

Product placement strategies and practices in contemporary blockbuster action films: an exploratory content analysis

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Abstract

This paper reports on the findings of an exploratory study, which examined the product placement methods and practices in five contemporary films of the action genre, via a content analysis that used a custom-designed, 13-item coding instrument. The films selected, based on overall box-office performance in 2010 and 2011, were: *Iron Man 2*, *Inception*, *Fast Five*, *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, for their relevant product placement characteristics. It examined the types of products, their brands and associated parent companies, and the modality of placements. Findings indicated that, for the selected films, automotive and electronic products were the most prevalent while the most common modality of placement was the ‘presentation’ type, suggesting a preferred method of the actual use of a product within the films. It concludes that, for the films examined, the industry gears product placements towards technological or transport products, targeted at male audiences.

Introduction

The application, strategy and practice of product placement in contemporary films is becoming increasingly prevalent and even ubiquitous, so that product placement is no longer considered a novel marketing tactic. While advertisers continuously search for more effective means of persuading consumers to buy the advertised products in an oversaturated world of advertising, marketers spend large sums of money on product placements in films that would appeal to their targeted markets or audiences. Today, larger film production studios also rely on such product placement deals as a major source of a film's funding. Hence, the topic warrants scholarly examination and analysis due to the practice's possible implications for audiences and the advertising and marketing industries. The fundamental research questions posed in this project are: What are the instances and methods of product placements presented within a sample of five (5) action-adventure films analysed? What are the general modal characteristics of such placements?

Product placement defined

Product placement, in simple terms and as defined by Gupta and Gould (1997), involves the incorporation of brands into movies in return for money or for some promotional or other consideration. In general, the term 'product placement' is associated with the film medium, although the practice is certainly not limited to film. To expand upon the definition in a broader sense, product placement is the purposeful incorporation of commercial content into non-commercial settings with product promotion generated via the combination of advertising and entertainment (Williams et al., 2011). This contemporary definition is a more appropriate classification due to product placement's extreme prevalence in modern society as a form of advertising, as many companies incorporate it as a key aspect of their marketing strategy. Product placement can be implemented in a vast spectrum of mainstream communication media including films, broadcast and cable television programs, computer and video games, blogs, music videos/DVDs, magazines, books such as novels, comics, Broadway musicals and plays, radio, internet and mobile phones (Williams et al., 2011).

Theoretical framework

This descriptive study is based on the positivist research paradigm as it seeks to obtain knowledge by the analysis of data and discovery of new information from a methodically objective perspective using an in-depth quantitative content analysis. The research also aligns with the functionalist perspective or paradigm of research and the theories related to product placement and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), where individuals are 'primed' (in which specifically designed

messages and visual representations can stimulate related thoughts in the minds of viewers) via conventions created by or for them to interpret and respond to them in a corresponding manner (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Scheufele, 2000). Therefore, different types of product placement can influence audience preferences in products and brands. This process occurs when individuals interact with the content of media messages they are exposed to (Weerakkody, 2009).

History of product placement

Newell, Salmon and Chang (2006) investigated the interesting and seemingly hidden history of product placement. Their research findings were based on an examination of internal documents obtained from motion picture studios, advertising agencies, television networks, and public relations firms that traced the development of product placement from its apparent conception going as far back as the 1890s. The historical research suggested that, in some form or another, a bartering system between companies and the film industry had existed for over 100 years although the practice is much more prevalent in contemporary times. The present-day forms of product placement resonate with echoes of past dealings. For example, the alcoholic beverage 'Jack Daniels' was placed in the Joan Crawford movie *Mildred Peirce* (1945) and, even as far back as 1896, two tubs of 'Sunlight Sapon' soap were prominently placed in a scene in the film titled *Washing Day in Switzerland*.

A research study by Williams, Petrosky, Hernandez, and Page (2011) comprehensively examined, revisited and renewed product placement in terms of definition, use, purposes of product placement, specific media vehicles, variables that impact the effectiveness of product placement, the downside of using product placement, and the ethics of product placement. The researchers concluded that the ideal product placement outcome is a win-win-win-win situation where the customer learns about new and established products and their benefits; the client receives relatively inexpensive advertising for their product; the media vehicle gets a brand for free or a reduced production budget; and the product placement agency gets a commission for bringing the parties together.

By the early 1980s, the film industry saw a substantial boom in product placement promotion and activity between major studios and companies. By this stage, product placement had become a robust source of revenue, allowing studios to subsidise some of the expensive costs of production and advertising (Gokhale, 2010). Research suggests that one of the pinnacle points and clear 'return on investment' indicators was the famous placement of 'Reese's Pieces' (a sweet) in the Steven Spielberg film *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), wherein just after two weeks of the film's release

Kraft (its parent company) recorded a 65% sales increase of the product. In 2005, it was recorded that firms paid \$722 million in fees, free products and promotional support for product placements in films, which in 2007 increased to \$2.9 billion, and was forecast to reach \$5.6 billion in 2010. In the 2002 film *Minority Report*, firms were reported to have contributed approximately \$25 million towards the production costs (constituting a quarter of the total), in which 22 brands were placed. Large companies such as Apple, Cadbury Schweppes and Mitsubishi have each spent tens of millions of dollars on product placements, and Volkswagen recently spent approximately \$200 million in fees and promotion to be integrated into NBC Universal's films and television programs (Wiles and Danielova, 2009).

The action-adventure genre

The genre of a specific film can elicit diverse emotional reactions and recall in audiences. Contemporarily, comedy, drama, and action are the most popular categories of film genres. Between 2007 and 2011, the Action genre has made up approximately 40% of the top 10 highest grossing films, always having at least one in the top three. In three of those five years, an action film has been the number one top grossing film (*Box Office Mojo*, 2010; 2011). The Action genre can be a very broad category, encompassing many subgenres that qualify the film as an Action film or, as commonly termed, Action-Adventure. Some sub-genres include: action-comedy, action-horror, disaster, fantasy, martial arts, sci-fi, spy, superhero, and thriller. At the core of an action film, its purpose is to entertain audiences. The Action genre involves one or more protagonists or, more appropriately, 'heroes' who face a series of challenges and obstacles to overcome. The protagonists are usually resourceful and battle against incredible odds, generally involving life-threatening situations to the hero, innocent characters and civilians. The antagonist, usually an evil villain, a super villain or an evil corporation, insinuates these situations. The genre is commonly perceived to place importance on story structure and the plot is secondary to the 'action', consisting of explosions, stunts, fighting, gun/weapon fights, vehicle chases, and spectacular sound and visual effects, to name a few. The primary audience demographic for action films is predominantly males between the ages of 18-44, to whom product placements can be assured to possess tailored characteristics suited to marketing products to this demographic (Sarno, 2005).

