

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN THE TOP TEN MAJOR MOTION PICTURES OF 1997

Patrick Nicklay, North Dakota State University
Julie Toner Schrader, North Dakota State University

ABSTRACT

An undergraduate student and a faculty member team up to explain the concept of product placement and how it was used in the top ten major motion pictures of 1997. Automobiles as well as sports played major roles in popular films of 1997.

INTRODUCTION

Product Placement is the practice of arranging for brand-name goods to make prominent, paid-for appearances in films, television programs and other entertainment productions (Elliott 1993). Although product placement has been around since the 1920s when cigarette manufacturers placed their products in motion pictures, the modern era of product placement began with the success of Reese's Pieces attributed to the movie *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*. Who knew that aliens from outer space apparently have a sweet tooth similar to that of their human counterparts? If the movie *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* is to be believed, aliens prefer the delightful sweet taste of the chocolate-covered peanut butter candies known to us as "Reese's Pieces." The phenomenal success of that movie in particular helped to launch sales of Reese's Pieces into the stratosphere. Consumers who have seen this tale of an alien stranded on earth and the young boy who befriends him, can probably also name the candy featured in the film: Reese's Pieces, not M & M's.

A timeless classic like *E.T.* has grossed nearly \$400 million at the U.S. Box Office since 1982, including re-issues (*Mr. Showbiz* 1998). This is an especially staggering statistic considering a large portion of the motion picture's gross was from a time before inflated movie ticket prices. Including the huge amount of business from video rentals, video sales, and television broadcast, it is easy to understand why Reese's Pieces sales increased so dramatically because of this one movie.

The formula for success, however, is not always guaranteed, which is why some organizations need more convincing than others to have their products used in a motion picture. Had M&M/Mars agreed to have their candies allowed on screen, it is certainly questionable whether or not Reese's Pieces would have been as successful. Fortunately for Reese's, they saw the high potential and rewards that this product match-up could offer. A film targeted at children but loved also by adults apparently was a key to the huge success for both the movie and the candy.

The sight of watching a favorite Hollywood star on the big screen is certainly a pleasure. Now imagine if that same star cracked open a can of Pepsi and took a big, refreshing

drink. Or perhaps he or she can be seen driving a luxury automobile such as a BMW or a Cadillac. Maybe the star of the film even lights up a Marlboro cigarette. The impressions that these scenes have are tremendously important for the actors, the products and the films.

Movies have become such a popular form of product advertisement and marketing because the benefits from a built-in target audience are very exceptional. Marketers can, in essence, choose exactly which type of crowd will be seeing their product on display. The greatest advantage is being able to appeal to consumers with popular actors or actresses. Throw a Coke into one hand and a bag of Doritos into the other hand, consumers will then associate those products with that film and the stars of that film. Product placement also adds a bit of realism to the film, the old generic beer labels used in films of yesterday are now more than ever being replaced with authentic labels.

An example of successful free product placement takes place in the 1997 film *Jackie Brown*. Two of the stars of the film, Samuel L. Jackson and Pam Grier, each sport some headgear from Kangol, an English manufacturer. Following the appearance in this Quentin Tarantino film, inquiries for the hat "took a significant leap," (*Entertainment Weekly* 1998).

Table 1
The Top Ten Highest Grossing Films of 1997

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Gross</u>
1	Men in Black	\$250,000,000
2	The Lost World: Jurassic Park	\$229,100,000
3	Liar Liar	\$181,400,000
4	Air Force One	\$171,900,000
5	Star Wars	\$138,200,000
6	My Best Friend's Wedding	\$126,700,000
7	Titanic	\$112,400,000
8	Face/Off	\$112,300,000
9	Batman and Robin	\$107,300,000
10	George of the Jungle	\$105,200,000
Source: <i>Box Office Guru</i> (1998)		

Advertisers may look at everything from who will be starring in the film to whether it is a sequel to a previous box office smash to whether or not it is based on a popular novel. In the end, product placement is determined by whether the marketer of a product will be seen by millions of people in a pleasing way. The advantages for a company to have a product mentioned or advertised in a film are unlimited. Movies are no longer just for viewing on the big screen and then on video. Other formats such as DVD are popping up to join the laserdisc crowd; pay-per-view is growing by leaps and bounds; and cable movie channels devote 24 hours a day to reruns of new and old movies. Networks are jumping on the bandwagon too, showing movies as fresh as just a year old on television. The Internet and computers are promising to go even further with new technology to bring a movie to your home monitor with the click of a mouse button.

