

***“Effects of congruence between brand and film
image in brand placements on brand recall
and attitudes”***

‘If you really think about it, when watching television,
you have product placement all the time’.

--- Jay Chiat ---

‘Watch out for this little P - it makes you want to buy
all sorts of things.’

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De effecten van brand placements (advertenties van merken in een film of televisie show) op herinnering, attitudes en gedrag zijn tot op heden voor een groot deel onbekend. Daarom is in deze studie een poging gedaan tot het ontrafelen van effecten die brand placements hebben op deze variabelen. Aangenomen wordt dat wanneer merkperceptie anders is dan perceptie van de film waar het merk in is geplaatst, dit effect kan hebben op herinnering, attitudes en gedrag. Na uitvoering van twee experimenten is gevonden dat de manier waarop merken in films worden geplaatst daadwerkelijk effect heeft op herinnering en attitudes. Specifiek wordt aangetoond dat congruentie in brand placements (waarbij merk en film op dezelfde manier worden waargenomen) samenhangt met hogere recall, positievere evaluaties en vrouwelijke associaties van het merk dan incongruentie.

The effects brand placements (i.e. advertisements of brands placed in a film or television show) have on memory, attitudes and behavior are still for a large part unknown. Therefore, in this study an attempt is made to uncover the effects brand placements have on these three variables. It is thought that when perception of a brand is utterly different from perception of the film it is placed in, this has effects on memory, attitudes and behavior. After conducting two experiments it is found that the way brand and film are perceived by consumers actually does have an effect on memory and attitudes. Specifically, in this study it is shown that congruence (i.e. film and brand are perceived in the same way) accounts for more recall, more positive evaluations, and more feminine associations than incongruent placements.

While watching television shows (e.g. *The voice of Holland* and *So you think you can dance*), viewers are flooded with advertisements (such as *Coca Cola*, *Mentos* gum and *Rexona*), whether matching the show or not. It is of great interest to take a more careful look at brand placement and the match it has or has not with its context. In the Dutch television shows just mentioned, the ‘light’ versions of *Coca Cola* are being drunk several times in an unnatural, forced manner by persons who do not fit the picture of a ‘light drinker’ (e.g. an extremely overweight man standing next to an underweight woman drinking *Coca Cola Zero* and *Light* together). In another example, *Coca Cola* (i.e. often emitting happiness) is shown in the film ‘*Natural born killers*’, in which death and despair prove to be present throughout (Britt, 2010). Yet a different example, although not a brand placement, is found in the series of healthy food promotion among high school children by Jamie Oliver. In the commercial breaks accompanying the show, commercials of *Coca Cola* (opposite of healthy) instead of more context appropriate brands such as *Campina* and *Appelsientje* (i.e. milk and orange juice respectively) are shown. Also, *Burger King* is the official partner of the *Eredivisie* (i.e. the Dutch soccer competition) even though *Burger King*, being a fastfood chain, appears to be the exact opposite of the sportive *Eredivisie*.

As these fragments show, it may be strange to see a well-known brand in such an inappropriate context. Although it is known that the context in which a brand is placed may have certain effects on consumer responses (Buchanan, Simmons & Barbara, 1999), how the match or mismatch between a brand image and its context precisely affects consumer responses has not been taken into account yet. This is the purpose of this study.

Introduction

Four types of advertisements are often used in television advertising (i.e. traditional commercial breaks, Fennis & Bakker, 2001; broadcast sponsorship, Meenaghan, 2001; snipes, Veltkamp, Pruyn, van Rompay & Groenveld, subm.; product placement, Russell, 1998). In this particular study a closer look at brand placement is taken. A brand placement is an advertisement in which branded products (not to be confused with product placement, which generally uses non-branded products) are embedded within the storyline of a film or television show (i.e. editorial content) often to benefit the advertiser (Balasubramanian, 1994). Brand placements are thought to have several advantages over traditional television advertising. First of all, for consumers, brand placements are much more difficult to avoid (e.g. by zapping to other channels or undertaking other activities) than traditional advertisements. And when

implemented in a smooth disguise (i.e. a low level of prominence), positive attitudes toward the brand and the ad are often evoked (Veltkamp et al., *subm.*). Despite this knowledge, much with respect to brand placement is still unknown. Given the importance of the use of brand and product placements (in 2006 already 80% of television commercials was product placement; Broadcasting & Cable, 2006), the question rises what way of insertion is best suited to increase the effectiveness of these advertisements. For example, the extent to which the perception of a brand by consumers (i.e. brand image; Zinkhan & Hong, 1991) matches the image of the show in which it is placed has never been taken into account. This is exactly the area of exploration here.

Previous research has focused on the effects of program context and more traditional forms of advertising on brand awareness and attitudes of consumers (Buchanan et al., 1999; Keller, 1993), but the area of brand placement has been neglected up to now. An attempt is made to replicate the effects found in studies of context and traditional advertising by replacing regular advertisements with brand placements (Study 1), as well as to uncover the influence of ease of information processing and personality (Study 2). The main research questions of these studies are the following: What is the impact of matching (versus mismatching) brand image and context image on brand recall and attitudes? And which underlying processes (e.g. level of involvement, processing fluency, openness to experience) may explain the results found? In particular, an attempt is made to find out whether a match is required between a brand image and the context in which it is placed to account for more positive effects on memory and attitudes. First, a short overview of literature is given.

Brand placement and consumer responses

As explained, brand placements are advertisements placed within the editorial content of a film or television show (Buchanan et al., 1999). Brand placements have several advantages over traditional advertisements. First, brand placements reach the entire audience of a film or television show, because they are embedded in the editorial content; it is not possible to turn away from them by zapping or getting a cup of coffee. Second, since consumers do not believe a persuasive goal is present in brand placements, often positive evaluations of the brand and of the advertisement are found (Van Reijmersdal, 2007). It appears that the attitudes and beliefs of television audiences can be influenced by ads placed within the storyline of a television show. Also, effects on memory and behavior have been found.

