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree=5 and strongly agree=1) to indicate their agreement or disagreement with two attitudinal statements for each product. For example, “*Tide* is a good laundry detergent” and “I would consider buying *Tide* for future laundry.” They also used 5-point Likert-type scales to rate the manipulation check items. Two items gauged the information processing manipulations were, “I was aware that there was product placement in the episode while I was watching it,” and “While watching this show I focused on the plot most of the time.” Two items gauged the congruency manipulation were “*Tide* (Dentyne) fits well in the storyline of this episode,” “*Tide* (Dentyne) comes out as expected in the plot of this episode.”

**RESULTS**

**Manipulation Check**
**Processing.** Two items were used to measure if the instructions indeed produced different types of information processing as intended. These two items were analyzed separately, because one item measured the involvement with the plot whereas the other measured the awareness of the placement in the program. Because participants in all the four conditions were asked to focus on the plot throughout their viewing, the involvement with the plot was not expected to differ between two different information processing conditions. These two different processing conditions would only influence participants’ awareness of the placement. Thus, the scores on both items were submitted to a 2 (Congruency: Congruent vs. Incongruent) x 2 (Information processing: Incidental vs. Deliberative) ANOVA, separately. As intended by the manipulation, there was a significant main effect of information processing on the awareness of the placement, $F(1, 93) = 124.8, p < .01$. No other effects were significant. This indicated that the manipulation took effect because the participants in the deliberative processing condition were more aware of the product placement ($M= 4.06$) than were the participants in the incidental processing condition ($M= 2.42$). Also as expected, the main effect of information processing on participants’ involvement with the plot was not observed ($F<1$). No other effects were significant.

**Placement.** Two items were used to measure if the two products, Tide soap and Dentyne chewing gum, were good proxies of the congruent placement and incongruent placement, respectively. These two items were merged (Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.78$) and submitted to a 2 (Congruency: Congruent vs. Incongruent) x 2 (Information processing: Incidental vs. Deliberative) ANOVA. The results showed that there was a significant main effect of the placement, $F(1, 93) = 322.77, p < .01$. This suggested that as intended by the manipulation,
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*Tide* was considered to fit the plot well and come out as expected in the context of the plot (M=3.77) than was Dentyne (M=2.08). No other effects were significant.

**Recall**

For free recall, the number of participants who listed the focal product, *Tide* or *Dentyne*, was recorded for each condition (see Table 1.1). A chi-square ($\chi^2$) test showed that there were significantly more participants in the incongruent condition (68.2%) than the congruent condition (31.8%) who recalled the focal product without any aid, $\chi^2=5.82$, $p<.05$. Hence H1a was supported. H1a was further tested for aided recall. The number of participants who recognized seeing the focal product was recorded for each condition (see Table 1.2). A chi-square test indicated that there were significantly more participants in the incongruent condition (63.9%) than the congruent condition (36.1%) who remembered seeing/hearing the focal product, $\chi^2=4.74$, $p<.05$. Hence H1a was also supported under the aided recall. These findings suggest that when product was placed in an unexpected fashion, more people tend to recall it or remember seeing/hearing it compared to when the product was placed in an expected fashion.

The effect of information processing depth on recall was also tested. For free recall, incidental processing tended to elicit higher product recall (M=61.4%) than did deliberate processing (M=38.6%), however, the effect was not significant, $\chi^2=2.27$, n.s. The same pattern also occurred in the aided recall condition. See table 1.2. Hence, H1b was not supported. It was expected in H1c that a stronger effect of product placement on recall would emerge under the incidental processing condition than under the deliberative processing condition. A chi square test showed that the effect of product placement on
unaided or aided recall did not differ significantly between incidental processing and the deliberative processing conditions, $\chi^2 < 1$. Thus, H1c was not supported either.

**Attitude**

For the focal product, an attitude index was created by averaging participants’ scores on the two attitudinal items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.65$), and submitted to a 2 (Congruency: Congruent vs. Incongruent) x 2 (Information processing: Incidental vs. Deliberative) ANOVA. There was a significant main effect of the type of product placement on attitudes, $F(1, 93) = 14.99$, $p < .01$, suggesting that the product in the congruent condition elicited more favorable attitudes ($M = 3.44$) than the product in the incongruent condition ($M = 2.96$). See Table 2.1. Thus, H2a was supported. There was also a significant main effect of the processing type on attitudes, $F(1, 93) = 51.74$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the participants in the deliberative processing condition had more favorable attitudes toward the products than participants in the incidental processing condition.

