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AVOIDING THE TIPPING POINT: A CONGRUENCY-RELATIONSHIP FRAMEWORK
FOR PRODUCT PLACEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Product placement is a form of advertising that involves placing a product or brand into some form of entertainment such as a television show, a movie, or a video game in exchange for monetary incentive. Mere exposure to the brand or product can cause a positive effect on memory and subsequently brand attitude. However, research also proves that perceptions of interruption and intrusion can surface, potentially resulting in negative brand attitudes. We discuss product placement in terms of the persuasion knowledge model and how consumers process persuasion information. Research reveals two pathways that consumers process product placement depending on prominence and exposure: implicit and explicit processing. If the consumer is explicitly aware of the placement and becomes overwhelmed, they have reached the tipping point of product placement, at which a negative brand attitude begins to ensue. In this thesis, we propose a relationship and congruency-based framework that offers insight into how marketers can execute placements that will be explicitly processed while avoiding the tipping point. This framework underlies the importance of relationships and congruency in consumer-entertainment and entertainment-brand connections in terms of enhancing the most important relationship, the consumer-brand relationship.

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Introduction

PQ Media estimates that product placements were worth \$6.01 billion in 2014, and expects revenues will reach \$11.4 billion in 2019 (LaFayette, 2015). In the realm of product placement, it's widely believed that exponential growth and rapid change is attributed to evolving technology and the tendency for consumers to fast forward or avoid commercials and advertisements while watching their entertainment. With these changing patterns of behavior, marketers must introduce new and innovative strategies to reach their consumers.

In this thesis, I propose a strategy for product placement that does not even attempt to be covert, but rather synchronizes all factors of the entertainment and the brand as extensively as possible, utilizing congruency of elements and intimate relationships to incorporate placements in a meaningful way. I theorize that marketers draw on intimate connections that consumers have with their brands and products, taking advantage of deep consumer-character relationships to model those connections using characters and products in a film or show. When meaningful relationships are not being used or do not make sense, as is the case in a placement that is not integrated with the characters, marketers should command pervasive congruency between movie factors such as plot, setting, storyline, or mood, and brand factors such as brand essence, brand values and brand personality.

In the first chapter, I review persuasion knowledge and information processing and introduce the concept of the tipping point of product placement, at which negative emotional responses are triggered and consumers brand attitudes are at risk. Chapter 2 explores the nature of these intimate relationships between consumers and their brands, as well as consumers and

their entertainment, building up to the overarching theme of employing relationships and congruency to achieve integrated and harmonious executions of product placement. In chapter 4, a framework is introduced, which organizes the different associations between all three entities (brand, entertainment and consumer) visualizing how characters and elements of the movie or show are merged as a mediator of the most significant relationship in terms of marketing: the consumer-brand relationship.

Chapter 1 The Persuasion Knowledge Model and the Tipping Point

Friestad and Wright (1994) propose a model which organizes an extremely crucial mechanism to marketing and advertising tactics: how persuasion strategies are perceived, processed and justified to the consumer. Research has shown that the exposure to a brand or product via product placement can cause mixed shifts in brand attitudes. According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), people acquire knowledge and make assumptions about how, why and when a message is meant to influence them in order to help them manage persuasive content (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In previous research, subjects were exposed to an advertisement or a sales agent, and the mere presence of these caused an activation of persuasion knowledge. When subjects perceive the stimulus as a tactic to persuade them, they progressively disengage from the interaction (Cowley & Barron, 2008). The *change of meaning principle* involves subjects doubting the direct messages of the selling agent, assuming that other motives are driving the interaction (Cowley & Barron, 2008). This research focused heavily on the Persuasion Knowledge Model, and the consumer's tendency to be influenced by the *change of meaning principle*, whereby they suspect that a stimulus is meant to persuade them and the direct message is perceived differently, and in some cases altogether discredited.

To delve deeper into the *change of meaning principle*, it may be necessary to clarify all the components in the case of product placement. In two studies, consumers were exposed to a sales agent or an advertising message, which was not covert, and therefore the mere presence of this exposure activated persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994 and Campbell & Kirmani, 2000) However, in the case of product placement, a traditionally covert tactic,

persuasion knowledge is not necessarily immediately activated. There is no direct selling agent, but there are characters of the film or TV show, and there is no direct advertising message but there is plot and dialogue. This makes analyzing persuasion knowledge in the context of product placement a bit more complex; however, clear evidence does show that there exists some implementations of product placement that cue the viewer to know that a covert advertising tactic is being used, and therefore they do succumb to a variation of the *change in meaning principle* (Friestad & Wright, 1994) Viewers then go into a somewhat defensive “mode” when they perceive the context as attempting to influence them, or when they develop persuasion knowledge. Another important point that stemmed from the research was the idea that viewer’s persuasion knowledge evolves over time and consumers catch on to the different tactics that are meant to influence them, and thus become less vulnerable to them (Cowley & Barron, 2008).

A concept known as product integration is equated to a more involved and engaged form of product placement. With product integration, a product or brand may be extensively involved in the plot or with the characters, such that it becomes a crucial aspect of the storyline. In several interviews, producers of programs declare that no money was exchanged for seemingly over-the-top, elaborate examples of product integration. Producers explain that the product was purely placed for the purpose of the story or to make their sets appear more familiar and realistic to viewers (Sandler, 2010). One prominent example is the popular sitcom *Modern Family*, and its controversial episode that heavily featured Apple’s iPad as an essential prop to the plot of one of its episodes. *Modern Family* co-creator, Christopher Lloyd, argues that “it was all story driven” and that no money was exchanged for the episode (Sandler, 2010). There is a buzz of suspicion that surrounds implementations that seem like extreme examples of product integration but are really just products placed for story-telling purposes. Other loopholes maintain a producer’s

ability to publicly make a statement that no money was exchanged, but fail to disclose that other trade-offs or deals could have been negotiated between the producers and the brand, suggesting that despite no physical exchange of actual money, the product was still placed or integrated due to advertising initiatives. Two distinguishable views emerged from this example: those who align closely with the idea that activation of persuasion knowledge negates any positive advertising effects, and those who view this episode as a “savvy creator-fueled storyline that made sense within the show’s fictional world,” (Sandler, 2010).

Wei, Fischer and Main’s (2008) findings from three studies indicate activation can negatively affect consumer perception of product placement, as we have so far discussed. These researchers also propose that these negative effects are qualified by perceived appropriateness of covert marketing tactics and by brand familiarity (Wei, Fischer & Main, 2008). This poses the question, how is appropriateness rationalized in the eyes of the consumer? Authors of this article first declare simply that if a consumer realizes a covert marketing tactic is taking place, they will respond negatively. However, the authors continue on to clarify that not all activations of persuasion knowledge diminish assessments of the brands engaged in this covert marketing, nor assessments of the producers, nor whatever medium the advertising message is encased in (Wei, Fischer, and Main 2008). Simply put, these authors are saying that covert marketing most likely will cause the consumer to respond negatively if it is noticed, but that response does not always, but sometimes does, extend to the featured brand, or the entertainment producers. Whether or not the consumer’s views are altered depends on familiarity of and relationship with the brand, previous individual perceptions of covert marketing, and the manner in which the consumers become aware of the persuasion attempt (Wei, Fischer & Main, 2008). In general, we emphasize

a component of appropriateness, which moderates the negative reaction that ensues after a consumer discovers a covert marketing tactic and activates their persuasion knowledge.

Both positive and negative perceptions can result after a viewer is exposed to product placement, thus there must exist some sort of peak point that occurs when the attitudes shift from positive to negative. At this point, consumer's persuasion knowledge is activated; they are potentially overwhelmed, highly aware of the influencing agent, and subsequently experiencing a shift to negative emotions such as frustration and disappointment. Stemming from that, we have this established notion that brand attitude and perception tend to be reflective of a consumer's buying behavior, and therefore success in terms of actual sales of the product placement implementation. It is clear then that decision-makers should be aware of and analyze the tipping point for their specific brand and audience in order to minimize the risk that the product placement will cause a negative perception of the brand or the movie stakeholders.

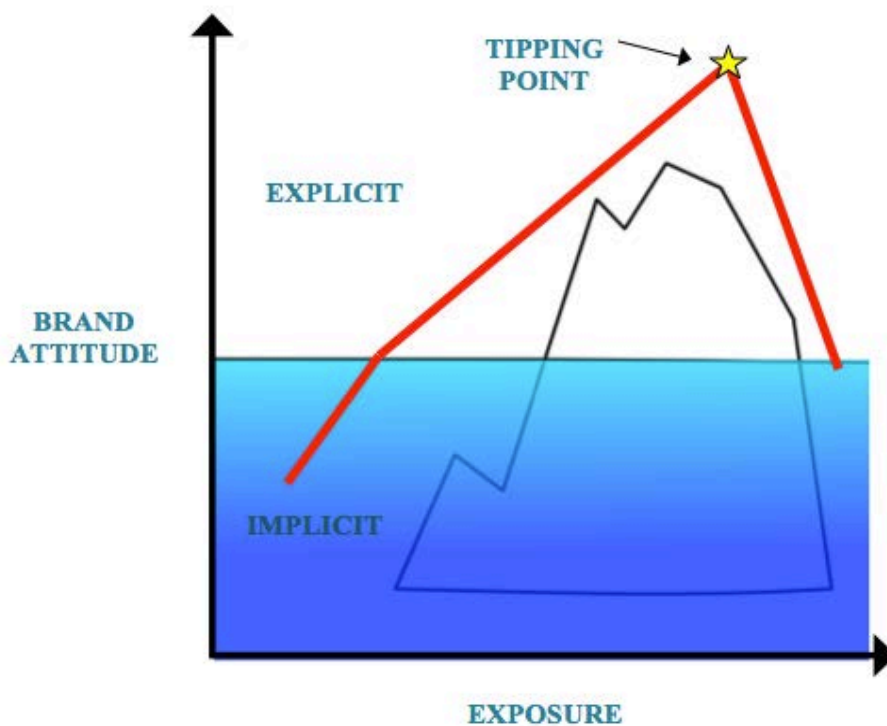
I propose based on the research that there is a "tipping point" with product placement, similar to Malcolm Gladwell's (2000) concept, whereby small factors repeatedly building up lead to a final point at which the consumer is overwhelmed and develops a negative attitude. When product placement is too much for a viewer, negative emotions and perceptions arise, and implementers are risking a shift to negative attitudes toward the brand itself. There are several components of product placement, and therefore there are several components that could be the reason that the consumer has become overwhelmed or has shifted to a negative perception. Some brands may act with the motto of *all publicity is good publicity*, or some brands may find that overdone product placement implementations are counterproductive to their goals of emphasizing and promoting a brand or product. It is important that researchers focus on the perceptual and emotional reactions of the consumer when appraising the strategy of product

placement. These emotional reactions stem from meaningful relationships that are highly intimate and emotional and will be extensively discussed in chapter 2. Research and social listening prove that covert marketing tactics such as product placement can produce a negative attitude or perception, but that some implementations do not produce these negative perceptions.