With respect to attitudes, research shows that the extent to which consumers like a show may transfer to the advertised brand (Gardner, 1985). For instance, when a show (e.g. *Two and*

a half man’) induces a positive vibe within the viewer, this vibe may lead to a positive attitude toward the brand presented (Batra & Stayman, 1990; Edell & Burke, 1987; Weaver & Oliver, 2000). Next to attitudes, associations that consumers hold regarding some form of editorial content (e.g. a film) can be transferred as well (spill-over; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens & Smit, 2005). For example, it has been suggested that advertising context can influence the effectiveness of an ad and the audience's perception of an ad (Nam & Sternthal, 2008). For instance, the evaluation of a car is more positive after consumers have to evaluate attractive destinations for a vacation, instead of unattractive destinations (Raghunathan & Irwin, 2001). Also, after exposure to a classy clothing brand, participants rate a restaurant more positively than after exposure to a casual clothing brand (Stapel, Koomen & Velthuisen, 1998). In another context, it has been shown that the image consumers have regarding a certain sports event may transfer to the brand that sponsors the event (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). However, whether a match should be present between the perceptions consumers hold regarding a brand and the perception of a context (e.g. the sports event) has not been measured until now.

Regarding memory, earlier studies have shown that brand placements incompatible with a show (incongruent) are thought to induce high brand memory (Feltham & Arnold, 1994). Behaviorally, it has been demonstrated that brands shown in a film are more often chosen in a purchase setting than other brands. When consumers are exposed to a particular brand placement (e.g. *Pepsi*), they are more likely to choose the brand shown over other brands compared to consumers who have not seen the brand placement (Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007).

Although a lot of studies have measured the effects of product and brand placement, only a few focused on how a brand should be integrated into the media context to increase the effectiveness on memory and attitudes. For example, prominence appears to be important in the sense that more prominent brand placements evoke less positive attitudes (Cowly & Barron, 2008). Prominence refers to the extent to which a brand placement possesses characteristics to make it a central focus in the attention of television audiences (Avery & Ferraro, 2000). Less prominently placed brands often induce more positive attitudes (Homer, 2009). When not prominently present and connected to the plot brand placements are better appreciated than traditional advertisements, since viewers do not feel persuaded into doing something (Avery & Ferraro, 2000; DeLorme & Reid, 1999). Especially the idea of adding realism to a film or show seems to be important (although this notion is rather neglected in brand placement). Prominent placements are particularly well remembered, but because consumers perceive these placements as more persuasive, evaluation is less positive.

Further, brand placements and effects regarding memory and attitudes can be categorized along three dimensions (i.e. Tripartite Typology of product placement; modality (visual, auditory) and plot connection; Russell, 1998), since it is thought that placements differ by being placed on screen or mentioned in dialogue (modality). The extent of integration in the story plot (plot connection) is of importance as well. Congruence between modality and plot connection (Figure 1) appears to affect recall and attitudes. For example, incongruent placements are remembered more often, but are also perceived as unnatural.

Table 1. Congruence (Russell, 1998).

		Plot connection	
		<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
Modality	<i>Audio</i>	Congruent	Incongruent
	<i>Visual</i>	Incongruent	Congruent

For the purpose of this study, ‘congruence’ refers to the extent to which a match is present between perception of the brand and the context in which it is placed. When brand perception is connected with the perception of the film it is placed in it is called a congruent placement and when there is no connection it is called an incongruent one.

Then, plot connection appears to resemble the matches and mismatches described earlier. Lower plot placements have a minor contribution to the story, merely mentioning the brand or a brief appearance of the product on the screen. Higher plot placements often take a major place in the story line or build the persona of a character (Holbrook & Grayson, 1986). An example of high plot connection is found in the film ‘*James Bond*’ with the *Aston Martin* in which the protagonist (James Bond) drives. In this film the character is clearly identified with the brand. Although resembling the focus of the present studies on the match (versus mismatch) between a brand and its context, still a slightly different approach is taken. How a brand and a film are perceived by consumers (i.e. brand image; Zinkhan & Hong, 1991) is of major importance.

Therefore, brand image should play an important role in brand placements and it may be a problem when images of brand and film do not match. Specifically, these studies focus on what happens if consumers hold strong attitudes toward a brand and the film in which they see that brand appear.

The context in which advertising appears has also received a considerable amount of attention in connection with consumer decision-making (Buchanan et al., 1999). For example, consumers have expectations regarding brands and the contexts (e.g. displays) in which they appear. Disconfirmation of these expectations may lead to re-evaluation of the brand and even reduction of brand equity. Furthermore, consumers find it important that consistency is maintained in brand communications. Drawing further on the notions of consistency and expectancy, already in the 1930s it was found that consumers appear to have a preference for unity and a tendency to perceive environments holistically (Gestalt psychology: figure-ground contrast, goodness-of-form and symmetry; Koffka, 1935; Van Rompay, de Vries & Van Venrooij, 2010). Perceiving environments as a whole most likely accounts for positive attitudes due to facilitated processing (Reber, Schwarz & Winkielman, 2004). The extent to which consumers enjoy holistic environments is the reason why exploration of the effects of matches and mismatches between brand and film perception is thought to be important.

Congruence and specific consumer responses

Drawing on the insights on brand image and context effects, it is thought that a brand placed in a matching context evokes positive attitudes. Literature already showed that perceived unity (congruence) in visual appearances (e.g. service environment, brand placement in film) positively affects consumers' aesthetic responses to products (theory of aesthetic pleasure; Reber et al., 2004; Veryzer, 1993). Also, in investigating the influence of processing fluency on aesthetical liking, it was found that people have a preference for stimuli that express similar congruent meaning (conceptual fluency; Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2008), due to effortless integration of these meanings into a clear impression (Reber et al., 2004).

