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PRODUCT PLACEMENT

The latest trend in advertising is to make it less advertorial. The tendency is to move away from in-your-face ads, where the product is the star, to mini-movies or quasi-documentary vignettes that feature "real-life scenarios" with the product(s) hovering in the background. Some would argue it's a sort of "art imitating art imitating life" scenario -- where ads are imitating the practice of product placement.

This may seem a bit confusing, but really, it's quite simple. The majority of us are getting tired of ads. Today's consumer is inundated with advertising everywhere: television, radio, billboards, magazines, buses, newspapers, the Internet... And these are just the usual suspects. More and more ad-space is popping up every day. From people walking down the street wearing signs, to flyers on our cars and in our mailboxes, to ads on the ATM screen as we wait for it to dispense our cash -- we see ads all day, every day. [3]

Imagine this scene in a movie: The hero is drinking a bottle of soda as the bad guys drive by disguised as delivery men. The hero leaps into his sports car and a chase ensues. The bad guys finally crash their delivery truck into a coffee house and surrender to the hero.

There is a reason why the hero was drinking Pepsi, the bad guys were driving a Federal Express truck and the crash scene was a Starbucks coffee shop. That reason is called product placement, and it is more prevalent than one might suspect.

Even television networks that depend on advertising dollars to stay in Product placement in movies is so ubiquitous that it's even become something to parody on the big screen. Two movies that do a good job of this are "Wayne's World" and "Josie and the Pussycats." In Wayne's World, the two main characters hawk a variety of stuff, including Nuprin, Pepsi, Pizza Hut and Reebok. The amusing part about this is that the product placement vignette takes place while the characters Wayne and Garth are lambasting the very thing they're doing. As Wayne says "Contract or no, I will not bow to any corporate sponsor," he is opening a Pizza Hut box and pulling out a slice of pizza. The camera lingers on the Pizza Hut logo and Wayne, holding the slice of pizza lovingly beside his face, smiles straight at the camera.

The movie "Josie and the Pussycats" takes the joke several steps further. A send-up on the music industry, "Josie and the Pussycats" manages to satirize name-brand integration throughout the film. To get an idea of just how saturated with brands, logos and products this movie is, here's a taste of what you can see in just the trailer alone: America Online, American Express, Bebe, Billboard Magazine, Bugles, Campbell's Soup, Coke, Entertainment Weekly Magazine, Evian, Ford, Gatorade, Kodak, Krispy Kreme, McDonald's, Milky Way, Motorola, Pepperidge Farm Cookies, Pizza Hut, Pringles, Puma, Ray-Ban, Sega, Starbucks, Steve Madden, Target, and T.J. Maxx.

Product placement isn't just for movies and television anymore. You'll find it in books, music videos, video games and on the Internet. [3]

But product placement has recently raised the ire of some critics who contend that it only increases the melding of commercialization and media. One major critic is even pushing for legislation that would force networks to fess up when a company is paying for a product in a show. [2]

Though new research from YouGov suggests product placement will not drive brand profile, while 70% of people quizzed claim their perceptions will not be changed by brands in paid-for slots. The survey of 2,062 people revealed just 32% of people quizzed were even aware that Ofcom's rules has changed to allow product placement. [1]

Despite the debate between artistic integrity and practical commercialism, there is no doubt that product placement is effective in most cases. Moviegoers may not even be aware of all the examples of product placement in an average Hollywood film, but they might remember enough details to boost sales after the fact.

References:

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