So when does product placement have a positive effect on the consumer's brand attitude? Cowley and Barron proposed two approaches to explain any shifts in brand perception after viewing product placement (2008). In the first, exposure increases implicit memory of the brand or accessibility, but does not improve explicit memory, as is the case in the mere exposure effect. In this process, the consumer misinterprets an increase in accessibility for an increase in liking (Cowley & Barron, 2008). This is arguably the intention of any covert marketing tactic, because the consumer does not explicitly remember being exposed to the brand, but does find that the brand is more familiar, which they interpret as more favorable. In the second approach, the placement simply increases explicit memory of the brand. Researchers found both an increase in explicit recognition memory and a positive shift in brand attitudes after exposure to an audio product placement that was high in plot connection (Russel, 2002). Russel (2002) further emphasizes a congruency-incongruency explanation to account for differences in how a consumer reacts to product placements that they are explicitly aware of and which improve their explicit memory of the brand. She proposed that incongruency was likely to raise suspicion and objection to the argument being made (Russel, 2002). Specifically, if a product placement in the background is moved to an incongruent product integration in the foreground, with an editorial vehicle intended to promote the product, then the viewer's "suspension of disbelief" is compromised, their movie or show is disrupted, and the viewer may become irritated (Ha, 1996). Ultimately we know that this irritation could spark negative brand perceptions. In Figure 1

below, the concept of the tipping point and the two pathways of explicit or implicit processing are combined to illustrate that brand attitude can remain positive in both implicit and explicit processing, but that after a certain point in the explicit pathway, the tipping point, consumer attitude toward the brand drops. We illustrate this with an iceberg to show the covert vs. overt alternatives of product placement. With the first section “under the water” in the implicit zone, the mere exposure effect is the foundation. In the second portion up until the tipping point, explicit memory is intentionally activated, but the implementation is not ill received because there is congruency and connection with the plot. After the tipping point, the explicitly processed placement is construed as inappropriate or excessive, and results in plummeting brand attitudes.

Figure 1: Iceberg Model of Product Placement

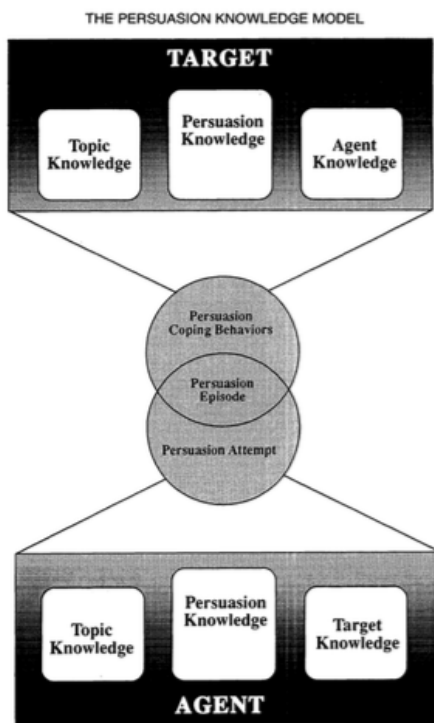


Consumers are becoming more and more aware and attuned to product placement implementations in their entertainment. Their persuasion knowledge will very likely be activated if a product placement is present because they are now highly aware of this practice. There is a possibility that consumers don't see the placement, but if they do not notice it at all then the implementation has no value. As Ephron (2003) puts it "If you notice it, it's bad. But if you don't notice it, it's worthless." This supports a kind of invisible point in between worthless and bad, which aligns with the concept of the tipping point, where consumers switch from a positive attitude to a negative attitude. If marketers attempt to draw on prominence factors and subtlety, they are taking on a very difficult task of defining a very specific point of a Goldilocks paradox of being "just right." However, we previously mentioned that even if a consumer's persuasion knowledge is activated, it does not necessarily mean that it is going to enact negative attitudes toward the brand or product. Research found that consumers may not develop a negative attitude toward the brand or product if they deem the implementation "appropriate." Marketers could utilize a different strategy of implementing product placements that fit within this realm of what the audience deems "appropriate" and stay in the positive range, before the tipping point.

How can decision-makers analyze the exact tipping point for their specific brand and audience, and truly pinpoint when the placement would go wrong? As the persuasion knowledge model points out, the first step to determining the tipping point is to assess how the product placement is processed in the mind of the consumer, either implicitly through a mere exposure effect or explicitly in an obvious, transparent way (Cowley & Barron, 2008). With explicit processing, implementations are most successful with extensive congruency. The means of achieving this congruency will be elaborated on in later chapters, but how can we determine how a consumer might process the implementation, or as we discussed earlier, how they determine

appropriateness? We previously discussed how consumer's assess appropriateness based on familiarity with the brand, individual perceptions of covert marketing, morality and norms, and also by the way that the he or she become aware of the persuasion attempt. The first few aspects mentioned familiarity, perception of covert marketing and morality and norms, all relating back to the consumer's relationships with brands, television shows, movies, and in general their entertainment. In the next chapter, we discuss the dynamics of these relationships between consumers and their "stuff." In chapter 3 we discuss the building blocks of the framework we propose in chapter 4, which emphasizes the importance of relationships and congruency in implementing product placement. In chapter 5, we review some examples of successful and unsuccessful product placement, and examine how the examples fit into our framework. Chapter 6 provides an overview of future directions for product placement, and how our framework is sustained in up-and-coming trends as well.

Figure 2: The Persuasion Knowledge Model



Chapter 2 Consumers and Their “Stuff”

PART ONE: CONSUMERS AND THEIR BRANDS

Without a doubt, any marketing tactic must first consider their brand and their target audience or main consumers. In this section we focus extensively on consumer-brand connections and specifically on consumer-brand relationships and the dimensions that define them.

The Role of Norms in Relationships

Social relationship theory says that relationships carry norms of behavior that guide people’s evaluations of their relationship partner (Aggarwal, 2004). In a study by Aggarwal, a key basis is that when consumers form relationships with brands, this social relationship theory is called on, and they use norms of interpersonal relationships as a guide to their brand assessments (Aggarwal, 2004). In the study, two types of relationships are examined as the author deems these two types most relevant in the consumer-brand interaction. These relationships are exchange and communal. In exchange relationships, benefits are given to others in motivation of getting something in return (Aggarwal, 2004). In communal relationships, benefits are provided to show concern for other’s needs. Aggarwal’s model proposes that adherence or violation of these relationship norms influences the appraisal of the specific marketing action, and overall brand evaluation (Aggarwal, 2004).

Aggarwal describes a new classification of consumers, termed “brand zealots,” who experience a relationship with their brands that goes well beyond fulfillment of a functional need (Rozanski, Baum & Wolfson, 1999). Later on, we will discuss highly emotional love affairs that consumers have with their brands, known as brand love. Brand zealots are characterized by their tendency to animate the brand, giving it quasi-human qualities, with an example given that the online trends indicate a cohort of consumers assigning names to their Volkswagen Beetles. The norms of the two types of relationships outlined in this study are depicted in Figure 3 (Aggarwal, 2004).

Figure 3: Norms of Exchange and Communal Relationships

NORMS OF EXCHANGE AND COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS	
Exchange relationship norms	Communal relationship norms
Accepting help with money is preferred to no payment.	Accepting help with no monetary payment is preferred.
Desirable to give comparable benefits in return for benefits received.	Less desirable to give comparable benefits in return for benefits received.
Prompt repayment for specific benefits received is expected.	Prompt repayment for specific benefits received is not expected.
More likely to ask for repayments for benefits rendered.	Less likely to ask for repayments for benefits rendered.
More likely to keep track of inputs and outcomes in a joint task.	Less likely to keep track of individual inputs and outcomes in a joint task.
Divide rewards according to each person's inputs and contributions.	Divide rewards according to each person's needs and requirements.
Helping others is less likely.	Helping others is more likely.
Requesting help from others is less likely.	Requesting help from others is more likely.
Keeping track of others' needs is less likely.	Keeping track of others' needs is more likely.
Less responsive to others' emotional states.	More responsive to others' emotional states.

NOTE.—The first three norms are tested in experiments 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

Table 1: Communal vs. Exchange Relationships

Communal Relationships	Exchange Relationships
Based on social factors	Based on economic factors
Motivation: giving benefits to others to demonstrate concern for them and attend to their needs, take perspective that transcends self-interest Ex. most family relationships, romantic relationships, and friendships	Motivation: giving a benefit to get something back in return, quid pro, quo Ex. Relationships between strangers and people who interact for business purposes

These two particular types of relationships are key because they are most relatable to the exchange between brands and consumers, because they involve some sort of exchange, much like a consumer and a company do with a product or service. The model proposed in this study is that consumer's value of a brand and its actions depends upon whether they perceive the brand's actions as violating or conforming to the norms of the relationship (Aggarwal, 2004). Similar to real-life relationships, if norms are violated, the relationship is evaluated negatively, and if actions coincide with the norms, the relationships evaluation is positive. Overall, from Aggarwal's research we have supporting evidence that violation or adherence to the norms or social relationships influence consumer's perception and attitude towards brands (2004). Applying this to product placement, consumers may feel that a norm of the consumer-brand relationship involves an assumed promise that the brand will not interrupt their entertainment and attempt to persuade them. In violation of this norm, the consumer's attitude toward the brand may dwindle.

It's Not Business. It's Personal.

Obviously, there are several differences between interpersonal relationships and corresponding norms, and brand-consumer relationships. Some distinct differences are that with brands, there is almost always that economic factor, because there is a monetary exchange. It would be ideal that brands aim to create more communal relationships with customers, emphasizing that they want to please the customer without expecting anything in return because this is a more positive relationship that is more rewarding for the consumer. If the consumer feels

that the brand's motivation is first and foremost to get a returning benefit, then they would likely go into that defensive "mode" and disengage from any perceived persuasive intentions of that particular brand. However, if the brand can somehow emphasize that it has more important motivations than making money, the consumer might take longer to retreat after their persuasion knowledge is activated. Obviously the goal of any business is to sell their product and increase profits, but brands can enact strategies that make consumers perceive the relationship as more communal than exchange. Additionally, depending on the nature of the product, whether it's a commodity, more hedonic or utilitarian, or other aspects, there is a mix of impersonal and personal aspects of the relationship (Aggarwal, 2004). Brands can capitalize on these personal aspects and help convince the consumer that their motivation "transcends self-interest" and is truly concerned with fulfilling consumer needs (Aggarwal, 2004). Here we point out a crucial point that in a relationship between a character and a consumer, which we will cover extensively in chapter 3, there is no monetary exchange element because characters are not real people or entities. Character-consumer relationships resemble real human person-to-person relationships more strongly than do brand-consumer relationships.

Relationship Status: Complicated

Susan Fournier lays a foundation of evidence that points to looking at consumer-brand relationships by closely considering the overlapping qualities these commercial relationships share with real, human-to-human relationships (Fournier, 1998). Fournier starts by attempting to legitimize the brand-as-a-personal-relationship notion by examining trends in which consumers personalize, animate and personify their material world. She cites that there exists a human

tendency to anthropomorphize inanimate objects, and that this has long been known to be a universal practice in virtually all societies (Brown, 1991).

It is difficult to imagine the extensive list of relationship types that potentially exist between a consumer and all the different brands they interact with. Fournier (1998) gives an extensive outline of fifteen different classifications of relationships that could exist between consumer and brand using relatable analogies to human interpersonal relationships. She goes through extensive investigation of three specific women, and their interaction with the brand. Next, we will describe our own case as a frame of reference in order to differentiate types of brand-consumer relationships.