With respect to attitudes, it is shown that congruent stimuli are more positively evaluated than incongruent stimuli. Although congruent placements may be noticed and therefore processed less (e.g. less brand awareness), more favorable effects with respect to attitudes toward the advertisement, the brand, and purchase intent have been found (Feltham & Arnold, 1994). Results did not differ with respect to brand image (Van Reijmersdal, 2007). Research on visual product features shows that congruence also influences brand perception. Variations in similarity of visual elements have large effects on credibility, for instance (Van Rompay & Pruyn, in press). Brand credibility is higher when a product possesses elements that have the same (i.e. congruent) symbolic meaning, such as shape and typeface design. Also, positive effects on attitudes and recall are found when an advertisement and television show both express a positive (or a negative) mood (Gardner & Wilhelm, 1987). A sad commercial in

the context of a cheerless program is more effective with respect to recall and recognition, than in the context of a cheerful program (Kamins, Marks & Skinner, 1991). In summary, the present research suggests that the extent to which a message can be processed fluently is an indicator of the extent to which a message is liked. Accordingly, it is concluded that a congruent brand placement (brand image matches the program in which it is placed) will result in more positive attitudes than a brand placement incongruent to the program and the first hypothesis therefore is as follows:

H1: Congruence as opposed to incongruence between brand image and film image will positively impact attitudes toward the brand.

Although incongruence is thought to have negative effects on attitudes, it may have a positive effect on memory. Earlier studies have shown that brand placements that do not match with their context (incongruent) induce better brand recall. For example, it is found that when a stimulus differs from its regular environment (i.e. incongruence), it grabs attention and, as a consequence, accounts for high brand awareness (Theewes, 2004). The same is found for attributes within an advertisement (Feltham & Arnold, 1994). Mental processing, or activation of associations, occurs during a program and does not stop when a commercial appears. This is true for traditional commercials and perhaps also for brand placements. The viewer expects that similar attributes will be evoked in the commercial as in the program previously viewed. For example, an advertisement for *Nike* portrays achievement and is therefore consistent with the attributes evoked by a football game. In contrast, a beer commercial showing ‘couch potatoes’ most probably is not viewed as consistent with a sports program. If an ad is evaluated as being inconsistent with the program, it evokes unexpected attributes which account for better memory.

Furthermore, it was stated that a match between an advertisement and its context will have low brand awareness, because congruent objects are not noteworthy and unlikely to prompt extensive cognitive elaboration (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Since it is thought that the effects found for more traditional forms of advertising also account for brand placements the following can be stated:

H2: Incongruence as opposed to congruence between brand image and film image will positively impact memory of the brand.

These predictions were tested in an experimental study in which pairing of a brand and a film is based on the difference in perceptions consumers hold regarding femininity and masculinity (Table 2).

Table 2. Pairing of brand and film based on *femininity*.

		Film	
		<i>Feminine</i>	<i>Masculine</i>
Brand	<i>Feminine</i>	Congruent	Incongruent
	<i>Masculine</i>	Incongruent	Congruent

Study 1

Method

Participants and design

In the first of two studies 137 participants were randomly assigned to the cells of a 2 (film: female versus male genre) x 3 (brand image: feminine versus masculine versus neutral) between participants design.

All participants were undergraduates from the University of Twente and received a course credit and a chance to win a gift coupon to the value of 50 euros for their participation. Three participants were removed from the dataset due to incomplete questionnaires, leaving 134 participants. Of these participants 30 were male and 104 were female. The mean age was 20.2.

Procedure

After a short introduction, participants were asked to take place in front of a computer. They were asked to read and sign an informed consent form before the start of the experiment. Then, they were told that the experiment took place on the computer and a pen-and-pencil questionnaire had to be filled out.

The experiment was divided into two parts. These two parts were presented to the participants as two separate studies. First, participants had to review a poster and second, a film fragment and a questionnaire were provided. Participants were asked to examine a poster on which a picture of the brand *Apple* was placed. An *Apple* computer was shown with underneath it a description of the brand (feminine: mother and son laughing; masculine: snowboarder;

neutral: blue screen). In a pretest, participants already had to indicate to what extent they thought *Apple* was feminine (versus masculine) and to what extent they thought the poster was realistic. It was confirmed that the feminine manipulations were more feminine and the masculine manipulations were more masculine ($p < .006$). Also, the extent to which a poster was thought to be realistic did not differ ($p < .101$).

Then, after examining the poster, participants were asked to watch a short film fragment. They were told that the purpose of this second part of the experiment is to measure attitudes toward the clothing in the film. Half of the participants were shown a fragment with a feminine genre and half of the participants were shown a fragment with a masculine genre. The feminine film was selected because it is a romantic comedy. Romantic comedies are mostly films aimed at a female audience (*'The Devil Wears Prada'*). The masculine film was chosen based on the amount of action scenes present (*'I am Legend'*; meant for a mostly male audience). These films were selected because *Apple* brand placements appear throughout both films. The edited fragments lasted for about 6 minutes.

In the feminine fragment a girl is being tormented by her boss. It is shown that Andy (the protagonist) is having difficulty combining her personal life with the assignments her boss gives her. The masculine fragment is about a man who is the only survivor of a fatal virus. This man is trying to find other survivors of and an antidote to the virus. In his quest he and his dog get into a fight with the monsters created by the virus.

Measures

Participants have to fill out a questionnaire comprising dependent measures and filler items to conceal the purpose of the study. To assess the effects of congruent and incongruent brand placements on brand awareness and attitudes two questions regarding recall and recognition of as well as attitudes toward the brands in the film fragment are asked. In a free recall question participants have to write down which brands they saw in the fragment. To measure recognition, they have to mark the brands they saw on a list.

