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## **The Role of Exposure Frequency, Prominence, and Memory of Brand Placements in Effects on Brand Image**

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Brand placement, the purposeful incorporation of a brand into editorial content, is an example of a potentially successful alternative to traditional advertising. Very little is known about the effects of brand placement on brand image, the perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. This is very surprising, because image change is often mentioned as one of the benefits of brand placement for advertisers. We studied the effects of exposure frequency and prominence of placement on brand image. We also studied the role of brand memory in this process.

### **[to cite]:**

Eva Van Reijmersdal, Peter Neijens, and Edith Smit (2005), "The Role of Exposure Frequency, Prominence, and Memory of Brand Placements in Effects on Brand Image", in E - European Advances in Consumer Research Volume 7, eds. Karin M. Ekstrom and Helene Brembeck, Goteborg, Sweden : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 659-659.

### **[url]:**

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# The Role of Exposure Frequency, Prominence, and Memory of Brand Placements in Effects on Brand Image

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Although a considerable number of studies on brand placement—i.e. the purposeful incorporation of a brand into editorial content—have been conducted, very little is known about the effects of brand placement on brand image. This is very surprising, because image change is often mentioned as one of the benefits of brand placement for advertisers. Knowledge of the effects on brand image is not only useful for advertisers but may also give insight into the psychological mechanisms, such as conditioning and associative learning, underlying effects of mixing advertising with editorial content.

Two studies were conducted, both aimed at measuring the effects of exposure to brand placements in television programs. The first study (survey) focused on effects of brand placements in an informational television program named “Je Echte Leef tijd” (“Your Real Age”) in which a number of advertisers participated. This program was broadcast on the Dutch commercial channel RTL4. During the program, viewers were encouraged to visit the program’s website and have their real ages calculated based on an extensive test. This “real age” is based on lifestyle, medical history, relationships, nutrition, and on how well one has maintained one’s body. In each of the seven episodes, two celebrities were present in the studio and talked about their lifestyle and what they did or did not do to keep their bodies young. Each episode also included special reports on issues such as sports clubs or cholesterol levels. The participation of the advertisers (i.e. the placed brands) became visible in several ways, each with different levels of prominence. A total of 655 respondents completed the online questionnaire of which 50.9% were non-viewers and 49.1% were viewers of the program.

In the second study (experiment), three fragments of approximately 25 minutes each were selected to manipulate exposure frequency. The fragments were natural parts of three episodes and each fragment included the same number and type of placements for each brand. The fragments included two different types of brand placements: prominent and subtle. A total of 139 undergraduates of two Dutch universities participated in the experiment. Both studies included brand measures, program measures and control variables.

Important finding from both studies was that especially the prominent brand placements affected brand image. These placements made a contribution to the story told in the program and were well-integrated in the content of the program. For these placements, the program image played an important role; brand images changed in the direction of the program image.

Our study also showed that image components that were not associated with the program were not affected and neither was brand attitude. Thus, the pairing of the brand with the program had effects that could not be explained by a general liking of the brand, as might be expected based on mere exposure theory (Zajonc 1968, 2001). This means that placing a brand in a television program can result in very specific image change. The program image is the determinant of the effects on the brand image.

The relationship between memory and image was examined in both studies. We found that memory was not related to brand image. Thus, respondents who remembered seeing the brand did not have a different image of that brand than respondents who could not

remember seeing the brand. These results are in line with those of Law and Braun (2000), and Auty and Lewis (2004a; 2004b), who showed that brand placement effects on brand choice were unrelated to memory. Our results also indicate that brand image is influenced implicitly, which means that image is influenced without explicit memory of the exposure. Many studies into the working of implicit and explicit memory have shown that these two types of memory are unrelated (for an overview, see Schacter 1987). These findings have some important implications for our knowledge of brand placements. They support the idea that brand image and brand memory are processed differently. This is in agreement with the evolving view that different measures are needed to estimate effects of brand placements (Law and Braun 2000). Future research may provide more insight into the effects of brand placement on both implicit and explicit memory.

Our survey showed that exposure frequency is an important variable in the affecting brand image. Two or more exposures were needed to change brand image. This implies that there is a threshold for affecting images in natural viewing situations. The experiment did not show effects of exposure frequency: the exposure per se was enough to influence brand image. This difference between the experiment and the survey is probably due to higher levels of attention in the experiment. As opposed to the survey, we explicitly asked the respondents to watch the episodes attentively in the experiment.

The effects on brand image found in these studies are promising, because the creation of images is a long-term process that is influenced by both brand use and marketing communication. We showed that exposure to brand placement, even only three times, was able to change the brand image in the direction of the program.

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