

Product placement in the UK



Media Promotion & Product Integration Project

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Introduction



PRODUCT placement occurs when a company pays a TV channel or a programme-maker to include its products or brands in a programme. Since February 2011 product placement has been allowed in TV programmes made for UK audiences. This project examines industry practices, media reporting and debate surrounding the relaxation of rules.

Paid placement is now permitted in films (including documentaries), TV series (such as soaps), entertainment and other genres, but is prohibited in news or children's programmes, with a list of products such as tobacco, alcohol and medicines that cannot be placed. Since European rules were changed in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive of 2007 all EC member states have relaxed their rules to allow product placement.

Research design and methods

THIS research project examines current product placement in TV shows and analyses the reporting and discussion of product placement in both general news media and specialist 'trade' media. This forms parts of a broader study that explores the changing relationships between media and marketing communications and considers industry practices, policies and problems.

For the reporting analysis we used Nexis™ to search for all articles in UK newspapers that included the terms

Table 1: Search results: unique articles on product placement

	2011	2012	2013	2014 (to May)	Total
Total UK News	207	172	111	118	608
Total Trade Publications	171	102	63	16	352
TOTAL	378	274	172	134	958

News coding and analysis

EACH published item has been coded against 143 coding nodes. These cover actors and reporting (who speaks; what options); topics, issues and controversies; forms of PP (location, type of PP, type of programme/media, products); regulation and governance. Some reporting patterns confirmed standard hypotheses, such as the predominance of pro-PP opinion in trade publications, but others indicated more ambivalence and complexity, such as the extent of criticism of PP by journalists across general news publications. Analysis is ongoing but key findings include:

In general UK News criticism of PP was mainly articulated by journalists themselves, ranged from mild to acerbic, and tended to be brief, personal comments made by columnists. Coverage and criticism of PP tended to be episodic or based on a review of media content, with approximately half the stories covering US film and television. Thematic reports, addressing the context of regulation of PP in UK TV, were exceptional. However, readers were informed about PP deals and breaches of Ofcom's rules, with some papers prominently featuring BBC 'infringements', in line with their editorial stance. Reporting of NGOs and academics critical of PP was marginal compared to pro-PP industry voices. Media creative staff were divided, with some critical and other accepting the trade-offs required to finance television output.

Trade Media gave voice to criticisms but these focused mainly on adoption, financing and advertising effectiveness issues. Attention focused on appropriateness but within a framework that rarely challenged the desirability of expanding product placement.

Overall, news coverage shows a process of normalisation advancing, but with some countervailing influences articulated in general news media. The most extensive voice of criticism came from columnists, with many reflecting a distaste and unease about PP accompanied by acceptance of its proliferation.

“Since 28 February 2011 product placement has been allowed in UK TV programmes”

Commercial media and marketing interests lobbied for these changes but were opposed by a range of consumer, health, children's, media reform and other civil society groups. Creative media professions were, and remain, split on the issue.

For advocates, product placement makes programmes realistic, secures vital funding (since ad avoidance makes traditional TV advertising less effective for marketers and less lucrative for media), and is welcomed by viewers, when done appropriately. Critics argue product placement allows marketers to pay for presence in programmes in ways that can distort editorial integrity and programme-making agendas and can bypass advertising controls.

Is product placement a price worth paying?

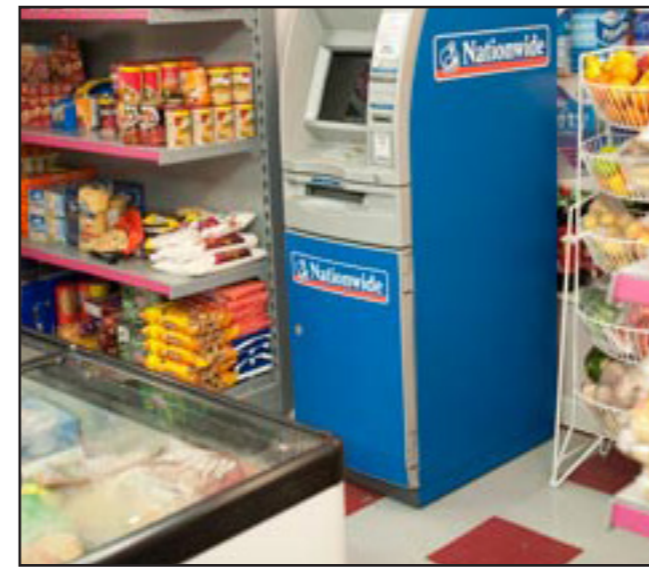
'product placement' or 'brand integration' between January 2011 – May 2014, resulting in a total of 608 discrete articles. We used the same search parameters for selected media and marketing 'trade' publications (including *Broadcast*, *Campaign*, *Marketing*, *Marketing Week*, *PR Week*) resulting in 352 articles. We imported these into Nvivo™ and coded each article in accordance with a coding sheet. Table 1 below summarises the search results quantitative data.