How much the film fragment is liked is measured with questions such as *'I think the film fragment was interesting'* (versus boring; Personal Involvement Inventory of Advertising, Semantic differential scale; 10 items, $\alpha = .916$; Zaichkowsky, 1990; Appendix 1). Then, the extent to which participants perceive *Apple* to be feminine or masculine is measured with questions such as *'I think Apple is daring'* and *'I think Apple is sensitive'* (Masculine Brand Personality/Feminine Brand Personality scale (MBP/FBP), Likert-format; 8 items, $\alpha = .622$; Grohmann, 2009; Appendix 2). Finally, to understand how much participants liked the brand

shown in the film, attitudes are measured (Likert-format; 12 items, $\alpha = .907$; based on: Cho & Stout, 1993; Appendix 3). This scale consists of items such as '*I think the brand is likeable*' and '*I think the brand is interesting*'.

Results

Manipulation check

Differences are found with respect to the posters ($p < .001$), which is expected and confirms the findings of the pretest. Participants having seen a feminine poster thought *Apple* to be more beautiful and charming (indicators of femininity) and participants having seen the masculine poster thought *Apple* to be more daring (indicator of masculinity). No differences were found with respect to clarity and the extent to which participants thought *Apple* to be a strong brand.

Attitudes

To measure the effects of brand perception and film on attitudes toward the brand placed, all six conditions were compared. To find out whether congruent placements accounted for more positive attitudes than incongruent ones, an analysis of variance is conducted. First (as shown in Table 3), a main effect of brand is present ($F(2,128) = 3.421$; $p < .036$), indicating that differences in attitudes come from the posters participants viewed at the start of the experiment. Those who viewed the female-brand image poster were more positive toward the brand *Apple* compared to those who viewed the male-brand image poster ($M = 5.101$; $s.d. = .132$ versus $M = 4.929$; $s.d. = .135$). The best results were found when *Apple* was portrayed as neutral ($M = 5.422$; $s.d. = .135$). A main effect of film as well as an interaction effect stayed out.

Table 3. Main effect of brand on attitudes toward the brand.

		DF	F	P
Main Effect	Film	1,128	.001	.979
	Brand manipulation	2,128	3.421	.036
Interaction Effect	Film*Brand manipulation	2,128	1.628	.200

Then, supporting the presented hypothesis, the results showed that differences in attitudes depend on the way a brand is perceived in a certain context ($F(2,131) = 4.607$; $p < .012$;

Figure 1). Although the best results were found when *Apple* was portrayed as neutral, a trend was present that showed attitudes toward *Apple* were more positive when participants saw a congruent message than when they saw an incongruent message ($F(1,88)= 2.837$; $p< .096$). Furthermore, when participants were specifically asked how much they liked *Apple* after being subjected to a congruent or incongruent brand placement, it showed that *Apple* was liked the most in a congruent setting ($F(1,88)= 5.129$; $p< .026$). There were no differences found with respect to the film seen, the results found apply to both feminine and masculine congruence. The results found with respect to attitudes toward a brand in a specific context replicate the findings of prior studies in the subject.

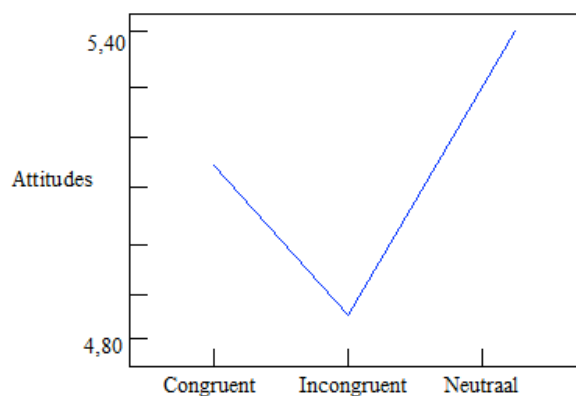


Figure 1. Effect of congruence on attitudes toward the brand.

Brand awareness

In order to investigate whether incongruence of film and brand image had positive effects on memory of the brand, an analysis of variance with brand and film as independent variables and recall as the dependent variable was conducted. With respect to brand recall it was found that differences exist between participants ($F(5,129)= 5.763$; $p< .000$; Table 4). An interaction effect was present as well.

Table 4. Main and interaction effects of film and brand on brand recall of *Apple*.

		DF	F	P
Main Effect	Film	1,129	20.897	.000
	Brand manipulation	2,129	2.562	.081
Interaction Effect	Film*Brand manipulation	2,129	3.472	.034

After it was shown there were differences, understanding of the direction of these differences was required. After comparing the incongruent versus congruent placements, the results showed that congruent placements were recalled better than the incongruent ones, which opposes to earlier findings ($F(2,129)= 3.472$; $p< .034$; Figure 2). Specifically, the results showed that with a feminine manipulation recall was higher when participants also saw a feminine film fragment ($F(1,89)= 7.098$; $p< .009$); congruent brand placement; $M= 1.67$; $s.d.= .49$) than when they saw a masculine film fragment (i.e. incongruent brand placement; $M= 1.04$; $s.d.= .21$). Interestingly, with a neutral manipulation differences disappeared ($M= 1.59$; $s.d.= .50$ versus $M= 1.32$; $s.d.= .49$). The same trend is perceived with regard to recognition ($F(1,89)= 2.547$; $p<.114$).

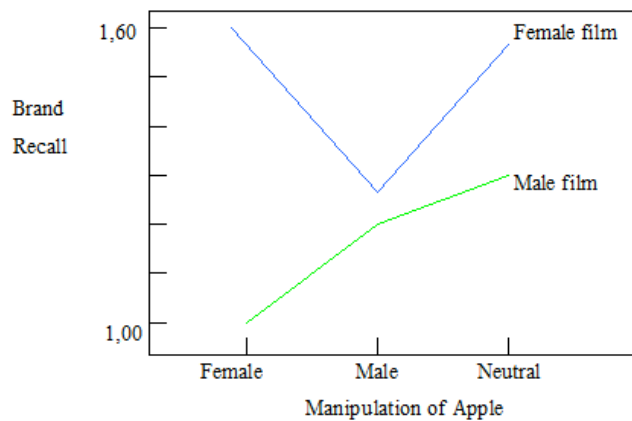


Figure 2. Effect of congruence on brand recall.