Literature Review

Galician and Bourdeau (2004) longitudinally studied the practice of product placement using samples of 15 Hollywood films released in 1977, 1987, and 1997. Gokhale (2010) replicated a similar study (utilising and expanding upon the frameworks established by Galician and Bourdeau, 2004) to

compare 15 Hollywood films against 15 Bollywood films between the years 2005 and 2009. These studies evaluated instances of product placement using variables such as the number of product appearances, duration of placements, types of products placed, modality of placements, integration levels, character associations and theatrical contexts. The frameworks utilised within the research by Galician and Bourdeau (2004) and Gokhale (2010) offered an appropriate guide for the selection of variables and their measurement in this study.

Balasubramanian, Karrh and Patwardhan (2006) conducted a thorough review of existing literature regarding product placement in order to create an advanced model to capture how such messages are designed to generate audience outcomes. The model focuses on four major theoretical components: execution/stimulus factors (e.g., program type, execution flexibility, opportunity to process, placement modality, and placement priming); individual-specific factors (e.g., brand familiarity, judgment of placement fit, attitudes toward placements, involvement/connectedness with the content); processing depth (degree of conscious processing); and message outcomes, that reflect placement effectiveness.

Researchers have gone to great lengths to measure and quantify varied forms of product placement methods that were previously and currently utilised by industries. As can be gathered from the reviewed literature below, it is demonstrated that there are several main factors relevant to this research that remain consistent across different studies. The existing empirical research elements that shape the framework of this current project are as follows:

Modality type: Modality type is the method in which the product placement is presented to the audience. It is considered an imperative variable that can impact the effectiveness of a product's placement (Williams et al., 2011). Its relevant factors depend upon delivery techniques and can be a combination of several of these. This is taken into consideration in the data collection process. The classification of the placements is categorised based on whether the modality is verbal (mentioned by a character), visual (simply placed in a scene), presented (clearly presented on screen or presented by a character) or demonstrated (demonstration of a product) (Soonkwan, Yong and De Los Santos, 2008). Past research indicates that each of these elements can influence audience outcomes.

The level of connection and integration: This connection refers to the degree to which the product or brand is integrated within the plot of the story. In general, the more integrated a product is within a scene and the more a product bears relevance to the plot (assists in the progression of the story),

the greater the audience response will be in terms of brand recall and positive attitudes towards it (Galician and Bourdeau, 2004; Wilson and Till, 2011).

Prominence: This concept relates to whether the placement is blatant or subtle, which can have significant effects upon audience perceptions. If a product is blatantly or prominently placed alerting the viewer of the placement, it can have a negative effect (Cowley and Barron, 2008). If the product is seamlessly placed yet still noticeable in a scene, it yields the greatest outcomes. Pamela Homer (2009) studied repetition in placement instances that are subtle against placements that were more prominent. An example of a subtle placement is where a product is placed within a shot or scene that is not intrusive to the viewer, such as a character who is sitting at a desk where the brand name of the computer monitor is visible. An example of prominent or 'in your face' placement would be when a product is overtly visible to the viewer and characters make reference to the product verbally, this is especially overt if the reference holds no real significance to the plot of the film. The coding of such a variable, like all other related variables, does not just fall into two distinct categories, but represents the two ends of the spectrum with varying degrees of prominence that fall in between.

Character association: This refers to the relationship between a product/brand placement instance and a character within a film. This product association with a character can powerfully assist in creating an emotive connection between brand image and audience perception (Soonkwan, Yong and De Los Santos, 2008). Whereas products that are associated with different integral characters can influence variable outcomes, if such an association of a product is linked to a protagonist versus an antagonist, a viewer may perceive a product as more desirable if it is associated with a heroic character. Other influential factors include the gender of the character and the product's level of involvement within the plot.

Theatrical context: In a theatrical context, a mood or emotive connotation surrounds the instance of a product placement. For example, a negative product placement context can cause a negative evaluation of a product. Within films, if an antagonist using a particular product or brand keeps committing negative deeds or crimes, or a brand is presented in negative venues or locations, viewers may associate and consciously or unconsciously develop negative feelings towards the particular product in their minds and vice versa (Soonkwan, Yong and De Los Santos, 2008). Again, this variable is susceptible to vary within a relatively large spectrum of emotive contexts and associations.

Method

The examination of product placement instances, methods, practices and strategies was performed in this study via a quantitative and descriptive content analysis of a sample of five recent action-adventure films.

The Sample

The five films selected for this research project belong to the genre of action-adventure films and share qualifying attributes, including market demographics, were among the top 10 grossing box office earners for 2010 and 2011, and plots that are set in contemporary times. Based on box office grossing, it is evident that the amount of exposure of each film to the public sphere is very high, with the average box office earnings for the five films totaling \$269,565,719 (Box Office Mojo).

However, currently there is an apparent lack of research conducted into the use of product placement within films that fall into the 'action-adventure' genre, hence this study could serve as a sound foundation for empirical development of that particular area of research.

Table 1: List of films selected:

Film title	Year released	Studio
<i>Iron Man 2</i>	2010	Paramount
<i>Inception</i>	2010	Warner Bros
<i>Fast Five</i>	2011	Universal
<i>Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol</i>	2011	Paramount
<i>Transformers: Dark of the Moon</i>	2011	Paramount

In 2010, the action-adventure genre represented 20% of the top 10 grossing films. Although this may be a seemingly small percentage for the genre, it is necessary to take into consideration the other films that constitute the remaining 80%. Animated films such as *How to Train Your Dragon*, *Tangled* and *Toy Story 3* made up 50% of the top 10 grossing movies for 2010, with comedy and drama making up the remaining 30%. The placement of products or brands within animations is relatively infrequent because producers feel that animations often transcend our contemporary realm of existence. Therefore, it is harder to place marketable products naturally into scenes of an animated feature. Animated movies are often targeted at children, also making them less attractive an

audience for product placement due to their low or even non-existent buying power - even with their 'pester power' to nag or influence parents to buy advertised products (Soni and Upadhyaya, 2007) for the types of products generally placed.

The period of the action, or the period in which the story is set, has a great influence upon the pertinence of products placed into films and, as such, films that are set in modern times can facilitate marketing methods while maintaining a much more natural setting for products (Redondo, 2008). As the films are all set in contemporary times, any product depicted will not seem misplaced in a temporal sense, which also promotes the accessibility of a product to potential consumers. The action-adventure genre also offers an appropriate platform for product placement, as the requirement for technology is generally integral to plots and scenes within the films.

