



University of Adelaide
Business School

**Product Placement in Reality Television: An Investigation of Audience Identification
and Program Credibility**

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Abstract

Grounded in media and persuasion theory, this thesis investigated the effects of program credibility and viewer identification with program participants on product placement outcomes, such as affiliation with the brand, perceptions of brand quality and ultimate desire for the brand. This study also examined how the fit between brand and program may moderate these relationships. Thus, this research contributes to current understanding of how the relationship between viewers and the television programs they watch, and the connection between brand and program may interrelate to affect product placement outcomes. It provides insight into the psychological mechanisms through which viewers are influenced by placements, with particular reference to the ‘transformational’ reality television format, where real program participants are guided in transformation to a desired self.

The research process involved several stages. The focus of the main study was arrived at through exploratory research with the Australian product placement industry. Practitioners first provided their insights via interviews. Next, relevant constructs were refined and their importance was determined through the Delphi technique. As a part of this process, a conceptual framework was developed and refined into a causal model of product placement effects. This model was then tested via a three week viewer panel study where a sample of 203 females aged between 16 and 35 viewed an Australian reality TV series within a natural viewing environment.

The results revealed that identification with program participants prompts viewers to affiliate themselves with any explicitly placed brand, regardless of its fit with the program. This suggests that viewers do not discount less congruent, significant or well integrated brands any more than well fitting brands when engaging in the identification process. Alternately, a positive association between advice credibility and all brand outcomes was only found for

those brands exhibiting a high level of fit. This suggests two things: first, where the brand exhibits a sufficient level of fit, the program is recognised as a source of the brand cue, and second, that a favourable assessment of this source contributes to greater perceptions of quality and affiliation with the brand. Hence, the full benefit of an implied endorsement is only achieved when there is a high level of fit between brand and program. Implications for balance theory, attribution theory and the persuasion knowledge model are discussed.

Declaration of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Claire Sherman and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Claire Sherman

Signed _____

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