Femininity

Since the participants were exposed to different levels of femininity during the experiment, it was thought that this construct may affect the associations consumers have with a brand. For this reason participants had to answer several questions regarding the extent to which they perceived the placed brand to be feminine. An analysis of variance was conducted to find out whether the scores on a femininity scale differed among participants after watching different fragments and *Apple* posters. First of all, a main effect of manipulation but not of film was found. An interaction effect was present as well (Table 5).

Table 5. Main and interaction effects of film and brand on perceived femininity.

		DF	F	P
Main Effect	Film	1,128	1.165	.282
	Brand manipulation	2,128	6.456	.002
Interaction	Film*Brand manipulation	2,128	3.055	.051

To get a more detailed understanding, a specific look at the different conditions is taken. It was found that differences exist between groups of participants ($F(2,131)= 6.736$; $p < .002$). Concerning the extent to which a brand placement is perceived to be more feminine (versus masculine), the best results with respect to liking and recall were found when the film seen was feminine. When participants were also exposed to a feminine poster of *Apple*, results were even better, thus an effect of congruence seems to occur.

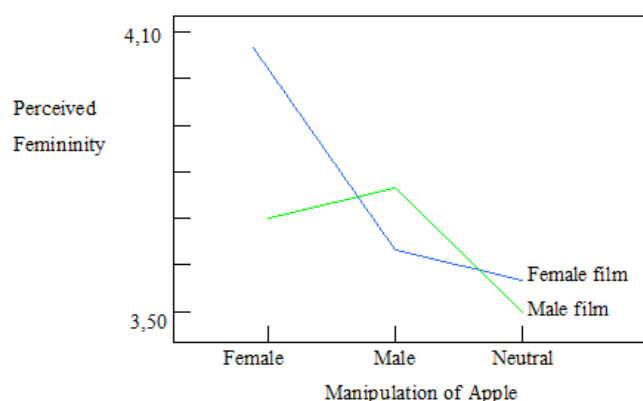


Figure 3. Perceived femininity.

After categorizing the six conditions into three larger groups based on congruence it was found that the participants in the congruent group thought the brand *Apple* to be much more feminine than the ones in the incongruent and neutral group ($M= 3.92$; $s.d.= .50$ versus $M= 3.67$; $s.d.= .50$ and $M= 3.54$; $s.d.= .50$).

When leaving out the neutral group and focusing on the congruent and incongruent groups specifically, it was found that *Apple* is perceived as more feminine when shown in a congruent message, even when the message is completely masculine ($F(1,82) = 7.127$; $p = .009$). It seems not to matter whether the context of the advertisement is masculine or feminine. A masculine brand in a masculine film shows a trend of feminine associations.

Discussion

Regarding attitudes, evidence is found supporting the first hypothesis. The results show that attitudes are more positive among those who viewed a brand placement that was congruent (i.e. when perception of brand and film are alike) than when the placement was incongruent. This is consistent with past research stating that holistic environments are liked more than environments that are not holistic (Reber et al., 2004). Consumers seem to have a preference for objects appearing in a context congruent rather than incongruent with the object.

In contrast, no support was found for the second hypothesis. This hypothesis stated that a brand will be recalled better when that brand does not match the film in which it is placed. Although it was generally thought that stimuli standing out significantly from their environment are recalled better (e.g. due to different conceptual meaning; Theeuwes, 2004), the opposite is found here. In this study *Apple* is recalled more often when placed congruently than when placed incongruently.

Although not a dependent measure, an interesting result is found when taking a look at femininity. It was found that the brand used for placement (*Apple*) is perceived as feminine when placed congruently, regardless of the masculine manipulations (i.e. the effect was also present when both brand and film were denoted as being masculine). An explanation for this curious finding may be found in earlier work on congruence and femininity, since terms such as elegant, smooth, easy to process, supple and well-balanced seem to apply to congruence as well as femininity (Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011). Moreover, given the pronounced effect congruence has on femininity, it is thought that congruence of itself may be feminine.

Furthermore, since messages that are easily processed are known to please the senses (i.e. processing fluency is hedonically marked), it is thought that processing fluency lays at the basis in explaining the results found in the present study. Facilitated processing, resulting from perceived unity, is generally thought to account for positive attitudes toward messages (Reber et al., 2004). Based on this knowledge it is thought that processing fluency may be the key to thorough understanding of these findings. Since no evidence for these speculations is provided in this study, in a second study attention will be given to the subject.

Processing fluency

Processing fluency refers to the ease with which information can be processed. An increase in processing fluency is shown to have a positive impact on consumer evaluations and to have a positive effect on consumer attitudes (Van Rompay et al., 2010). Research has shown the importance of congruence among meanings associated with elements within an environment (i.e. conceptual fluency; Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2008). For instance in an online environment, banners thematically matching the website in which they are embedded, accounted for more favorable attitudes toward the ad as opposed to banners that did not match the website thematically (Shen & Chen, 2007). The same is found in retail environments. A store is rated in more positive terms when scent and music are congruent than when they are not (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001).

The findings suggest that consumers perceive environments in a holistic manner and that their decision-making is a result of the ease of meaning integration of certain elements in an environment. It seems that an increase in the experience of positive affect is found because of effortless intergration (Reber et al., 2004). Also, in order for a consumer to form an opinion or to make a purchase decision integration of different elements is required (i.e. information processing). The relative ease with which information can be integrated or processed (i.e. processing fluency) is thought to shape consumer response (Winkielman & Cacioppo, 2001).

It is thought that stimulus congruence facilitates processing and contributes to positive evaluations of products and brands. Consumers tend to integrate meanings into an overall impression and congruence is expected to facilitate this impression formation (Van Rompay & Pruyn, in press). Also, it is found that stimuli that are easy to process are evaluated more positive than more difficult to process stimuli (Reber et al., 2004).