Another factor that contributed to the selection of the films was based on their accessibility to audiences as well as to a researcher. As these films all grossed within the top 10 box office films for 2010 and 2011, and all can be easily purchased on DVD, streamed via online movie databases, aired during primetime or otherwise on free-to-air and pay television, along with the availability of downloadable, pirated versions on the internet.

The films were also chosen due to the high density of product placements present in them, with the exception of *Inception*. Films such as *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* had the most product placements for 2011, where director Michael Bay inserted 71 identifiable brands and products, seven more than the previous year's *Iron Man 2*. As the films with the highest number of product placements for 2010 and 2011 were both action-adventure films, this gives further significant weighting to the relevance of this study and its sample (Brand Cameo, 2010; 2011).

Coding procedure

The collection of data was performed via detailed content analysis. A coding guide and instrument were created for the purposes of this study in order to collect, measure, compare and quantify numerous product placement variables existing within the five selected films (see Appendix 1). These variables were based on frequently researched elements of product placement as referenced to in several of the primary content analysis studies examined in the literature review. The coding instrument closely followed the coding variables used in Sung, Choi and de Gregorio (2008), Gokhale (2010), Redondo (2006) and Galician and Bourdeau (2004). The coded quantitative data were analysed using Excel software.

Variables measured

The following is a list of variables, measures, and their operational definitions used in the coding process (see Appendix 1 for the full 'Coding guide' used). However, due to limitations in length, this paper will only report on the findings related to some of these variables and their relationships with each other, using just five of the research questions examined in the overall project. The remaining variables and research questions will form the basis of another paper.

Coding Instances of product placement: Each time a product placement occurred in a film under analysis, it was allocated a number in chronological order of analysis. The variables examined in the study are as follows (see Appendix 1 for details):

Year of release: The year in which the film was released; **Film Studio:** The name of the major studio/production company that released the film, obtained from the credits indicated at the beginning of each film; **Film ranking:** The films were allocated a code according to its year's ranking in total gross box-office earnings. These figures were obtained from the Box Office Mojo website; **Brand name of product:** In each instance of product placement, the name of the brand as visible to a viewer was recorded; **Parent company:** The parent company of each product or brand placed was recorded with the relevant information identified using the One Source (Global Business Browser) website which compiles a global database of companies, parent companies and executives; **Product category:** Each product placed was coded into one of the 25 predetermined principal product categories, such as 'Accessories' or 'Transportation'; **Product sub-category:** Each product placed was assigned to a subcategory relative to its principal category. For example, the product category for 'Clothing' was subdivided into ten subcategories such as beachwear, dresses, jeans, etc.; **Specific product:** If applicable, the name of the specific product was coded. This applied to specifics such as its model or type, for example the Apple 'iPhone 5' or GMC 'Topkick'.

Type of placement: Each product placement was coded under one of the following types: *Simply (visual) placed into the scene* - If the product was simply set into the scene, for example the product 'sitting' on the table or background with no obvious interaction or purpose; *Referred to via audio* - If the product was not on screen but referred to verbally by a character/s; *Presentation of product* - If the product is clearly presented on screen or presented by a character, also presentation in a heroic fashion, for example, a close up of a character's wristwatch showing its brand name or a close up shot of a car clearly displaying its logo; *Demonstration of product* - If the product is being used, operated or shown performing on screen, generally with the involvement of a character interacting

with the product, such as a car chase scene demonstrating the car's manoeuvrability/performance, or demonstrating an interface operation on a mobile phone; *Both presentation and demonstration of product* - This involves an amalgamation of the presentation and demonstration of a product. It is considered the height of product placement wherein the product is clearly placed and engaged with to a high degree on screen; for example, a heroic shot of a car with its logo clearly visible that is demonstrating its high-speed performance.

Reliability

All units of analysis were coded exclusively by the first author. To ensure the reliability of findings, an intra-coder reliability test was performed by recoding 10% of all units of analysis with randomly selected sections of each film. The results demonstrated that all variables had a high level of agreement or intra-coder reliability, with a rate of agreement of .95 across all areas of coding.

To understand how product placement methods are being utilised in contemporary action adventure films, the fundamental research question that forms the basis of this research viz. '*What are the instances and methods of product placements presented within a sample of five (5) action-adventure films selected for analysis?*', and '*What are the general modal characteristics of such placements?*', were examined, as applied to the top five grossing box-office action-adventure movies from Hollywood from the years 2010 to 2011 using the following specific research questions:

RQ 1: What products or brands were placed in the sample of films analysed?

RQ2: What are the parent companies of the products or brands placed in these films?

RQ3: What are the specific products or brands placed or represented in the films?

RQ4: How often does a specific product appear in the films analysed?

RQ5: What are the methods or modality types of the placements used in the films analysed?
(e.g., Are they simply in the background or integrated into a scene?)

Findings and Discussion

The following summarises the initial findings of the descriptive and quantitative content analysis of the five films with respect to the five research questions examined.

Frequency, product, brand and parent company

Overall, the research identified a total product placement occurrence of 378 instances within the five films in the sample, hence constituting an average of 75.6 product placements per film.

'*Transformers: Dark of the Moon*' had the most instances of product placement, followed by '*Iron Man 2*' (see Table 2 and Figure 1). The most frequent product category identified was 'Transportation', which totaled 147 (39%) recorded placement instances. The second most frequent category was 'Electronics' with 53 (14%) recorded placement instances, followed third by 'Fashion Accessories' with 47 (12%) recorded placement instances. The brand that appeared most frequently was Apple, with 28 placements of various products. Apple-branded products were also the main brand to feature in most films, appearing in four out of five films in the sample. The Apple brand appeared predominantly in *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* totaling 25 individual placements, but the Apple brand only appeared once in *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, *Iron Man 2*, and *Fast Five*.

The parent company which had the most total placements was General Motors, with 41 recorded placements inclusive of five brands of cars, which were Chevrolet, Corvette, GMC, Hummer and Pontiac. General Motors also featured in three out of the five films. The majority of General Motors Company placements occurred in *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, recording 36 instances. This would be due to several of the cars being integral characters of the film itself, in which the alien robot characters transformed into the actual product, such as '*Bumblebee*' who transformed into a 2011 Chevrolet Camaro, '*Sideswipe*' into a 2011 Chevrolet Corvette, '*Ratchet*' into a 2010 Hummer H2, and '*Ironhide*' into a 2009 GMC Topkick. The use of products themselves as characters plays to the strengths of product integration and product placement effectiveness.