Table 2: Sample of coding analysis preliminary results

Coding Node	TOTAL	UK News	Trade
REPORTING ON PP			
Journalist critical of PP	126	126	0
Journalist pro PP	30	19	11
TV/media critic critical of PP	63	63	0
Marketers & Marketing Coms pro PP	110	39	71
Media Creatives critical of PP	51	49	2
Media Creatives pro PP	31	29	2
Television Industry critical of PP	6	6	0
Television Industry pro PP	125	45	80
Academics critical of PP	11	10	1
Academics pro PP	4	4	0
Consumer/health critical of PP	12	11	1
Media reform NGOs critical of PP	5	5	0
Viewer/person critical of PP	22	21	1
Viewer/person pro PP	2	1	1
ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIES			
Creative expression	22	17	5
Editorial control and integrity	38	23	15
Disclosure and transparency	23	19	4
Inappropriate ad placement	29	27	2
Separation (media and adv.)	16	7	9
Subtlety	38	24	14
Undue prominence	22	16	6

* In five trade articles journalistic evaluation was 'mixed', acknowledging problems, and some professional commentary was critical of PP executions but no items criticised PP as a marketing practice.

Media Reporting



PRODUCT placement has entered the lexicon and is now applied to ever-broader areas of social life. In addition to television shows, films and other media forms including books, music, fashion, journalists now apply product placement to government PR ('The Treasury has done some overnight product placement', *The Telegraph*, 20 March 2013), culture (with Beyoncé's 'singing' at Obama's inauguration described as 'cultural product placement', *The Guardian*, 2 February 2013). That is one finding of the ongoing study of over 900 published articles that will examine the distribution of coverage (quantitative) and the discourses through which product placement has been understood, framed and discussed.



Summary and next steps

IN the first three years product placement has generated fewer deals and less income than originally predicted by industry. The main reasons for this are

1. Strong regulations
2. Insufficient incentives for media (due to a well-functioning prop placement market and high transaction costs for PP)
3. Marketers' caution
4. Recognition of the need to ensure acceptance by key stakeholders and viewers.

PP arose from two overlapping debates focused on regulation and on marketing effectiveness, both of which encouraged PP to be introduced in a manner that was non disruptive, 'subtle', and tolerated. Three years on, there are indications that PP is becoming more integrated into media and marketers planning.

The next phase of this project will be to complete the analysis of TV programmes and reporting of PP. This will contribute to a book-length study of media and marketing integration and to journal articles. This research will contribute to answering the questions how, and why, has the integration of media and marketing become normalised?

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Jonathan Hardy and UEL for the opportunity to undertake this project.

My motivation for applying for the internship was the opportunity to work closely with an academic on a research project that will contribute to something bigger in the world outside the university. This project is highly relevant to my area of study - journalism, as it investigates the British media and its laws and regulations.

This project has remarkably increased my knowledge of marketing industry in the UK, especially when it comes to product placement. It has helped me develop critical thinking and analytical skills. As an aspiring journalist, I enjoyed reading the 958 articles, which have helped me improve my marketing and journalistic terminology. I have learnt how to carry out both quantitative and qualitative research based on a coding frame in the software Nvivo, which I am likely to use in the future. Due to the television analysis aspect of this project, I am now much more observant and critical of advertisements in general, and especially product placement. I now also feel much more prepared to write my dissertation in the third year of university, having ten weeks of research experience.

This internship project has been challenging, as media promotion and brand integration was a new field for me to explore, hence the internship presented a valuable opportunity for me to become more self-disciplined. I am very thankful for this experience, especially considering the fact that I was in my first year of university. This project has given me insight into the world of academic research, and will definitely be great help in my future career. My supervisor Jonathan Hardy has been very understanding, flexible and helpful, and I am excited to have contributed research towards his new book.