Based on the previous information it is stated that a congruent message is probably liked more because it can be processed more easily. A match between objects and brands appearing in a film can be integrated without effort, which induces more positive affect. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: Congruence as opposed to incongruence between brand image and film image will positively impact attitudes toward the brand because it is more easy to process.

Since the meaning of and attitudes toward advertised messages are for a large part influenced by consumers' personality, it is reasonable to imagine that different people have a unique preference for specific advertisements (Meyers, Sen & Alexandrov, 2010). Also, consumers seem to positively evaluate an ad when it matches their personality. Therefore, next to processing fluency two personality factors (i.e. openness to experience and involvement) are measured as well.

Openness to experience and involvement

The Five Factor model of personality (Traits: neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience; Costa & McCrae, 1992)) is thought to explain patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about oneself and the environment in a range of social and personal contexts (Vandereycken, Hoogduin & Emmelkamp, 2000).

Since personality can elicit different responses in the same situation it is thought that it may also have an effect on the way congruence in advertising is perceived. Particularly openness to experience is thought to be of importance with respect to the effects of incongruent

brand placements on attitudes. Openness to experience (low scores account for more conventional, traditional interests, and preference of things that are plain and straightforward; Goldberg, 1993) is considered to be important in perceiving and acting on brand placements, and in understanding consumers' reactions to products (Duhachek and Iacobucci, 2005).

It is thought that an incongruent placement is appreciated more when a person is open to experience, since an incongruent placement appears to be innovative and unconventional and needs to be approached with imagination and creativity.

H4: Individuals who are more open to experience will have more positive attitudes toward incongruent as opposed to congruent brand placements.

Also, the extent to which a person is involved in a film may have an influence on how well a placement is remembered and how positive attitudes are. Involved consumers may particularly dislike an incongruent message because they are completely absorbed in the message. The interruption of an incongruent stimulus may therefore come as a more unwanted surprise than for viewers who are less involved in the film.

Earlier research has shown that when a person is highly involved in a message or program, an upcoming ad is often not noticed or processed, which accounts for low recognition (Cameron, 1994). Moreover, low involvement makes peripheral aspects of an ad (such as source, music, background) more important in influencing attitudes. In contrast, high involvement makes message cues (quality of presented claims) play a large role in influencing brand attitudes (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983).

High involvement is thought to result in lower recognition of but more negative attitudes toward the brand due to high elaboration of incredible content. Because the quality of the message is important to high involved consumers, it is thought that an incongruent placement induces negative affect. An incongruent placement will have the quality to attract attention even when the consumer is highly dedicated to the editorial content. But negative affect arises due to the incongruent information. It can be stated that:

H5: Individuals who are high involved will have more positive attitudes toward a congruent as opposed to an incongruent brand placement.

Study 2

Method

Participants and design

In the second study 126 undergraduates from the University of Twente and Bonhoeffer College Enschede participated in a 2 (predisposition (Processing fluency, Openness to experience, Involvement: high versus low) x 3 (brand image: congruent versus incongruent versus mild incongruent) between participants design in which participants are randomly assigned to the cells. Participants from the University of Twente received a course credit for their participation. Only two participants were cut from the dataset due to incomplete questionnaires, leaving 124 participants, 53 being male and 71 female. The mean age is 18.7.

Procedure

After participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form they were told that the experiment took place on the computer. The procedure was in close replication of Study 1, although this experiment was divided into four parts. In the first part a poster was shown to the participants. They had to attend to the poster and read the description that went along with it. The same posters were used as in Study 1, except the descriptions were slightly different. This time the posters were categorized as congruent, incongruent and mild incongruent to the film. A pretest confirmed that *Apple* was perceived to be more feminine after seeing the feminine (versus masculine) poster ($p < .002$) and again no differences were found in realism ($p < .206$).

Then, after viewing the posters, participants had to fill out a personality questionnaire. This questionnaire measured the extent to which participants were open to new experiences (Hoekstra, Ormel & de Fruyt, 1992).

In the third part a fragment of the film '*The Devil wears Prada*' is shown; the same as in Study 1. This fragment is chosen over the fragment from '*I am Legend*', because the brand *Apple* was more pronounced here.

Finally, participants had to fill out a questionnaire comprising questions about the dependent variables mentioned earlier.

Measures

Participants had to fill out a questionnaire consisting of dependent measures and filler items to conceal the purpose of the study. To assess the effects of congruent and incongruent brand placements the same questionnaires as in Study 1 were used (i.e. recall and recognition;

femininity and liking of the brand; Grohmann, 2009; Cho & Stout, 1993). In addition, to find out what specific influence processing fluency, openness to experience and involvement have with respect to perceived femininity of the brand placements, an additional questionnaire regarding processing fluency and involvement is added (Liveliness and ease of image formation, Likert-format; $\alpha = .89$, Ellen & Bone, 1991, Appendix 4; Personal Involvement Inventory of Advertising, Semantic differential scale; 10 items extended with one question measuring personal involvement, $\alpha = .916$, Zaichkowsky, 1990, Appendix 1). Statements, such as *'The fragment I just saw is chaotic'* and *'I think this film was boring versus interesting'*, have to be answered using a 7-point Likert scale and semantic differential scale respectively to capture the ease of processing and relevance of the program. Openness to experience was assessed earlier in the personality questionnaire. Questions such as *'I often try new and foreign dishes'* are posed to understand a person's openness to experience (NEO-FFI; $\alpha = .83$; Hoekstra, Ormel & de Fruyt, 1992, Appendix 5).

Results

Openness to experience and involvement

Although openness to experience and involvement remain interesting factors no differences with respect to explaining the observed associations with femininity are found ($F(1,83) = 1.243$; $p < .268$ and $F(1,83) = 1.298$; $p < .258$ respectively). These factors are kept from further analysis and focus is on main effects only.