In terms of parent companies (with the exception of Apple), automotive company products were the most frequently depicted in the selected films. Similarly, with the exception of Apple, the specific brands that are most frequently featured are also those of the automotive industry. The prominence of automotive products is not surprising given the selected films' subject matter and genres. Additionally, as can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, the diversity of the parent companies and individual brands is quite wide, with parent companies and particular brands that are not part of the top five making up around 65% and 75% of product placements respectively. This indicates that the five films generally had not necessarily favoured a particular parent company or brand. The exception to this is Apple, with the placement of its products making it the second most frequently seen parent company as well as the most frequently placed brand overall. Note that no other individual technology or electronics organisations' products come close to the prevalence of Apple's products within the selected films. This also reflects Apple's market share in the technology industry, where its products are similarly widely distributed among consumers in Western countries such as the United States, Great Britain, Australia and elsewhere.

Table 2 – Instances of product placement by film and most featured brand:

Film	Instances of product placement	%	Brands most featured	Most featured product type
<i>Iron Man 2</i>	83	22	Audi, Initium, Kodak, Dr Pepper	Car
<i>Inception</i>	29	7.7	Seiko, Mercedes, Ford, Samsung	Watch
<i>Fast Five</i>	57	15.1	Dodge, Staryee, Ford, Brahman	Car
<i>Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol</i>	72	19	Apple, BMW, Oakley, Prada	Laptop
<i>Transformers: Dark of the Moon</i>	137	36.2	Chevrolet, Ferrari, Corvette, Mercedes	Car

Figure 1 – instances of product placement

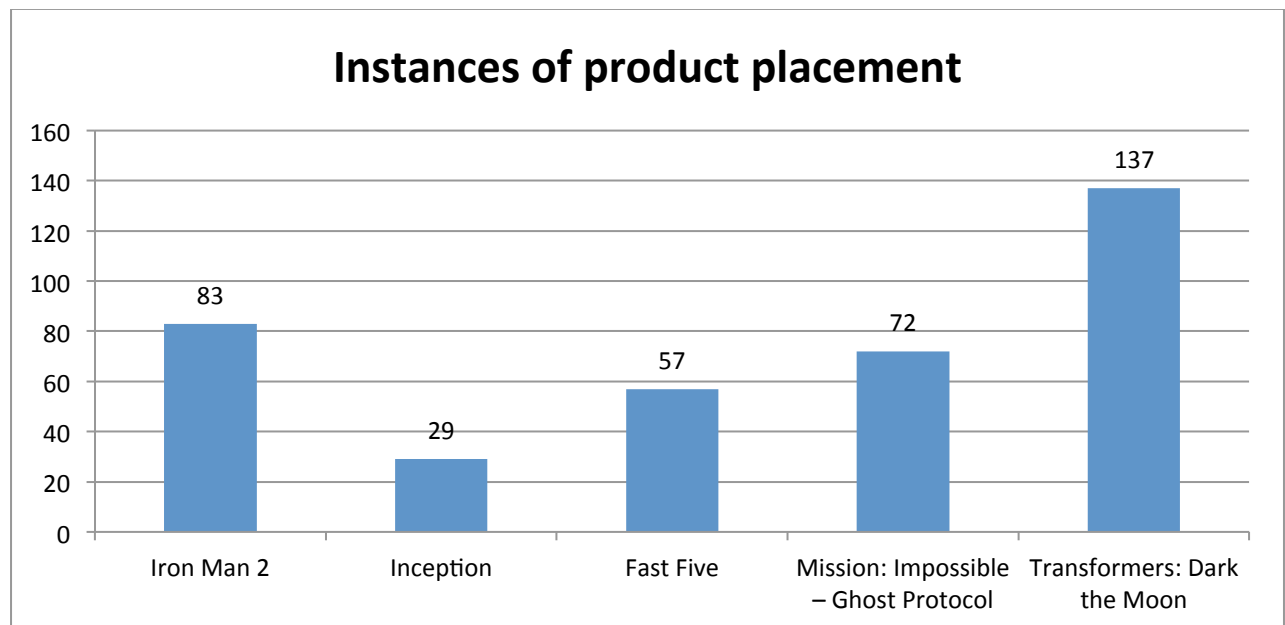


Table 3 – Top 5 overall most used parent companies and brand frequency

Parent Company	Frequency	Overall %	Brand	Frequency	Overall %
General Motors Company	41	10.8	Apple	29	7.7
Apple Incorporated	29	7.8	Chevrolet	24	6.3
Fiat S.p.A	27	7.1	Mercedes	15	4
Daimler AG	17	4.5	Ferrari	14	3.7
Volkswagen Group	16	4.2	Dodge	12	3.2
Others	248	65.6	Others	284	75.1