In social and interpersonal relationships most people would agree that there is a strong correlation between the amount of time a person has been in some type of a significant relationship with another person, and how close they feel to that person. This could be extended to commercial contexts, and how long a person has owned a product. This could explain the intimacy that people feel with their cars, oftentimes even naming them, as Aggarwal explained about VW Beetles. However, extensive consumer behavior research surpasses relationships that are only based on the exchange and attaches more connection, bond, and even love to the relationships that consumer's have with their brands.

In this example we contrast a washer and dryer vs. a car, and the qualities of these two contrasting relationships between product and an owner. This will provide a specific case of how easily readers can agree with or relate to ideas that personify or humanize products. This leads to more explicable consumer-product relationships, and a varied degree of extension to the brand results.

Now we delve deeper into qualities of the relationships between a consumer and their laundry machines and a consumer and their cars. In the case of the washer and dryer, the machines provide a functional service of cleaning clothes, but do require effort and work, and are associated with chores. Some qualities that might be associated could be warmth, cleanliness, purity and comfort. The consumer only uses this machine around once or twice a week, likely not every day, and could have negative connotations with the machines, since they are a tool to accomplish housework or chores. Even further, the brand of the washer or dryer is not a highly emphasized aspect of the machine, because the machines are more associated as commodities.

Now we consider the relationship between a consumer and their car. In this case, the brand is highly emphasized, placed immediately in front of the consumer on the steering wheel, immediately visible every time they drive the car. The brand also acts as somewhat of a defining title, as consumers frequently find themselves answering the question, “what kind of car do you drive?” The make and model of the car is analogous to a surname or a family crest, because it identifies the car in terms of the groups it belongs to, but does not identify the car individually, as a first name does. This may be why we would recognize the trend of the brand of the car being integrated into the car’s name that was given by the consumer (i.e. Heidi the Hyundai). Moving on to characteristics and emotional attachments, the car is a functional product, because it performs the service of helping a consumer get from point A to point B. This may qualify the car as being helpful. The car also is equipped with airbags, seatbelts and other safety features, which may give the car the trait of being protective. The car has a radio, or an aux chord, which opens up a whole other door of emotions that are associated with music. The seats and temperature adjustment control may give the car the trait of being comfortable. These characteristics may also make a car an emotional product. So we have an entity that the consumer interacts with

everyday, that is helpful, protective, comfortable, and associated with as many emotions that music can be associated with. The mere fact that the consumer exists *inside* of the product when in use, similar to a house or a place to live, adds another comforting or profound aspect to it's character. With all these qualities, we can personify the car into a best friend, a mom, or some other close relationship that is comfortable, protective, helpful, associated with feeling safe, and adept to understand any emotion the consumer is feeling. The car could also be seen as slightly more hedonic (products associated with pleasure, excitement, joy and fun) because the consumer can listen to music, roll the windows down, adventure to new places, maybe feels a sense of freedom and maybe the car even embodies a travel companion. Hedonic products are more likely to elicit brand love than utilitarian products, like the washer-dryer counterpart (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love will be further examined later in this chapter.

Any attachment the consumer feels with the washer and dryer is less likely based on love or connectedness and more based on apprehension to change, given that the washer and dryer had been so reliable to the consumer for several years. When considering how features of a car translate into feelings of the consumer, it is not surprising that consumers name their cars, or have a more significant relationship with car brands than with brands of a washer or dryer. The length of time a consumer has owned a product is significant, but the main point is that quality and characteristics of the interaction with the product are significant too. In terms of product placement, the length of time that advertisers get to position a product strategically with regard to a relationship varies depending on the medium of entertainment. For example does the implementer have an entire season on a show airing once a week to build relationships, or does the implementer only have a two hour movie time slot? Despite limited time, quality can still be established based on other meaningful relationship characteristics like relatedness and emotional

attachment. Even further, thinking about relationships opens up a range of other dimensions apart from time or quality that get at the notion that the relationship between a consumer and their brand is extremely complex, not based on any one or few dimensions, and therefore difficult to grasp.

DTR-Define The Relationship

Fournier (1998) argues that brands can and do serve as viable relationship partners, that consumer-brand relationships are valid at the level of lived experience, and that consumer-brand relationships can be described in many ways. There are four core conditions that qualify interpersonal relationships and should be considered when implementing a product placement that integrates product and character (Fournier, 1998).

1. Relationships involve reciprocal exchange between active and interdependent relationship partners
2. Relationships are purposive, involving at their core the provision of meanings to the persons who engage them
3. Relationships are multiplex phenomena, they range across several dimensions and take many forms, providing a range of possible benefits for their participants
4. Relationships are process phenomena: they evolve and change over a series of interactions and in response to fluctuations in the contextual environment

We covered some exchange features with Aggarwal's research, coming to the general conclusion that while the relationship between consumer and brand always has to have some element of monetary exchange, manipulating the perception of the relationship to more of a communal relationship is more beneficial to the brand. In Fournier's paper, theories of animism and impression formation are marshaled in support of an argument for the brand as a reciprocating relationship partner (Fournier, 1998). She uncovers ways in which brands are

animated, humanized, or somehow personalized, inspiring the analogies previously discussed, comparing the relationship between a consumer and his or her laundry machines and the consumer and his her car.

In the article, Fournier (1998) goes through an extensive idiographic analysis of three different cases, consisting of various backgrounds and values, with the intention of the analysis being to create a holistic picture of how projects, concerns, and themes that make up one's identity are manifested into relationships and more specifically brand relationships. She creates a portfolio that emphasizes a holistic approach to analyzing consumer-brand relationships, in which the relationship that a consumer has with one brand is important to the relationship that a consumer has with another brand (Fournier, 1998). This aligns with the nature of Fournier's (1998) research, which focuses on extensive evaluation of just three unique women with an elaborate brand relationship portfolio, rather than collecting only shallow research on the masses of consumers.

These three women that Fournier (1998) looked at were not just buying brands because of functionality or because of some shallow liking, they were involved in extensive relationships that stemmed from various different sources, developed in different ways, and persisted due to care and keep. All of these relate to Fournier's (1998) core conditions of purposive relationships that center around the self and therefore are fundamental to marketing tactics.

In summary, based on Fournier and her research on brand-consumer relationships, it is clear that the relationship that a consumer has with their brand is not something that can be easily manipulated or decided by marketers and brand executives. Consumers will attach meaning and develop relationships with their brands in a personal way (Fournier, 1998). Previously we mentioned that the best thing marketers can do is be aware of and research how their brand is

used to add meaning to life, outside of the advertising initiatives and positions that the company intentionally presents.

Throw in the characters

Before we mentioned that the exchange versus communal nature of the relationship is not relevant to the character-consumer relationship. What if then, we apply Fournier's brand-consumer relationships to the characters, utilizing product placement and interacting brand and character to mimic real consumer-brand relationships. The consumer should see the connection that is similar to real-life relationships that consumers have with products and marketers should use that to foster stronger relationships with consumers and their brands. In other words, we theorize that marketers should utilize characters as mediators to the relationship between brand and consumer, modeling a personal relatable relationship in a television show or movie, that the consumer feels they could relate to. This eliminates any concerns about violating a direct brand-consumer relationship by interrupting consumer entertainment with commercial goals, but rather lets the consumer see a relatable, significant relationship that a character they love has with the products they know. To visualize this, suppose that marketers discover insights that teenage girls have an intensely addictive relationship with their cell phone, and suppose we classify it as Fournier's "dark" dependency relationship. This dependency relationship is defined as an "obsessive, highly emotional, selfish attractions cemented by feeling that the other is irreplaceable," and that "separation from the other yields anxiety," and "high tolerance of other's transgressions results," (Fournier, 1998). That last aspect highlights how previous attitude toward the brand affects whether or not a consumer grows irritated by placement. For a cell

phone company, for instance Samsung, it would be a powerful strategy to implement an integrated placement that interacts with the plot and the character and illustrates this relatable dependency relationship, enabling consumers to think about how they too have that kind of relationship with their cell phone. Scenes could depict a teenage character facing a conflict that she has lost her cell-phone and is experiencing extreme anxiety. This could be depicted in a sitcom, utilizing humor as an entertainment factor to distract the consumer from retreating from the persuasion attempt. Implementers would be utilizing congruency given that we are suggesting putting humor into a sitcom. By having the cell phone depicted in this plot be a Samsung product, it might enable the audience to feel closer to the brand, or increase brand attitudes, because they feel close to the character, and now also relate to the addictive cell-phone relationship being depicted.

In a sense we propose that marketers use movie and character elements to act as a buffer that distances the consumer from feeling directly targeted by a persuasive technique, but models a relatable, meaningful relationship that they too have with their brands, between the characters they love and depicted brands or products.

Brand Love

From Fournier we legitimized the potential of a consumer-brand relationship to be very complicated and emotional. We zoom in to examine one specific emotion in a connection between consumer and brand: love. Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) depict a simplified notion that love is greater for brands with products that are perceived as more hedonic over utilitarian products, agreeing with our washer-dryer and car analogy. In terms of tangible outcomes, brand

love is linked to high brand loyalty and positive word of mouth (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). It is no longer just about satisfying customers; while this is extremely important still, it's now a core *expectation* that the brand will satisfy the customer. In today's competitive market however, consumers needs demand something deeper than just satisfaction (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006).

Shimp and Madden (1988) coined the concept of “consumer-object love,” which is based on 3 components: liking, yearning and decision/commitment. These researchers based their findings on Human Development psychologist, Robert J. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love. Shimp and Madden (1988) took Sternberg's eight outcomes of types of love and redefined them in terms of consumers and objects, resulting in these eight potential relationships.

Figure 4: Shimp and Madden's (1988) Consumer-Object Relation

Kind of relation	Component		
	Liking	Yearning	Decision/ Commitment
1. Nonliking	-	-	-
2. Liking	+	-	-
3. Infatuation	-	+	-
4. Functionalism	-	-	+
5. Inhibited desire	+	+	-
6. Utilitarianism	+	-	+
7. Succumbed desire	-	+	+
8. Loyalty	+	+	+

[a]Cell entries represent the presence (+) or absence (-) of each concept-defining component.

We see from these eight outcomes that the strongest relationship that results is loyalty, consisting of liking, yearning, and decision/commitment, which is ultimately the goal that any brand wants to achieve in a consumer-object relationship. Brand love is defined as the “degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name,” (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love includes passion and attachment for the brand, positive evaluation of

the brand, positive emotions in response to the brand, and declarations of love for the brand (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). This is important to marketers because knowledge about customer's brand love is hypothesized to help understand and predict post-consumption behavior (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) set out with two objectives in their study, both of which are relevant here. The first is to determine potentially mediating effects of brand love on brand loyalty and positive word of mouth and the second is to consider how and if brand love could be anticipated based on researching perceived brand characteristics and product category (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). The hypotheses are that satisfied consumers who experience brand love will be more brand loyal and engage in more positive word of mouth behaviors (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). The next hypothesis is that hedonic products have a positive effect on brand love (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). Much like our example of the washer and dryer vs. car, the car's hedonic nature has a positive effect on brand love. Carrol and Ahuvia's (2006) next hypothesis is interesting; it states that hedonic products have a negative effect on brand loyalty. Considering the case of a lipstick, toy or desired food product, the hedonic playful nature might endorse consumers to try different things, therefore jumping around to different brands. Hedonic products might benefit then from a product placement that depicts commitment. A beloved character could express why they are committed to a certain lipstick, and explain why they feel it has everything they need, and therefore they do not need to try anything else. To illustrate this too, we could enact a placement of lipstick in a reality TV show such as *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, in which Kim explains why "she just knows" this is the lipstick for her, and she doesn't need to try any other products. This could also be utilized with toys, or food, using characters and storyline to depict commitment and feelings of complete satiety, not needing to explore any other brands. In general, the idea is that emotional relationships between consumers

and brands can be illustrated idealistically through product placement, in a way that marketers have control over, which can facilitate a message, strengthen meaning, or overcome a barrier that real consumer-brand relationships might be facing. All of these hypotheses were found to be significant (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). This article helps give more concrete backing to abstract ideas about emotional relationships between consumer and brand, and really highlights how these relationships manifest into positive outcomes for the brand.