Brand awareness and attitudes

An analysis of variance showed that the expected effects of congruence on recall and recognition failed to appear as well as the effects on attitudes (F 's < 1 , ns.).

Femininity

With an analysis of variance results found in Study 1 were replicated and again differences occurred regarding the extent to which brand placements were perceived to be feminine ($F(2,121) = 8.078$; $p < .001$). The results showed that the congruent placement was more feminine to the participants ($M = 4.034$; $s.d. = .095$) than the mild incongruent ($M = 3.830$; $s.d. = .092$) and incongruent placements ($M = 3.509$; $s.d. = .097$).

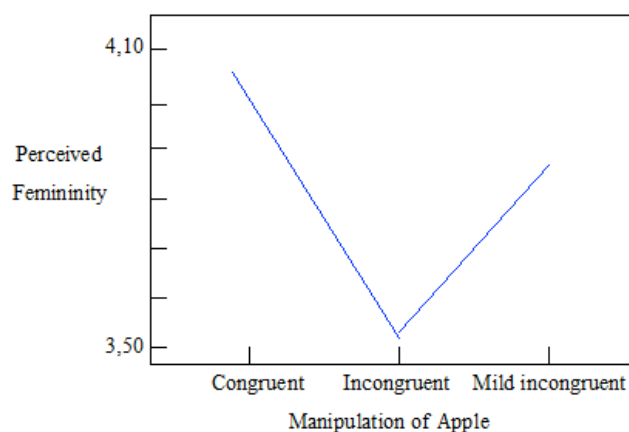


Figure 4. Perceived femininity

When focusing on the congruent and incongruent groups specifically, it was found that *Apple* once more was perceived as more feminine when shown in a congruent placement, even when the message was completely masculine ($F(1,83) = 14.834$; $p < .000$). The extent to which a brand placement is congruent in the sense of brand and film image accounted for the feminine associations consumers had with a brand. Again, this effect was found when a brand placement consisted of both feminine brand and film image and masculine brand and film image.

Processing Fluency

Processing fluency was thought to mediate the relationship between brand and film congruence and liking. Based on the criteria for conditional mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986), processing fluency was tested as a mediator of the effects of the film and brand image interaction on liking (and femininity). In order for mediation to apply, however, the interaction between the two independent variables (film and brand) should have a significant effect on both the mediator (processing fluency) and the dependent variables (liking and femininity).

To test another criterium for mediation, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with brand, film, their interaction, and the proposed mediator (processing fluency) as covariate should be conducted. This analysis should show a reduction in significance of the interactive effect of film and brand on liking (and femininity; compared to the original analysis without the mediator included as covariate) and a significant effect of the mediator (processing fluency).

No significant effects were found on either of the two criteria, however a marginal trend seems to be present in the effects of film fragment and manipulation on processing fluency

($F(1,83)= 2,182$; $p< .143$). This may suggest that a congruent message results in better processing which in turn accounts for more feminine perception.

Discussion

In this second study positive effects of congruent brand placements on attitudes and recall were not found. On the other hand, effects of congruence on femininity did occur. Participants found the brand more feminine when it was placed congruently opposed to incongruently. It is thought that an explanation for this result is found in the context in which a brand is placed. Prior research demonstrated that a person's masculinity (versus femininity) is positively related to the masculine (versus feminine) image of a cigarette smoked (Vitz & Johnston, 1965) and that people often act so as to 'live up' to these images. For instance, a masculine man is less likely to smoke cigarettes with a more feminine character than a more feminine man (Fry, 1971).

It would make sense then that when a brand is placed in a very masculine film, the brand itself becomes more masculine as well. However, this study shows something else. It does not matter whether a film or a brand is perceived to be feminine or masculine or both, if they are the same the brand is perceived to be more feminine. Also, participants indicated that brand placements in which brand image matches film image are easier to process than placements without a match present. Therefore, perhaps an explanation for these results is found in congruence and processing fluency.

Earlier, it was mentioned that congruence and femininity share a few characteristics, such as elegant, smooth, easy to process, supple and well-balanced (Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011). Processing fluency may also trigger characteristics such as smoothness and elegance. Furthermore, processing fluency may be an indicator of how much consumers perceive a brand to be feminine and how much they like a brand, since congruent messages are more easily processed than incongruent ones.

In this study a mediating role of processing fluency on liking is not found, but a trend of mediation between a congruent placement and perceived femininity is. After comparing the present results with past studies it is thought that, given the pronounced effect congruence has on femininity, congruence of itself may be feminine. To summarize, this second study is successful in replicating the effects on perceived femininity, but exploration of specific elaboration processes did not answer the questions raised by Study 1.

General Discussion

Although the proposed congruence effects varied somewhat in strength across the two studies, the overall results testify to the importance of congruence between perception of brand and film in brand placements and the influence on memory, attitudes and associations (e.g. femininity). In Study 1 it was shown that a congruent brand placement positively affects attitudes toward the brand. Also, opposing earlier thoughts on the subject, Study 1 showed that brand recall was positively affected by a congruent placement as well. Furthermore, although not a dependent measure, it was found that the extent to which the brand was perceived to be feminine was higher, again when the brand placement was congruent. Then, in Study 2, albeit that positive results of congruent brand placements on attitudes toward and recall of the brand were not found, effects of congruence on femininity were obtained. Once more participants found the brand more feminine when it was placed congruently opposed to incongruently. It is thought that this has all to do with the context in which a brand is placed. As mentioned, the results with respect to femininity replicate those of Study 1 and on top of that, a trend is observed toward explaining the effects found on femininity.

A trend is found showing that processing fluency has an effect on perceived femininity. A brand placement consisting of a similar perception of brand and film is found to be more feminine than a brand placement without matching images. Also, although no evidence is found in these studies, these placements are enjoyed more by consumers because the different elements are more easy to integrate. Effortless integration still is thought to lead to high processing fluency which in turn accounts for positive attitudes toward the brand.