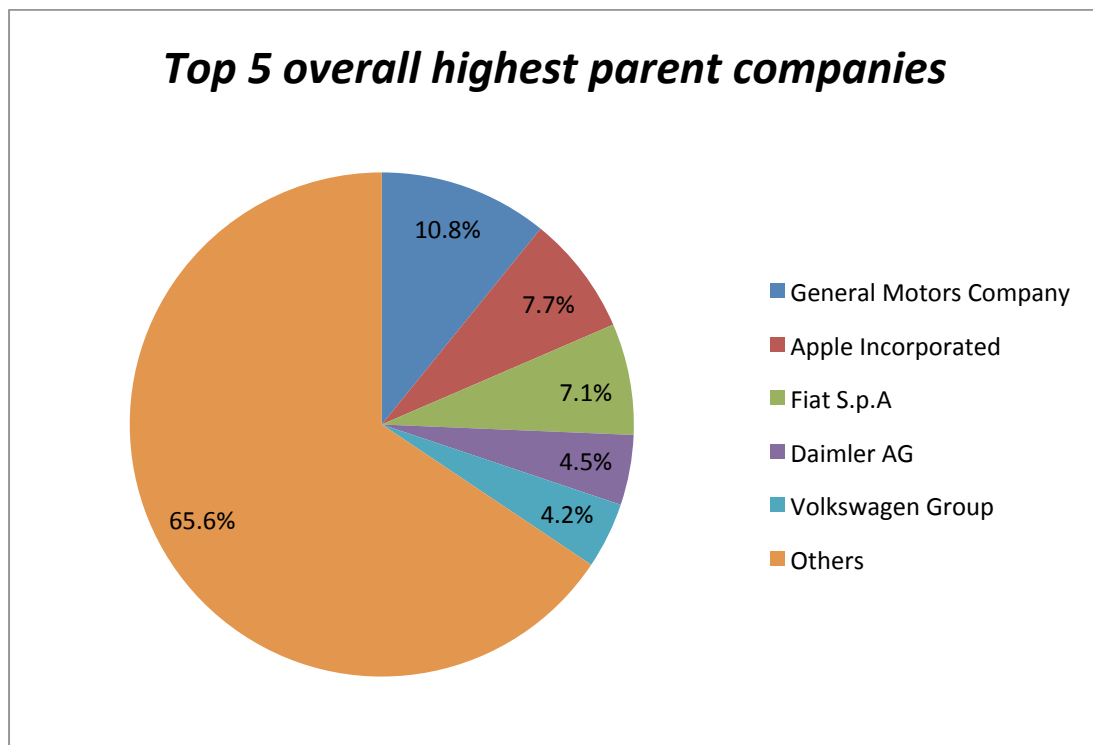


Figure 2 – Top 5 overall highest parent companies

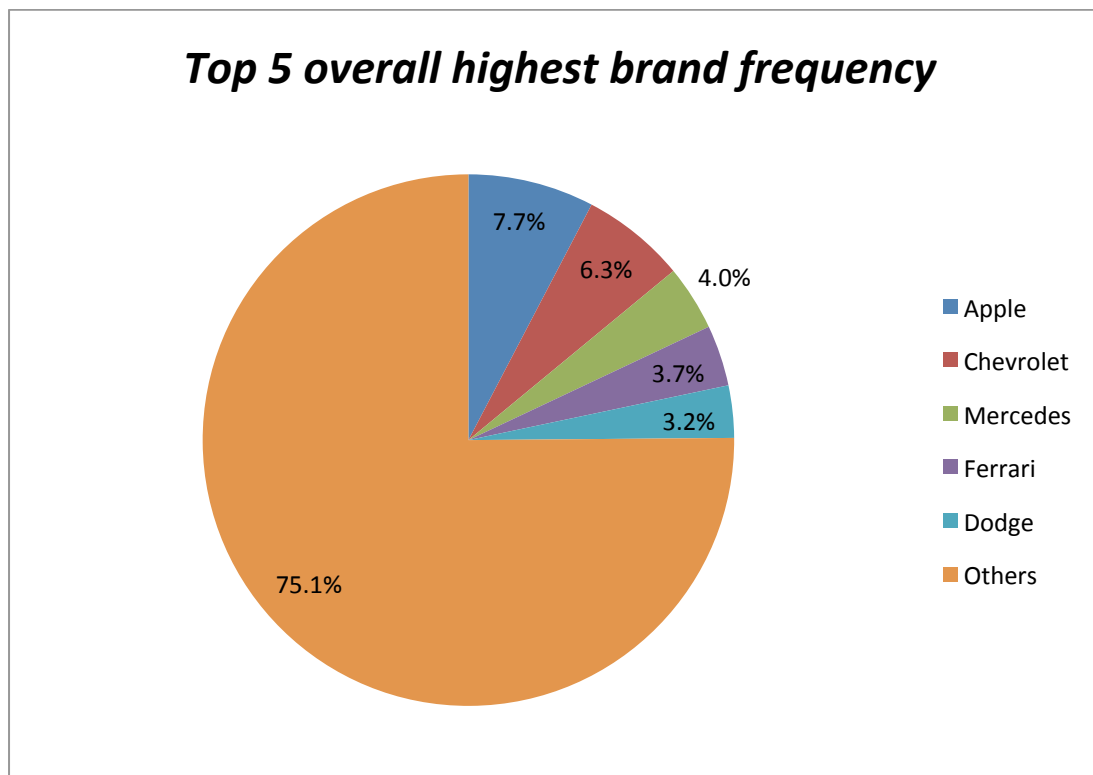


Figure 3 – Top 5 overall highest brand frequency

Discussion

With the selected films being of the action adventure genre, it is not surprising that the most frequently seen products belong to transportation and electronics product categories, which respectively made up 39.2% and 14.3% of the products seen (see Figure 4). In a similar way, products that fall into the car sub-category make up 36.5% of products seen in the films (see Figure 5). Products from other subcategories were far less frequently seen, with the next most frequently seen product subcategory of sunglasses making up only 5.3% of the total products placed. This leads to the conclusion that with the exception of transportation/cars, the product categories/subcategories are quite well distributed and that, aside from cars, filmmakers do not have specific subcategories of products that they place within their films. The particular prominence with which cars are featured is likely the result of the subject matter of the selected films, specifically *Fast Five* and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, where cars and driving were dominant elements of the stories. Indeed many key characters of the film *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* were literally cars themselves.

Table 4 – Top 5 overall highest frequency product category and subcategory

Product Category	Frequency	Overall %	Product Subcategory	Frequency	Overall %
Transportation	148	39.2	Cars	137	36.5
Electronics	54	14.3	Sunglasses	20	5.3
Fashion Accessories	47	12.4	Laptops	16	4.2
Logo	32	8.5	Miscellaneous Signage	16	4.2
Tourism	13	3.4	Mobile Phones	12	3.2
Others	84	22.2	Others	177	46.6