Alina Kolosova



Television analysis

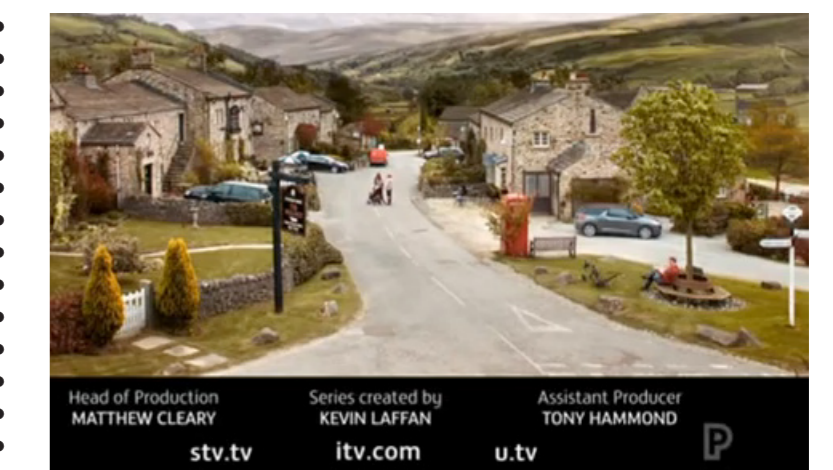
WE examined product placement in television shows broadcast over one week in June 2014 (10 hours). Our sample included the entertainment reality show *Big Brother* (Channel Five), and two soaps containing product placement: *Hollyoaks* (Channel Four) and *Emmerdale* (ITV). We also examined the soap *Coronation Street* (ITV) and ITV drama series *Vera* to assess how products and brands appear under 'prop-placement' arrangements, since the programmes selected did not have product placement arrangements.

Hollyoaks
Hollyoaks, produced by Lime Pictures for Channel Four and shown also on E4, 4OD, is a long running British soap drama featuring a cast primarily aged between 16-35 and is aimed at a teenage and young adult audience. *Hollyoaks* 'attracts a considerable child audience' with 10% of its audience aged 4-9 (Ofcom (2013: 18) *Ofcom Broadcast Bulletin*, Issue 236, London: Ofcom).

Currently *Hollyoaks* has a programme sponsorship and product placement deal with Vo5 shampoo, a brand owned by Unilever, which also owns other brands featured in *Hollyoaks*. Unilever placements include Ben and Jerry's ice cream (interior shop scenes) and Adshel posters for Vo5 (exterior street scenes). *Hollyoaks* features a variety of other brands including Pringles (Kellogg Company), Puffed Wheat (PepsiCo), Coca Cola, Adidas sportswear, and music. Amongst the most significant are alcohol brands since product placement of alcoholic products is prohibited. Under the UK's strict advertising regulations 'Alcohol ads are banned from appearing in and around programmes commissioned for or principally targeted at audiences below the age of 18, as well as programmes likely to appeal particularly to [such] audiences' (ASA 2014). Alcohol brands such as Baileys and Smirnoff feature prominently on set and in the foreground of character action in domestic settings and bars, although some bottle brands are not displayed or are fictitious.

- Key findings:
- » *Hollyoaks* illustrates rules permitting dual sponsorship and product placement deals (Unilever)
 - » The show blends paid placement with prop placement and fictitious or otherwise 'unbranded' goods.
 - » Some healthy foods (Activia) but significant food and drink in High Fat Salt Sugar categories (Coca Cola)
 - » Prominent alcohol brands shown in programme with significant under-18 audience
 - » Marketers can use product placement rules to by-pass controls on advertising and benefit from showing character engagement, products in use, etc.)

Emmerdale



Emmerdale is a long-running British soap first broadcast in 1972. *Emmerdale* is sponsored by McCain, Canadian food producer of oven-ready frozen food products and the world's largest producer of French Fries. In one episode examined there are 8 verbal and visual references to chips. Asked what she wants for tea a child answers 'pizza, chips and tomato ketchup'. A mother tries to mollify her son with the offer of dinner, 'two steak and chips'. Are these independent, editorially justified decisions based on characters' lifestyles or indications of sponsor influence? Does it matter if a producer of HFSS (high fat salt and sugar) food pays for presence in a family viewed TV soap?

Big Brother

Channel Five's *Big Brother* provides a vehicle for brand integration, such as a deal with Touchstone pictures to feature its upcoming release *Frnight Night*, a groceries delivery deal with Ocado, and a deal with Schwatzkopf hair dye maker Henkel. In the programmes examined, prominent brands featured included health and beauty products (Elvive, Garnier, Lush), food and drinks (Ribena), and music, with housemates singing karaoke versions of a One Direction song.

Programme (summary selection of data)	Date	Visual PP	Aural PP	TOTAL (PP in seconds)
Hollyoaks	24/6/14	91	40	131
Hollyoaks	26/6/14	347	0	347
Emmerdale (pt1)	26/6/14	44	173	217
Emmerdale (pt 2)	26/6/14	102	0	102
Big Brother	25/6/14	86	135	221