Of all the research on consumer behavior and how consumers interact with brands, one may wonder why specifically emotional, personal consumer-brand relationships are important to highlight in regard to product placement. This marketing focus of meaningful relationships between brands and consumers that reach the same complexity as that of relationships between people sets the theme of how implementers should contemplate combining their brand with a movie or show. Movies and TV shows have an abundance of different relationships, and they have thematic conceptualizations of the ideal, touching on the consumer's notion of ideal vs. actual self. By using characters to model these intimate brand-consumer relationships that Fournier's (1998) discussed, consumers may find connections or insights from watching the show or movie about how to reach their ideal self. In a perfect world, consumers infer from this modeling of relatable relationships that the means to achieve that ideal self is to consume the brand that the characters are consuming. The purpose of movies and television lies fundamentally in imitations of people, relationships, life, emotion, art and fantasy. Therefore, if real people have these experiences and stories that cause them to have such multifaceted and emotional relationships with brands, then why can't these relationships be recaptured in entertainment, through characters and plot? Retrospectively, the only lens that makes sense for a marketer to look through when analyzing their brand, audience and strategy should be that of this

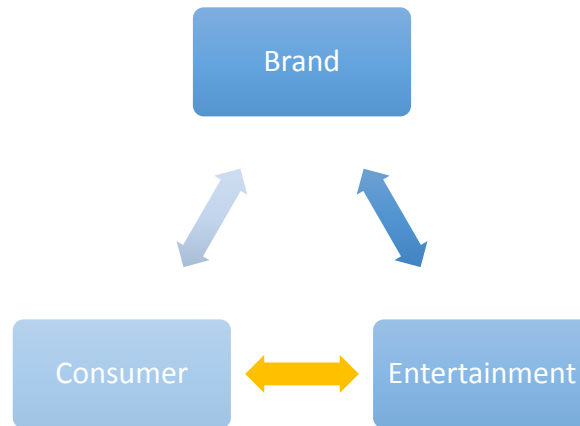
vastly researched entity of consumer behavior: the module of intimate consumer-brand relationships.

From Fournier (1998), we also learn that other nonsocial relationships in the target consumer's life are also having an affect on the brand relationship. With product placement, it is essential that these other relationships that marketers consider include the ones that consumers have with their entertainment and with their characters.

PART TWO: CONSUMERS AND THEIR ENTERTAINMENT

There are two entities to product placement backed by two distinct industries that are interacting when it comes to this tactic: entertainment and advertising. These two industries have been interacting in various ways for years and new tactics and types of partnerships are constantly emerging all the time, leading us to presume that they will continue to interact in new and innovative ways. Product placement is one such tactic that continues to grow and adopt new and inventive practice. We can envision a triangle of consumer-brand relationships, as well as a relationship between brands and the entertainment industry and therefore it is natural that we see the last link to complete the triangle: the relationship between consumer and entertainment (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Consumer, Brand and Entertainment Relationships



This section only briefly touches on the connections between a consumer and their shows, movies or other forms of entertainment, because the aim is to communicate one point: these relationships are extremely significant in a variety of ways in terms of the success of implementing product placement. Russel and Puto (1999) published an article that explores a kind of paradigm of audience connectedness. First and foremost, authors reference that there is a dimension of intensity to consumer-show/movie relationships and that such relationships are highly varied, ranging on a continuum of no involvement to fanaticism (Russel & Puto, 1999). The results of the studies by Russel and Puto (1999) communicate some interesting displays of audiences' relationships with their shows. The notion deemed "connectedness," consists of consumers engaged in highly intense relationships that encompass more than just the experience of watching the program, reaching into viewers personal and social lives as well (Russel & Puto, 1999). Authors discuss a precursor for connectedness, that being high involvement relationships, with consumers patterns of thinking ranging from simply refusing to miss an episode to borderline addictive undertones (Russel & Puto, 1999). Audiences expressed examples that signify shows being well-liked because the consumer personally relates to the characters, situations or themes of the storyline (Russel & Puto, 1999). It makes sense that identifying with

the characters or other aspects of the show coupled with extremely high involvement serve as predeterminants of connectedness. These findings are not surprising when we consider not only our own relationships and experiences with shows and movies, but in seeing how entertainment affects society. Consider the madness that occurred with endeavors like the release of the seventh book in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, or the return of the beloved *Star Wars* franchise in 2015 with the release of the movie *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Russel and Puto (1999) specifically reference television shows in their article, but we can extend the same findings and especially the concept of "connectedness" to movies, books, video games, and any other form of story entertainment.

So what is the impact of this widespread connectedness factor? Russel and Puto (1999) specifically examine the impact on perception of consumption images, such as symbolic products like hair, clothes, cars or houses. Other consumption images cited in this article included subtle influences, such as product placement. Authors heavily touched upon the show *Seinfeld*, due to its extensive involvement with different brands through product placement (Russel & Puto, 1999). Subjects even described heavily featured products as "Seinfeldesque," (Russel & Puto, 1999). Another noteworthy finding was the unwillingness for subjects to accept the placements as an advertising maneuver, stating "Well, I wouldn't say that they use "sponsors," they don't get any money for products they talk about on the show. If they like a product for whatever reason, they talk about it," (Russel & Puto, 1999).

DeLorme and Reid (1999) conducted 8 focus groups in their study to investigate moviegoer's experiences and perceptions of branded props in films. The results of the study showed three distinct themes centered around movies (DeLorme & Reid, 1999). The three themes relevant to the movie were appreciating realism, noticing the familiar, and relating to

characters (DeLorme & Reid, 1999). With appreciating realism, we remember discussing what the consumer deemed “appropriate” when assessing persuasive material, and we find from this study that subjects reported it being a good thing that the brands were there, because they created a realistic set that was more relatable because it more closely resembled the consumer’s own everyday life (DeLorme & Reid, 1999). With the theme of noticing the familiar, moviegoers’ attention was drawn and held more for branded props and products that were familiar to them, which they had purchased and used in their own lives, supporting what we previously discussed, regarding the potentially positive impact of modeling consumer-brand relationships in entertainment (DeLorme & Reid, 1999). Not only were subjects more attentive, but they also expressed higher enjoyment due to the familiar qualities they related to (DeLorme & Reid, 1999). This reasoning applies to the third theme as well, because audience members expressed that seeing familiar brands interact with the characters actually facilitated them feeling closer and more related to the characters (DeLorme & Reid, 1999). Again touching on our point, if the consumer-brand relationship is strong enough that seeing a product interact with a character causes them to feel closer to the character, then we hypothesize that the reverse is also true: the consumer-character relationship is strong enough that seeing a character interact with a product makes them feel closer to the product. Ultimately, it would be more ideal for a character to help draw attention to a brand and make the consumer focus on the brand, than for a brand to help draw attention to a character and make the consumer focus more on the character. However, both situations are beneficial, because they draw on intimate relationships in regards to the brand.

We discussed the intensity of relationships between consumer and brand in part 1, but even more intense than that are consumer’s relationships with their entertainment. When it comes to entertainment, marketers and producers have an opportunity to take advantage of these

relationships that contain this strong connectedness factor, and implement product placement with the brand or product as a facilitator, in a sense piggybacking or building from these strong established relationships.

Chapter 3

Building Blocks of a Framework: Brand, Movie and Character Factors

The idea of integrating product placement with the characters and with the plot is not a new concept. However, with the framework presented in the next chapter, we propose going a step further and attempting to use character and movie factors to actually mimic or model real consumer-brand relationships, and act as a mediator that strengthens or develops the real life consumer-brand relationship. Based on the research discussed in chapter 2, we know that there is a significant and fragile relationship between consumers and their brands and products, and therefore marketers should do what they can to foster, preserve and adjust those relationships tactfully. We have also covered evidence that consumers' attitudes can be affected both positively and negatively, depending on several factors of the implementation and the activation of persuasion knowledge. According to Stanton and Lowenhar (1977), in advertising decisions related to television, three components make up the system of analysis: characteristics of the viewer, characteristics of the television shows, and characteristics of the products to be advertised on the shows. These authors argue that traditional research focused heavily on that first facet of the viewer, but failed to explore the second two factors thoroughly enough (Stanton & Lowenhar, 1977). For this research, we analyze social listening and observations of product placements both well-known and highly reviewed, as well as more modern examples that stray from the traditional placement provided. In chapter 5, we cover highlights found through social listening and discuss various sources. Overall, from observation of films and television shows, as well as review of blogs, vlogs and other social media reviews, there is evidence to support that both marketers and movie producers should first consider the relationships that consumers have with their characters and movies, as discussed in chapter 2, and then attempt to achieve

congruency with that relationship in the product placement. In the next chapter, these factors will be put into a relationship + congruency framework that marketers and producers can use to align bring the consumer closer to the brand.

Expanding on Brand Factors

We have extensively covered brand relationships and the relationships between a consumer and their beloved branded products. The focus with brand relationships is on the intimate relationship that consumers have with a brand based off their interaction with a manifestation of the brand, the product. While the product-consumer relationship and congruency potential accounts for half of the model outlined in chapter 4, oftentimes the product is not the immediate thing that comes to mind when a consumer thinks of a brand. Some product placements also do not include the physical product, but rather a brand element such as a logo, slogan or other indicative symbol. Due to the plethora of marketing tactics and strategies, brands can prove very successful without even featuring their products in their advertisements. For example, Patagonia is notoriously known for its lack of advertising specific products, but rather focusing their marketing on promoting causes, specifically in regard to environmental initiatives. Recently, Patagonia released a series of advertisements for “Bear’s Ears,” a natural monument in Utah that is significant in Native American Culture (“Celebrate Bears Ears”). Previously, President Obama had protected this land, but with changing political leadership this is subject to change, and Patagonia pushes these advertisements to enact viewers to be aware of what is at stake and take action (“Celebrate Bears Ears”). Consumers may have a relationship with the brand Patagonia because they own a soft, colorful fleece pullover that provides them warmth and

comfort, or that they shared significant experiences with, resulting in them an emotional attachment to the product and therefore brand. Or, it could also be that the fleece pullover is merely another article of clothing that they own because of style, and that the true foundation of the emotional attachment to the brand lies in the inspiring environmental initiatives they stand for and the heavy representation of these values in the advertisements that consumers have viewed. Perhaps, the relationship the consumer has with the brand has nothing to do with the product, but instead is rooted in the essence of the brand itself.