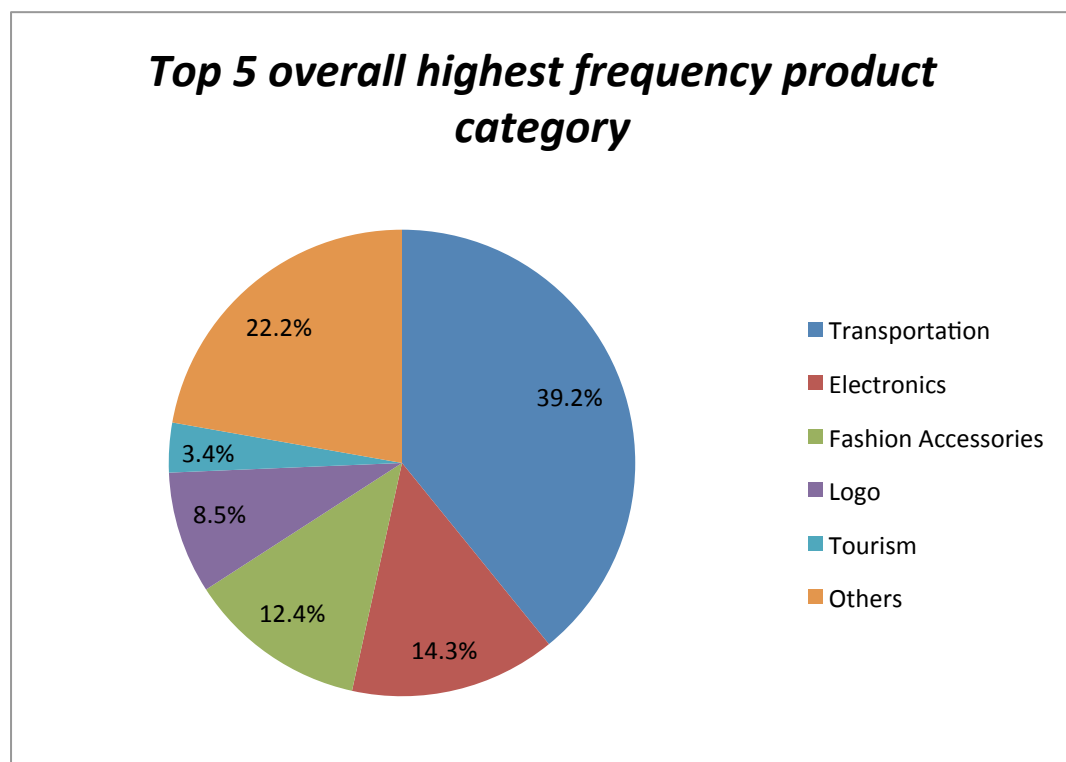


Figure 4 – Top 5 overall highest frequency product category

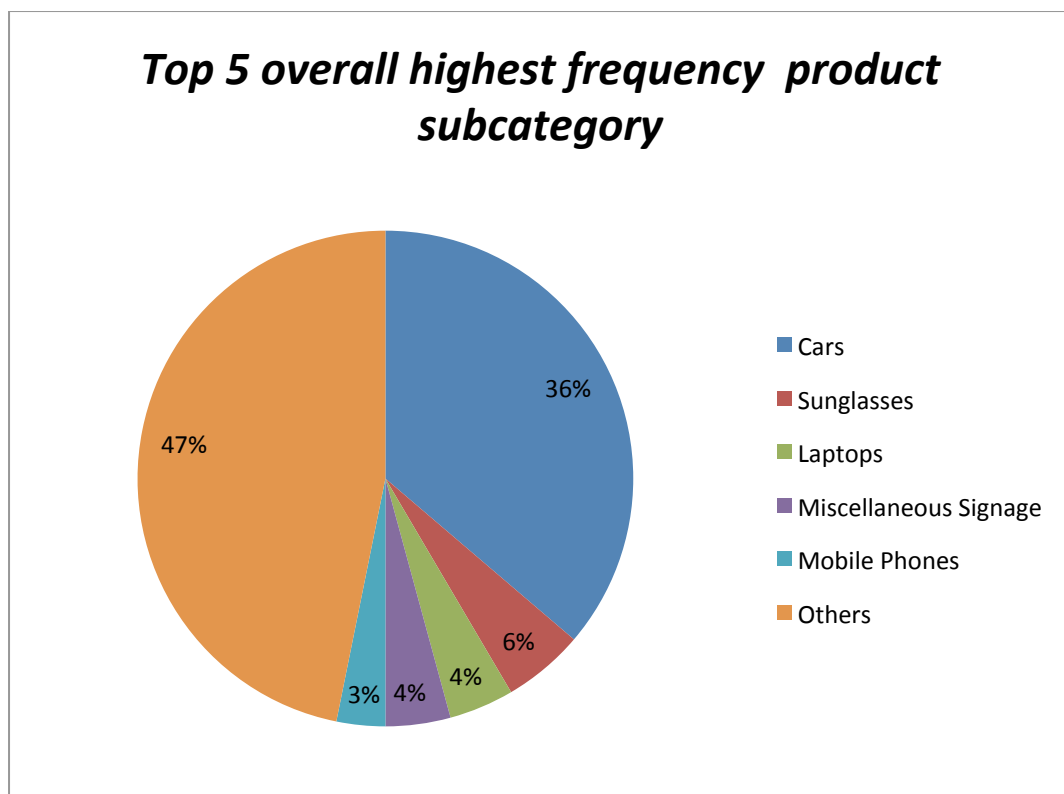


Figure 5 – Top 5 overall highest frequency product subcategory.

Type of Placement (modality)

Each film demonstrated a variety of different product placement types. The five types of placement as defined in the coding procedures were: simple visual, audio, presentation, demonstration, and the presentation/demonstration combination. The most common type of placement discerned from the analysis was the ‘presentation’ type, occurring 210 times out of the 378 instances, representing 55.6% of the overall placement types with an average of 42 instances per film. This was followed by 80 instances (21%) of ‘simple visual’ placements (see Table 5 for overall results). Transportation (80 instances/21%), Electronics (36 instances/9.5%) and Fashion Accessories (33 instances/8.7%) had the most ‘presentations’ of products, meaning that products were clearly presented on screen, presented by a character, or presented in a heroic fashion. The results suggest that on-screen interaction with a product is a preferred strategy demonstrated by the studios and advertisers.

Discussion

These results further support previous findings that actual utilisation of products within a film’s plot is a preferred method and is perceived to have a greater effect upon audiences. A product’s ideal

type of placement would involve a combination of high integration into the film's plot, interaction with a central character and for the product to be presented as well as demonstrated. While this may be the ideal placement for advertisers, such placements would come with a substantial price tag for them since a specific product placement would need to be considered at various levels of filmic production, such as scriptwriting, set design, filming and editing of a scene involving a the placement (Russell, 2002).

The results indicate that 'type of placement' categories bear a strong correlation to a product placement's prominence and also its character association (where applicable). The correlation between the areas of analysis, shows they are generally related to one another in a parallel and ascending manner. Thus, if the product placement was simply placed into the scene the prominence of that product would not be that significant, nor will it generally have a character association, whereas if a product placement was demonstrated - for example where a character is driving a car in a high speed chase scene - the prominence of the product would be relatively high and would be associated with the character operating the car. This correlation is evident in the findings for prominence and integration.

A significant example of this phenomenon would be the final car chase/heist scene in *Fast Five*, where the two main characters *Dominic Toretto* (Vin Diesel) and *Brian O'Conner* (Paul Walker) have stolen a very large security safe by attaching it with chains to their two high performance 2011 Dodge Chargers, which were coded as 'both presentation and demonstration of a product'. The 'heroes' drag the safe at high speeds through the city of Rio de Janeiro while being pursued by gang members and corrupt police. Throughout the scene, the Dodge Chargers are given plenty of screen time involving multiple shots and angles of the cars seen running (demonstrating) at high speeds, with fast acceleration, exceptional manoeuvring and drifting. The scene goes for approximately 16 minutes and demonstrated extremely high integration characteristics for the Dodge Charger that proved essential for the progression of the plot, with the product also being strongly associated with the main heroes of the film. This type of placement can play an important role in effectively promoting a product to a desired market and the findings suggest that production companies and advertisers may be mindful of this fact.