Further, these main effects were qualified by a marginally significant interaction effect, $F(1, 93) = 3.45$, $p = .06$. This suggested that the effect of product placement (congruent vs. incongruent) on attitude was moderated by the information processing type. One-way ANOVA was conducted in each information-processing condition to disintegrate the 2-way interaction. The results showed that the effect of product placement on product attitudes was significant in the incidental processing condition, $F(1, 93) = 14.86$, $p < .05$, and not significant in the deliberative processing condition, $F(1, 93) = 2.31$, n.s. Specifically, in the incidental processing condition, congruently placed product elicited more favorable attitudes ($M = 3.12$) than did incongruently placed product ($M = 2.44$). Thus, H2c was supported. This implies that participants’ attitudes are affected by the placement type only
when they are unaware of products placed in the show, i.e., under incidental processing condition. In the case where they are aware of product placement, however, their attitudes are similar under both placement conditions.

**Ancillary Analyses**

These analyses were conducted to ensure that the recall of and attitude toward the focal product were influenced by the manipulation of congruency and information processing, and not other factors, such as participants’ familiarity with *Seinfeld* and their general attitudes toward product placement practice. Therefore, scores on these factors were submitted to 2 x 2 ANOVAs and the results were shown in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. Significant main or interaction effects occasionally occurred, however, there was no consistent pattern. For example, information processing was found to influence their agreement with the statement “product placement is acceptable if I am aware of its presence.” However, the main effect of information processing was not found on other items. Overall, these results strengthened our argument that it was the placement congruency and information processing manipulation that had an expected impact on focal product only.

**CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this research was to investigate how the perceived congruent placement in a television program influenced recall of and attitudes toward the placed product. Moreover, how audiences’ information processing mode – incidental vs. deliberate – moderated the influences. The results showed that compared to an incongruently placed product, a congruently placed product elicited lower product recall, but more favorable product attitudes among respondents. Importantly, such attitudinal effect was more pronounced
when the respondents engaged in incidental information processing when they watched the TV sitcom than when they engaged in deliberate information processing.

Consistent with past research (d’Astous and Chartier 2000; d’Astous and Seguin 1999), when the product is congruently placed in a movie or TV program, indicating a better integration between product and program, audiences are more likely to generate favorable attitudes toward the product. A theory of congruity (Mandler 1982) suggested that congruent information fits with consumers' category expectation more than incongruent information, and consequently, congruent information is seen in a favorable light. In contrast, when information incongruency increases and consumers have more difficulties resolving the disparate information, then, negative evaluations are likely to occur. In the context of product placement, this means that a product that follows the storyline and its appearance fits well into the program is favored over a product whose appearance does not fit into the program well. In addition, the moderating effect of information processing revealed that although congruent placement enhanced product attitudes, this effect was stronger when respondents were unaware that products were placed in the program they are watching than when they were aware. We speculated that this is because when respondents engage in deliberate processing of both program and product placement, they are likely to spend more effort understanding the product and forming their attitudes toward the product. Therefore, the different effects of congruency vs. incongruency on product attitudes might be attenuated by the deliberate cognitive process. In the incidental processing condition, however, respondents are not aware of product placement, which might facilitate the expected effect of congruency on product attitudes.
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As Mandler (1982) suggested, situations of incongruency are more likely to be considered novel and draw attention. This perspective implies that consumers in such situations are likely to pay increased attention to incongruent information, and consequently exhibit higher recall and recognition of the information provided. Our findings supported Mandler’s (1982) explanation, showing that respondents who were exposed to incongruent placement tended to remember the focal product than those who were exposed to congruent placement. The effects of information processing on recall, either the main effect or interaction effect with placement congruency, were not found in this study. One possible explanation is there is a lack of implicit memory tests to capture the effect of incidental information processing. Deliberate information processing occurs when people exert intentional effort to access and encode outside information. Therefore explicit memory tests, such as recall and recognition, are appropriate to test the recall of information processed in a deliberate mode (Law and Braun 2000; Shapiro and Krishnan 2001). Incidental information processing occurs incidentally, automatically, and sometimes unconsciously. Therefore implicit memory tests, such as sentence completion and word association, are appropriate to test the recall of information processed in an incidental fashion (Duke and Carlson 1993). This study only used explicit memory tests, which might not be able to tap the information that is processed incidentally. This might explain why the effects with regard to information processing on recall were not shown.