The changing technological times and increasing ability to interact with a nontangible entity via social media and other technology has endorsed brands to become more than just a personification of their products, allowing them to extend beyond the limitations of only being able to interact with a consumer through their products by opening up infinite possibilities of how a brand could position itself in the marketing world. For example, a soda brand does not have to position itself based on qualities of the product, such as how it is refreshing and sweet. A soda brand could choose to embody sharing, fostering emotional, personal relationships like how Coca-Cola did with their “Share a Coke” campaign. This has been the case for years, but with increasing marketing mediums and growing technology, new ways of communicating brand essence apart from the product are possible. Senior Brand Activation Manager, Chris Ross, said this about the campaign: “Share a Coke is about taking our global brand and making it personal to our consumers, giving them the chance to share a personalized Coke with friends or loved ones and creating special moments of happiness, and memories,” (Hepburn). Happiness, relationships and loved ones don’t have anything to do specifically with the product of a sugary, bubbly drink, but the brand has cultivated an essence, and this essence is what the consumer feels a personal connection with. This campaign, along with copious others highlight how it is

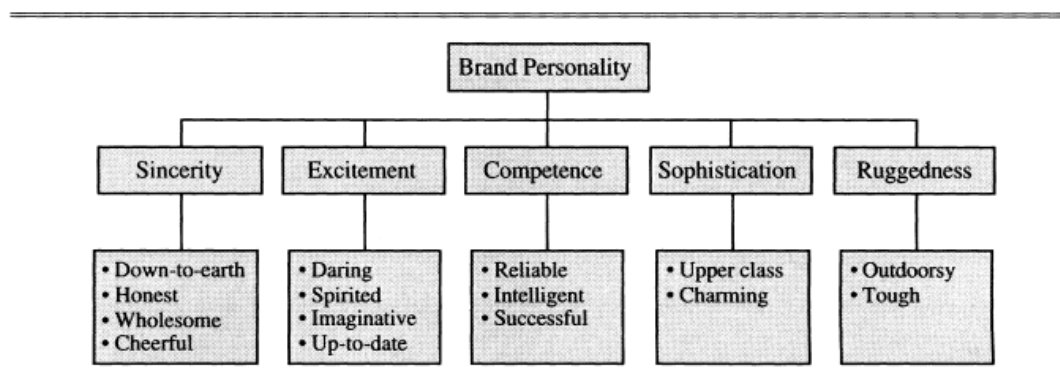
important to also consider how a brand essence without the product can create a need to adjust marketing tactics. Therefore, here a second aspect of the framework becomes apparent, and that is achieving congruency in product placement using brand elements only. Achieving congruency is important to consider with all facets of product placement. It requires extensive research and awareness of various aspects of the consumer, brand, product, characters, and movie, and appropriate execution. Again we touch on the factor of appropriateness, and its importance in terms of persuasion and the consumer. Congruency is most important when we're talking about connections that don't involve a human entity, such as a character or consumer. This is visually depicted in the framework in chapter 4.

In chapter 2, we focused heavily on consumer-brand relationships, and accentuated that oftentimes those relationships stemmed from interactions and perception of the products, which then extended to the brand. Again, we revisit the washer-dryer vs. car example, and how we discussed that certain qualities about the product itself lead to personification and humanization of the products, and that this extended to the brand, advancing the consumer-brand relationship. Instead of considering the personal connection of the product and the consumer, we could examine how the consumer interacted with the essence of the brand. Perhaps the brand is Audi, and the consumer draws on the memory of the recent 2017 Super Bowl commercial, "Daughter" whereby Audi utilized their 1-minute or about \$10 million slot to draw attention to the political issue of equal pay in America (Kramer, 2017). The commercial targeted fathers, and presented the emotional message of "*what will I tell my daughter*", in regards to her female family members having less "worth" than her male family members. Perhaps a relationship progresses based of this essence that Audi supports women and supports innovative progress, captured by their slogan "Drive Progress."

It was important to focus heavily on brand-consumer relationships that develop from qualities of the product because the tactic that we're talking about here is *product* placement. However, some consumer-brand relationships develop based off aspects of the brand specifically, unrelated to the brand's product itself. Being aware of this essence or personality factors would definitely aid in achieving that congruency in product placement, because it provides another way that marketers could align their brand by matching the essence or personality of the characters, movie or television show to the brand essence, in a way that seamlessly makes sense to the consumer, and does not push them past the tipping point. If a character is widely portrayed as pushing environmental activism, brand executives would do well to negotiate that the character fights for Mother Nature in the scene, while wearing a Patagonia fleece.

In order to give some structure to brand essence and personality, we look at Aaker's 5 brand personalities. Aaker's five dimensions of brand personality of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness, are depicted in Figure 6 below (Aaker, 1997).

Figure 6: Aaker's Brand Personality Framework



Obviously, being able to classify your brand according to these dimensions would help marketers determine the best characters to integrate their product with, depending on the character's essence and personality as well. We will discuss further examples and draw on Aaker's framework in Chapter 4.

Character Factors

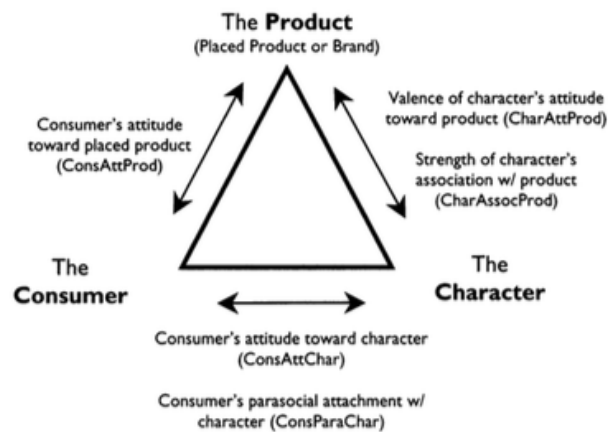
Continuing on with our underlying theme, we move on to look at character factors, and first and foremost, character relationships with consumers. We highlighted the potential to achieve congruency by mimicking real consumer-brand relationships with the characters in the context of a movie or show. Russel and Stern (2006) deliberate product placement effects based on interactions between consumers, characters and products using three essential theories that support each dyad. Authors propose that applying the genre theory to the character-product relationship and the parasocial theory to the character-consumer relationships, provide the foundation for their proposed balance model of product placement effects in sitcoms (Russel & Stern, 2006). Genre theory rationalizes the classifications of genre as based on attributes specific to one genre but not others (Russel & Stern, 2006). This theory provides definitional background to the nature of the associations between character and product because these two factors and several other factors would all align with the essence of the show (i.e. if the show was a sitcom, the character-product relationship would likely be rooted in humor). The parasocial theory unveils highly valuable information for marketers about the nature of the consumer-character relationship. In parasocial theory, viewers are inclined to experience attachment or distance from fictional characters in a very real manner as if the relationship was with two real people (Russel

& Stern, 2006). For a television series, in just one episode viewers establish perspectives of characters based on the attitude the character portrays; then later as the series progresses, the relationship becomes complicated and more meaningful and the viewers become invested, to the point of actually genuinely caring for the character. We know there is proof of this, which is why consumers get so hysterical and take to social media and blog posts, expressing aggressive outrage and distress after one of their favorite characters is killed off a show. With these parasocial relationships, viewers interact with the characters as if they were real and relationships are cultivated over long periods of time, sometimes even years that a show is aired. With episodes every week, audiences can even live vicarious experiences with the characters, and simulate a real attachment relationship that lasts for several years.

Now with both the genre theory and the parasocial theory at work, Russel and Stern (2006) present their balance model. In social psychology, a theory known as Heider's (1946) balance theory points out the tendency for people to want to maintain balance of attitudes in a triad relationship of two people and an object (i.e. if a person encounters liking that another person has for an object, and the perceiving person likes the second person, then to achieve cognitive consistency, the perceiver will decide to adopt an attitude of liking toward the object as well) (Russel and Stern, 2006). The main point of the balance model is completing another third side of a triangle, joining the relationship between product or brand and consumer, with character relationships as the mediator. This relationship was a crucial finding in the development of the model outlined in chapter 4. We can immediately imply how Heider's (1946) balance theory is going to facilitate Russel and Stern's (2006) balance model of product placement. The perceiving person is the consumer, the object is the product, and the second person is the character. This article applies this to celebrity endorsements, whereby a consumer likes a celebrity and the

celebrity advertises that they like the product, therefore the consumer decides to like the product as well (Russel & Stern, 2006). With product placement, the idea is that if these intimate relationships exist between character and consumer, and the genre theory requires a significant character and product relationship, then the consumer will observe and adopt the attitude that the character has for the product (Russel & Stern, 2006).

Figure 7: Russel and Stern's (2006) Balance Model of Product Placement Effects



This balance model would not work if these relationships are not strong enough to support it. The relationship between the character and the consumer has to consist of trust and positive attitudes, or the model does not apply. For example, if you see a celebrity endorsement that features a celebrity you do not like, then you will not be subject to the balance theory, and you will not assimilate those attitudes for the product into your own repertoire. How can marketers harbor these character-consumer relationships? Garretson and Niedrich (2004) review how spokes-characters are perceived and how they succeed at generating trust and positive brand attitudes. Spokes-characters could be cartoons like the Pillsbury Doughboy or Frosted Flakes' Tony the Tiger, but specifically spokes-characters reference endorsements by characters not by

celebrities acting as themselves (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004). This is an important distinction because relevancy and expertise are presumed factors that promote trust, and spokes-characters are created for the sole purpose of promoting a brand, therefore clearly perceived as highly relevant. Applying this to product placement, it is important that in creating congruency one selects relevant characters that have some sort of expertise. The expertise does not necessarily have to be in the product category itself, like doctors with medicines, but it could be expertise about some aspect that the product embodies. For example, with James Bond and Omega watches, the character James Bond is an “expert” of sorts in sophistication, luxury and class, and therefore audiences might construe him as having expertise as to what watches best embody these qualities. A third aspect that was predicted to affect spokesperson trust is nostalgia, because in-depth interviews found this consistently brought up as a mediator of trust (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004). When applying this to characters in a television show or movie with complex emotional plots, we can generalize the nostalgia for cartoon spokes-characters to in general an elicitation of emotion, which may include nostalgia. The results of the study found that that expertise and nostalgia had a positive effect on brand trust, but that relevancy did not directly affect spokesperson trust (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004). Researchers were surprised by this, and drew on other evidence regarding human spokespersons explaining that in other research human endorsers were more favorable if they were promoting products that were consistent with their image (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004). Perhaps due to the abstract nature of cartoon characters, relevancy is not as significant with spokes-characters, given that in the case of cereal we are talking about a toucan endorsing Fruit Loops and a tiger endorsing Frosted Flakes. However, authors are sure to clarify that this is not the case with human spokespersons, so in the case of non-animated movies or shows use of product placement, this finding that relevancy does

facilitate trust with human endorsers is applicable. We now have three factors that are implied from this study, relevancy, expertise, and elicitation of emotions, which are all found to help establish trust for a character as a spokesperson. This article provides evidence that is applied to product placement that relates to further strategies to create congruency in the placement implementation.

Another interesting effect supports critical analysis of character factors. In the article discussing the worth of product placement in films, placement worth was enhanced when the product was involved with known characters, but no change occurred when the product was associated with unfamiliar or familiar actors or actresses, or the “stars,” (Wiles & Danielova, 2009). Figurative meaning is associated with the characters of the film, but audiences aren’t factoring in their knowledge of the actor or actresses themselves (Wiles & Danielova, 2009). This means that when an audience is consuming entertainment, they relate to the character that is portrayed and apply whatever happens in the plot, including product placement, to the personality of the character rather than to the celebrity.