Table 5 – Type of placement frequency (and percentage %)

	Iron Man 2	Inception	Fast Five	Mission: Impossible	Transformers	Overall
Simple Visual	20 (24.1%)	13 (44.8%)	6 (10.5%)	12 (16.7%)	30 (21.9%)	81 (21.4%)
Audio	11 (13.3%)	0 (0%)	3 (5.3%)	3 (4.2%)	9 (6.6%)	26 (6.9%)
Presentation	43 (51.8%)	10 (34.5%)	31 (54.4%)	46 (63.9%)	80 (58.4%)	210 (55.6%)
Demonstration	9 (10.8%)	6 (20.7%)	12 (21.1%)	5 (6.9%)	11 (8%)	43 (11.4%)
Presentation and Demonstration	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (8.7%)	6 (8.3%)	7 (5.1%)	18 (4.7%)
Total	83 (22.0%)	29 (7.7%)	57 (15.1%)	72 (19.0%)	147 (36.2%)	378 (100%)

Conclusion

When drawing conclusions from this content analysis, it is clearly evident that the strategies and applications of product placement used within the five-film sample are diverse and prevalent. The results offer some interesting insights into the various methods of product placement utilised by the film studios and advertisers and further support the empirical generalisations indicated in the literature review. The most frequent product categories stem from automotive and electronic products and, as such, the parent companies are similarly distributed, which is not surprising in relation to the action genre to which the selected films belong. Apple was the most placed individual brand, with its products dominating the electronics category. Other brands do not have such dominance within their specific categories, indicating that there was no general preference for one brand over others.

The most common type of placement was the 'presentation' type, suggesting that the actual use of a product within the film is preferred as the method as it is conceived to have a greater effect on audiences. The 'type of placement' indicated a strong correlation with a product placement's

prominence and its character association, in which the variables were associated with one another in a parallel and ascending manner.

Overall, the results were compelling and offered some key insights into contemporary product placement within five very recent blockbuster action films. Based on the sheer frequency of placement incidences, it is evident that product placement practice is a carefully considered and thoroughly asserted area of film production and advertising, as the venture (if successfully facilitated via the methods discussed above) is both advantageous for product manufacturers and the film industry.

As stated earlier, this paper reports on only two areas selected from a larger field of analysis, with only the relevant quantitative data analyses presented, such as 1) frequency and product/brand/film specificity, along with 2) the modality type of product placements – which support weighted theoretical underpinnings and confirm previous research findings and paradigms. A subsequent paper will discuss the more complex and detailed findings, including the level of integration, prominence, character association, and theatrical context of products placed in the sample of five films.

Alternative Explanations

Since the study did not incorporate any kinds of field testing, sample testing or surveys involving external subjects, there is no influential susceptibility that can be examined as no external psychological variables or factors were considered. In other words, apart from the released film content, no other aspects of product placement were examined in the study.

As the research was performed using content analysis, the responsibility for producing findings and discussions were inherently placed upon the analytical ability and interpretation of the researchers. As such, the results are susceptible to influence by the sole coder's subjectivity and possible conscious or unconscious biases towards the content or the subject matter, which may have gone undetected. With regard to reviewing and coding incidents of product placement within each film, there could be occurrences that were simply missed, under/over analysed or misinterpreted. For example, the coder may have paid less attention to, or missed instances of, product placement due to subconscious subjective preference, such as between female-targeted versus male-targeted products due to the coder's membership of specific demographic groupings and resulting subjectivity.

Another factor to consider would be the fact that the researchers come from scholarly backgrounds in communication, marketing and film, and thus may be more perceptive of product placement and marketing techniques presented within films, whereas a general viewer may not even notice such placements as deliberately included. Some recorded instances of product placement may not have actually been the intent of the filmmakers or advertisers, yet may be perceived as such by the coder and included in the content analysis. Such biases would have gone undetected even with an intra-coder reliability test conducted with acceptable results obtained.

Finally, as the theoretical framework utilised within this study was based upon existing research, the frameworks do not entirely take into account that previous research studied more than one genre and not just the action-adventure genre exclusively. Tactics, products and the type of placement could vary considerably between different genres, thus what could be considered a significant finding within the realm of a drama may differ from that of an action film.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study and Areas for Further Research

This study closely examined several significant elements of product placement. Even though the findings of this exploratory study offer some key insights into the uses of contemporary product placement methods and strategies, there are inherent limitations associated with the research.

First, the sample was relatively small and only consisted of five films. The research was also limited to large Hollywood productions, which cannot represent the overall action genre and product placement industry at large, therefore the findings are not generalisable beyond the sample of the five films analysed. Given the small scale of the research project and the research method used being solely content analysis, a holistic picture of the process of product placement cannot be gained from this study. However, it serves as a good preliminary study that can be continued later on a larger scale, using multiple methods of data collection such as interviews with advertising and marketing executives who deal with product placement; directors, producers, production designers, and writers of films; and focus groups with movie goers about their opinions on product placement, applying methodological triangulation (Weerakkody, 2009).

Product placement is a marketing tool that aims to influence outcomes in consumer behaviour in audiences; hence, research into audience reactions to such placements could serve to produce useful insights. This research also only covers the filmic conduit of product placement. As the practice of product placement continues to grow, future analyses should involve research into other media channels such as TV, theatre plays, video games, music, internet content including blogs and web-series, and even books such as novels. To truly grasp a more definitive outcome, the research

would need to be replicated on a much larger scale that encompasses analysis into aspects mentioned above and, specifically in respect to this research analysis, an expansion into all genres along with a much larger sample of films over a longer time frame. Further research could also consider comparative analyses of films that are targeted at specific demographics (for example, males versus females of the same age group); produced in different countries (for example, Hollywood versus the United Kingdom or Australia) or from different genres (for example, Action adventure versus comedies) and draw distinctions between relevant/divergent marketing tactics used in each context. However, even though this research and its findings only offer a small insight into a specific area of the practice of product placement, the results are compelling and the frameworks utilised set a solid foundation for future research.