Limitations and Future Research

First of all, with respect to the brand, in the present research advertisements of *Apple* were evaluated in the context of brand placements. The brand chosen for this experiment is one of the biggest brands in the world and the advertised product is very familiar. Making use of a well-known brand such as *Apple* has several advantages as well as disadvantages. A possible disadvantage is found in the fact that consumers already have developed a strong attitude (positive or negative) toward the brand. This may prevent effects (that would be present with lesser-known brands) from showing. On the other hand, the effects found in the present research for a well-known brand such as *Apple* will most probably apply to newer or lesser-known brands as well. Perhaps even to a greater extent, since consumers do not already have strongly developed attitudes toward these brands. Also, consumers have knowledge of a lot of brands in the marketplace, which makes the present studies generalizable to genuine

environments. Finally, lesser-known brands may be easier to manipulate (because consumers do not already hold strong opinions toward the brand) and therefore produce even more pronounced effects.

Also, in these studies the natural contrast between femininity and masculinity is used to get a clear understanding of the effects of congruence on recall, attitudes and associations. The effects of congruent brand placements may not be the same for all categories of brands. In future research it would be interesting to find out whether the same effects are obtained in different categories, such as adventure and health. For instance, evaluation of brands such as *Low Alpine* (which is probably perceived as adventurous) placed in a film taking place in an office and *Burger King* placed in a film promoting healthy lifestyles may give more insight on the subject. It is expected that the results for these brands may differ from the results found here. For example, with respect to brand placements consisting of adventurous versus non-adventurous elements, it is thought that individuals highly open to new experiences will have more positive attitudes toward an incongruent placement than toward a congruent one.

Also, it is thought that the different effects found between the two studies regarding attitudes toward the brand, may be explained by the composition of the research samples. The sample was skewed with respect to men and women. This skewness may in part explain the effects regarding perceived femininity (which was the same for both studies) and attitudes (*Apple* was not evaluated as favorably). In the first study, the larger part of respondents is female ($M_{\text{female}} = 103$ versus $M_{\text{male}} = 30$). In the second study the difference in number decreased ($M_{\text{female}} = 71$ versus $M_{\text{male}} = 53$). This may explain why *Apple* in Study 1 received more favorable attitudes when appearing in a congruent placement than when appearing in an incongruent or mild incongruent placement. Perhaps, women are more sensitive to variations in congruence than men. This would explain why attitudes toward congruent placements are more positive in Study 1 than in Study 2, since the larger part of the first sample consisted of women. To find out whether there is a correlation between the relative amount of women within the sample and the effects on liking, a univariate analysis of variance was conducted. In study 1 no differences were found between men and women and the results found on attitudes ($F(1,132) = .022$; $p < .882$). In Study 2, however, a trend is found showing a discrepancy between men and women ($F(1,122) = 2.216$; $p < .132$). This finding may indicate that women are more sensitive to variations in congruence than men, which as a consequence has effects on attitudes.

Then, some concerns exist regarding the length of the film fragment. The two fragments in which the brand placements are shown to the participants (from '*The devil wears Prada*' and '*I am legend*') last for approximately six minutes. This length does not correspond to the length

of regular films shown on television lasting usually for about ninety minutes. This may have considerable consequences for the effects of congruent versus incongruent brand placements when they are shown on television. On the contrary, when comparing the fragments to today's music-videoclips on *MTV*, what was thought to be a potential problem no longer is. In these clips it becomes a topic to show as many brands in the shortest amount of time possible.

Further, another possible barrier is found in the prominence of brand placements. Earlier, prominence was described as the extent to which a brand is placed in a central focus of television audiences (Avery & Ferraro, 2000). Since prominence has different effects on recall and attitudes (Homer, 2009), it is of great importance that no differences exist in the fragments used in the experiment. In the present research no attention has been given to how prominent the brand is placed in the fragments, but this should be a central point in future research.

Deliberating on the subject, it is questioned whether or not congruence and prominence are independent from one another. It may be that an incongruent brand placement of itself is more prominent than a congruent one. Then, the effects of congruence should be the same as for prominence. Comparing the results found in the present studies on congruence with the results found in earlier research on prominence, results appear not to be the same. Prominent placements usually were remembered more than less prominent ones, while in contrast incongruent placements were remembered less than congruent ones. In future studies it may be of interest to investigate the relationship between prominence and congruence.

Also, although effects of personality factors such as openness to experience stayed out, it should not be assumed that personality does not have any effects. The possible joint effects of congruence and personality factors on brand attitudes, recall and associations may still be of interest in future research. In fact, in a slightly different context effects of personality and congruence have been found (Van Rompay, Pruyn & Tieke, 2009). For example, participants with a high need for structure have more positive attitudes toward advertisements consisting of a natural product shape and a natural advertising slogan (i.e. congruence) compared to an artificial slogan (i.e. incongruence). This result indicates that dispositional differences between consumers do exist and it is therefore of great importance to further investigate those differences in the area of brand placements as well.

Finally, additional research would probably benefit from using larger samples of participants to obtain more precise conclusions. The sample sizes of these studies were perhaps a little too narrow with respect to gender and age. Almost all participants were high school or college students rather than random consumers which makes it more difficult to generalize to the entire television audience.

Conclusion

The present research contributes to the field of brand placement research, because it shows that congruence between brand and film should be taken into careful consideration. Placing a brand and assuming consumers will notice it and like it, is not enough in today's consumerism. These studies show that the way a brand is perceived, as well as perception of the show in which the brand is presented, appear to have a great influence on recall and attitudes of the television audience.

Although these findings only cover a small part of brand placement research, a lot of new opportunities come with the presented results. First, more aspects of personality may be investigated to find out whether brand placement congruence has different effects on different people. Second, field experiments may provide insight in what exactly are the effects of brand and film image congruence in real-life situations. Finally, the mentioned possibility of a relationship between congruence and prominence offers a great opportunity for further research.

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