We discussed the TV show *Modern Family* before, and the episode that centered on the integration of the Apple iPad. In this article the producers explained that they were merely creating a story that was consistent with an aspect of the character, in this case being the character Phil Dunphy’s “obsession with technology and gadgets,” (Sandler, 2010). Fournier (1998) would likely point out here that due to the intimate relationships between brand or product and consumer, and the finding that brands are rooted in one’s identity, it is natural that products are used to support traits of characters and to communicate character identity for the sake of the storyline. In other episodes, Phil brings home a high-tech universal remote that controls all the technology in the family room, and his wife, Claire, can’t operate the remote

properly. Another episode depicted Claire scrounging to get Phil an iPad for his birthday, because it was the only thing he wanted. These other episodes prove that the character Phil does have a tech-savvy character, and even a prior relationship with Apple's iPad, and therefore filming an entire episode on an iPad serves as a creative way to model the consumer-brand relationship. It was perhaps the frequency and duration of this particular example that pushed some consumers over the tipping point, given that a majority of the episode was actually video on the iPad; however, *Modern Family* producers did well with selecting the appropriate character to integrate the product with, and illustrated a unique but relatable relationship between Phil and his gadget.

Several components of character qualities could be used to enact consumer-brand relationships or construct a congruent implementation. A few such qualities are depicted below, and should be considered when aligning features of product placement.

- Character personality
- Character likes and dislikes
- Character flaws or weaknesses
- Problems characters encounter
- Relationships with other characters
- Other characters perceptions of the character
- Main vs. supporting characters
- Likeability/audience perception of the character
- Character relationships with types of products
- Character relationships/interactions with other brands

Movie/Show Factors

Russel and Stern (2006) talk about how the length of time that a television show goes on gives the consumer more time to get acquainted and attached to the characters. This familiarity gives audiences the feeling of security and comfort. With movies, specifically non-serial movies,

the producers only have a span of a few hours to develop this relationship. Serialization of sitcoms enables viewers to posit a long relationships with characters, and therefore gives them a longer time for attachment to grow. We discussed with consumer-brand relationships that while length of relationship can be positively correlated with significance of the relationship, a long period of time is not required to create meaningfulness, as the core factor of relationships is quality (Fournier, 1998). Therefore, while TV shows go on for longer periods of time in the consumer's life than a movie, and therefore give the consumer more time to create a relationships with the characters, movies can still solidify a significant relationship in just the few short hours they are "together." It is arguably more essential though that marketers and producers are selecting the appropriate characters to interact with their product, because they don't have an hour slot once a week for several seasons (years to consumers) to clarify the complexities of the relationships, they only have a few seconds or minutes most likely.

In regards to components such as popularity and length, the core reason to consider and manipulate these factors has to do with exposure. The longer the television show time slot, or the longer the movie, the more time for potential exposure to brands. Continuing off of that, marketers should investigate what other brands are featured in the movie, how they are incorporated, and how their brand might be positioned in relation. For example, in Michael Bay's *Transformer: Age of Extinction*, 55 brands total were included in the film (Han, 2015). Marketers might want to avoid getting involved in such a commercialized execution of product placement, because their brand would likely not have a lot of exposure time, might get lost in the sea of other brands, and might be lumped into several parties that the consumer now has a negative attitude toward, due to the consumer crossing over the tipping point.

d'Astous and Berrada's (2011) article outlines communication strategies that could enhance effectiveness of product placement in films, looking specifically at comparative advertising. Fournier (1998) helped us to think of brand-consumer relationships as a portfolio of connections that were interconnected. To prove this, consider Fournier's (1998) rebound type relationship, whereby the souring of one consumer-brand relationship created the means to create another relationship. It makes sense to consider comparative advertising even further, and poses the question: how does the execution of one brand placement in a film affect the way another brand placement in the film is perceived, and can strategies be enacted to utilize these other brand placements to the marketer's advantage? d'Astous and Berrada (2011) explain that advertisers could take advantage of other brands featured in the film, especially brands who may not be the top player in the market. If brands are featured side-by-side with the market leader, they may be able utilize a comparative strategy that helps them remain competitive or even gain market share.

Karniouchina, Usley and Erenburg (2011) discuss how it is important to choose a suitable movie that is appropriate with the product placement, furthering evidence that genre is an essential movie factor to consider. In another study, authors proposed that categorical storage of the placement would more likely result in recall of the brand or product when that same category or context resurfaces (La Ferle & Edwards, 2006). The study's findings expressed that placements in dramas resulted in marginally lower returns, and placements in romantic movies resulted in significantly lower returns (Karniouchina, Usley and Erenburg, 2011). The authors advocate the explanation that romantic movies and dramas characteristically consist of heavy emotional involvement of the audience. Adding produce placements to this state of mind may result in quicker emotional and cognitive overload for the consumer, causing less effective

product placements in these genres. Additionally, with highly concentrated emotional scenes, there is a narrower range of ways that placements can be integrated congruently with the emotional atmosphere. Even further, the authors suggest that placements could be construed as disruptive or even altogether overlooked due to incompatibility with the film (Karniouchina, Uslay and Erenburg, 2011).

It is important to also consider movie or show factors such as critical acclaim. Wiles and Danielova (2009) found critical acclaim to be negatively associated with the worth of product placement in successful films, because it is perceived as more disruptive because advertisers are viewed as imposing on artistic consumption goals. Consumers desire a comfortable protection for critically acclaimed films from marketing strategies (Wiles & Danielova, 2009).

Other recurring trends emerged in the research, like the tendency for audio and visual placements to be more successful than only audio or only visual placements (Wiles & Danielova, 2009). In terms of the general style of the film, not only should genre be considered, but also the nature of the audio and visual filming style. For instance, in an action movie, audio and visual stimuli are highly intense, characters might be screaming, explosions and other startling sounds might be happening in the background, and visual stimuli might be overwhelming as well. For a drama, characters are speaking softly, scenes transition delicately and emotions are high. Product placements in intense action films would obviously be executed much differently than in an emotional drama. Prominence would be extremely important to align with appropriate genre of a movie and style of audio and visual cues. It is also important to note that even in action movies, not all scenes are intense and action-packed and therefore some more soft, delicate scenes could also be used to communicate specific brand or product essences.

In terms of scope or viewing reach of the film, the movie Transformers 4 specifically comes to mind. Of the 55 brands featured, several were Chinese brands. These brands are highly unfamiliar to an American audience, and might be construed as inappropriate or confusing to the consumer. The intention may have been that the movie producers wanted to target a global audience, including Chinese brands in an effort to expand the scope of the movie's success. However, since Americans are not familiar with those Chinese brands, they perceived fewer brands than actually were featured, lessening the intensity of total product placement in the film .

The following provides a list of factors that should be considered in regards to aspects about the movie or show.

- Movie/show genre
- Movie/show rating/popularity
- Length of movie/timeslot of show
- Critical acclaim/award nominations
- Plot type
- Setting
- Span of reach for viewing (Is this a global movie?)
- Other product placements in the film
- Intensity of audio/visual cues

Chapter 4

A Congruency-Relationship Framework for Product Placement

Based on the data and research we've discussed thus far, we propose a theoretical framework that uses the consumer's strong relationships with characters and television shows or movies, to mediate the relationship between consumer and brand or product. This framework would be taken into consideration when a marketer is implementing a placement that they intend for the audience to process explicitly, remaining safely in the zone that precedes the tipping point. The overarching theme is that persuasion knowledge and consumer-brand relationships give us key insight as to how we can improve the strategy of product placement: by focusing on congruency and relationships. As discussed earlier, there are many types of relationships and they are an important aspect of this model. In some of the non-human interactions of product placements (e.g., between movie type and brand elements, or between movie type and the physical brand), "relationships" as such are not possible, therefore congruency is the goal. We discussed in chapter 3 the various ways that congruency can be created in regards to movie and character factors. Note that this framework is intended for fictional shows and movies, which have established characters and a storyline, not reality television shows, documentaries, or other nonfiction works.

The framework depicts 6 different associations, some consisting of already established relationships and some showing connections that decisions-makers could manipulate strategically; these links are numbered 1 to 6 for reference. In the relationship between characters and placements of brand elements such as logos, slogans, or other symbolic indicators where the tangible product is not present (link 1), the focus transfers to brand essence, values or personality. The brand could be conjoined with elements of the characters values or qualities that

make up the essence of the character. As we discussed with Patagonia, sometimes the brand encapsulates more than just the product, and even more importantly, sometimes what immediately comes to mind when considering a brand is not the product, but rather elements of brand values, brand essence, and brand personality. In this case, character values and essence would want to be congruent with brand values and brand essence. This relationship could also specifically focus on personality. We elaborate further on 5 Aaker's brand dimensions of brand personality, shown in Figure 6 in chapter 3.

To provide structure to aligning brand personality with character personality, Aaker's brand dimensions we first analyze what brand dimensions apply to the brand of the product placement. Next we can look at certain underlying characteristics of that dimension (i.e. outdoorsy and tough traits for the ruggedness dimension) and try to match characters that possess these traits (Aaker, 1997). Going back to the Patagonia example, we could imagine a character that values environmental activism might be best utilized as a tool for a product placement that depicts a Patagonia logo. Another example could be a Starbucks logo being depicted in the background of a character who is known for their obsessive coffee-drinking tendencies.

Another example to explain this link highlights a situation in which a congruent relationship between characters and brand isn't feasible, because the characters wouldn't appropriately interact with the product in the context of the film, or don't have the means to model a meaningful relationship. For example, in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, the turtles are attempting to hide in Times Square, New York. They disguise themselves by curling up into their shells directly on top of each cup of a bra featured on a large Victoria's Secret billboard in Times Square, camouflaging them to the public. The execution is cute and humorous, and communicates the sexy playful factor of Victoria's Secret's brand personality. Obviously, the

character personalities of the turtles don't align with the brand personality of Victoria's Secret, nor would they naturally interact with lingerie products in the context of the film, but elements of the brand personality are still encapsulated with the billboard as a brand element rather than the tangible product.

For the next association between characters and placements that involve the tangible products of the brand (link 3) we revisit the concept of congruency and relationships. We discussed previously that a modeling strategy could be used to facilitate brand-consumer closeness by depicting intimate, relatable relationships between character and consumer. Obviously the product as well as brand elements are entities of the brand itself, therefore Aaker's framework can be applied in terms of products too. For example, in *Top Gun*, Tom Cruise's character plays a cool, handsome, and fearless lead character who drives a motorcycle and later flies a military fighter. The character does all of this while sporting a leather jacket and a pair of Ray-Ban aviator sunglasses (Renko, 2011). From the traits of Aaker's brand dimensions, this character was charming, daring and tough, making him align with dimensions of ruggedness, excitement and sophistication. The brand personality of Ray-Ban closely aligns with the character's profile of traits, achieving congruency, and most importantly resulting in a 40% increase in sales within 7 months of the film's release (Renko, 2011).