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Appendix 1

Guide for coding

1. Film name – name of the film that is being analysed.

Film Name	Code
Inception	1
Iron Man 2	2
Transformers: Dark the Moon	3
Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol	4
Thor	5

2. Year – Year in which film was released.

Category	Code
2010	1
2011	2

3. Film Studio – name of the major film studio/production company.

Category	Code
Paramount Pictures	1
Warner Bros	2

4. Film ranking – Ranking of the film according to global box-office grossing.

Category	Code
Rank # 1	1
Rank # 2	2
Rank # 3	3
Rank # 4	4
Rank # 5	5
Rank # 6	6
Rank # 7	7
Rank # 8	8
Rank # 9	9
Rank # 10	10

5. Brand name of product – Brand name of each product to be recorded.

6. Parent Company – Parent company of each brand/product to be recorded.

7. Product category and subcategory – each product to appear on screen is to be recorded and allocated into the corresponding product category and subcategory.

Product Category	Code	Product Subcategory	Code
Fashion Accessories	1	N/A	100
		Backpacks	101
		Belts	102
		Handbags	103
		Hats	104
		Caps	105
		Hosiery	106
		Jewellery	107
		Neckties	108
		Scarves	109
		Sunglasses	110
		Suspenders	111
		Watches	112
		Wallets	113
		Umbrellas	114
		Other	199
Clothing	2	N/A	200
		Beach wear	201
		Dresses	202
		Jackets	203
		Jeans	204
		Sportswear	205
		Suits	206
		Sweaters	207
		T-shirts / Shirts	208
		Designer wear	209
		Other	299
Household	3	N/A	300
		Bedding	301
		Blankets	302
		Comforters	303
		Fabrics	304
		Appliances	305
		Clocks	306
		Glassware	307
		Picture frames	308
		Silverware	309
		Other	399
Electronics	4	N/A	400
		Electronic games	401
		Personal stereos	402
		Telephones	403

		Television	404
		Mobile Phones	405
		Computers	406
		Laptops	407
		Tablets	408
		Video recorder	409
		Digital camera	410
		Other	499
Food/Beverage	5	N/A	500
		Candy	501
		Cereal	502
		Cookies	503
		Fast food	504
		Frozen meals	505
		Ice cream	506
		Juice	507
		Snacks	508
		Soft drinks	509
		Chocolate	510
		Other	599
Liquor	6	N/A	600
		Beer	601
		Spirits	602
		Wine	603
		Other	699
Footwear	7	N/A	700
		Boots	701
		Sandals	702
		Shoes	703
		Slippers	704
		Sneakers	705
		Other	799
Furniture/Furnishings	8	N/A	800
		Beanbag chairs	801
		Beds	802
		Bookcases	803
		Ceiling fans	804
		Chairs	805
		Desks	806
		Tables	807
		Lamps	808
		Other	899
Health/Beauty	9	N/A	900
		Bathing accessories	901
		Combs and brushes	902

		Cosmetics	903
		Fragrances	904
		Shampoos	905
		Soaps	906
		Tissues	907
		Vitamins	908
		Medicines	909
		Other	999
Music/Video	10	N/A	1000
		Books-on-tape	1001
		CDs	1002
		DVDs	1003
		Bands	1004
		Other	1005
Publishing	11	N/A	1100
		Books	1101
		Activity books	1102
		Calendars	1103
		Comic books	1104
		Magazines	1105
		Newspapers	1106
		Posters	1107
		Other	1199
Sporting Goods	12	N/A	1200
		Balls	1201
		Bicycles	1202
		Exercise equipment	1203
		Flying Discs	1204
		Footwear	1205
		Goals	1206
		Nets	1207
		Protective Equipment	1208
		Racquets	1209
		Rods and Tackle	1210
		Sticks, Bats and Clubs	1211
		Vehicles	1212
		Wickets and Bases	1213
		Various sports	1214
		Other	1299
Stationery/Paper	13	N/A	1300
		Address books	1301
		Bookmarks	1302
		Diaries	1303
		Greeting cards	1304
		Stationery	1305

		Desktop accessories	1306
		Other	1399
Toys/Games/Videogames	14	N/A	1400
		Action figures	1401
		Activity sets	1402
		Arts and crafts sets	1403
		Beach toys	1404
		Board games	1405
		Card games	1406
		Hobby sets	1407
		Dolls and accessories	1408
		Models	1409
		Puzzles	1410
		Remote controlled toys	1411
		Computer games	1412
		Ride-ons	1413
		Videogames	1414
		Other	1499
Software/Website	15	N/A	1500
		Educational software	1501
		Professional software	1502
		Reference software	1503
		Anti-virus software	1504
		Websites	1505
		Other	1599
Destinations	16	N/A	1600
		Stores	1601
		Malls	1602
		Restaurants	1603
		Cafes	1604
		Other	1699
Transportation	17	N/A	1700
		Cars	1701
		Planes	1702
		Helicopters	1703
		Motorbikes	1704
		Railways	1705
		Boat	1706
		Other	1799
Finance	18	N/A	1800
		Banks	1801
		Credit/Debit cards	1802
		Financial services	1803
		Other	1899

Entertainment	19	N/A	1900
		Cinema Theatres	1901
		TV programs	1902
		Radio stations	1903
		Other	1999
Tourist promotion	20	N/A	2000
		Country	2001
		Specific city or region	2002
		Landmark	2003
		Other	2099
Simple placement of logo	21	N/A	2100
		Banner	2101
		Billboard	2102
		Poster	2103
		Display	2104
		Other	2199
Other	22	None of the above	2200

8. Specific product – Specifically identify what the product is. For example: iPhone, Dr Pepper, Audi R8 etc...

9. Type of placement – The type of placement is to be assigned to one of the following categories.

Category	Code
Simply (visual) placed into the scene	1
Simply referred to via audio	2
Presentation of product	3
Demonstration of product	4
Both presentation and demonstration of product	5
Other	9
N/A	0

10. Prominence – Prominence of the placement appearing on the screen.

Category	Code
In the background in a subtle manner	1
In the background in a blatant manner	2
In the foreground in a subtle manner	3
In the foreground in a blatant manner	4
Fills the majority of the shot (full attention)	5
Other	9
N/A	0

11. Level of integration – On a scale of 1 – 10 – how integrated is the product placement into a scene or film?

0 – Not integrated

1 – Simple placement with no interaction...

5 – Product plays a role within the scene or plot...

10 – Product is integral for the progression of the plot...

12. Character association - Is the product placement associated with a male or female? If so what kind of character are they?

Category	Code
Male protagonist	1
Female protagonist	2
Male antagonist	3
Female antagonist	4
Neutral male character	5
Neutral female character	6
Other	9
No association	0

13. Theatrical context of the placement – The tone/connotation surrounding the placement is to be recorded.

Category	Code
Positive	1
Negative	2
Neutral	3
Other	9
No context	0