In the end, a product may end up being seen by hundreds of millions of potential consumers worldwide. The life of a product may be extended for decades, or the product could have a rebirth of success. That is why the movie format outperforms that of television. A TV program can be taken off the air, but removing a movie from existence borders on the impossible. In the end, it adds up to a very long shelf-life for the film, which means that product placement in films doesn't end once a motion picture leaves the theater and heads to video format.

The purpose of the present paper is to provide a content analysis of product placement in the top ten films of 1997 using U.S. box office receipts to rank the films (*Box Office Guru* 1998). Table 1 provides a list of these films. The top ten movies are chosen because the movie ticket buying public has voted with their money which movies they like best, and the products found in these films wind up being seen the most over any other films of the year.

ANALYSIS

The year 1997 was indeed a banner year for the motion picture industry, bringing in a record estimated \$6.24 billion domestically (*Box Office Guru* 1998). The top ten films combined for roughly \$1.5 Billion, or about 24% of the total dollars (*Mr. Showbiz* 1998). Along with shattered box office records, the motion picture industry is also on the rise with the average production cost. The implications of this trend will only mean that more and more studios will be selling ad space within their films to help keep overall production costs down. The end result: expect *more* product placement in films today.

The 1997 release of the 19th outing for James Bond 007 in *Tomorrow Never Dies* is the ultimate example of a movie and its product partnerships. MGM/UA, distributor and production company for *Tomorrow Never Dies*, combined with numerous partners to produce a \$ 100 million dollar global campaign to entice moviegoers to see the film. That sum doubles the amount used to promote the previous Bond film, *Goldeneye*, released just two short years earlier. The BMW Z3 used in the 1995 film alone attributed to a twice as large order than expected. Following the successful promotion of *Goldeneye*, partnerships made for the *Tomorrow Never Dies* film would allow for screenwriters to *write in* specific product placements in the plot lines. For instance, Bond's new car of

choice is the new 750iL sedan from BMW. He uses an Ericsson cell phone and a watch by Omega. Bond drinks Smirnoff Vodka and Heinekens and apparently can't go without his Visa card. Visa, in its first Hollywood promotion, chose to utilize Bond in a 30-second commercial, meanwhile co-star Michelle Yeoh promotes a new 007 line of cosmetics by L'Oreal.

Table 2
Product Placements in the Top 10 Movies of 1997

<i>Men in Black</i>	<i>The Lost World</i>	<i>Liar Liar</i>	<i>Air Force One</i>
Automobiles	Automobiles	Airlines	Alcohol
Chevrolet	BMW	American	Budweiser
Ford	Buick	Lufthansa	
	Chevrolet	Northwest	Entertainment
Cigarettes	Mercedes	TransWorld	U of MI Football
Camel	Canyon Motorcycles	Tower Air	
Marlboro			News Sources
	Entertainment	Automobiles	CNN
Entertainment	San Diego Chargers	Chevrolet	
Jeopardy	San Diego Zoo	Chrysler	Other Products
New York Mets	Sea World	Dodge	Intel
		Ford	NEC Technologies
News Sources	News Sources	Jeep	Perrier
Daily News	CNN	Mercedes	Sony
New York Post	Washington Post	Nissan	Xerox
New York Times		Volkswagen	
	Services	Volvo	
Services	Blockbuster Video		

Table 2 Cont.

Bloomingdales	Phillips 66	Entertainment	
Psychic Friends Network		LA Dodgers	
	Other Products		
Other Products	Hershey's Krackel	Other Products	
Hamilton Watches	Mitsubishi Satellite	Apple	
Kineses Keyboards	Phones	Dr. Suess	
Raid	Nikon Cameras	Fastpack	
Ray Ban Sunglasses	Sega Video Games	Spalding	
Rolex Watches		Sprite	
		Starbucks	
Total Products: 16	Total Products: 16	Total Products: 21	Total Products: 8

**Table 2-Continued
Product Placements in the Top 10 Movies of 1997**

<i>My Best Friend's Wedding</i>	<i>Face/Off</i>	<i>Batman and Robin</i>	<i>George of the Jungle</i>
Airlines	Automobiles	Automobiles	Automobiles
United	GMC	Honda Motorcycles	Lincoln
	Hum Vee	Mercedes	
Alcohol	Mercedes		Services
Absolut Vodka		Other Products	Hilton Hotels
Amsel Light	News Sources	Apple Computers	McDonalds
Miller Beer	CNN		Neiman Marcus
Miller Lite			UPS

Table 2 Cont.

	Other Products		
Automobiles	Chiclets		Other Products
BMW	Yamah Watercraft		Armani
Chevrolet			Baked Lays
Ford			Coca-Cola