The point of separating brand elements and tangible products within the overall brand bubble in this framework is to provide detail in how specific modes of execution of the placement correspond to specific congruency strategies. To explain simply, a character cannot directly hold a brand element such as a logo or a value in their hands, but their personality, values and essence, can align with that of the brand, and therefore congruency can be achieved in

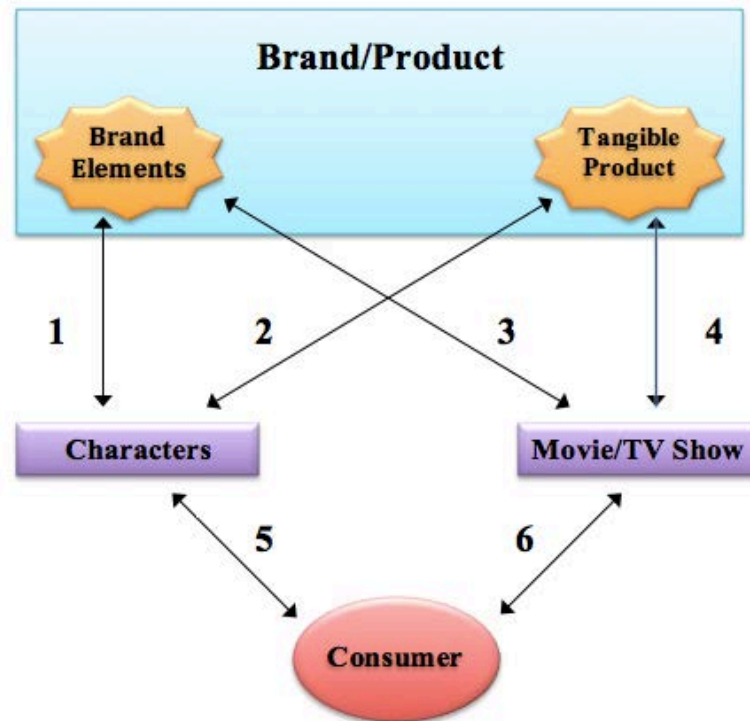
a scene by capitalizing on those similarities. When you do have a tangible product, characters can physically interact with the product and literally touch the brand with their hands.

Moving on to the movie or television show (links 2 and 4), these components need to achieve congruency in brand essence, movie themes and plot. For example, having a tobacco or alcohol company advertisement or logo depicted in a drama film that depicts deeply troubled characters who struggle with alcoholism and addiction definitely would not achieve such congruency. However, depicting anti-smoking advertisements and advertisements for *Alcoholics Anonymous* would make sense with the themes of the movie and plot.

In the classic example of Reese's pieces and E.T., plot factors required the character to lure E.T. out somehow, resulting in the use of a trail of peanut butter pieces placed carefully to extract the shy UFO character. Reese's pieces were even deemed a "UFO's candies" and experienced a 65% jump in profits two weeks post-premiere (Renko, 2011). According to Jean-marc Lehu (2007), director Steven Spielberg originally reached out to Mars to negotiate and product placement for M&M's but Mars declined.

In terms of movies and tangible products and vehicles of the brand, movie or show factors need to align with and be integrated into the plot. For a movie that involves high speed chases or car scenes, a car company would prove extremely appropriate because it is already seamlessly involved in the plot.

Figure 8: Congruency Relationship Framework



1. Congruency of brand values/essence/personality with character values/essence/personality
2. Congruency of character-product relationships/ model character-product relationships
3. Congruency of brand essence/values/personality with movie/show elements (i.e. setting/plot/atmosphere)
4. Congruency of product integration into movie/show elements (i.e. setting/plot/atmosphere)
5. Established Consumer-Character Relationship (See Chapter 3)
6. Established Consumer-Entertainment Relationship (See Chapter 2)

There are several close and very similar relationships occurring in this framework, and they all closely resemble each other due to how intertwined the product is with the brand and the character is with the movie. To summarize congruency, we can think of it in terms of 2 crucial tiers of relationships that facilitate the overall goal: strengthening the consumer and brand relationship.

1. The consumer-show/movie/character relationships

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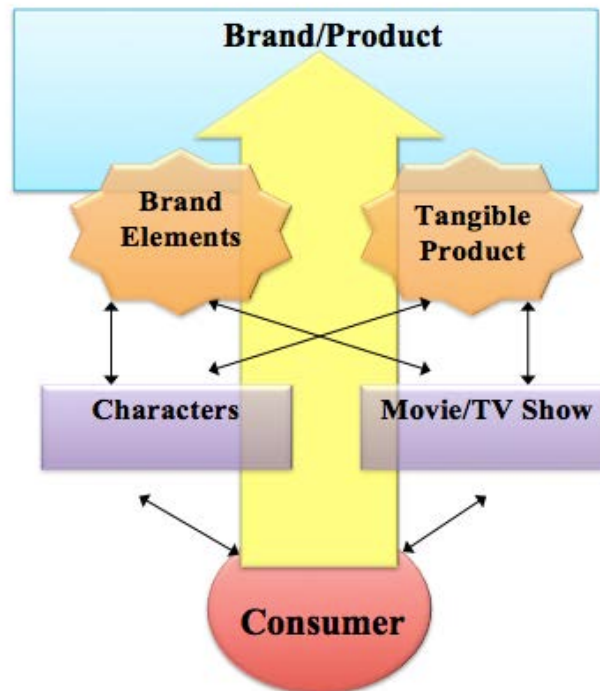
2. Character/Movie-brand/product relationships

=

3. Consumer-Brand relationship

When congruency is achieved in both tiers through some or all of these relationships, this framework is optimized, and product placement is executed in the best way. A visual depiction of this notion in regards to the framework is shown in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9: Connecting Consumer and Brand



In Gutnik et al. (2007), authors describe an advantage of product placement being that it “may actually add to the experience.” This poses the question, why emphasize congruency and

relationships in the execution of product placement? The answer is that it creates value for the consumer. With a value-added product placement implementation, brands definitely get closer to the goal of consumers perceiving their relationship with the brand as more communal than exchange. Value-added experiences provide evidence that the brand's motivation is to actually fulfill the needs and please the customer.

Chapter 5

And the Award for Best (and Worst) Product Placements Goes To...

In this section we will cover a range of examples of product placements, highlighting applications to the framework, and failures to adhere to the concept of utilizing meaningful relationships and employing detailed congruency.

The Best Policy

According to Friestad and Wright (1994), appropriateness beliefs have to do with whether the advertiser's tactics are seen as "moral and normatively acceptable" versus being perceived to be manipulating, deceiving or unfair to the consumer. It makes sense through a purely humanistic lens, in that people don't want to be a fool; they don't want to be tricked or deceived, and they definitely don't want to spend their money on something that is not at least what they perceived it to be. In the case of covert marketing, it makes sense that a consumer is skeptical as to why the advertisers are attempting to influence them without them knowing. In order to foster those essential brand relationships, it may be important that advertisers are extremely explicit when they implement product placement, but they would want to do this only if the consumer receives it as honest, humorous and a good way to integrate movie and brand. Such may be the case in the CW's *Jane the Virgin* example, whereby the network, the CW, was featured in its own show with a character who played an actor who was auditioning for a very important role with a highly esteemed network, which was the CW. This implementation was in no way attempting to be covert or to hide the product placement, but it aligned with the playful personality of the show and even more importantly, the personality of the character. The

character is an extremely self-absorbed, lovable, playful, goofy actor, the long-lost father of the main character, who is completely convinced that he graces the world with his presence. This tactic would very likely not have worked for a critically acclaimed movie such as *La La Land*, or even for the CW's own emotional drama *The Vampire Diaries* TV show, because the tactic would be seen as incongruent with the personality of the show and of the characters.

What Not To Dare

Previously we mentioned Michael Bay's *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, the fourth in a very commercial series of movies that harbor a surplus of product placement. As mentioned before, a whopping 55 total brands were featured, including several Chinese brands. Through vlogs and social listening, it is clear that there is a lot of negative backlash regarding the overwhelming executions of product placement in several Michael Bay films. In one vlog, a critic unveils more rationale behind why product placement in this fourth *Transformers* film was so poorly received ([JoBlo Movie Trailers], 2014). First, they highlight the immediate placement, no more than a few minutes into the film that depicted a fake brand *Glacier Bay Mining Co.*, using execution factors to emphasize the word "Bay," not coincidentally also the last name of the *Transformers* director, Michael Bay ([JoBlo Movie Trailers], 2014). Another more intriguing execution of product placement is the integration of a Lamborghini vehicle and what the vlogger describes as a "money shot" that is featured just moments after the tragic death of a beloved character ([JoBlo Movie Trailers], 2014). This evil Lamborghini character is also called out as being unnecessary because according to the storyline, alien Transformers turn into cars and other technology in order to stay hidden ([JoBlo Movie Trailers], 2014). However, in this storyline, the

evil character has no reason to blend in, and therefore his transformation back into the forcefully placed Lamborghini fails to achieve congruency between the tangible product and the movie factor, specifically plot. Another example features an Oreo cookie vending machine that turns into a transformer, and is criticized as being completely over-the-top and ridiculous ([JoBlo Movie Trailers], 2014). In a scene with the main character, a violent vehicle crash results in the scattering of Bud Light beers all over the road. The main character is frustrated during the scene and proceeds to pick up a bottle, crack it open on the door of the vehicle, and then take a chug of it “for no apparent reason whatsoever,” as the YouTube video declares ([JoBlo Movie Trailers], 2014). Examples from this film extend on indefinitely, but the main goal is to illustrate exactly why these executions were perceived so poorly. These rationales for frustration all relate back to failure to achieve congruency in emotion, storyline, character connection, and subtlety. All of these instances likely push the consumer over the tipping point, whether it is merely the obviousness that activates their persuasion knowledge without qualifying appropriateness or the implementation after the character’s death not being “moral and normatively acceptable,” as emphasized by Friestad and Wright (1994). Another issue that highly agrees with our framework, is incongruity. In an example of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, the incongruity exists from the original 1990 film to the 2014 remake. In general an important character trait is that the turtles love pizza. In the 1990 film the brand depicted is Domino’s, but in the 2014 remake, Pizza Hut is frequently placed through the film, and another character even discusses aspects about the pizza. Below we provide a list of some of the different rationales behind consumers regarding placements as inappropriate.

What does the audience dislike about product placement?

- Inconsistency- Pizza Hut and Domino's, the turtles loved Domino's in the 1990 *TMNT* movie, and Pizza Hut in the 2014 remake.
- False advertising: Chappie using several PlayStation 4's to stimulate a human brain
- When it has no artistic storytelling purpose: Mac & Me → McDonalds
- When it's not necessary: Oreos vending machine transformer
- When it doesn't make sense to the plot: villain not trying to blend in at all, why does it need to turn into a sports car?
- When it is incongruent with emotions or insensitive: *Transformers: Age of Extinction* → a beloved character dies in beginning, villain turns back into a Lamborghini.
- When it interrupts their entertainment

Getting it Right

We move on to consider aspects that the consumer appreciates in regards to placements. In a blog entitled *Brands & Films*, product placements are extensively covered, including a countdown of the 40 best product placements (Renko, 2011). Some noteworthy instances stand out. In the case of the movie *You've Got Mail*, for not one but two distinctly positive implementations of product placement. First and foremost, there is the brand the title references, AOL, and the programs well known usage of the message "you've got mail," that is translated when a consumer opens his or her mailbox. Apparently the title of the film was "You Have Mail," originally, but AOL and Warner Bros urged the director to change the title of the film (Renko, 2011). In this case, the title implementation of AOL could not be any more appropriate to the storyline of the film, which portrays an online love affair developed entirely from emails. In this instance, the product placement was almost essential to the plot. Without AOL in this film, the realism and relatability of the characters interacting with the program is diminished. Applying our framework, the characters felt closer to the brand because they were watching an imitation of a real relationship that a consumer has with the AOL product by watching the

characters in the film. Certain details were portrayed, including Meg Ryan's character whispering along when the mailbox opened "you've got mail." Again, the characters relationship with the AOL product so closely resembled real consumer-AOL relationships, and thus the consumer felt more connected to the brand. Without observable AOL brand elements, the diminished vividness that results from displaying the AOL logo on the screen followed by a very recognizable verbal cue would take away from the added value, resulting in a less favorability. The second successful film in this brand is Starbucks (Renko, 2011). The rationale behind the value that was added from this product placement lies in the dialogue that the character explained, written below (Renko, 2011):

"The whole purpose of places like Starbucks is for people with no decision-making ability whatsoever to make six decisions just to buy one cup of coffee. Short, tall, light, dark, caf, decaf, low-fat, non-fat, etc. So people who don't know what the hell they're doing or who on earth they are can, for only \$2.95, get not just a cup of coffee but an absolutely defining sense of self: Tall. Decaf. Cappuccino."

