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Eye tracking, product placement and Lady Gaga: What *Bad Romance* can teach us about embedded branding

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Today's marketing professionals face some pretty notable challenges when trying to get their messages in front of consumers as they buzz around syncing up all of their devices at their own convenience. As prospective customers spend more time browsing content on mobile phones and social networks, marketers can no longer rely on their traditional channels for messaging.

But marketers aren't reinventing the wheel. For many, the solution to this new-age problem lies in an age-old approach: product placement. Call it what you will: embedded branding or branded entertainment - the marketing tactic of placing branded products inside emotionally engaging and relevant programming isn't exactly a new concept. MediaPost.com cites occurrences of blatant product placement in films for over 100 years. PQ Media has been tracking spending on this methodology since the mid-'70s and has reported nearly consistent growth in this

approach through the decades. In fact, even after reports of a sluggish year in 2009 (approximately \$3.61 billion spent on strategically-placing products in television, films, Internet, video games and other media), PQ still predicts that we will be able to measure increased growth in 2010 and beyond.

Reliable metrics

But, when it comes to product placement, how do you measure exposure? Can you measure brand and ad recall? Can you get a feeling for overall impact? How can you create standards for matching a product with the most effective context? Are there reliable metrics to help with pricing more competitive product placements over others?

There are a number of installed methodologies that marketers can use to answer these questions. Traditional testing methodologies such as observation, self-reporting, questioning methods and case studies to test product recall have all been employed to achieve that perfect balance of having limited-but-enough exposure to promote recall and elicit an emotional response that could impact purchasing decisions without interfering with the overall consumer experience.

New York researcher The Nielsen Company established the PlaceViews application in 2006 as a result of a 10,000-person study over 50 programs that contained both



embedded and traditional commercial content. Its method combines metrics such as placement duration, type and number of occurrences with brand familiarity and recall based on post-exposure questionnaires.

From Nielsen's findings the community has taken some solid steps to understand what properties will cause recall. Although post-production testing followed by post-exposure questionnaires is informative, it only continues the cycle of a trial-and-error game. So with the aforementioned questions in mind, marketers are looking to gain some insight about the effectiveness of product placement before a piece is launched.

Banking on Lady Gaga

While most actors and performers grudgingly acquiesce when forced to incorporate product placements into their TV shows and movies, Lady Gaga has no such qualms. In fact, the *Product Placement News* reported that Lady Gaga was "set[ting] the standard for music video product placements" and that the companies who have products that are featured in her music videos are "banking on [her] to revitalize the market." Experts anticipate that partnerships with her could result in as much as 30 percent of future profits - starting with her music videos and continuing into the future with a relationship to her reputation.

Thus, Gaga's music video *Bad Romance* was a natural place to begin. Over the span of its five-minute running time, the video includes a host of branded items including shots of an HP Envy laptop, Nemiroff Lex Vodka, Carrera sunglasses, an iPod classic, a Wii controller and Dr. Dre headphones and ear buds. Peppered with brand placement there was enough diversity in size, duration of exposure

and branding to draw some preliminary conclusions about the parameters that lead to recall.

Explore the impact

To explore the impact of embedded branding, Ania Rodriguez, founder and CEO of Key Lime Interactive (KLI), a Miami research company, designed a short exploratory pilot study and worked with SensoMotoric Instruments (SMI), a Boston and Berlin, Germany, research agency, to use its eye- and gaze-tracking tools to capture attention data over *Bad Romance*. The objective of the study was twofold: to determine if there are significant trends in size of branded products or length of exposure that reliably result in product recall; and to use preliminary data to design a study that could attempt to determine ideal parameters for embedding products without disturbing the viewer's experience.

"Ultimately, if the industry can define some sort of baseline standards for these parameters we could ensure that the pricing for such placement is on target and, even more interesting for me, if we've managed to maintain the desired fluidity of the entertainment piece," says Rodriguez.

Participants were asked to "relax and enjoy the following video" while their attention was monitored for the entire four minutes and 55 seconds by SMI's RED eye-tracking device. Post-viewing, participants were asked if they could recall any advertising in *Bad Romance*. Then they were shown a list of the embedded brands and asked again if they recalled any of those listed.

The combination of the measurements from the eye-tracking equipment and the questionnaires produced the

following metrics: visible time of products in the video; the amount of time participants spent looking at embedded products (i.e., dwell time, revisits, diversions, etc.); aggregate visual trends across the group as a whole to determine parts of the video that demanded attention/competed for attention; and comparisons across given demographics of age, gender, country of citizenship and previous exposure.

Results were informative

Overall, the results were informative. For example, the participants were asked post-viewing if they recalled any advertising for products in *Bad Romance* and 56 percent reported that they did. They were able to freely recall some products and significantly more products were recalled by younger respondents (less than 34 years old) who might have served as the target demographic for particular brands.

The study went on to integrate the recorded visual attention to investigate a correlation in the video design parameters to the ability to recall products. Perhaps not surprisingly, the amount of time a participant dwelled on a particular product resulted in a significant increase in their ability to recall the product. One common type of visualization that can be easily extracted from the eye tracking is a heat map. The heat map shown depicts the aggregate attention of all 43 participants at a given frame in the music video. The warmer spots are indicative of a longer dwell time and the spots that have no heat information were likely not dwelled upon. The majority of attention was focused on faces or more specifically eyes/sunglasses.

As one would imagine, a product's frequency of appearance had a slight statistical significance to the product recall. The relationship between the amount of time participants dwelled on a product and the number of appearances that product made explained nearly 92 percent of cued recalls. Surprisingly, display size of the product was seemingly irrelevant.

Some products appeared simultaneously or competed with other semantic attractors (i.e., flashy or erotic events during the video) that likely disrupted their call for attention. For products placed during these parallel events, visual attention was not reported during competition. Differences were seen in the products recalled by participants based on their country of citizenship (U.S. or Germany). It's suspected that brand campaigns, pop-culture trends or other variables might result in priming of the recognition and therefore attention that particular brands receive.

Measurable return

As with all advertising opportunities, we can assume that brand managers and marketers are going to want to have a measurable return on their investment before making the decision to allocate advertising dollars on product place-

ment. Additional studies similar to the Lady Gaga project could help determine the minimum amount of exposure recommended for brands with a given reputation or a better understanding of how such products should be placed in context. Once these metrics are established, it's not far-fetched to think that product placement space in pop culture could be bought and sold at standard rates in the same way you would opt for a fourth-page ad vs. a full-page ad in a print publication. | [Q](#)

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