Managerial Implications

As shown in this study, the congruently placed product led to different persuasion effects: Favorable product attitudes but low product recall. This may suggest that recall and attitudes are two equally persuasive, significant strategies for product placement.
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practitioners. In one case, practitioners need to consider getting high recall of their products, and in the other case they need to consider obtaining favorable product attitudes. Which strategy is executed requires practitioners to consider the communication objective of the placement (d’Astous and Chartier 2000). If they want higher product recall, then somehow incongruent placement is a way to go; if they want positive product attitudes, then congruent placement is a way to go. Bear in mind also that audiences may engage in different information processing, which could also affect the attitudinal outcome. One factor that helps to determine the communication objective of product placement is the product life cycle.

Product life cycle describes the evolution of a product over four cycle stages: Introduction, growth, maturity, and decline (e.g., Cox, 1967). At the introduction stage, a product is just launched in the market and consumers are unfamiliar with the product. At the growth stage, although demand for the product is growing, the competition is also high. At these stages, marketing strategies are recommended to emphasize on increasing consumer awareness of the product and stressing product merits to increase consumer awareness (Hofer 1975). These strategies call for high retention or recall of products. As shown in this study, incongruent product placement could lead to high product recall. Therefore, placing product in a less congruent program context seems a good choice when the product is at the introduction or growing stage. At the maturity stage, product is at its peak and is familiar to the vast majority of prospective consumers. Strategies for this stage are recommended to focus on product differentiation and consumer satisfaction. The decline stage is the last stage of a product life cycle. At this point, the product is viewed as just another commodity. Strategies for this stage are recommended to emphasize on buyer
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loyalty. These strategies call for favorable product attitudes to compete with competitors’ brands during the purchase process (Hofer 1975). As shown in our study, congruent placement could lead to positive product attitudes. Therefore, placing product in a congruent program context would be a good choice when the product is at the maturity or decline stage.

Limitation and Future Studies

This project was to examine the effect of placement congruency and information processing on product recall and attitudes in a TV program. Consistent with our expectation, a congruently placed product (Tide) tended to elicit more positive attitudes but lower recall compared to an incongruently placed product (Dentyne). Although the results of manipulation check indicated that Tide and Dentyne are good proxies of congruent and incongruent placements, it is possible that different modalities might also contribute to the observed persuasion effect (Law and Braun 2000). Specifically, Tide is a visual placement whereas Dentyne is an audio placement. Future research should consider using congruent and incongruent placements within the same modality, either visual, or audio, or a combination of both. This would help to eliminate the possible confounding effect of modality as well as to strengthen the current findings.

REFERENCES


Understanding the Effectiveness of Product Placement:


Understanding the Effectiveness of Product Placement:

Journal of Advertising Research, 42 (2), 80-92.


Understanding the Effectiveness of Product Placement:

**TABLE 1.1**
Free Recall of Focal Product as a Function of Placement Congruency and Information Processing
Understand the Effectiveness of Product Placement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Congruency</th>
<th>Information processing</th>
<th>Incongruent</th>
<th>Congruent</th>
<th>Count (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incidental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27 (61.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17 (38.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count (percent)</td>
<td>30 (68.2%)</td>
<td>14 (31.8%)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 1.2**
Aided Recall of Focal Product as a Function of Placement Congruency and Information Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Congruency</th>
<th>Information processing</th>
<th>Incongruent</th>
<th>Congruent</th>
<th>Count (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incidental</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34 (55.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27 (44.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count (percent)</td>
<td>39 (63.9%)</td>
<td>22 (36.1%)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1
Understanding the Effectiveness of Product Placement:

**Product Attitude as a Function of Placement Congruency and Information Processing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Congruency</th>
<th>Information Processing</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incidental</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deliberate</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congruent</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incongruent</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1**

**General Attitudes toward Product Placement as a Function of Placement Congruency and Information processing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Attitude</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>F Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placing products in TV programs, Realistic, and Acceptable if obvious (α=0.67)</td>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>0.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placement x Processing</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewers subconsciously influenced</td>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placement x Processing</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable if aware of its presence</td>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>3.145*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placement x Processing</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to see real brands in programs</td>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placement x Processing</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I buy brands that I see</td>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placement x Processing</td>
<td>3.22*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p<0.05

**Table 3.2**

**Episode Knowledge/Familiarity as a Function of Placement Congruency and Information processing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge/Familiarity</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>F Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

29
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>Processing</th>
<th>Placement x Processing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seinfeld left $1500 at the laundry</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add sand in washing machine</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to the old job</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry wore a purple dress</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry paid the fine</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan of Seinfeld; Watched this Episode earlier; and Follow the reruns of Seinfeld (α=0.86)</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>