The key to effective dialogue can be difficult to articulate. The reason this dialogue provides value is because it is anecdotal, clever and thought-provoking. The consumer manages to describe a positive quality about the brand: that consumers have a wide variety of options to choose from. However, the characters dialogue is honest and realistic and even fosters artistic thought with a metaphor that implies the coffee product beverage plays into a consumer's identity. Another key is again that decision-makers used relatable aspects drawn from real consumer-Starbucks relationships, and gave the character a dialogue that viewers related to and were even inspired by.

Wilson Sporting goods redefined the landscape of product placement as a whole new category of *brands becoming characters* was born. Other executions of product placement include the brand or product being placed in the set, being used or interacted with, and being

talked about. Interestingly enough, Wilson Sporting goods did not pay a dime for the product placement, but it was estimated by Maynard and Scala (2006) that the company would have had to pay between \$1.85 million and \$11.5 million based on number of mentions and appearances in the film as well as estimated total number of people who viewed the film. After the film, Wilson Sporting Goods launched a real replica product complete with the beloved character's bloody face and all, which generated positive profits (Maynard & Scala, 2006).

What does the audience like?

- Placements of sought-after products: Nokia and *The Matrix*: Nokia brick made you look like you were taking a really important phone call
- Products that align with the story: Mini cooper in *The Italian Job*: needed lightweight vehicles that could hold the weight of the gold
- Brands as Characters: Wilson from *Castaway* , Bumblebee and Optimus Prime from *Transformers* franchise
- Meaningful/Thought-Provoking Dialogue: Starbucks → *You've Got Mail*
- Brand personality/character personality congruity: Omega, BMW, Aston Martin → *James Bond*
- Brands when they are essential/add artistic vividness: AOL → *You've Got Mail*
- Purpose to the product's integration: Reese's Pieces, *E.T.*
- Congruity with plot development/character development : graphite concierge key from American Airlines → *Up in the Air*

In this chapter we describe several examples both good and bad, which provide supporting evidence for a need for congruity in execution as well as close examination of relationships when integrating a placement. There is an abundance of ways that these congruities or incongruities in execution can surface, and the only way to truly begin to decipher some of the core rules about this execution is to individually study both positive and negative examples. These examples as well as infinite more heavily support the congruency as a requirement of product placement.

Chapter 6

Sequel? The Future of Product Placement

We may not be able to definitively predict or measure how a product placement implementation will be perceived by customers, but we have established from social listening that consumers are less likely to have negative views of product placement if it is subtle, consistent, and congruent with the movie, characters, brand and products.

So what does the future of product placement look like? Gutnik et al. (2007) discuss the future of product placement based off new and growing trends. Specifically, the authors emphasize how technology is shaping films and video and changing the way we view television (Gutnik et al, 2007). Authors explain how the change in television viewing patterns, and specifically the use DVR (digital video recording) that enables consumers to fast forward through commercials is responsible for the changes (Gutnik et al., 2007). Repeatedly, the need for product placement and other new marketing tactics is emphasized here, because if consumers aren't viewing TV commercials, then advertisements are not reaching their target audiences. Gutnik et al. (2007) move on to discuss future directions for product placement, suggesting that with growing use of CGI (computer-generated imagery) products or brand elements can be added to a movie or TV show after it has already been filmed. With the potential to negotiate placements post-production, Virtual Product Placement is born. Not only could this increase flexibility in being able to produce examples of different executions, but it provides a mechanism to support the product placement strategy emphasized in this thesis. Producers could produce multiple examples of different ways that the characters interact with the product, or different

ways that brand elements are incorporated into the scene, and then present alternatives to advertisers who are experts in the strongest practices of product placement.

Product placement as a tactic faces criticisms from both sides of the coin because substantial evidence suggests that using covert marketing tactics in general are too risky in terms of preserving the consumer-brand relationship. However, if decision-makers choose to be more overt in their implementation of product placement, they also risk those relationships because they might frustrate the audience if they are construed as disrupting their entertainment in an attempt to persuade them, pushing them over the tipping point.

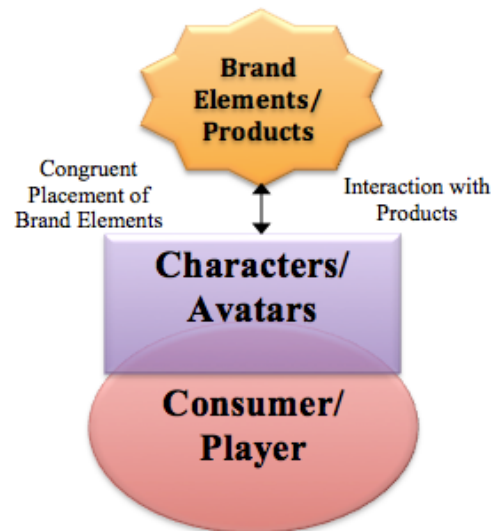
Marketers need to either find the tipping point between these two negative outcomes and be sure to avoid going over it, or they need to adopt new strategies that reposition product placement in a way consumers deem appropriate. The problem that came up consistently with covert marketing is that consumers may feel a sense of betrayal or decreased trust in the brand because the brand fails to disclose its attempting to persuade. A logical conclusion is to disclose that the brand is there, and be honest; however, in the case of product placement, there are not a lot of ways that the brand can clearly communicate this in a way that makes them sure the audience sees the disclosure. The brand could turn to being overly obvious that they are attempting to advertise their product through execution of the placement, but then they risk frustrating the audience that is trying to enjoy their movie or TV show. It could be interesting to come up with other ways the brand could reposition the covertness of the placement, in order for consumers to deem it appropriate. A suggestion could be that marketers use it as a “hunt” that is playful and interactive, that the consumers have the *option* of engaging with. Advertisers could use social media to make the hunt known, and to officially declare its presence in films, so as not to appear to deceive or betray the consumer.

Another intriguing future direction for product placement is *reverse product placement*, described by Gutnik et al. (2007). In this practice, a fictional brand is created and integrated into the show or movie world, and then later the fictional brand is made real and launched into the real world (Gutnik et al, 2007). The example authors give is Bubba Gump Shrimp, which was created in the film *Forrest Gump* and then launched as a real restaurant chain post film release (Gutnik et al, 2007). Another example is Pepsi Perfect, released in 2015 as a limited edition product to celebrate *Back to the Future* Day. This commemorates a day that the character Marty McFly traveled to the future, specifically to October 21, 2015, and all he wanted was a Pepsi. Interestingly this example implemented a variation of a product to make better sense with the film, and later PepsiCo decided to bring it to life as a reverse product placement (Novak, 2015) Reverse product placement also helps to highlight the significance of movie and character elements, and how consumers relate intimately to entities in cherished entertainment, supporting that current established brands have potential to profit from this adoration of entertainment.

Another emerging trend in product placement introduces a new concept of character placement (Lomas, 2013). In character placement, a certain characteristic or aspect of the character that is unimportant to the plot, is strategically selected in order to promote a brand. For example, perhaps a character is necessary in a story but their career or occupation is not important nor necessary to be brought up in a film (Lomas, 2013). Character placement determines that the character's occupation will be a photographer, so as to provide an integrated medium to display the camera brand Cannon as much as possible (Lomas, 2013). In the future we may find that characters are being placed in films purely for advertising purposes, and that they are not even necessary to the plot.

We did not focus on product placements in video games in this thesis, but similar research to what we covered here would be beneficial to look at for video games. We suggest researching relationships that consumers have with their video games, and then determining how certain factors of the game could implement product placement congruently, while taking advantage of important relationships wherever possible. Gutnik et al. (2007) found that gamers tended to respond positively to placements, and in one study 70% of subjects surveyed considered product placement to be a positive feature of the game. Interestingly, the “relationship” between the player and the characters in the game has even more connectedness, because the consumer is controlling the depicted character, can create avatars that look like themselves, and makes the decisions inside the fictional world. This agrees nicely with our framework where consumer-character interaction brings the consumer closer to the brand. Gutnik et al. (2007) cites that in the video game *Everquest II*, players can actually have their avatar order a pizza from Pizza Hut. It’s highly comprehensible that this motivates consumers to want to consume Pizza Hut as well. Thinking of the high interaction, integration of products in the setting of the game, and even overlap of the consumer-character relationship help to prove that our framework would work if placements in shows and movies were able to imitate this close interrelatedness. Visually we might see something like Figure 10 below as an adaptation of one side of our framework for video games. Further research could definitely provide future direction for product placement in video games.

Figure 10: Partial Framework Adaptation for Video Games



Conclusion

Successful product placement is highly theorized. In this thesis I propose simply that a desire for congruency does indeed exist when it comes to consumers and product placement. This congruency can also protect brands and producers from the backlash of product placement whereby the consumer is affected by the activation of persuasion knowledge, and risks crossing the “tipping point.” Branders are constantly innovating new ways to reach consumers and develop meaningful relationships. It seems clear then, that when a third entity of entertainment comes into the consumer-brand relationship, a useful strategy would be to take advantage of the relationships that consumers have with entertainment to cultivate consumer-brand connections. Emphasis on the importance of relationships provides a new lens with which to look at product placement.

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ACADEMIC VITA

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Education: Pennsylvania State University Schreyer Honors College *May 2017*
Major(s) and Minor(s): Dual Major in Marketing and Psychology
Honors: Marketing

Thesis Title: Avoiding the Tipping Point: A Congruency-Relationship Framework for Product Placement

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Coupland

Professional Experience

AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION- *Intern* *Summer 2016*

- Designed signs, programs, invitations, brochures etc. *Orange County, CA*
- Assisted with events, event coordination, and social media.

BIG TEN NETWORK- *On-Campus Marketing Intern* *November 2014-March 2015*

- Created and implemented a basketball competition given a \$5000 budget in order to engage Penn State students with the Big Ten Network.

Work Experience

NORDSTROM SALES ASSOCIATE *Summer 2016*

- Seasonal sales associate for the Accessories Department at Nordstrom in Mission Viejo, CA.

Professional Memberships

PENN STATE MARKETING ASSOCIATION: COLLEGIATE CHAPTER OF THE
AMERICAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION *Fall 2014-Present*

- *Vice President of Communications* (Current):
 - Managing all internal and external communications for the Penn State Marketing Association (PSMA) including recruitment, member relations, public relations, weekly emails, social media, and promotion of professional events.
- *Project Manager-Consulting Division*
- *Digital Marketing & Advertising Division*:
 - Created marketing materials using Photoshop.

Community Service Involvement: THON involvement through Alpha Delta Pi sorority and Penn State Marketing Association