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Product Placement Can Be A Lot More Powerful Than We Realize

Product placement makes us prefer and identify with brands...we might not like.

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Advertising (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/consumer-behavior>) is all around us. Depending on whom you ask, the average American is exposed to hundreds if not thousands of commercial messages every day. TV advertising is of course one of the best-known forms of advertising, and we've all seen more TV ads than we can remember. Modern technology however, in the form of digital video recorders, allows us to skip through TV ads. This is one of the reasons advertisers rely more and more on embedded marketing, or product placement. Product placement is the practice of embedding products within a TV program or film as a way to promote those products. Product placement can be very successful, as shown by the 65% increase in Reese's Pieces sales after its placement in *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, or the 50% increase in Red Stripe sales after its placement in *The Firm*. These figures show that product placement can have rather powerful effects on viewers, despite its seeming innocuousness. In fact, product placements can be more powerful than we realize, making us implicitly prefer products even if we don't explicitly prefer them. In this post I'm going to discuss how product placement influences our implicit cognitions to give you a better appreciation of how it affects us in ways we don't consciously realize. After reading this, hopefully you'll start to view placements differently, though to be quite honest it actually might *not* benefit you.

In one of my previous posts, entitled "Implicit Attitudes Predict Impulsive (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/self-control>) Behavior", I discussed the concept of an implicit attitude. As I mentioned then, implicit attitudes are attitudes that unknowingly become associated with

... program or film become unknowingly associated with products placed in that TV program. Specifically, the emotions we experience while watching the program are transferred to products placed in that program, though we'd be unaware of the transfer. If those emotions are positive we'll implicitly prefer them more, and if they're negative we'll prefer them less. When placements are background placements are less likely to elicit conscious thoughts about the product, conscious thought having the effect of directly influencing explicit attitudes.

In addition to implicit attitudes, product placement can affect what's called implicit self-identification. Implicit self-identification is automatically associating yourself with an object, for example a consumer brand. When we watch a liked character use a brand, we can start to automatically identify with the brand as a way to vicariously experience that character's life. This has happened in experiments even when people were prompted to perceive placements as advertisements and reacted by explicitly liking the placed brand less! That finding is important, for a few reasons. First, psychologists have actually found we're more likely to buy something we identify with than something we like. Second, it shows that even when we view placements skeptically they can still give us a favorable inclination toward placed brands. Taken together, this means that we might buy products we've seen placed in TV or films even if we view the placements as an attempt at manipulation.

These days, pretty much every branded product in TV programs and films was intentionally placed there for a fee. Product placement is big business, quite simply because it works. Research has shown its indirect effects may be more potent, in that they're apparently more resistant to suspicion. This raises the question: How do we as members of the viewing public protect ourselves from this form of advertising? The best suggestion I have at this time is stop watching TV and films. We all know that's an unrealistic suggestion though, which makes the issue of resisting product placements quite the quandary. If I become aware of any useful information I'll blog about it, but until then remember the products you see on TV aren't just part of a narrative world, they're carefully designed advertisements intended for the purposes of commercial promotion.



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Children accept ad claims at face value, and the consequences can be harmful.

